VALUES, MEANING AND IDENTITY: THE CASE FOR MORALITY

by

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Abstract

Since Plato's time, there have been attempts to show that the generally altruistic way of life is superior to the totally selfish way of life. Drawing upon the conclusions of philosophers and social psychologists, I argue that it is better to have a fairly moral character than a totally selfish one. I first argue that it is possible to have genuinely altruistic motivations (rather than disguised selfish motivations). I then show that both the altruistic and the selfish way of life are genuine choices for rational beings. Next I argue that the nature of values is such that they require reinforcement from others in order for us to verify that what we believe to be values are indeed values. I further argue that values are unattainable for the totally selfish person. Subsequently, I point out that values are necessary for an agent to have a meaningful life, and very likely necessary for a human to be able to have a sense of self. Since most people desire to have a meaningful life and a sense of self, I argue that the benefits possible to the fairly moral person outweigh the benefits possible to the totally selfish one, even if the latter can disguise her selfishness completely.

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Dedication

To my parents, for their support and their love.

Chapter I

One of the oldest dilemmas in life and in fiction is whether one should do what one believes to be morally right when to do so seems to put one at a disadvantage. For most of us, these issues arise as relatively minor considerations, such as whether one should inform a shopkeeper that she has given one too much change, or whether one should give money to a beggar in the street. However, occasionally, an ordinary person is faced with a more significant problem. The quick answer to how one should act is, of course, that one should do what is morally right. And moral reasons are usually recognized as sufficient justification for one's actions. However, one might ask whether to act for moral reasons is a sign of wisdom or of weakness. To bring this question into greater clarity, one could imagine a completely selfish person and compare her to a completely moral one, and ask who fares better in life. Indeed, this is the question that Plato asks in *The Republic*.[1]

I will argue, if not in favour of the completely moral person, at least in favour of her somewhat moral cousin. There are good reasons to have a character that meets not only the legal but also the fairly high social expectations of those with whom we interact. I recognize that there is a gap between sufficient moral decency and absolute moral sainthood, and will not argue for the latter. Although I argue over the type of agent one should be, both the scope of the intended audience of my thesis and the intended effects upon that audience are restricted. To a large degree, one's character is difficult, if not impossible, to change by the time one reaches adulthood. Furthermore, my argument will be based upon the desirability of certain qualities which a completely selfish human being may not desire. Thus, my thesis is not designed to

cause wicked members of a moral community to reform their characters. Also, most moral agents are not in need of an argument for being moral. Most who do what is right do so simply because they feel it is right, and do not feel the need for further justification.

However, there are some who, while they have a moral character, are reflective about that character and fear that those who are selfish may, in some circumstances, be getting ahead of them in life. They fear that they are in some way irrational to follow the dictates of their more moral natures. I hope that my thesis can offer solace to them. I intend to argue that the reflective moral agent acquires desirable benefits that the selfish one lacks. I believe that the reflective moral human being will appreciate having those qualities, even if her selfish counterpart will not.[2] Ideally, this will give the moral person good reason to be satisfied with the character she has.

To make this argument, I will first have to argue that it is possible, when deciding the course of action to take in a particular situation, to be motivated to help others without having an ulterior motive to help oneself. While there is more to having a moral character than this, this is an essential part of having such a character. Thus, Chapter II will consider psychological studies that indicate that humans can be motivated by altruism, without an underlying core of selfishness. It will also include some reasons that altruistic motivations might have arisen in humankind. Therefore, this chapter more than any other will rely heavily upon accounts outside the field of philosophy, and especially upon accounts in social psychology. Since I am not a psychologist, I will have to rely upon findings that are supported in their own fields. However, this chapter will also have philosophical arguments that show that we are not all selfish.

The arguments and accounts in Chapter II might lead the main thrust of the thesis to

become a victim of its own success. A popular position within moral philosophy holds that any person who is sufficiently rational will have moral motives. Thus, the perfectly selfish person is said to be in some way rationally defective and, hence, not a desirable person to be. Chapter III will include arguments that show how it is possible to be both completely rational and completely selfish, if one is a selfish person of a certain type. As will be shown in that chapter, such a being is likely to be unsuccessful unless she disguises her character. Together, Chapters II and III show that the question of whether it is better to have a moral or selfish character is a legitimate one.

The nature of values is a subject of debate within the field of philosophy. Chapter IV will present two plausible views of values. It will be shown, whichever of the two views is true, that values can provide the sense of importance that is commonly associated with them, and also that an individual needs inter-subjective support to verify that what she thinks of as values are in fact values. In addition, the chapter will show that the rational selfish person presented in Chapter III cannot have values. This will prevent the selfish person from gaining anything that requires values.

Chapter V is an examination of one of the things which a moral person can have and which a selfish person cannot: a meaningful life. I shall present and defend a definition of a meaningful life. Such a definition will include having values. Chapter VI describes a concept of identity that, in the case of humans, itself very likely requires values. Since a reflective moral agent is likely to want both a meaningful life and a sense of identity, it follows that she has reason to be glad to have her moral character.

Historically, arguments for moral behaviour and character have often been part of larger

religious accounts of a world that includes an afterlife that benefits those of moral character and punishes those who are selfish. Without arguing for or against the existence of supernatural entities or an afterlife, I wish my argument to stand independently of such accounts. I hope that by examining the sort of character that is preferable, more light will be shed upon the smaller quandaries that most of us encounter in everyday life.

Endnotes

1. Plato, *The Republic*, G. M. A. Grube, trans., rev. C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works*, John M. Cooper, ed., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), Book II, 360b-368a.

2. One might argue in a parallel fashion that the egoist may gain benefits that only she appreciates. However, this argument is never made. The benefits of being an egoist (e. g. greater wealth, power, etc.) are still seen as benefits by a moral person, but benefits which are (possibly) outweighed by the benefits of being moral.

Chapter II

A. 'Man is a social animal'

When deciding how to act, most people take into account the interests of others, not merely as means to serve their own ends, but as ends in themselves. Few do so all the time; humans sometimes also act in their own interests. However, most consider the interests of others often enough that having one's interests completely ignored by another with whom one interacts is more the exception than the rule. In this chapter, starting from the fact that human beings live together and cooperate with each other, I will show that they are motivated by genuine altruistic feelings. It may be argued that altruism is not the same as morality, for one could be altruistic towards some and not others, while morality may require one to be more generally fair in one's actions. However, while moral motivation may require a greater level of generalization than altruistic motivation, it does at least require the altruistic desire to help others. Thus, showing that human beings can be genuinely altruistically motivated also, when combined with the human ability to generalize and to govern themselves by rules of conduct, shows that people can be moral.

The literature on this subject is broad, and this chapter will touch upon the work of many philosophers, economists, and psychologists. In particular, I will focus my attention upon the work of C.D. Batson, who used empirical psychological tests to separate egoistic from altruistic motivations, and also that of Kristen Renwick Monroe, Michael C. Barton, and Ute Klingemann, who used personal interviews in order to examine the motivations of those who have behaved heroically, as compared to entrepreneurs. I will also rely upon Joel Feinberg's philosophical

arguments against the truth of psychological egoism. In addition, I will look at various accounts of how prosocial behaviour could have developed among humans.

We are a gregarious species, or as Aristotle put it, social animals.[1] We not only, on the whole, work in groups, we play in groups, and enjoy talking with each other. One of the more severe punishments given to prisoners is solitary confinement. We assist each other in accomplishing tasks. Human beings are not the only creatures that do this, but it is something that almost all humans do.

B. Selfishness as a motive

Our gregarious natures do not necessarily mean that we have altruistic natures as well. "Much economic analysis – and virtually all game theory – starts with the assumption that people are both rational and selfish", as Robyn M. Dawes and Richard H. Thaler put it.[2] Economists seemed to have learned this from the works of Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith. Hobbes held that, left to themselves, people would be in a constant state of conflict with each other (the war of all against all), either through the desire for more power, for pride, or as a necessary protection against those with such desires.[3] He held that in order to keep us all from acting on our purely selfish desires, to the detriment of everyone, a powerful sovereign would be needed. Adam Smith held a slightly more optimistic view, believing that each citizen's naturally selfish desires could work towards the greater good of all of them. Thus he states: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages."[4] The idea

that we can make valid predictions based upon the assumption of agents' selfishness and rationality was taken up by economists. Anthony Downs, for example, in *An Economic Theory of Democracy,* states that even voters are economic consumers out to maximize individual utility,[5] and that people in government are themselves governed by self-interest, namely, their interest in getting votes.[6] While he admits there are some exceptions, he thinks that they are few enough that he can formulate his theory of democracy without taking them into account. This could prove troublesome for those who believe that altruism is not that uncommon a human motivation. For, if a theory that ignores altruism can still successfully predict human actions, then this itself is evidence of the rarity of altruism and the prevalence of selfishness. Downs' notion of political people as selfish maximizers has been followed by Mancur Olson, Jr. in *The Logic of Collective Action*, and until recently, according to Brian Barry, "the books of Downs and Olson, plus a handful of articles, really [did] exhaust the field of worthwhile attempts to get from general premises to substantive political conclusions".[7]

Thus, for some time, economists did not appear to accept the notion that altruism should be considered when attempting to predict human behaviour. The mainstream view of the usefulness of studying man insofar as he is selfish is not without its critics, but man as individual utility maximizer is still presented in economics textbooks,[8] and James Buchanan won a Nobel Prize in Economics in 1986 for his work in using this model of man to investigate why citizens vote the way they do, or how those seeking elected office will act in order to get votes.[9] Thus, the model of *homo economicus*, according to which "individuals must be modeled as seeking to further their own self-interest, narrowly defined in terms of measured net wealth positions" was brought to the public choice perspective.[10] This view has been challenged, and I shall look at

Robert Frank's account later in this chapter, but it should be noted that it is a challenge, and that the mainstream view still follows along the lines of Smith (narrowly interpreted), Downs and Buchanan.

At this point, it is important to note that Smith himself did not hold that people were merely selfish. His very first sentence in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it."[11] Even Hobbes' war of all against all is not total, since he holds that, in this war, small families would be fighting each other, which implies that there is something holding a family together.[12] Later, he explicitly states that those "nearer in kin are nearer in affection".[13] Unfortunately, followers of Hobbes and Smith have, on the whole, glossed over any sympathy for others or affection we may feel for our kin; those theorists who assumed that man is basically selfish said that such affections were either rare, limited in scope, or in any case not a significant determinant of one's general actions, and so concluded that they could be safely disregarded. And the idea that humans lack true altruism has found its way into various theories, not only of economics, but of psychology and evolutionary biology.[14]

The ignoring or explaining away of human empathy in Hobbesian theories has had an effect on those who have adopted them. First, they have accepted the idea that, for the most part, everyone is selfish. Then they have gone on to the normative claim that everyone should be selfish. Their fellow feelings may properly be restricted to family members; the public world, particularly the corporate world, can be an arena in which no quarter is asked and none given. This effect has been noticeable. "Business consultant Richard Hagberg found in doing

psychological profiles of hundreds of top executives that between the mid-1970s and early 1990s, most had chucked 'tenderhearted' workplace sentiments favouring collegiality in favour of 'tough-minded' sentiments focussed on the bottom line." The virtue of selfishness seems to be the lesson learned in the 1970s and 1980s by many businessmen, who had such mottos as 'Greed is Good' or 'The Me Generation'. This adoption of selfishness as a normative guideline in the workplace is typified by Ivan Boesky in his commencement address at the University of California at Berkeley, in May 1986, when he stated that 'Greed is all right', and received applause for his speech on this theme.[15] Thus, in both theory and, in some cases, practice, empathy as a motive has often been ignored, or restricted in scope to close friends and family.

C. Altruism is a significant and irreducible motive

Given all this, it might be easy to conclude that empathy is not a strong motive. Yet there are cases of altruism in daily life. People hold doors open for others, give strangers directions when asked, help friends move (a phenomenon I have benefited from annually for the past eight years), give rides to the airport, call friends to cheer them up, volunteer for suicide hotlines, donate blood, pick up books that others drop, give money anonymously to charity, and perform a host of other activities, seemingly for no reward. They also occasionally act in extremely heroic ways. Marc Dilley, 46, and Margareta Dilley, 48, of Wenatchee pulled Wendy Roberts out of a burning sports-utility vehicle on March 4, 1998, in Wenatchee. Sylvia Brown, 54, of Sebago Lake, Maine, drowned in Sebago Lake while trying to save Mildred Massello, who also drowned, on June 25, 1997. Robert Dummer, 39, of Holmen, Wisconsin, saved ice fisherman Arlen Arttus from frozen Third Lake in Trempealeau, Wisconsin, on February 21,

1998. James Munro, 54, of Bothwell, Ontario, and Gerard Jansen, 66, of Guelph, Ontario, saved pilot Nancy Kozlovic from a burning plane that crashed near a house in Guelph on June 24, 1998.[16] These people risked (and in some cases lost) their own lives trying to save others. They are examples of altruism *par excellence*.

In a study performed by Kristen R. Monroe, Michael C. Barton and Ute Klingemann,[17] four sorts of human beings who performed pro-social actions were interviewed: entrepreneurs, who were examples of "the inventive creativity, drive for success, and goal-oriented rational actor described by economists"[18]; philanthropists, who were wealthy enough to support their families and give to charities; heroes, who put themselves at risk to help someone in immediate need; and rescuers, in this case, people who had put themselves in extreme risk in order to help feed, shelter and hide Jews being persecuted in Nazi Germany.[19] Each of the interviews was transcribed and analyzed independently by three to six analysts, who were looking specifically for the possible selfish causes of prosocial and seemingly altruistic behaviour proposed by economists, psychologists and biologists. The interviews were intended to elicit, insofar as it was possible, the particular motivations, behaviours and ways of seeing themselves and the world held by the subjects.[20]

It was found that rescuers and heroes did not fit the standard models put forward to explain away prosocial acts as in some way egoistically motivated. They did not consider the costs to themselves, or any benefits they might receive from their actions. Some of the rescuers refused awards decades later, one of them saying she had not done enough to deserve such recognition. During and even after the war, many rescuers faced harsh social ostracism for their acts, and did not expect any praise. Neither were the actions pursued to make the rescuers feel

better about themselves.[21] Rather, the Jews were perceived as people who "just had to be saved."[22] Rescuers acted on their own, without support from any group of rescuers that could have helped each other.[23] Unlike philanthropists, rescuers "did not first attend to their own needs and then to the needs of others".[24] In short, it seems that the rescuers acted on motives that were truly altruistic. They put the welfare of others in need before their own welfare, without expecting or desiring a reward in the future. Hidden egoistic motivations may explain some of the prosocial actions of the entrepreneurs, but not those of the rescuers or heroes.

There are two caveats here. First, one might question the methodology of the interviews. Perhaps, the rescuers were acting on egoistic motivations of which they were themselves unaware. This possibility will be addressed in the discussion of Batson's experiments later in this chapter. Second, one might point out that rescuers and heroes are by their nature rare, and that most of us do not have altruistic motivations. There were many people in Germany who did not act to save the Jews.

But altruistic acts seem to be more widespread than the domain of saints, rescuers and heroes.[25] The existence of a certain class of people, beggars, found in most cities past and present, demonstrates that altruism is not an uncommon trait. It is unimportant at present to determine what percentage of beggars are genuinely in need. What is significant is that people give money to beggars. Adam Smith notes this on the same page that he considers self-serving butchers, where he acknowledges that a beggar depends "chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow citizens".[26] These citizens also give money to charities without being compelled to do so. They sometimes even donate to charities anonymously, or give to beggars when no witnesses are present. When they do this, they are not trying to gain social support from others, or a reputation

for being good that may help them in their selfish endeavours later. They give money because they think that others are in need. They are not thinking of themselves. This poses a challenge to economic theories that focus only on the motive of selfishness. In some of these cases, it is not even conceivable that a rational agent would give money to others, with no thought of any return. Since humans do this, the models are inaccurate and do not adequately predict human behaviour in at least one important respect.

Defenders of psychological egoism, the belief that all human motivations are selfish, try to circumvent these examples by arguing that so-called altruistic acts are actually motivated by long-term self-interest. For instance, helping others move is a way of establishing a reputation for helpfulness that will allow one to exploit those others later. These arguments are unconvincing when it comes to accounts of life-threatening heroism. And the theory that people act only when it is in their long-term selfish interests to do so, as psychological egoists maintain, does not accord with other observations. Often, when human beings are selfish, they are not thinking of possible long-term consequences of their actions. Certainly, people do not always act with an eye towards their long-term interests. They may cheat on a diet, or continue to smoke although they know that smoking is unhealthy. In addition, emotions such as pride can lead to actions that are against one's long-term self interests. We simply are not as rational as economic theories model us to be.

In fact, emotions guide actions to a great extent and often lead to actions that are against the agent's interests.[27] A good example of this is revenge. Revenge can lead to pointless feuds and, even when one is successful in harming another who has done one wrong, one does not necessarily help oneself in any way except through acquiring a sense of gratification at being

revenged. Robert Frank argues that revenge has a place in pursuing one's long-term interests because the threat of revenge deters potential non-cooperators.[28] But even if Frank is correct, such thoughts of one's long-term interests are not being entertained by one who is motivated by revenge. Again, humans commonly do not calculate what is in their long-term interests, but act according to their emotional states, however beneficial or harmful to themselves this may be.

The advantage of theories that take human selfishness as the key to predicting all behaviour is their simplicity, which makes them easy to understand. Newtonian physics is simpler than the relativistic physics of Einstein, and so is used for middle-sized objects on Earth that do not move close to the speed of light. Simplicity, however, is only a virtue for these theories if they retain some predictive power. The selfishness-based theories do not always have a good track record in predicting what individuals will do. Survey research by David Sears and Carolyn L. Funk shows that, on most issues, the identification of an American voter as a liberal or a conservative predicts voting patterns on various issues more accurately than one's personal benefit from an issue being decided one way or the other.[29] For instance, "it explained one's views on national health insurance more than being privately insured or not."[30]

Downs acknowledges the following problem for his theory. Since the expected value of one particular vote in an election is small, "it is outweighed by a very small cost of voting".[31] Yet many eligible voters continue to vote while being fully aware of this fact. On Downs' theory, they must all be assumed to be irrational. But even if this were so, it would indicate a failure to predict the actions of these voters, or to explain them, since simply saying that people are irrational does not explain particular actions. A more likely hypothesis is that citizens are rational to vote, but are motivated by reasons other than self-interest when they do so. Downs

tries to explain this in terms of members of a democratic society having a long-term interest in keeping democracy going, but this does not explain very well why an individual votes, since the chance that her vote is crucial to keeping the democratic system alive is also tiny.[32] It is much more likely that voters either irrationally believe that their vote is more crucial than it is, which seems unlikely, or that they vote for reasons other than self-interest. In the case of voting, the most likely reason to vote would be one of "citizen duty", which is altruistic.[33]

There is further evidence that people are motivated by altruism. Robyn Dawes and Richard Thaler[34] have shown that with various games that "reward self-interested behaviour at the expense of the group", an altruistic core of participants (25 to 35 percent) "refuse to take rational self-interested action, even under conditions of complete anonymity with no possibility of group punishment".[35] This number rises sharply if they are allowed to talk and otherwise increase feelings of group identity. Many motives other than self-interest can determine an agent's actions, and some of these motives are altruistic.

This altruism is not a cleverly disguised means to some subconscious egoistic end. Social psychologists have isolated four possible motives for pro-social actions, or actions that help others. These motives, along with their corresponding values (according to C. D. Batson)[36] are: egoism, altruism, collectivism and the urge to follow one's principles. It has not yet been determined whether the latter two motives are independent or are ultimately subsumed by other motives. However, according to recent experiments in social psychology, the altruistic motive is independent of the egoistic motive in many important ways. This is significant, because it provides empirical evidence to refute psychological egoism, using a method different from the narrative interviews. In addition, the subjects of these experiments are not drawn from a pool of

rescuers or heroes, which adds support to the view that altruism is not particularly rare.

First of all, Batson showed that the altruistic motive was independent of the egoistic motive of reducing empathetic distress, called aversive-arousal reduction. Batson designed an experiment in which "subjects observed a young woman named Elaine receiving electric shocks; they were given an unanticipated chance to help her by volunteering to take the remaining shocks in her stead."[37] Some subjects were told that if they did not take Elaine's place, they would continue to observe her take the shocks (this was the difficult escape condition). Other subjects were told that they would not continue to observe her take the shocks (this was the easy escape condition). "Because empathic arousal is a result of witnessing the victim's suffering, either terminating this suffering by helping or terminating exposure to it by escaping should reduce one's own aversive arousal."[38] Thus, if the egoistic motive of reducing empathic arousal were the sole motive, then there should have been more participants in the easy escape situations leaving, rather than taking the shocks themselves, even when they were manipulated by the experimenters into thinking the victim to be similar in values and interests to themselves (thus allowing for a greater chance of empathy). However, this was not the case. The perception of similarity which allowed for empathy did make a difference. Other studies confirmed this.[39]

Next, Batson demonstrated that the motive for pro-social actions did not reduce to the egoistic motive of avoiding empathy-specific punishments such as social or self-censure.[40] Here, Fultz, Batson, Fortenback, McCarthy and Varney[41] first ran an experiment to test for socially administered empathy-specific punishments. Participants were first given some notes to read, ostensibly as part of a listening experiment. These notes were apparently written by a lonely undergraduate student named Janet. Then the students were given a letter which described an

opportunity to be part of a long-term relationship study with Janet. The students were divided into those who were told to identify with the individual in the note (and so to be highly empathetic) and those who were told to "focus on the techniques used to get the communicator's message across"[42] (and so not to be very empathetic). It is noteworthy that Batson put some of the subjects "in the mood" to be altruistic, rather than picking them out because they already showed evidence of being so. Given the results of his experiments, this suggests that most people have the potential to respond to altruistic motivations.

Each group was sub-divided further by social expectations. The first group had reason to believe that only they knew both that Janet needed a friend and that they could help her. They were told that no one else would see the notes (so no one else knew Janet was lonely), that their responses would be anonymous, and that they would seal the response form concerning the long-term relationship study in an envelope addressed to a professor, so nobody else would know if they did not want to help Janet (the professor would not know that Janet needed a friend)). The second group was made to believe that the experimenter and professor both knew of Janet's needs, and that both they and Janet would know if the student agreed to the long-term relationship study or not. The results were a victory for the empathetic-altruism hypothesis, since more help was offered from the students in the high-empathy groups, while there was no significant difference resulting from the differing potential for negative social expectations.

Next, three experiments were conducted measuring one's urge to avoid internal empathy-specific punishments, by seeing how humans acted when they had an excuse not to be helpful. First, subjects were given a chance to help Katie Banks, described as being in need. They were separated into being low-empathy or high-empathy as in the second experiment above. They

were also either not informed as to whether others had pledged time to help, were informed that others had not helped (thus giving the person an internal excuse not to help, since others were not helping) or that others had (thus not allowing this excuse, and presumably allowing any self-administered guilt to affect them). Contrary to the egoistic model, which predicted that high-empathy subjects would still be less likely to help when they had an excuse not to help, the altruistic model predicted that high-empathy subjects would be as likely to help whether or not they had an internal excuse. Once again, the altruism theory was correct. In another experiment, all participants were told that another participant was getting electric shocks for each incorrect answer that participant gave on a test. They were then told that they had a choice. They could perform task A, for which they would receive a raffle ticket for each correct response, or task B, for which they would reduce the number of electric shocks the other participant would allegedly receive for each correct response. After being divided into a low-empathy and high-empathy group, the high-empathy group was further sub-divided. Some were given two similar tasks (either both involving letters of both involving numbers). Others were given different tasks, one involving numbers and one involving letters. "Subjects in this condition were told that most people prefer to work with the numbers (letters), whichever appeared on the nonhelpful option A." Thus these subjects "could attribute choosing to work on the nonhelpful option to the type of task (numbers or letters) rather than to selfishness, reducing anticipated self-punishment"[43] Thus according to the egoistic model, high-empathy subjects with different tasks and an excuse that they could attribute to the type of task, rather than to selfishness, should have been more likely to perform option A than high-empathy subjects with similar tasks. Once again, this was not the case. The high-empathy group was not significantly

affected by being told or not told this information. The third experiment focussed on the possibility of an excuse through the difficulty of qualifying to help. Subjects were faced with an Elaine-like situation (Elaine was the subject who was "shocked" in the first study listed above) but would be able to help only if they qualified for a numeric recall test which presumably Elaine had passed. They were told either that seven in ten students passed this test or that only one in five did. Once again, the difficulty of the task (which on the egoistic hypothesis could have provided an excuse for not offering to take Elaine's place) did not affect the helpfulness of the high-empathy group. A similar experiment added the feature that subjects, after hearing a broadcast of someone in need, but before being asked to volunteer time to help the victim, were separated into high-empathy and low-empathy groups and then asked to identify the colour of ink of certain words. It had been previously observed that "latency ["The time from the onset of a stimulus to that of the response."[44]] of color naming for a particular word will increase whenever a subject has been thinking about something related to that word".[45] Presumably, the subject thinks more of the meaning of the word, and so less of the colour of the letters comprising it. Thus, she takes longer to identify the colour of the ink. Some words were punishment-relevant, such as duty, guilt, shame, and should. Others were victim-relevant such as hope, child, needy, and friend. The experiment showed that high-empathy people had a greater latency than low-empathy individuals in recognizing victim-relevant words, but that both groups were equal in recognizing punishment-relevant words, indicating that high-empathy persons were thinking of victim-relevant and not punishment-relevant concepts, further indicating that the egoistic motive of avoiding self-punishment was not more pronounced in the high-empathy group.

Finally, Batson ran experiments to see whether prosocial actions were due to altruistic empathy or merely the egoistic motive to gain praise, honour or pride through helping others, called the empathetic-specific reward motivation. One study[46] measured the subjects' speed at recognizing the ink colour of victim-relevant versus reward-relevant words (such as good, merit, honour, praise, nice, and proud) and once again, there was no increase in latency at recognizing reward-relevant words between the high-empathy and low-empathy groups. Another study[47] investigated the mood change of subjects who were told either that their task would be relevant or irrelevant to reducing another subject's electric shocks, and also, just before the task, were sub-divided either by being told or not being told that the victim would not receive shocks after all. The egoistic theory predicted a positive mood change in only the high-empathy individuals who felt the task would make a difference, and thus could anticipate a specific internal reward. The altruistic theory predicted that the mood should go up for high-empathy individuals either if they felt their task would help reduce the number of shocks, or if they knew the subject would not experience shocks in any case. Once again, the altruistic theory was correct.

Another egoistic theory was that "empathetically aroused individuals help to gain the good feeling of sharing vicariously in the needy person's joy at improvement". In one study[48], people listened to a broadcast about someone's plight, and were then given the opportunity to stuff envelopes for a fund drive for that person. Some were not told anything about feedback, others were told that they would not be given feedback on the results of their efforts, and a third group was told that they would hear from the person helped on the results of their efforts. The empathetic-joy egoistic hypothesis predicted that the high-empathy group would be no more likely to help than the low-empathy group if they were told there would be no feedback, while

the altruistic hypothesis predicted that the high-empathy group, despite knowing they would get no feedback, would be more helpful than the low-empathy group. The altruistic hypothesis was correct once again. Other experiments also confirmed the altruistic hypothesis over the empathetic-joy hypothesis.[49]

Finally, there is the negative-state relief version of egoism, which predicts that "the need for the reward of helping [in alleviating the temporary feeling of sadness in seeing someone suffering], not the reward itself, is empathy specific".[50] In a study,[51] undergraduates were once again asked if they wanted to take shocks in Elaine's stead, but this time they were sub-divided into those who were told they would be watching a video that would cause "strong feelings of happiness and pleasure" and those who were led to expect that they would be watching a neutral video. The negative-state relief model predicted that the rate of helping among the high-empathy group would be lower for those expecting the egoistic reward of relieving their distress through watching the mood-enhancing video. Once again, it was wrong. There was no difference between the two high-empathy groups in willingness to help. This result was confirmed in another study.[52]

In conclusion, none of the egoistic explanations for apparently altruistic motivations has borne fruit. Given the 'winning streak' of experiments testing for altruistic motivations versus various egoistic motivations among high-empathy individuals, then, unless another egoistic explanation for altruistic motivations can be shown to hold up in experiments, it should be concluded that altruistic motivations, independent of egoistic considerations, do exist. This is important, because, if none of the many attempts to explain apparently altruistic motives by showing that they are actually some form of egoistic motives succeeds, then psychological

egoism is shown to be false. It is, of course, possible that some unknown form of psychological egoism has not yet been tested in Batson-like experiments. However, the fact that so many attempts to reduce altruistic motives to selfish ones fail is encouraging. The above experiments provide a strong inductive argument against psychological egoism. A person's motive can, at a particular moment, be intrinsically altruistic or intrinsically egoistic. And, since human beings can have motives that are essentially altruistic, the theory that all altruistic motives are really disguised selfish motives, or are so for most of us, is false.

Psychological egoism can also be attacked on theoretical grounds. Joel Feinberg[53] raises and refutes some of the more common arguments in favour of psychological egoism. While Batson's experiments provide empirical evidence against psychological egoism, Feinberg's arguments are philosophical, and so target the arguments put forward to support psychological egoism. The argument that, when we act voluntarily, the motive behind the action is our own, is, as he points out, a tautology, and does not tell us the direction of our motivation. To the argument that a person who attains that which he desires usually feels pleasure, Feinberg replies that there is no proof that the accompanying pleasure is the end or purpose of that desire.[54] By itself, correlation does not prove causation. Furthermore, such an argument does not explain malevolent actions which harm the agent as well as the person acted against, as pointed out in the case of revenge described by Robert Frank. In addition, Feinberg argues that even if benevolent actions were carried out for peace of mind, the reason that being benevolent gives one peace of mind must be because one has a desire to help others; the latter must be a deeper motivation for the former to have any force. Otherwise, helping others would not bring such peace. But we need not rely only upon Feinberg's arguments against psychological egoism's

claim that we act altruistically only because of the pleasure we derive from doing so. Batson's experiments also show that the accompanying pleasure, or urge for peace of mind, can be absent and a pro-social action with an altruistic motive can still be performed.

Another argument starts with the true premise that we sometimes deceive ourselves and think we are acting on virtuous motives when, in fact, we have more selfish ones, even if they are merely enhancing pride or avoiding guilt. The argument extrapolates that we always do so, and thus leaves no room for virtue for its own sake. Feinberg rightly points out that such a sweeping generalization requires empirical evidence, and none exists. In fact, the Batson experiments are refutations of this generalization.

Of course, psychological egoism is a very strong claim. Skeptics about altruism do not need to hold that everyone is always selfish but only that most people are primarily selfish, and would be even more so if they thought they could escape detection. This seems to be the view put forward by Matthew Ridley and Bobbi S. Low in "Can Selfishness Save the Environment?" and "Why We're Not Environmental Altruists – And What We Can Do About It."[55] Their argument seems to be that evolutionary pressures resulted in humans who tend to act in selfish ways instead of assuming costs in order to help the environment. While some will respond to the information about the actions that should be taken to help the environment, most will not. Rather, humans will make excuses or assume that the environmental problems are not as serious as they are made out to be.[56] One reason for this is that we have not evolved to consider long-term consequences very well. Since the environmental concerns of which we are aware are mostly about future problems, it is more difficult to make humans realize their severity. Ridley and Low thus hold that we should investigate ways to appeal to our short-term selfish interests in

order to help save the environment.

The data that Ridley and Low have gathered seem to show that humans are not very good at dealing with environmental degradation. However, one must be careful not to generalize from this to assume that most of us are selfish in other ways. As Ridley and Low have said, concerns about the environment deal with the long-term future, which humans have difficulty dealing with rationally. Furthermore, one's altruistic motivations tend to be awakened more often when there is a visible subject in need of help. It may prove more difficult to martial altruistic motivations to "save the earth" than to help a particular person or group. So, we cannot conclude from Ridley and Low that most humans are generally selfish, but rather that it is easier for them to be selfish in certain areas, such as developing concerns about the environment.

In addition, the fact that human beings, even when not helping with environmental problems, bother to excuse or rationalize their behaviour indicates that their altruistic motivations are not so much absent as overwhelmed. The excuses seem to be as much to reassure themselves that nothing needs to be done yet as to convince others. Thus, even when they do nothing to stop or slow down environmental deterioration, they at least seem to see that they have some *prima facie* obligation to do so. Otherwise, they would not have to make such excuses or rationalize to mitigate the seriousness of the problem. People rarely say "I know that what I am doing is destroying the environment and I do not care." This seems to indicate, again, that altruistic motives are not absent, or event particularly rare, although they can be overwhelmed by selfish ones.[57]

If it were not the case that altruistic individuals (those at least occasionally motivated by altruistic motives) lived among other altruistic individuals, then it would be difficult to argue

that people should be at least somewhat altruistic. As David Hume illustrates with the example of a person who finds himself in "the society of ruffians",[58] an individual who attempted to cooperate with others when none of them was inclined to cooperate with her would be more likely to be victimized, and less likely to survive. It seems that her tendencies towards altruism would be entirely unhelpful to her. If this were the case then she would have reason to be selfish rather than the only altruist among selfish individuals.[59]

Hume's example is important since often people who ask the question "Why be moral?" do so because they have a low opinion of the behaviour of their fellow citizens. The question may be prompted by their seeing a person escape punishment for some crime. This may lead them to assume that a selfish strategy would be more profitable than their current one, and that, if only they could eliminate their own altruistic tendencies, they would be more rational.

D. Preliminary accounts of the genesis of cooperative behaviour

Fortunately, altruistic feelings and behaviour, and the expectation of such by others, is likely to be at least partially innate, and thus shared by most humans. Some evidence for this is the fact that animals, like us, can engage in cooperative behaviour, particularly with close relations. This is not to romanticize the animal kingdom as some paradise, for, as Matthew Ridley points out in *The Origins of Virtue*, there are examples of actions that, if carried out by humans, would be considered evil. Ridley states that "ground squirrels routinely eat baby ground squirrels; mallard drakes routinely drown ducks during gang rape; parasitic wasps routinely eat their victims alive from the inside; chimpanzees – our nearest relatives – routinely pursue gang warfare." [60] This last may actually be overstating Ridley's case, since to engage in

gang warfare requires a level of coordination and trust between gang members, but the point is well made that benevolence is not universal within the animal kingdom.

But some acts seem to be motivated by a type of empathic feeling, even for a member of a different species. Batson relates the story of an Irish Setter that jumped to safety from a burning car, but then returned and rescued her owner's two-year-old girl from it.[61] John Robbins relates cases of animal heroism, from a sea turtle rescuing a shipwrecked woman and keeping her afloat for two days, thus itself being unable to eat, to dolphins forming a ring around a wounded sea lion to protect it from killer whales.[62] One way of explaining this behaviour would be via the claim that some animals have empathy, especially for those they know, but that not all animals react empathetically, and it may be that an animal's other instincts are often more powerful than the empathetic one.[63] It is not my aim to attempt to determine when cooperative behaviour is the result of some empathetic instinct and when it is caused by some other, blinder instinct, such as is probably the case with cooperative insects. But the fact that some animals seem to care about others at least justifies the investigation of how our own sense of empathy could have evolved.

Of course one's genes do not completely determine one's degree of empathy. A social component also leads to altruistic behaviour. Children tend to imitate role-models, and, given that the majority of role-models are or are portrayed as at least fairly altruistic individuals, the children will be influenced towards behaving morally. P.A. Miller and N. Eisenberg have found, not surprisingly, that children who are abused tend to be less empathetic than unabused children.[64] And pets tend to be relatively friendly with other animals with whom they are raised (as opposed to animals that are strangers), even if they are of different species. Nevertheless,

although the social component must partially explain how people have acquired altruistic motives, it builds upon an innate predisposition in humans. It is therefore important to investigate why an innate tendency towards altruistic behaviour might have arisen.

One plausible answer, commonly found in scientific studies and philosophical speculations, is that groups of humans in which the majority exhibit friendly behaviour, that is, in which members have a ready framework of cooperation, forgiveness, and trust, will do better than groups in which trust is absent. If, for example, every farmer had to worry that her crops would simply be taken by others, she would have less incentive to labour to grow those crops and all would starve. This situation is colourfully described by Hobbes as the state of nature, or "the war of all against all". By contrast, the more that people can trust each other, the more they can cooperate to achieve together what they could not achieve separately. Put in evolutionary terms, cooperation makes it more likely that individuals will prosper and reproduce. Thus, any genetic disposition towards cooperation, especially cooperation with one's kin, would be favoured in any individual who had other cooperative individuals with whom to interact. And, of course, any social practice that makes cooperation easier would help individuals adopting that practice among others adopting similar practices survive more readily than those that did not.

However, while a group composed of altruists would do better than a group composed of selfish people, the group would have to have an internal means of effectively detecting and punishing those who try to reap the rewards of cooperation without cooperating themselves. I will go into more detail about such means later in this chapter. But first, I wish to examine some philosophical and scientific reasons to cooperate. Philosophical accounts of why it makes more sense for humans to cooperate date back to Plato's *Republic*. Plato states that people need to

cooperate in order to accomplish anything, otherwise they would be rent by infighting.[65] Cooperation is a precondition that allows people to enjoy the fruits of their labours with less fear that those fruits will be taken from them. Furthermore, if they are especially good at producing a particular thing that they can trade to others, then they can devote their energy to producing it and trade what they do not need of it for other goods that they do need. In the simplest terms, instead of each person trying to grow or hunt food and make clothing and a shelter, individuals can specialize as farmers, hunters, weavers and carpenters. The carpenter will not starve because she can trade her labour for food from the farmer. Similarly, the farmer will have a shelter without having to build one. Thus, cooperation allows individuals to specialize, which makes them all more productive. Each person prospers more than she would outside such a social group.[66] Finally, cooperation is necessary in order to oppose an outside threat more effectively. Plato's principle of the division of labour results in a class of professional soldiers who would be more effective at protecting a community than citizens who were generalists, or specialized in something else.[67] It is interesting to note that many species of insects have developed specialized roles. Such specialization only makes sense if the various sorts of insects within each such species cooperate. Just as 1000 ants working together can accomplish more than could 1000 ants kept separate from one another and forced to work alone, so a colony of soldier ants and worker ants working together will prosper more than either a group of worker ants without soldier ants to protect them or a group of soldier ants without worker ants to build a home and find food. Without cooperation, such beneficial specialization could not have evolved in the insect world, nor would it have arisen among humans.[68] The rigid specialization proposed by Plato is an extreme structure to impose upon free-willed agents, but it is true that

specialization allows people, through cooperation, to do more than they could do separately.

Plato does not hold out hope for the indefinitely prolonged continuation of civic cooperation. He believes that even a perfectly just city, however stable its design, will eventually degenerate by stages into an unjust one.[69] For citizens will not always perform the roles that they should. Thus, for Plato, our recognition of the benefits of cooperation is not enough by itself to keep people working together.

David Hume takes a more optimistic approach. He holds that children observe the inborn empathetic feelings their parents have towards them and each other, and this leads them to recognize the advantages attained through cooperation. "In a little time, custom and habit, operating on the tender minds of the children, makes [*sic*] them sensible of the advantages, which they may reap from society, as well as fashions [*sic*] them by degrees for it, by rubbing off those rough corners and untoward affections, which prevent their coalition."[70] This leads to the cooperation of larger and larger groups of people, and the invention of justice, which, in Hume's view, is a non-natural virtue. For Hume, although this initial empathy is necessary for people to realize the benefits of justice, it must also be carefully controlled, in order to prevent people unjustly favouring their own kin.[71] Here, education of the young plays a role in reinforcing our desire for justice.[72] This is not to say that Hume believed that we ever were in a state of war of all against all. "Men are necessarily born in a family-society, at least; and are trained up by their parents to some rule of conduct and behaviour."[73] Hume's account thus combines the ideas of naturally occurring (genetic) virtues with social control through education (along with the individual's own ideas of how cooperation with others is useful).

David Gauthier also examines how the willingness to cooperate in some ventures might

prove useful to the individual. He looks at maximizers, who are agents that try to maximize their interests. He agrees with Plato that beings who agree to cooperate and abide by those agreements will profit more than beings who do not agree to cooperate at all. He examines selfish maximizers, who cannot be relied upon to honour any agreement when reneging would be more profitable. For instance, a farmer who agrees to supply food to a carpenter who builds a house for her might decide not to keep her end of the bargain once the house was built. But then word could spread about the farmer and nobody would enter into agreements with her in the future. Gauthier found that constrained maximizers would fare better. They would at least be able to keep to agreements they had made, so long as keeping the agreement would not leave them worse off than if they had never made the agreement in the first place. Even if word spreads that they are constrained maximizers, cooperation with them and between them is still possible. This may provide a means to surpass the Hobbesian state of nature to some extent. However, Gauthier's theory does not explain all the altruistic behaviour we observe. For instance, it does not explain heroic actions.[74] This does not diminish Gauthier's point, however, that there is reason for selfish maximizers, independently of any altruistic considerations, to want to become constrained maximizers. However, one needs more that this to show how people might have developed the altruistic motivation to help others to the extent that we witness it.

E. Genetic explanations of our instincts for cooperative and trustworthy behaviour

I now turn to several scientific accounts of how our species came to contain altruists. Richard Dawkins, in *The Selfish Gene*,[75] discusses the characteristics genes must have if they are

to survive and make copies of themselves. Of course, genes have no desire to reproduce, but those that make many copies will be more prevalent than genes that do not, and thus the characteristics associated with these genes will tend to be more common. Dawkins shows that there is a good reason for creatures to have the tendency to help their own kin (and, to a lesser extent, other members of their species); genes that help to cause such behaviour are more likely to proliferate because the carriers of such genes are more likely to survive and reproduce than carriers of genes that do not help to cause such behaviour. This may also explain acts of limited to total self-sacrifice demonstrated by some animals. A baby chicken will twitter when it feeds, which attracts other chicks to the food and leaves less for the one that twitters. Since the chicks in the wild are likely to be surrounded by siblings, this twitter is helpful to the propagation of a chick's genes by aiding the survival of siblings carrying some of those genes.[76] But cooperation can extend beyond one's own species in the animal world, and be beneficial. Such cooperation and mutually beneficial behaviour occurs in the case of ants caring for, protecting and 'milking' honey dew from 'domesticated' aphids (an arrangement which aids both species' survival) or large fish refraining from eating certain types of smaller fish in order to allow the small fish to clean the large fish of parasites.[77] While these cases of helpful behaviour do not point to the evolution of the emotion of empathy by themselves, they at least show that some causal factor that encourages cooperative behaviour seems to be genetically favoured.

Dawkins gives another example which he has trouble explaining in terms of his selfish gene theory: "This is the case of bereaved monkey mothers who have been seen to steal a baby from another female, and look after it. I see this as a double mistake, since the adopter not only wastes her own time; she also releases a rival female from the burden of child-rearing, and frees

her to have another child more quickly."[78] One possible explanation for this is that when a certain degree of intelligence evolves in animals, helpful behaviour which promotes survival is best accomplished through emotional drives. These same emotions, while helpful in general, can also lead to behaviour which is occasionally 'counter-productive' from the point of view of a selfish gene. If my explanation is true, then one could surmise that the evolution of empathy (along with other emotional states) in humans and some other animals is a fairly efficient means of ensuring cooperative behaviour among intelligent beings, and that such empathy is often the means that has evolved as the causal mechanism underlying cooperative behaviour in the more intelligent animals. This means that not all helpful behaviour in the animal world is dictated by blind instinct, unaccompanied by feelings of empathy.

Taking a step back from actual animal behaviour, Robert Axelrod developed models of behaviour on his computer, based upon the familiar Prisoner's Dilemma, and invited people to send in various strategies to see which would win. In a Prisoner's Dilemma game, two agents are given the chance either to cooperate or not cooperate with each other. Thus, there are four possible outcomes: both can cooperate, both can be uncooperative, the first agent can cooperate while the other is uncooperative, or *vice versa*. If they both cooperate, then they will each do better than if they are both uncooperative, but if one cooperates and the other does not, the one who cooperates will suffer the worst possible outcome, while the one who is uncooperative will obtain the best possible result. Thus, given no knowledge of what the other person will do, each prisoner will seem to do better if she does not cooperate: Either the other person will cooperate, in which case the first will do better not to cooperate and get the best possible result, or the other person will not cooperate, in which case the first will also do better not to cooperate, this time to

avoid the worst possible result. But if both prisoners reason that their best strategy is never to cooperate, then both prisoners are doomed to achieve a worse result than if they cooperated with one another.

The establishment of a powerful enforcer, such as Hobbes' sovereign, would be one way to require this cooperation, allowing them both to gain the benefits of mutual cooperation without fear of defection from the other side. Indeed, some laws seem designed to secure greater benefits for all by stopping an individual from benefiting at the expense of others. What is interesting, however, is that there is a strategy for dealing with non-cooperators that still allows one to benefit from cooperating with cooperators. This strategy can be internalized, thus removing the need (in some cases at least) for an external sovereign to mandate cooperative behaviour.

This strategy is not to cooperate all the time; that would simply lead to being exploited by consistent non-cooperators. On Axelrod's later model, which also has various computer programs with various strategies repeatedly interacting with one another, this would lead to non-cooperators increasing in numbers at the expense of cooperators, until there were only non-cooperators left.[79] This is because, roughly speaking, Axelrod's later model increases the number of programs using a certain strategy if the previous 'generation' of programs did better using this strategy than programs with different strategies.

The strategy that did the best in Axelrod's tournaments was the tit-for-tat strategy.[80] This strategy tells one to cooperate initially, and then simply to repeat the opponent's previous action. Thus, if a tit-for-tat program meets either a consistent cooperator or another tit-for-tat program, both will benefit greatly in comparison to two consistent non-cooperators. If it meets a

consistent non-cooperator, it will do only slightly worse than the latter. In the long run, it is likely that a group of individuals that follows the tit-for-tat strategy will outperform a group of agents that consistently fails to cooperate with each other. Furthermore, when a few non-cooperators, or even small groups of non-cooperators, are introduced to a group of those that follow the tit-for-tat strategy, those in the latter group are not overwhelmed by the non-cooperators. Tit-for-tat is an evolutionarily stable strategy.[81]

However, the strategy of consistent non-cooperation is also fairly stable, and a single tit-for-tat entity introduced into a field of consistent non-cooperators will fare badly. Yet, if a small group of tit-for-tat strategists could somehow come together, they would fare well, and tit-for-tat would come to dominate. This is called clustering.[82] In addition, where "recalculation of the payoffs can be done in such a way that an individual has a part interest in the partner's gain" (because, for example, one's kin carries some of one's genes), an altruistic strategy such as tit-for-tat will also be advantageous. This strategy could also include learning to pick up cues as to whether to continue the cooperation, especially when the relationship to the other is uncertain, as sometimes occurs in both the animal and human worlds. "One cue to relatedness is simply the fact of reciprocation of the cooperation." Presumably, a consistent non-cooperator would be less likely to be related to a conditional cooperator than would another conditional cooperator. Thus, the tit-for-tat strategy can first gain an evolutionary foothold in a world of consistent non-cooperators through the clustering of kin and then spread through cooperation with one's own kin group and, eventually, members of other cooperative kin groups.[83] This is similar to Hume's account, related above.

The interesting aspect of the basic tit-for-tat program is that it seems to model what

happens with humans. People are initially disposed to be decent to others, but will be quick to react negatively if they perceive that they have been shown disrespect or betrayed by another. Forgiveness is possible. If a person does wrong to another but then apologizes, makes suitable reparations and seems sincerely willing to cooperate in the future, then, often (though not always), the wronged party is willing to cooperate again. The tit-for-tat strategy models this forgiveness.

Of course, this strategy has some problems when followed in the real world. Human beings are often inclined to hold grudges. Furthermore, it is an unfortunate fact that a person sometimes interprets another's behaviour as being motivated by more ill-will than is actually the case. The first person will then respond, using tit-for-tat, at the level of the perceived behaviour, as opposed to the true behaviour. The other will then respond in kind, or worse if she also misinterprets the first person's behaviour as showing more hostility than actually exists. This can lead to a series of increasingly nasty interactions between people, as each, by engaging in tit-for-tat, can become more and more uncooperative and hostile towards the other.[84] This may explain why we need laws and why communication is important in stopping possible escalations into blood feuds (or, in the cases of countries, wars).

Escalation based upon misunderstanding is also modelled in more complex prisoner's dilemma computer simulations. In these simulations, there is a small chance of error. Thus, a tit-for-tat strategy will occasionally be non-cooperative even after the other strategy was cooperative. Between two tit-for-tat players, this can lead to a series of each taking a turn at being non-cooperative at the other's expense. One way to counter that outcome is to be more 'forgiving', and occasionally cooperate even after the other was non-cooperative. Of course, one

must not be *too* forgiving, or one will be exploited by the constant non-cooperators, or constant defectors. Another strategy is to program 'contrition' into the strategy, so that it will "avoid responding to the other player's defection after its own unintended defection."[85]

A further successful strategy is based on the notion that in real life people do not usually need each other's help simultaneously. Marcus R. Frean designed a simulation in which "each individual waits for the other to respond before reassessing its own decision."[86] A strategy that does very well in this scenario is called 'firm-but-fair'. It begins by cooperating. If the other cooperates, it continues to cooperate. If the other defects, it also defects. If, after it defected, the other cooperates, it cooperates, and so, like tit-for-tat, it is forgiving, and thus is able to cooperate with those strategies that learn that it will not tolerate being exploited. On the other hand, if, after it defects, the other defects, it will sometimes (but not always) cooperate anyway, which adds the generosity that was suggested as a modification to tit-for-tat, so avoiding a series of mutual defections. It does not analyze whether its own defections were intended or unintended and so, unlike the contrite version of tit-for-tat, must rely upon its generosity to deal with the small chance of error that is programmed into these games.

Another prominent researcher in this field is Peter Danielson.[87] Danielson is cautious about the conclusions that can be drawn from computer models such as those he uses, and stresses that he is "making no claims to explain how any real historical agents became rational",[88] much less how they became moral. But his work at least suggests that it is possible for moral attitudes to arise through evolution. In "How to Evolve Rationality & Something Better" he uses a model on which it can be shown, not only how rationality (in the sense of a being efficiently pursuing its interests) might arise through a process similar to evolution, but

also how this sort of evolution could lead to the predominance of a number of other strategies. One such strategy is conditional cooperation, in which an agent will cooperate with a second agent that the first agent knows will reciprocate such cooperation.[89] Such a strategy requires forward-looking agents with the ability to detect "cheaters" who would respond with defection to one's own cooperation.

All of these computer simulations demonstrate that genetic characteristics that lead creatures to simulate strategies like tit-for-tat or firm-but-fair or conditional cooperation would lead to those creatures, on average, becoming more successful, and thus more likely to survive and reproduce those genetic characteristics. Thus, there may be good reason to believe that the tendency in humans towards empathy for others, tempered with the wisdom not to be exploited by someone who has demonstrated anti-social tendencies, is generally, by leading to some strategies that resemble those listed above, a survival-favouring trait.

F. Emotions as the means to cooperative behaviour

Although our emotions are sometimes thought of as interfering with our ability to assess our interests rationally, it is likely that emotions play a large role in determining how we humans decide whether or not to be cooperative. Frank believes that it is no accident that we did not evolve to be emotionless thinkers. Frank notes that we sometimes do not have time to make calculations when we decide whether or not to help someone in need. According to the strict model of reciprocal altruism (in which we do a favour in the expectation of a returned favour), if we come upon a stranger who has a one-in-twenty chance of drowning, then we should rescue the individual only if there is a greater than one-in-twenty chance of that individual returning the

favour. "Yet rescue attempts have always been common, even when they involve great peril to the rescuer."[90] We are not cool rational calculators, and thus act in ways that do not fit the strict model of reciprocal altruism. One might explain rescue attempts as being part of a more generalized version of the tit-for-tat strategy, according to which we always help those who (as far as we know) are decent, or who are in a life-threatening situation. However, Frank also has a possible explanation for heroic, life-threatening rescue attempts which, since presumably one cannot collect a reciprocal benefit if one is dead, do not seem rational.

His theory is that people are fairly good at reading other people's dispositional states, and communicating their own dispositional states to others. For instance, the disposition to become enraged when harmed by another may lead one to take revenge, even at significant cost. There is no reason to do this on a strictly rational model, since to harm another at a cost to oneself is still a net loss for oneself. But if others know that one would take revenge, then it makes provocation by others less likely. Thus, the disposition to become enraged, combined with the ability to communicate that one has such a disposition, serves the function of preventing exploitation. Of course, if this disposition is not known, or disregarded, it can lead to blood feuds, as in the tragic case of the Hatfields and the McCoys. In general, however, the disposition to become enraged and vengeful serves its purpose.[91]

The disposition to be heroic can be explained in a similar way. Although occasionally it results in one taking life-threatening actions, it also marks the individual as a good person to be around, one likely to help others when they are in need, and one who is likely to be trustworthy. Thus, people tend to be more friendly towards those known to have this disposition, and people with this disposition, on average, prosper, even though some individuals sacrifice themselves.

More generally, the disposition to be trustworthy, if communicated, is useful. If you choose a partner in initiating a cooperative venture, other things being equal, you probably want to work with someone with a reputation for being trustworthy rather than an unknown. If the emotions associated with trustworthiness were shown clearly on another's face, you would also be able to make this choice, even without knowing the person's reputation. If you were known to be a bad liar it would similarly be easier to make cooperative deals, since people would be able to detect when you were lying, and, by extension, when you were *not* lying. "A blush may reveal a lie . . . but in circumstances that require trust, there can be great advantage in being known to be a blusher."[92]

Frank's theory relies upon our ability to communicate our disposition to be helpful, and to read such an attitude in others. The ability to read others is a quality we all share to some extent, although it can be improved with conscious practice. "Posture, the rate of respiration, the pitch and timbre of the voice, perspiration, facial muscle tone and expression, movement of the eyes, and a host of other signals guide us in this task . . . we apparently know, even if we cannot articulate, how a forced smile differs from one that is heart-felt."[93] Humans have a fairly well-developed ability to read each other's emotional dispositions and decide whether they are trustworthy or not.[94] Frank's theory seems plausible, not only because it explains our ability to detect cheaters and cooperators, but also because it brings into explanations of human actions an important part of what it means to be human. In Frank's view, emotions are not side-effects of our evolution that render us imperfectly rational beings, but rather the means by which we can act rationally in our dealings with each other, for the most part and in the long run.

G. Imitation as a means towards adopting and reinforcing the cooperative strategies

The ability to communicate and read emotional states, then, sometimes allows altruistic individuals to 'out-evolve' selfish ones. There is a further explanation worth considering as to why, within a given group of mostly altruistic people, individuals with altruistic genes are more successful at prospering and passing on these genes than selfish individuals who are found in the group, and, thus, how groups of altruistic individuals retain their genetic predispositions to altruism over time.

Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson suggest that it is possible that humans tend, when presented with both cooperative and selfish role models, to use "the frequency of a variant among his role models to evaluate the merit of the variant."[95] Thus a human raised by altruistic individuals is likely to copy such behaviour and be altruistic herself: "conformist transmission provides at least one theoretically cogent and empirically plausible explanation for why humans differ from all other animals in cooperating, against their own self-interest, with other human beings to whom they are not closely related."[96]

This disposition to conform to the norm of cooperation may still be with us now that we are interacting with larger numbers of people than our ancestors. Thus, we may retain a disposition to help those we encounter, even though they are not among our 200 nearest kin. That being said, there are also motivations that lead us to be wary of strangers, and less likely to help those whom we perceive as not being part of our group. Thus, nationalism, racism, and other manners of helping those perceived to be in the in-group but not those perceived to be in the out-group may have a genetic basis. Still, people can help strangers, as witness the rescuers of the Jews, who have throughout history been treated as an out-group. I will discuss this issue

more in Chapter VII, as I am in the present chapter merely trying to establish that people are not merely selfish, and that there are ways that truly altruistic motivations could have developed within us.

Boyd's and Richerson's theory is a possible resolution of the apparent paradox (to those not convinced by Frank's arguments that most selfish people are detectable) that altruistic groups should do better than selfish groups, but that selfish individuals within those altruistic groups should do better, in evolutionary terms, than altruistic individuals within altruistic groups. I will address later the question of whether selfish individuals actually do better than their altruistic cousins. Assuming that selfish individuals do better, why do their genes not take over the group, making it into a selfish group? Boyd and Richerson have provided a possible answer to this question, and have also shown how people could learn to cooperate with others, even those not closely related to themselves. They provide a plausible explanation for Hume's view that people might extend the natural affection they feel towards close kin outwards towards others.

Of course, the theories detailed in this chapter are not mutually exclusive. We may have a predisposition to empathy which is then affected, through our disposition to conform, by the level of empathy of the people around whom we are raised. The nature and nurture debate is longstanding in many fields, but in the case of the development of empathy there is room for both genetics and our social environment to play a role.

H. A selfish individual among altruists

All of us are prone to at least occasional acts of selfishness. People tell lies to each

other, for example, or fail to return borrowed books, or park illegally, and so forth. "The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners reports that about $435 billion is ripped off from businesses by their own workers each year--about 6 percent of an average firm's revenues and three times the rate of such fraud estimated in the 1960s . . . The Josephson Institute's "1996 Report Card on American Integrity" found that in the [previous] five years stealing by teens had increased. [In 1996] some 42 percent of teen boys and 31 percent of teen girls admitted stealing something at least once [in the] last year."[97] These lies and crimes are fairly common, and seem to show a pervasive lack of consideration for others. It would seem that although human beings are often altruistic, they also commit selfish acts, particularly when they can persuade themselves that the harm to others is minimal (especially when they commit a crime against an institution, so that no particular individual is pictured as being harmed), or when they can rationalize their needs as being more important than others', particularly if they believe that certain groups of others have few or no rights against their selfish behaviour. Human beings are quite skilled at inventing excuses for their behaviour, sometimes to deceive others, but often to convince themselves that what they are doing is not that bad. Even if society is based upon a background of cooperation towards common interests, it must be acknowledged that selfish behaviour exists, either in its 'honest' form of selfishness identified as such, or rationalized away with some excuse.

Consider cheating on taxes. "About 25 percent of Americans admit to some form of tax cheating, and that costs $100 billion annually."[98] On the one hand, people who cheat on taxes are seen by those who do not as selfish; the cheaters are ignoring the interests of the people who are served by the money the government collects. On the other hand, some people feel that the

tax laws themselves are unjust, and so to cheat on their taxes is in their opinion a sort of civil disobedience. Such people would not begrudge their fellow citizens paying fewer taxes as well, and all people receiving fewer government services. Thus, they are not like selfish people who cheat on taxes but who wish to benefit from others not cheating on taxes.

It seems likely that most people are generally altruistic, but are prone to acts of selfishness, which they then try to excuse. However, there are some people who are thoroughly selfish in every aspect of their lives, and who do not need to assuage their consciences with excuses. Many of these people are sociopaths, or in more modern terminology, psychopaths. They are, by definition, incapable of empathy or guilt, and they may make up about one percent of the population.[99]

The psychopaths' existence is explained by Frank, who argues that, in a species in which some individuals are selfish but try to pretend to be altruistic, and others try to detect who is genuinely altruistic and who is merely pretending to altruism, there will arise some who are capable of disguising their nature to a great extent. These people, unlike most people, will not have empathy. They will be able to lie while giving the emotional cues for honesty, and will be undetected, for the most part.[100] Psychopaths fit this description very well, and are often described as being able to charm people, at least at first.[101] There is a parallel between psychopaths and cuckoos, who place their eggs in the nest of birds of a different species to be raised by them. The cuckoos lay eggs that look similar to the eggs of the host species. Otherwise, the host bird would simply throw out the 'stranger' eggs. There is a remedy, however. As the cuckoos have evolved to lay eggs that look very similar to those of the host species, so host species have evolved to become very discerning, and very good at detecting eggs

that are not their own. Thus, an evolutionary 'arms race' has developed.[102]

There is a similar arms race among human beings. We have become better and better at detecting cheaters, and new cheaters have arrived who are better and better at remaining undetected. Leda Cosmides and John Tooby have demonstrated through a series of experiments that people "do not have a general-purpose ability to detect violations of rules. But human reasoning is well-designed for detecting violations of conditional rules when these can be interpreted as cheating on a social contract."[103] In the words of Matthew Ridley, it seems that we are far better at detecting cheaters in social situations than at spotting "other, logically comparable but socially different events, such as when people have made mistakes or broken prescriptive rules that are not social contracts."[104] We would never have evolved such an incredible ability to detect cheaters if there were no cheaters good enough at deception to evade our detection some of the time.

Frank argues that one reason to be altruistic even in situations in which we know we will have no repeated interactions, such as tipping a waitress in a foreign city, is that our characters are affected by our actions. Thus, being selfish when we are likely to be undetected will cause us to have more selfish characters in general, which in turn may be detectable by others: "Few people can maintain a predisposition to behave honestly while at the same time frequently engaging in transparently opportunistic behaviour."[105] Given that some individuals who are already completely selfish will be good at feigning trustworthiness, however, their acts of undetected cheating will not necessarily influence their ability to appear trustworthy to others. Thus, there are some materially successful selfish people in any large enough social group. Fortunately, while there will be cheaters, the numbers of such cheaters in a given altruistic

society will be relatively low. This is because of: a) the success of tit-for-tat-like strategies in having cooperators greatly benefit from long-term relationships, b) the not inconsiderable ability to detect cheaters, and c) our strong negative reactions to cheaters, once detected.[106]

I. The persistent question

We can still ask who is better off: the rare successfully deceptive cheaters, or the more common relative altruists. I do not pretend that the present attempt will be able to convince a completely selfish person such as a psychopath to become altruistic. Rather, it is designed to provide some justification for the motives of altruists. My goal in this chapter was to show that altruism is fairly prevalent, and that altruistic motives are not some disguised form of egoistic motives. It has been argued that most prosocial acts have hidden egoistic motives, perhaps partially based upon the idea that one expects selfish behaviour, in general, to be selected, since such behaviour should in theory increase fitness more than altruistic behaviour. To address this argument, the present chapter has included a number of theories on how altruism could have developed naturally in human beings.

However, this still leaves open the question of whether it is in an individual's interest, given that she lives among altruistic people, to be so herself. For it is sometimes easy to believe that selfish people, in certain circumstances, prosper more than altruists. It is also sometimes easy to believe that people are becoming more and more selfish, or, worse, that they were always mostly selfish. This can happen through real-life exposure to selfishness, or, occasionally, through considering examples of it. People who believe that nice guys finish last are likely to think that altruists are rare in our society and that they are quickly exploited to ruin by their more

selfish associates. Accounts in this chapter may answer the question as to why selfishness has not taken over in general.

Still, they may not be convincing to the individual deciding whether she should be altruistic, even if she believes her society is so. As Dawkins has noted, individuals can foil genetics. For instance, every instance of contraception counters the genetic urge to reproduce.[107] Thus, an individual might ask whether, despite his innate urge to be altruistic, it is in his interests to obey that urge. Some teenage girls experience an urge to become mothers while still very young, when a good argument could be made, based upon the probably quality of their lives if they follow through on this urge immediately, for waiting before they procreate. There are many other examples that could be listed, but it is enough for my present purposes to demonstrate that some genetically transmitted instincts can and should be judged and possibly overcome.

Given the strong case for our genes and social conditioning determining our general moral characters, we may think that the question is a mere intellectual exercise. But we are generally capable of rational reflection and consider it worthwhile. Perhaps the reason we do not engage in this reflection more often is our need to act quickly to make real-time decisions. And while the instincts we have to be altruistic are strong and probably cannot be completely eradicated, they can be diminished, as Batson has discovered.[108] Gerald Marwell and Ruth Ames[109] found that graduate students in economics tend to be more likely to be selfish in experiments designed to test for altruistic and selfish behaviour. Given the focus on self-interest in many economics theories, it is possible that the belief that all people are motivated by self-interest may lead people to become more self-interested themselves. If this is the case, then

there is an important reason for showing that people are, in fact, quite altruistic.[110] It may be that, as Matthew Ridley states, "If people are not rational maximizers of self-interest, then to teach them that such behaviour would be logical is to corrupt them."[111] Furthermore, that morality is the underpinning of social cooperation does not automatically mean that a social group is stable. Altruistic motivations may have helped our ancestors to survive, but may themselves be partially overcome by arguments that we are all actually selfish. Since this might lead to a general deterioration of our society and a lower quality of life for its individuals, it seems important to argue that genuine altruism is a significant human motive.

Batson believes that the problem is reversible. He holds that the reason that people can suppress their altruistic instincts is two-fold. One, people have a desire to self-reflect critically. Two, there is a fairly (though not universally) widespread false belief that 'all human motivation is ultimately egoistic'. In this case, a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, since neither those who do not reflect on this issue at all, nor those who do reflect but know that altruism can be an ultimate motivation, will suffer a reduction in altruistic instincts. Batson's answer, then, is to spread the word as widely as possible that true altruism does exist, and that psychological egoism is false.[112] Presumably, the widespread knowledge that there is genuine altruism will influence people to become more altruistic.

But it may not be enough to know that altruism is an ultimate human motivation. Upon seeing another person go unpunished, or nearly unpunished, for breaking a rule, people may ask why they should follow that rule. As Frank puts it, people who continue to uphold the rule in these situations may feel like 'chumps'.[113] Furthermore, they may be tempted to some personal gain through breaking a rule and may stop to consider whether to break their moral codes to do

so. And upon thinking about what they should do in a particular case, they may go on to ponder whether moral behaviour in general, or an altruistic character in particular, are worthwhile.

Frank attempts to answer this question. As previously stated, he holds that it is a beneficial strategy from a strictly rational point of view, to have a readily identifiable trustworthy character.[114] And, since, in Frank's view, character traits are discernible, then "in order to *appear* honest, it may be necessary, or at least very helpful, to *be* honest."[115] Thus, one's good character is a sound investment in serving one's long-term interests, and individual acts of altruism are useful in maintaining that character. Unfortunately, this theory relies upon one's character traits being discernable. One who can disguise her selfish nature, as psychopaths are able to do to some extent, will not be given a reason to be moral from Frank's theory. Thus, the selfish person's response to Frank's theory would not be to wish to be moral, but to wish to be sneakier.

Despite the fact that people are not very rational, and are capable of great self-deception, most like to think of themselves as rational. Once they think about the question "Why be moral?" they will want to discover reasons for being altruistic or selfish. When it comes to deciding what to do in a particular situation, one can use moral reasons to justify moral behaviour. In studying a particular case of potential selfishness, moral reasons can apply. For instance, a person can justify a good act by saying that her conscience requires it, or that she considers herself a person who always keeps promises. And in practical terms, it is likely, as Frank holds, that one's actions affect one's character, so that if one values having a moral character one should act morally.[116] However, one would risk using circular reasoning if one tried to use moral reasons to justify having a moral character.[117] When someone asks why she

should have a good character, she is expecting something more than the answer that it is morally good to have such a character. Other reasons need to be found.

So the question is whether it would be in a person's interests, if it were possible, to attempt to suppress her altruistic instincts, and to be a selfish person who considers only her own interests. Such a person might still feign altruistic actions, at least enough to avoid jail, but would never actually consider the interests of others. Even if an individual is both genetically and socially predisposed to be altruistic and cannot overcome such conditioning, she can still wonder whether this is a cause for regret. A moral individual might accept that she will be altruistic, for the most part, but still wonder whether there is any *reason* to be so. The question of altruistic motivation, historically framed as "Why be moral?", is still important to investigate. This is what I will address in the following chapters. I will begin by examining, given that most people with whom she interacts are fairly altruistic, what a selfish individual can expect to gain, either through obvious acts of selfishness or deceptive ones that do not reveal, or help to reveal, her character.

Endnotes

1. Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, Part. II, In Richard McKeon, ed., *Introduction to Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1947).

2. Robyn M. Dawes and Richard H. Thaler, "Anomalies: Cooperation," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 2 (1988): 187.

3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. xiii, 1651. Reprint. C. B. Macpherson, ed.(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968).

4. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776. Reprint. Edwin Cannan, ed. (New York: Random House, 1937), 14.

5. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 5. Although the two are not necessarily linked, it seems fairly safe to assume that in practice, the maximization of individual utility is motivated by self-interest.

6. Ibid., 278.

7. Brian Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 182-3.

8. For example, Edwin Mansfield, *Microeconomics: Theory and Applications*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1979), Paul Wonnacott and Ronald Wonnacott, *Economics, 3rd ed.* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1986), and Walter Nicholson, *Microeconomic Theory: Basic Principles and Extensions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: The Dryden Press, 1989).

9. See William J. Zahka, *The Nobel Prize Economics Lectures* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992).

10. James Buchanan, "The Public-Choice Perspective" in *Essays on the Political Economy*, 20. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1989).

11. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part I, Section I, (1759). Reprint. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1971), 1.

12. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. xvii, 2.

13. Ibid., Ch. xix, 22.

14. For a survey of various views that assume that man is basically and essentially selfish, see Alfie Kohn, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1990), Ch. 7, and Martin L. Hoffman, "Is Altruism Part of Human Nature?", *Journal of Personality and Social*

Psychology 40(1) (1981): 121-137. I shall address these concerns later in the chapter.

15. Cited in Matthew Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* (London: Viking, 1996), 260.

16. These extremely heroic accounts are taken from "Carnegie Fund Honours 18 for Heroism", in *The Spokane News*, February 26, 1999, link visited June 1, 2000, <http://www.spokane.net/news-story-body.asp?Date=022699&ID=s536776&cat=>. Link currently inactive but the same data can be found at <http://www.carnegiehero.org>. Visited June 14, 2001.

17. Kristen R. Monroe, Michael C. Barton, and Ute Klingemann, "Altruism and the Theory of Rational Action: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe," in *Ethics* 101 (1990): 103-122. See also Monroe, "John Donne's People: Explaining Differences between Rational Actors and Altruists through Cognitive Frameworks," *Journal of Politics* 53 (1991): 394-433.

18. Monroe, "John Donne's People," 410.

19. Ibid., 396.

20. Ibid., 403.

21. Monroe, Barton and Klingemann, "Altruism and the Theory of Rational Action," 109-110.

22. Ibid., 110.

23. Ibid., 112-113.

24. Ibid., 114.

25. There is a danger in seeing altruistic acts as being the domain of saints, as it sets up a dichotomy between being motivated only by the concern for others and being motivated only by a concern for oneself. This might give some people the excuse, if they do not feel motivated to be saints, to be completely selfish. It is likely that most people are motivated by both altruistic and egoistic concerns, if the former are irreducible to the latter. For more on the danger of using saints as an excuse to be selfish, see Kohn, *Brighter Side*, Ch. 7.

26. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 14.

27. It might be objected that, since an agent's preferences may differ from what is in her short-term or long-term interests, that an economic theorist might simply say that economic theories about agent utility are only concerned with an agent's preferences, regardless of whether those preferences are to serve the interests of herself or of others. This would differ from Buchanan's approach, but perhaps a case could be made for some of the other economic theorists. In that case, I might be accused of fighting a straw man. If so, then I am glad that I do not have to fight so hard, since it would then be easier to prove that genuine altruism does exist. However, many

people believe that human beings are truly selfish, once one clears away various altruistic disguises that this selfishness can adopt. And, as will be shown later in this chapter, there are cases in which graduate students in economics seem to react more selfishly than other graduate students in various tests of altruistic and selfish behaviour. One reason this could be so is that they are taught, or come to their courses already believing, that the rational agent is a selfish one.

28. Robert Frank, *Passions within Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), 5.

29. David O. Sears and Carolyn L. Funk, "Self-Interest in Americans' Political Opinions" in Mansbridge, Jane, ed., *Beyond Self-Interest*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 147-170.

30. Jane Mansbridge, "Self-Interest in the Explanation of Political Life" in Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond self-interest*, 18.

31. Downs, 267.

32. Downs, Ch.14. Barry, 20.

33. Mansbridge, *Beyond Self-Interest*, 16; Barry, 20; Frank, *Passions within Reason*, 231.

34. Dawes, et al, "Anomalies: Cooperation," 187-197. See also Robyn M. Dawes, Aphons J. C. van de Kragt, and John M. Orbell, "Cooperation for the Benefit of Us - Not Me, or My Conscience," in Mansbridge, ed. *Beyond self-interest*.

35. Mansbridge, *Beyond self-interest*, 17.

36. C. Daniel Batson, "Why Act for the Public Good? Four Answers,"*Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 20(5) (1994): 603-10.

37. C. Daniel Batson, et al., "Is Empathetic Emotion a Source of Altruistic Motivation?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40(2) (1981): 290-302. The reference is to page 293. This experiment, and the others to follow, are all detailed in part III of C. Daniel Batson, *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social-Psychological Answer* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1991). Most references to Batson's experiments will be to this work unless otherwise indicated.

38. C. Daniel Batson, "Altruism and Prosocial Behaviour," Ch. 22 in Gilbert, et al., eds., *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 4th ed. 2 vols. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 301.

39. Batson, *The Altruism Question*, Ch. 8.

40. Ibid., Ch. 9.

41. J. Fultz et al, "Social evaluation and the empathy-altruism hypothesis,"*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50 (1986): 761-769.

42. Batson, *The Altruism Question*, 132.

43. Batson, "Five studies testing two new egoistic alternatives to the empathy-altruism hypothesis" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55(1) (1988): 52-77. The quotes are from page 63.

44. "latent time", *The Collins English Dictionary, 2nd ed.*, Patrick Hawks, ed. (London: William Collins & Co., Ltd., 1986).

45. V. Geller and P. Shaver, "Cognitive consequences of self-awareness," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 12 (1976) 99-108. Referred to in Batson, *The Altruism Question*, 144.

46. See Batson, *The Altruism Question*, 152.

47. Ibid., 150.

48. Ibid., 158.

49. Ibid., 162-3.

50. Ibid., 163.

51. C. D. Batson, "Negative-state relief and the empathy-altruism hypothesis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56 (1989): 922-33.

52. Batson, *The Altruism Question*, 172.

53. Joel Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism," Ch.1 in George Sher, ed., *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1987), 5.

54. Even if it is, that does not tell in favour of psychological egoism, since the pleasure need not be casually distinct from the action, but taken in the doing of it for its own sake. I am grateful to James Dybikowski for mentioning this point.

55. Matt Ridley and Bobbi S. Low, "Can Selfishness Save the Environment?" *Human Ecology Review*, Winter/Spring vol. 1 (1994): 1-13. Originally printed in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept. 1993. See also their "Why We're Not Environmental Altruists – And What We Can Do About It," *Human Ecology Review*, 1 (1994): 107-136.

56. Ridley and Low, "Why We're Not Environmental Altruists – And What We Can Do About It," 118, 135.

57. In any case, when it comes to helping others directly, most of us are motivated by altruism at least to some extent. There are numerous cases of people helping people, as I have noted, and Batson's experiments show that this helping behaviour is not necessarily tied to hidden egoistic motives. Again, the interviews with the rescuers of the Jews during World War II, and with other heroes, show that selfish motives do not play a role in their behaviour. This indicates that we can expect altruism to be a fairly common, albeit not universal, motivation for fairly common actions. This fits in with the observation we have of people engaging in helping behaviour even at a slight to moderate cost to their own well-being.

58. David Hume, "Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals" in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals,* 1777. Reprint. *Analytical Index by L. A. Selby-Bigge.* 3rd ed 1893. Reprint. *With notes by P. H. Nidditch.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Section III, Part I, p.187.

59. One might argue that her behaviour might eventually influence others to behave altruistically in turn, thus helping her to build up a society of altruists, and so serving her interests in the long run. However, this would depend upon how difficult it would be to alter others' behaviour from being selfish to being altruistic.

60. Ridley, 215.

61. Batson, *The Altruism Question*, 211.

62. John Robbins, *Diet for a New America* (Walpole: Stillpoint Publishing, 1987), 27-30.

63. A more complex example is that of dolphins who cooperate in groups, but for the purpose of violently kidnapping an unwilling female dolphin from another group (Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue*, 161-2). This shows a level of cooperation that suggest empathy, but also an act that suggests lack of empathy. But humans are also sometimes selective with respect to the subject of their empathy. I will address that matter in the final chapter of this thesis.

64. Batson, *The Altruism Question*, 221.

65. Plato, *Republic*, G. M. A. Grube, trans., rev. by C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works*, John M. Cooper, ed., Book I, 351c-d.

66. Ibid., 369b-370c.

67. Ibid., 374a.

68. Of course, a species could itself have a specialized niche. It could, for instance, consist of members that eat only a certain sort of food, or thrive only in a certain environment. However, the sort of specialization I am describing is that which takes place within a species, with different members of the same species assuming different roles. In order for this sort of specialization to cause members of the species to prosper, comparted to a species of generalists,

cooperation between members of the same species is required.

69. Plato, *Republic*, Book I, 545c-576b.

70. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (1739). Reprint. Book III, Part II, Section II, L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 485-7.

71. Ibid., 485-7.

72. Ibid., 500-1.

73. Hume, "Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals", Section III, Part I, p. 190.

74. There is a gap between Gauthier's constrained maximizers and the commonly held expectations of moral behaviour. Martin Hollis notes, "Even if the theory can show why it pays the strong to play fair with the strong, and the weak to play fair with the weak, what reason have the strong to play fair with the weak?" Martin Hollis, *Trust within Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 96.

75. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene, 2nd ed.*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

76. Ibid., Ch. 6, pp.100-1.

77. Ibid., Ch. 10, pp. 181, 187.

78. Ibid., Ch. 6, pp. 101-2.

79. Axelrod, Robert, *The Complexity of Cooperation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 17

80. Axelrod, Robert, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984).

81. Ibid., 99-100.

82. Ibid., 66-7, 96.

83. Ibid., 97.

84. This is recounted in Roger Fischer and Scott Brown, *Getting Together: Building Relationships* as *We Negotiate*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 197-202.

85. Axelrod, *The Complexity of Cooperation*, 33-4.

86. Marcus R. Frean, "The prisoner's dilemma without synchrony," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London,* Series B, Vol. 257 (1994), 75-9. The reference is to page 76.

87. Peter Danielson, "How to Evolve Rationality & Something Better", 1-7, in press, visited on June 10, 2001. <http://eame.ethics.ubc.ca/Robo/pad_publications.htm>.

88. Ibid., 1

89. Ibid., 1-7. In the simplest models, agents cannot hide their strategies from one another. See also Danielson, *Artificial Morality: Virtuous Robots for Virtual Games* (London: Routledge, 1992), 65.

90. Frank, *Passions within Reason*, 28.

91. Ibid., Ch. 1.

92. Robert Frank, "A Theory of Moral Sentiments," Ch. 5 in Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond self-interest*, 78. Frank's theory allows for the development of the disposition to help others in need, or those weaker than oneself, and therefore could explain why we are altruistic beings rather than the constrained maximizers that Gauthier presents.

93. Ibid,. 78.

94. This is a human equivalent of the ability of Danielson's agents to identify whether other agents will cooperate with them or not. This may also explain, incidentally, why people are more willing to cheat large institutions, such as the government, than other individuals. While other individuals have emotional dispositions, an institution does not have a personality as such. We have evolved to interact well with people, but not with institutions. Thus, the usual emotional constraints not to cheat the other are weaker. Frank notes that we have this propensity in *Passions within Reason*, 248.

95. Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, "Culture and Cooperation," Ch.7 in Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond self-interest*, 199.

96. Ibid., 127.

97. Harrison Rainie, Margaret Loftus and Mark Madden. *US NEWS: Culture and Ideas.* <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/greed.htm>.

98. Ibid. Quote is referring to M. Hirsh Goldberg's *The Complete Book of Greed* (William Morrow and Company, New York, 1994.)

99. Robert Hare, *Without Conscience* (New York: Pocket Books, 1993), 1-2.

100. Frank, "A Theory of Moral Sentiments", 78-87. See also Frank, *Passions within Reason*, 10-11.

101. Hare, Ch. 7, 9.

102. This example is from Dawkins, 103-4.

103. Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, "Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange", Chapter 3 in *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1992), 163-228.

104. Ridley, 130.

105. Frank, "A Theory of Moral Sentiments", 95.

106. Ibid., 90.

107. Dawkins, 118-20.

108. C. Daniel Batson et al., "Critical Self-Reflection and Self-Perceived Altruism: When Self-Reward Fails,"*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53(3) (1987): 594-602.

109. Gerald Marwell and Ruth E. Ames, "Economists Free Ride, Does Anyone Else?" *Journal of Public Economics* 15 (1981): 295-310.

110. See Dawes, et al., "Cooperation for the Benefit of Us," for more speculation on this experiment. C. D. Batson also holds this view. See his *The Altruism Question*, 227-9.

111. Ridley, 145.

112. Batson, *The Altruism Question*, 227-9.

113. Frank, *Passions within Reason*, 18-19.

114. Ibid., 249-50.

115. Ibid., 18.

116. Frank, "A Theory of Moral Sentiments," 95.

117. I will explore this issue more deeply in the next chapter.

Chapter III

The last chapter showed that altruism is a genuine motivation and gave many possible reasons for how humans came to be altruistic. However, none of those theories gives a selfish individual reason to be altruistic, much less moral, assuming that she can disguise her selfish nature. In this chapter, I wish first to defend the feasibility and importance of the question "Why should I be moral?" In doing so, I aim to show that one form of ethical egoism, (roughly, the view that people should serve their own interests) is tenable and a threat to the view that people, insofar as they are rational, should be moral. I will not define morality, except to make the assumptions that to be motivated to be moral, one must be motivated to act in others' interests, and that a moral rule is prescriptive both for oneself and for at least some others.[1] I then wish to examine the practical problems that a person who is openly selfish is likely to face in a world like ours. Finally, I wish to look at what a successfully deceitful selfish person is likely to have to give up, in comparison with her moral cousin.

A. The feasibility of ethical egoism

1. Is ethical egoism a coherent doctrine?

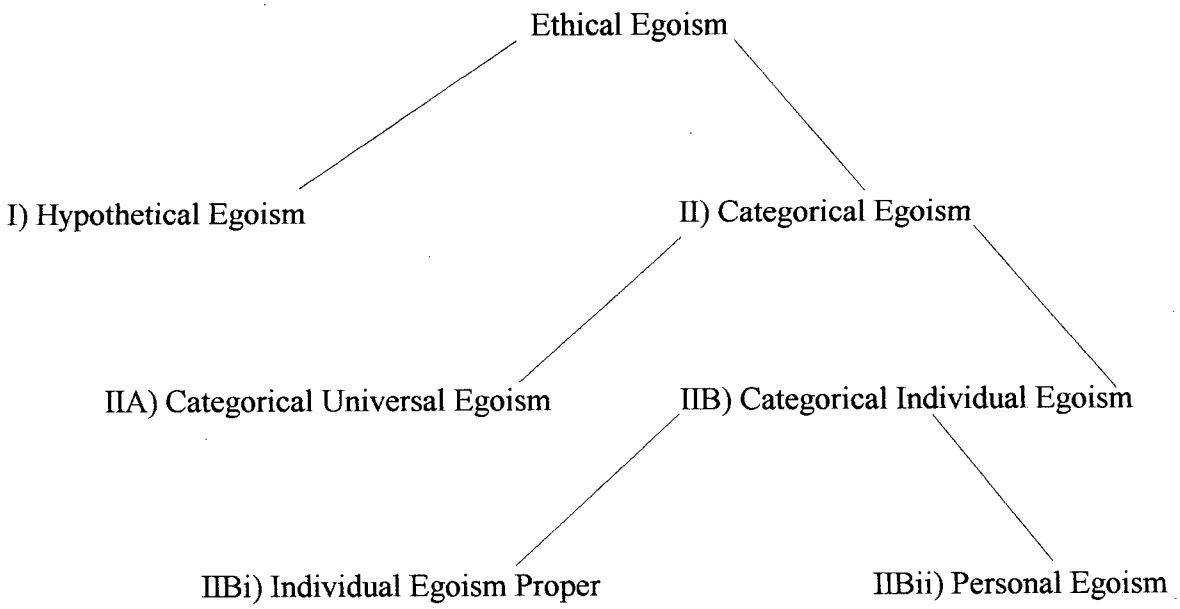
Some philosophers have denied that ethical egoism is a coherent doctrine. If this were the case, then an answer to why one should be at all altruistic rather than completely selfish would be that no rational alternative to acting unselfishly exists. This answer can seem attractive because there are many different forms of egoism, and most of them are incoherent, or have other obvious problems. However, this answer is not satisfactory because one form of egoism remains a

challenge to the moral point of view. Since I have already addressed psychological egoism, which denies that we are ever intrinsically motivated to act in the interests of others, I will, in this chapter, examine ethical egoism, which denies that we should ever be so motivated. It will be shown that selfishness as an alternative to being altruistic is not yet ruled out.

There are many sorts of ethical egoism. I will give more complete definitions later, but will sketch out the differences between the various egoisms here.[2] They can be divided into I) hypothetical egoism, which holds that one should be egoistic for another, non-egoistic reason, and II) categorical egoism, which does not place egoism under such a restriction. The latter can be sub-divided into IIA) categorical universal egoism, which holds that everyone should serve her own interests, and IIB) categorical individual egoism, which holds that there is one particular individual whose interests should be served. Again, the latter can be sub-divided into IIBi) individual egoism proper, which states that everyone should serve the interests of one individual, and IIBii) personal egoism (or personal ethical egoism), which advises that individual to serve her own interests, without making any claims about what others should do. This section will demonstrate that, while most of these forms of egoism are no threat to the moral point of view, the last form of egoism is. Let us begin by examining I.

Brian Medlin distinguishes the categorical egoist, for whom the egoistic dogma is the ultimate principle in ethics, from the hypothetical egoist, who believes that universal egoism is the means to an end, that end perhaps being utilitarian or perhaps that of obedience to one's god.[3] Medlin correctly holds that this latter form of egoism is not, strictly speaking, a rejection of the value of others, but rather a convoluted manner of affirming it, by making selfishness its servant. It would, if successful, give an altruistic reason for being selfish. This view is most popularly

Figure 1: A Classification of Types of Ethical Egoism



known as the 'invisible hand' theory of Adam Smith, according to which citizens best increase the general prosperity by pursuing their own selfish ends. However, even if it were shown that individual selfishness could lead to such general prosperity (and I hope in the previous chapter to have placed some doubt upon a community's ability to survive if populated by such selfish people), hypothetical egoism would have to make the much stronger claim that individual selfishness is more successful than individual altruism in increasing the general well-being of a community. I do not believe that this has been satisfactorily proved, and the burden of proof would definitely fall to the proponents of a strong invisible-hand theory. Whatever the merits of this proposition, however, my thesis is not concerned with finding moral reasons to be selfish, but rather with examining reasons to be altruistic from the standpoint of the benefits and detriments that such a character gives an individual, in comparison with those benefits and detriments that a selfish character obtains.

Let us now turn to categorical universal egoism (IIA). Medlin defines universal egoism as follows: "Universal egoism maintains that everyone ought to look after their own interests and disregard those of other people except insofar as their interests contribute towards his own."[4] So long as we add the rider that the "ought" in this definition is categorical and not instrumental to some greater "ought", we have a good definition for IIA. Medlin states, first, that such an egoist could not promulgate this view without acting against his own interests, nor could he proclaim to others what he does not believe (that everyone should act morally, for instance) without becoming an individual egoist (specifically, the personal ethical egoist, though Medlin does not use the term). According to Medlin, "we assert our ultimate principles not only to express our own attitudes but also to induce similar attitudes in others, to dispose them to conduct themselves as

we wish. In so far as their desires conflict, people don't know what to do. And, therefore, no expression of incompatible desires can ever serve for an ultimate principle of human conduct."[5] And universal egoism expresses the attitude both that I want to satisfy my interests at the expense of the interests of others, and that I want each other person to satisfy her interests at the expense of the interests of others and myself. Medlin makes the modest assumption that personal interests and those of others will occasionally come into conflict.

I agree with Medlin that IIA is not a coherent doctrine, but wish to consider an objection made by Jesse Kalin, who uses the example of a chess game to make his point. A chess player may see that her opponent ought to make a certain move without wanting her opponent to win the game. Similarly, one could believe that other people should pursue their own interests without wanting them to do so.[6] Thus, to hold a belief about what others should do is not necessarily to express a desire that they should do it. However, as George Carlson rightly points out in "Ethical Egoism Reconsidered", there is a difference between entertaining egoism in this sense and believing it in the sense of "being disposed to act in a way appropriate to [the egoist's] approving it as a principle of action for all".[7] If one fails to do the latter, then there is no practical difference between this form of universal egoism and personal egoism, which I will investigate below. If one is disposed to act as Carlson describes, on the other hand, then one is trying to act according to an incoherent doctrine, as Medlin states. Thus, IIA either is incoherent or transforms into another form of egoism. So much for categorical universal egoism. Let us now look at IIB, categorical individual egoism.[8]

Kai Nielsen shows in "The Voices of Egoism"[9] that there are two forms of IIB. One sort of individual egoist, the individual egoist proper, will, as Medlin claims, "set out to persuade me

that I should look after him regardless of myself and others".[10] This is a coherent prescriptive doctrine, but one that would be unlikely to succeed (unless one can convince others that one is the only important being: a god perhaps). However, a different sort of individual egoist looks after her own interests, without having any thoughts about what others should do. Nielsen calls this the personal ethical egoist. It is unfortunate that Medlin does not make this distinction, since he confuses the two types of individual egoism.

Medlin believes that individual egoism is not a moral doctrine, and thus not a topic worthy of moral philosophy. Certainly, personal egoism does not seem to be such a doctrine, as it does not tell others what to do, and one would presume that a moral doctrine would at least be prescriptive, more or less, for other people.[11] Individual egoism proper, on the other hand, does seem to be at least a prescriptive doctrine. However, to avoid charges of being completely arbitrary, it would require metaphysical beliefs by all its adherents (including, presumably, the individual egoist) about the total moral superiority of one being to all others. Such metaphysical beliefs are perhaps held by some cult members, but not by most individuals who wonder why they should be moral. Furthermore, as Kalin rightly points out in "In Defense of Egoism," if person A judges that person B should act in A's interests, and B judges that B should act in his own interests, then the two judgements are inconsistent.[12] Therefore, each form of individual egoism proper which holds that all agents should act in one agent's interests, is inconsistent with any form of individual egoism proper which substitutes another agent as the one whose interests overrule everyone else's. These forms of individual egoism proper, although coherent, seem easily defeated because there is no reason to suppose that any given human has the superior moral status necessary to motivate people to accept any such doctrine. Without such a reason, it would

be next to impossible to be successful in life if one attempted the strategy of convincing people to exalt one person's moral status above all others.

On the other hand, Nielsen thinks, correctly, that personal ethical egoism (IIBii) is not so easily dismissed. Medlin is correct to state that it is not a moral doctrine. For one thing, it can be adopted by an individual without that individual needing to think in terms of what others, even others in similar situations, should do. Thus, it neatly avoids the incoherency of IIA and the impracticality of convincing others of the bizarre view required by IIBi. And note that, although two personal egoists could (and likely would) be in competition with one another, their doctrines are consistent, since A's doctrine is that A should follow only A's interests, and does not state what B should do, while B's doctrine is that B should follow only B's interests, and does not state what A should do. The price for avoiding the traps of inconsistency and impracticality is giving up any claim to be a moral doctrine. However, as Nielsen rightly notes, personal egoism still seems a possible choice of a way of life for an individual, and, as a hostile alternative to morality, this choice should be analyzed by moral philosophers. In theory, one could decide either to be a moral person or to forgo morality and be a personal ethical egoist. The justification of the former choice is asked for by the question "Why should I be moral?"

In "Why Should I Be Moral?" and "Why Should I Be Moral - Revisited" Nielsen raises and attempts to answer many common objections to the relevance and importance of the question in the titles. Nielsen distinguishes the causes of morality from reasons to be moral, since it is possible that people may be moral without being able to justify why.[13] This is important. If, as argued in the previous chapter, most of us have altruistic instincts, most likely as a result of our genetic heritage, we can still ask whether these instincts serve a purpose today. He acknowledges

that the "should" in "Why should I be moral?" cannot be a moral "should", on pain of circularity, and also claims that to call someone irrational simply because she chooses to be amoral is to give rationality itself a moral sense, which merely disguises the circularity.[14] Nielsen warns further that those who say that only the moral have "true" happiness or serve their "true" interests may be using "truth" from within the context of moral evaluation, which again is circular. Finally, if one assumes *contra* Aristotle that humans do not have a function *qua* humans, then one cannot argue for morality by saying that it is essential to realizing one's human nature. The moral overtones of such a function are realized when one asks "Why should I fulfill my human function?" I agree with Nielsen's distinctions made above, and with his view that personal ethical egoism is not so easily dismissed. And a more detailed analysis of internalism can show why the question of why one should be moral cannot be settled merely by a definition, on pain of circularity.

2. An account of moral internalism and moral externalism

The issue of whether a personal ethical egoist makes any sense as a rational agent is relevant to the debate between internalists and externalists. Not to be confused with the internalism–externalism debate in epistemology, the issue between moral internalists and moral externalists is whether there is anything about the nature of moral concepts themselves (that is, internal to them) that must give an agent a motivation or reason to act. And moral internalism, like epistemic internalism, comes in many flavours. Thus, the purpose of this section is, first, to distinguish the various types of moral internalism, and, second, to identify which form of moral internalism would, if true, show the personal ethical egoist to be, by definition, either irrational or unable to grasp the meaning of moral terms. The following sections will show that arguments in

support of this form of internalism are unsound.

A basic definition of moral internalism can be found in *The Routledge Encylopedia of Philosophy*: "Internalism states that moral considerations are necessarily motivating for those who grasp them."[15] Externalism, the opposing view, states that moral considerations are not. Christine Korsgaard makes a similar distinction:

> An *internalist* theory is a theory according to which the knowledge (or the truth or the acceptance) of a moral judgement implies the existence of a motive (not necessarily overriding) for acting on that judgement. If I judge that some action is right, it is implied that I have, and acknowledge, some motive or reason for performing that action . . . On an *externalist* theory, by contrast, [a] conjunction of moral comprehension and total unmotivatedness is perfectly possible: knowledge is one thing and motivation another.[16]

Since externalism is simply the negation of internalism, I will focus upon the many versions of moral internalism before returning to a definition of externalism. David Brink makes numerous distinctions between types of moral internalism.[17] First of all, he distinguishes between the idea that moral concepts necessarily give an agent a motivation to act (internalism about motivations), from the idea that moral concepts necessarily give an agent a reason to act (internalism about justificatory reasons). Second, he distinguishes among agent internalism, appraiser internalism and hybrid internalism:

> *Agent internalism* claims that it is in virtue of the concept of morality that *moral obligations* motivate, or provide reason for, the agent to do the moral thing . . . *Appraiser internalism* claims that it is in virtue of the concept of morality that *moral belief* or *moral judgement* provides the appraiser with motivation or reason for action . . . *Hybrid internalism* claims that it is a conceptual truth about morality that the *recognition of a moral obligation* motivates or provides the agent . . . with reason for action.[18]

These distinctions are orthogonal, but some combinations can be quickly dismissed. Agent internalism about motivations is obviously false, since the mere fact that an agent has a moral obligation to X does not motivate her to X – after all, she might not even be aware of such an

obligation. Appraiser internalism about reasons for action is similarly obviously false, since an agent who is mistaken in her moral beliefs or judgements does not necessarily have the moral justification to act on those beliefs. Hitler may have believed that his actions were morally right, but his beliefs in no way morally justified his actions. Agent internalism about reasons and hybrid internalism about reasons both seem obviously true, since if an agent has a moral obligation (much less recognizes one) then she has a moral reason to act, even if she is unaware of it. Thus four of the six forms of internalism are not very interesting to discuss.

Of the various sorts of internalism described above, this thesis will be primarily concerned with appraiser internalism about motivations. I prefer to examine this form of internalism rather than hybrid internalism about motivations because the former, unlike the latter, allows people to ask the "Why Be Moral?" question even if they are mistaken about what their moral obligations are. The main question this chapter will address is whether there is anything internal to moral beliefs or moral judgements that would necessarily cause any agent with such a belief or judgement to be at all motivated to act morally. If the personal ethical egoist is a logically possible rational agent, then appraiser internalism about motivations must be false. In that sense, I am an externalist. I believe that an agent would need more than the belief that X was the morally right thing for her to do in order to have any motivation to do X. If appraiser internalism about motivations is false, then the "Why Be Moral?" question cannot be simply answered with a definition of what it means to be moral.

It might be argued that I am ducking the issue by focussing on motivations rather than on the agent's reasons for actions. For it could be argued that, if an agent were rational, then she would be motivated to do what she had reason to do. Thus, if she had a moral reason to do X,

she would have the motivation to do X, if she were rational. The fact that some agents were not motivated to follow their moral beliefs would simply mean that they were irrational, not that internalism is false.[19] However, this depends upon the meaning of rationality. I take a purely instrumental view of rationality, and hold the Humean belief that beliefs are not desires, and do not intrinsically motivate.[20] On such a view, to have a reason to do Y would indicate that one is motivated directly to do Y, or that one both is motivated to achieve X and believes that doing Y will help to achieve X. A rational agent is one who has all the relevant information about the means needed to achieve her desires, and who will pursue such means, if possible. But the rational agent's initial set of desires are not restricted. It may be impossible to achieve all her desires, but the rational agent with complete information will know how to achieve each desire, if it is possible to achieve it at all. She will also know how to achieve various combinations of desires, insofar as they are possible. A rational agent, on this view, will respond to instrumental reasons to perform actions that will achieve her desires, but will not respond to reasons that she has no motivation to obey. Thus a personal ethical egoist could be rational, and recognize a moral reason to do X, and yet, since she is not motivated to be moral, have no desire to do X.[21]

An alternate conception of rationality would require a rational agent to be at least somewhat motivated to do whatever she believes she has a (moral or non-moral) reason to do. So if an agent is rational in this sense and believes that she has a moral reason to do X because X is a moral obligation, then the agent will be motivated to X. However, this merely changes the wording of the question "Why should I be moral?" to that of "Why should I be rational in this second sense, rather than selfish?" For the difficulties of justifying morality with moral reasons are replaced by the difficulties of justifying being rational in this alternate sense (that is, having

the motivation to do what one has moral reasons to do). For if one appeals to the fact that X is a moral reason, combined with the supposedly insurmountable value of being rational (in the second sense), in order to justify doing X, but being rational means being motivated to do what one has reason to do, including what one has moral reason to do, then one is still using moral reasons to justify moral action. On this alternate definition of rationality, one is appealing to the fact that a rational agent in this sense would obey reasons, including moral reasons, and then saying that one must be like such an agent in order to be rational. But an agent could lack any desire to be rational in this second sense, and still be fully rational in the purely instrumental sense. To say that such an agent is irrational is true if one uses the second sense of rationality, but does not fully address the question of why a purely instrumentally rational personal ethical egoist would want to be rational in this second sense. And that is the question that this thesis is addressing.[22]

Therefore, I will offer a modified version of Brink's definition to define the sort of internalism that I am addressing. For the purpose of this thesis, internalism (or more formally, appraiser internalism about motivations) is the view that 'it is in virtue of the concept of morality that moral belief or moral judgement provides every instrumentally rational agent who holds such a belief, or makes such a judgement, with some motivation for action'. Externalism is the view that moral belief or moral judgement does not, merely in virtue of the concept of morality, provide every instrumentally rational agent who holds such a belief, or makes such a judgement, with any motivation for action.

If arguments for internalism are sound, personal ethical egoism, the strongest candidate for egoism, is not a coherent doctrine. It is irrational to pursue a course of action that requires

one to choose not to be motivated by that which, given sufficient understanding, one cannot help but be motivated by, if one is instrumentally rational. If internalism is sound, then being morally good is in the instrumentally rational agent's best interests. The question of why it is in one's interests to avoid selfishness would become a matter of clarifying how this is so. Such clarification may not be easy to do[23], but it would be possible, in theory, for every instrumentally rational agent.[24] However, the arguments for internalism are unsound. I shall now address the arguments of Christine Korsgaard and Michael Smith, two proponents of internalism.

3. Korsgaard on how one decides to act

Korsgaard believes that a rational agent must be moral. She argues that, insofar as we are reflective beings, we need some form of self-legislation in order to be able to act at all. That is, we need to be able to say that some actions are better than others, in order to have a reason to do a particular action, and thus be able to so act.

Let us examine Korsgaard's argument in "Sources of Normativity"[25] in more detail. "I desire and I find myself with a powerful impulse to act. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I act? Is this desire really a reason to act? The reflective mind cannot settle for perception and desire, as such. It needs a reason. Otherwise, at least as long as it reflects, it cannot commit itself or go forward."[26] It should be noted that Korsgaard uses "reflective" here in the sense of being capable of thinking about one's actions and motivations.

Korsgaard holds that once one reflects upon an action, one needs a reason for that action. In Kantian fashion, one must act according to a law. But this law could be the law of "acting on

the desire of the moment", or acting in one's own interests, as opposed to acting morally.[27] In Korsgaard's view, the law under which one chooses to act is the expression of one's identity (as a wanton, egoist, member of a society, etc.). Thus, the law determines how one thinks of oneself, and "the conception of one's identity . . . [is] a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking." This sense of "practical identity"[28] is one to which I will return in Chapter VI, since I hold that it is important to note the relationship between one's identity and one's values.[29]

Korsgaard continues to follow Kant in holding that a good law is one that a person can endorse as an intrinsically normative entity (one others would agree is binding).[30] She holds that all others would have, *a priori*, to agree to a law made according to this criterion, if they were rational.[31] She also maintains that "we take things to be important because they are important to us – [Kant concluded] that we must therefore take ourselves to be important. . . . if there is any such thing as a reason for action – then humanity as the source of all reasons and values must be valued for its own sake."[32] Thus, she argues that we are morally valuable and must consider each other as so, if we are rational. For, in order for our actions to be valuable, they have to be in line with the laws we create, but for these laws to be valuable, we have to consider ourselves, and any beings with similar legislative abilities, as valuable.

However, there is a challenge to this argument. "Consistency can force me to grant that your humanity is normative for you just as mine is normative for me . . .But it does not force me to share in your reasons or make *your* humanity normative for me."[33] Thus, the position of a personal ethical egoist is consistent with what Korsgaard has thus far said. Korsgaard has a solution, but it doesn't work. Her solution is that if self-consciousness requires me to obligate

myself according to my own laws, then consciousness of you must require me to obligate myself according to your laws (or at least find them provisionally obligating – one might try to give excuses that both interlocutors would recognize as legitimate).[34] The fact that we respond to each other's words as meaningful means that we are conscious of each other as carriers of meaning.[35] Thus "one can intrude into another's consciousness." Yet a personal ethical egoist might find it more rational to ignore the other's words as conveying obligations. So long as one holds that "being me" is important while being "just anyone" is not, then one can consistently hold the egoist position.

Korsgaard holds that this is impossible, that such a person "would have to hear your words as mere noise, not as intelligible speech." Similarly, an animal's cries of pain can obligate us as reasons to change its condition, by intruding on our consciousness.[36] Korsgaard believes that she has argued for the necessity of recognizing that how we respond to others means that we recognize them as able to obligate us. "For it is the most familiar fact of human life that the world contains entities that can tell us what to do and make us do it. They are people, and the other animals."[37] These act as 'sources of normativity'.

I think, however, that a personal ethical egoist could understand the meanings of another's words without accepting that they have normative force over him, just as one can ignore an animal's cries of pain, while being aware that the animal is in pain. Another person's words would not be mere noise, but they would be empty of obligation. The other would not be seen as a source of normativity but as an obstacle or resource with respect to one's own ends. An example of how the egoist might think could be as follows. Imagine that one hears another individual asking him to repay a debt. The egoist can think: "According to this chump's

normative system, which he thinks I share, I should respond with a repayment of the debt or a convincing excuse as to why I cannot do so. I don't care about that as such, but according to my egoist program, it is necessary to placate him and maintain the fiction that I share his normative system. Therefore I must repay the debt, present a convincing excuse as to why I cannot do so, or find another way to preserve the fiction."

4. Michael Smith on Internalism

Michael Smith[38] holds that, assuming the existence of moral facts at all, one has reason to be moral merely by virtue of one's rationality. Smith uses a definition of internalism that is similar to the one I use. He defends the practicality requirement on moral judgements, or P:

> P: If an agent judges that it is right for her to x in circumstances Q, then either she is motivated to x in Q or she is practically irrational.[39]

Externalism says that P is false, because moral judgements do not entail that, in the absence of some form of irrationality, one is motivated to do what one judges to be right. Once again, part of the difference between Smith's views and mine stems from a difference in our definitions of rationality. Smith's view of the rational person closely follows Bernard Williams's and is as follows. A fully rational being would have no false beliefs, would have all true beliefs that were relevant to the situation, and would have no errors in her deliberations (which for Smith means that she would have desires that were systematically justifiable).[40] Except for the last condition, this is similar to the instrumental account of rationality. Where Smith's account differs is that he believes that for desires to be systematically justifiable, one should be able to explain almost all her desires to be means of achieving a few desires, or ideally one. Presumably, the perfectly rational agent would have one master desire, and all other desires

would be desires for means to the end of the master desire. And, because Smith is an internalist, this desire would in turn be affected by a realization of the moral facts, assuming that moral facts exist. However, it simply seems false that people actually seek such a master-desire (although it may well be the case that many people have a very small number of desires that are not means of achieving other desires, I do not think that people choose to have a small, as opposed to a large, number of such irreducible desires as a goal). Furthermore, an agent can be rational while having many desires that are not reducible to each other. Indeed, there is no reason for a rational agent to have to justify any of her irreducible desires, much less to do so by trying to find a way of reducing them to some other desire. The upshot of this is that Smith's definition of desire introduces an element of justification of desires that is unwarranted in an account of rationality. A purely instrumentally rational personal ethical egoist could ask "Why should I be practically rational in Smith's sense, rather than continue as I am?" and the issue this thesis is concerned with would remain.[41] As noted earlier in this chapter, the issue of whether internalism is true or false cannot be decided by the formulation of a definition, if that definition leaves some question similar to the "Why be Moral?" question to be asked, and such is the case with Smith's definition. Therefore, the test of internalism is whether P can succeed if "practically irrational" is taken to mean irrational in the purely instrumental sense.

Smith does present substantive arguments for internalism, but they do not prove externalism to be false, and, most notably, do not adequately explain seeming counter-examples to internalism.[42] If it is logically possible for there to be amoral agents who have moral beliefs despite remaining unmotivated by them, then internalism fails. If such amoral beings exist, then obviously their existence is logically possible. Robert Hare has shown us that at least one

subclass of amoral humans, called psychopaths, exists. There really are people among us who lack guilt and empathy. They are good candidates for being personal ethical egoists, assuming that they are reflective about their way of life. This would seem to be a problem for those who, like Smith, support internalism. However, an internalist could argue that these people are not counter-examples to their view. One could argue that psychopaths, and all amoral agents, either are irrational (which satisfies the conditional P by making the consequent true) or fail to make moral judgements (which satisfies the conditional P by making the antecedent false).

Since there are human beings who seem to be rational in the purely instrumental sense, and yet are not motivated to do what is right, internalists must give an account of them in such a manner that their existence is consistent with internalism, claiming that they do not really make moral judgements. One way of doing this is to say that they make judgements of a different kind. "Even if they do use moral words to pick out the same properties that we pick out when we use moral words, they do not really judge acts to be right and wrong; rather they judge acts to be 'right' and 'wrong'."[43] Thus, they use moral words in a different sense from moral people. For example, Richard M. Hare held that, for an amoral agent, to say "x is 'right'" does not mean "x is right" but rather "x is in accordance with what others judge to be right."[44] If this strategy succeeds, it leaves the practicality requirement intact, since amoral agents fail to satisfy the antecedent of its conditional. It could still be true that if one judged what was right and wrong, then one would be motivated to do right, were one rational. This would lead anyone truly considering the "Why be moral?" question (as opposed to the "Why act in accordance with what others judge to be 'moral'?" question), to reject egoism out of hand as a rational alternative to morality.

Richard Hare's argument is inadequate. As David Brink points out, it does not take the challenge to internalism posed by the existence, or even the conceivability, of amoral agents, seriously enough. We can think of amoral beings who judge "x is right" and not just "x is 'right'". For instance, Brink gives the case of the amoral person "who claims to have special insight into what is *really* right and wrong; . . . whose judgements about what is right and wrong to do are therefore, even by her own lights, out of line with the judgements of others."[45] Such an agent could still be unmoved by her own moral judgement. And if we can think of such people without being inconsistent in describing them, this makes it seem as though they could be fully rational and yet not be motivated to x. This seems to undermine P.

Furthermore, even if all amoral humans happen to think as Richard Hare describes them, this would not be sufficient to establish internalism, since it may simply be an accident of fate that there are no amoral agents among us who think as Brink holds that they do. Of course, it might be some comfort if egoism were thought of as at least humanly impossible, insofar as we are rational. However, Brink does not concede this either, and believes that some amoral humans are rational and make moral judgements that pick out the same properties as our own moral judgements. I share Brink's belief that such humans exist.

Smith responds by giving a different picture of what it means when an amoral agent says "x is right". His picture is more convincing than Richard Hare's, and could be accepted as what an amoral being is really saying without being subject to Brink's response that internalists do not take the challenge posed by the existence of an amoral being seriously enough.

> The point is not that amoralists really make judgements of some other kind: about what other people judge to be right and wrong, for example. The point is rather that the *very best* we can say about amoralists is that they try to make moral judgements but fail.[46]

Smith's argument is that amoral agents lack mastery of moral terms, and such mastery is a prerequisite for the ability to make moral judgements. He begins with an analogy. Smith suggests we postulate a woman, whom I will call Helen. Helen, blind from birth, has been hooked up since birth to a miraculous machine that allows her to feel, through her skin, whenever an object in "view" of the machine has the appropriate surface reflectance properties to be a certain colour. Thus, she has a reliable method for using colour terms. "She uses terms with the same extension as our colour terms, and the properties of objects that explain her uses of those terms are the very same properties as those that explain our uses of colour terms . . . However . . . many theorists have thought that we should still deny that she possesses colour concepts or mastery of colour terms. For, they say, the ability to have the appropriate visual experiences under suitable conditions is partially constitutive of possession of colour concepts and mastery of colour terms."[47]

If we say those theorists are wrong, that Helen does have mastery of the colour terms because she uses them so reliably, then, Smith claims, we are begging the question instead of proving wrong those who hold that mastery of colour terms requires visual experiences of colours. Thus, we cannot decide at this stage whether Helen has mastery of colour terms or not without bringing in another argument. If such mastery does not require visual experiences, then she has it. If it does require visual experiences, however, then she lacks it.

Smith argues by analogy that an amoral agent does not really have mastery of moral terms because she never has any moral motivation. Thus Brink's argument similarly begs the question, as opposed to proving wrong those who hold the practicality requirement, since it assumes that real moral judgments do not entail moral motivation. If they do, then internalists

are right; if they do not, then externalists are right. Thus, Smith holds that Brink's argument is inconclusive.

I agree with Brink against Smith, but wish this to be more than an expression of my faith. In an attempt to break this deadlock in favour of externalism and the possibility of the rationality of egoism, I will give an independent argument that shows that the practicality requirement is not part of the mastery of moral concepts. To extend Smith's analogy, just as a sighted person can go blind and still have mastery of colour concepts, so it is possible (through severe head trauma) for a moral person to become amoral.[48] She loses only her motivation to be moral, not her judgement and certainly not her memory of past judgements. It is difficult to believe that this now amoral agent loses mastery of moral terms, assuming her memory is not affected. She could even identify moral properties in new situations because of their similarity to the things that used to motivate her. This example presents someone who has acquired mastery of moral terms in exactly the way we acquired it, (and thus can judge things to be right or wrong just as we do) and yet who is amoral. Smith's own analogy allows for the viability of amoral humans who can master moral terms. The rational egoist who makes moral judgements is apparently saved from being defined out of existence.

Yet an internalist might challenge the relevance of my example of someone who starts out as moral but becomes amoral because of a head trauma. For the internalist could hold that the mastery of moral terms requires more than memories of what was right or wrong, or extrapolations from one's memories, and that people such as those described in the head trauma case may retain memories of moral judgements, but would lack the ability to make moral judgements, either in new cases or when thinking about old ones. This argument would

maintain that real-life amoral humans (and, in fact, all possible amoral agents) do not have the fine-grained ability to pick out right from wrong that the miraculous machine gives Helen in picking out colours.

It is true that the subtleties of right and wrong are sometimes extremely difficult to discern, and would likely be more so for an amoral member of a moral community. Martha Nussbaum believes that moral subtleties are not all easy to discern, and that the various subtle interactions recorded in some of the best novels give us examples of moral attention and moral action. Since moral decisions have to be made in concrete cases, Nussbaum holds that a person is "responsible . . . for getting the detail of his context for the context it is, for making sure that nothing is lost on him . . . Obtuseness is a moral failing; its opposite can be cultivated."[49] The question, then, is whether amoral human beings are all unable, by virtue of being amoral, to make the fine distinctions between right and wrong that moral people can make, and whether this lack, if there is one, prevents them from being able to make moral judgements. For if nobody who is completely amoral can make moral judgements, then the possible existence of amoral agents does not refute internalism. An internalist could still say, "If amoral agents could make moral judgements (which they cannot), then that would be enough for them to be motivated to be moral, if they were rational."

Nussbaum is correct. The moral facts of any concrete case are far too numerous and context-specific to be fully captured by any theory. Morality is partly a skill in perceiving all the morally relevant details of the situation one is in, and nobody has total mastery of this skill. Thus, there is always room for improvement in developing one's moral sensibilities. Furthermore, it would be especially difficult, though not *a priori* impossible, for an amoral agent

to develop such sensibilities. A completely amoral person would lack certain emotional motivations, such as fellow-feeling or love (although she might retain others, such as disgust or happiness), that we consider to be a necessary part of many of our interactions with other people, most notably when we consider these people not merely as objects to be manipulated, but as *people*. It seems likely that experiencing these emotions is part of what allows us to fine-tune our moral sensibilities and perceive morally relevant facts about a concrete situation involving ourselves. Thus, the amoral person may more readily misidentify the right thing to do in some situations. This could be a reason to deny that she has mastery of moral terms, and so support internalism.

I think, however, that there is a difference between having mastery of moral terms and having a completely refined moral sensibility. I do not believe that any human being could have the latter to a degree of absolute perfection; there is always room for improvement, and a concrete situation is likely to contain a greater number of moral facts relevant to its context than any one human mind could process. It is true that the ability to feel empathy for others' situations gives those of us who are moral more chances to see some morally relevant factors in a particular context, and, thus, it is also true we are closer to complete mastery of moral sensibilities than those without concern for others. However, mastery of moral terms does not require one to have a complete mastery of moral sensibilities, nor does it require one to feel empathy for others.

Furthermore, one may be able to gather moral information about a situation without being moved by the situation oneself. Psychopaths are examples of amoral agents, being instrumentally rational beings who are unmotivated by any moral considerations, even if they are

made aware of them. It is conceivable, though admittedly unlikely, that some psychopaths could be skilled at literary criticism, for instance, and could analyse all the moral ramifications of a complex moral interaction (such as Nussbaum's analysis of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*)[50], but still correctly believe that if they were in a situation described in such a novel, they would not feel any motivation to do the morally right thing. Thus, even a heightened perception of what is morally appropriate for a particular context does not automatically bring with it the motivation to do the right thing, nor, as we have seen, is having such motivation a sufficient condition for gaining perfect moral sensibilities. This means that it is logically possible for there to be rational amoral individuals who make genuine moral judgements, and this possibility in turn refutes internalism.

Even if one argued that the concept of the amoral, skilled literary analyst in the above example is a self-contradiction, I do not think that this would mean that the amoral agent does not have mastery of moral terms. Moral sensibility is on a continuum between perfect knowledge and perfect ignorance of the relevant moral facts of a situation, but even a relatively obtuse amoral person could judge some actions to be morally wrong. While Nussbaum accurately shows that some situations require delicate moral sensibilities to judge what actions are appropriate, and how to proceed, there are other situations in which the relevant moral facts are obvious. Even a dense amoral individual can see that torture for entertainment is wrong, despite not having any motivation to refrain from that activity. Thus, internalism seems to be in trouble, even without my example from the last paragraph.

Amoral human beings may well be able to determine what is right or wrong for some straightforward issues so long as they can learn sets of moral rules as easily as moralists, and

there is no *a priori* reason why they cannot. They may not feel personal horror at acts of cold-blooded murder, but from observing the horror of others when they speak of such crimes, are able to guess that these are morally wrong. They could even judge that they are objectively morally wrong, if they believe in objective values. But such a judgement in itself would not stop them from committing the crimes, since judging x to be morally wrong would, for them, have the same lack of effect as judging something to be rectangular. Thus, it seems that there are ways for amoral humans to learn that some things are wrong without needing to experience any emotional aversion to them. This could allow them to judge that torture for fun is wrong. They could do this even if they could not make fully-informed judgements upon more complex issues, such as doctor-assisted suicide, or the morally best way for a father to give approval for his daughter's marriage.[51] One can have mastery of moral terms without being able to decide every moral issue. This shows that an amoral agent can have mastery of moral terms, and this counts heavily against the practicality requirement. Such an amoral being could exist as an ideal to which an ethical egoist could strive, without being irrational. Since the example of the amoral agent is not shown either to lack mastery of moral terms or to be irrational, the question "Why be moral?" is still open.

Perhaps this point can be seen more easily with another colour analogy. Picture someone who is partially colour-blind. She may be able to discriminate the colours yellow and blue, but not the colours green and red. In this case, we would say she had mastery of some colour terms, but, without Helen's miraculous machine, no mastery of others. In addition, even normally sighted humans can perceive colour differences only to a certain extent, although the colour spectrum is continuous. It is unreasonable to deny that we have mastery over those colour terms

that we can discriminate, even though there are separate colours that we cannot discriminate from each other. Similarly, to whatever extent we can discern the morally relevant factors applicable to a particular situation, we do not need an unattainable complete mastery of all morally relevant factors to make a moral decision about the action that is probably right. And as for someone who is completely amoral, even if she cannot pick out the morally relevant details of a concrete situation as readily as a moral person, she certainly can understand some actions to be wrong, and others to be morally acceptable. This understanding is all that is needed for a mastery of moral terms, and the ability to make moral judgements.

Next I wish to turn from refuting internalism to defending its opposite, externalism. Smith holds that we need to explain why a change in motivation reliably follows a change in moral judgement. For those who support Smith's definition of practical rationality, it is easy, since the correlation of changes follows from P. As soon as someone who is rational adopts a belief that performing a certain act is morally right, she will be motivated to perform that act. Her new motivation, in this interpretation, is to do exactly what she judges it right to do (in the *de re* sense). Her belief in the rightness of an act will of itself provide her motivation to perform it. To take an example, if she judges it right to support a union on strike, she is, if fully rational, *directly* motivated to do so. An externalist must explain why a person is motivated to x when she judges it right to x, and no longer motivated to x when she changes her view and judges it wrong to x. The only motivational content that can do this is the motivation to "do the right thing" in the *de dicto* sense.[52] Thus, if a person judges it right to support a union, then, because she has the *direct* motivation to do what is right, whatever that happens to be, she will then *indirectly* acquire the motivation to support the union. This seems to Smith to be "one thought

too many".[53] The person has to have both a contingent generic desire to do what is right and a specific belief that a particular act is right. If Smith's argument held here, it would show externalism to be an inadequate explanation of human motivation. Assuming that ways could be found around the objections to internalism noted earlier, this would leave personal ethical egoism as incoherent. So it is important to determine how much of a problem this "one thought too many" is for externalism.

But first note that, on Smith's own analysis of moral reasons, he also appears to provide "one thought too many". He claims that normatively desirable behaviour is what fully rational versions of ourselves would want us to do.[54] These fully rational beings, remember, would have no false beliefs, would have all true beliefs that were relevant to the situation, and would deliberate properly (which for Smith means that they would have desires that were systematically justifiable).[55] Smith believes that, if there are moral facts, then there would be a convergence in the desires of the fully rational versions of different people.[56] Thus, he defines a person's normative reason to do X as the motivating reason that a fully rational being would have that she do X. Yet, we certainly do not think of such a rational being when we are deliberating over whether to do X or not. Are not the *de dicto* belief of the externalist and Smith's fully rational being both extra thoughts?

Smith would say no. Presumably, the normative reason one has to do X is hypothetical -- one is not meant to have the thought of a fully rational being anywhere in one's head, while the *de dicto* belief of the externalist must presumably lie somewhere in one's mind if it is to be a motivating desire. Yet Smith does say that a person wondering whether her desire to dance a jig is worth acting on will ask herself, "in effect, whether or not if she were fully rational she would

desire that she desires to dance a jig in her current circumstances."[57]

In addition, Smith states that a set of general and specific desires is rationally inferior to a set of desires that adds a more general desire that explains and justifies the desires in the former set, thus exhibiting more unity.[58] Yet a good candidate for a very general moral desire would surely be the *de dicto* desire to do the right thing. This desire does not seem alien to a fully rational being (in Smith's sense of rationality), and if we are trying to judge what such a fully rational being would do, assuming the truth of internalism, this desire would seem to be one that that being holds. Thus, this desire seems to appear in both Smith's view and the externalist view.

It is possible to explain both how we less than perfectly rational humans might have gained the desire to do the right thing in the *de dicto* sense, and how we can have indirect desires that appear to us to be direct desires. First examine Smith's statement: "[C]ommonsense tells us that if good people judge it right to be honest, or right to care for their children and friends and fellows, or right for people to get what they deserve, then they care non-derivatively [directly, as opposed to indirectly] about these things." We often allow for exceptions to general policies, such as that of honesty, and these exceptions are allowed in order to do what is right. In the case of honesty, we can think of situations in which one is motivated to lie because one wants to do the right thing. Most of us also have exceptions to a general policy that people get what they deserve, since there might be overriding considerations. For instance, I might judge that, although you deserve the money you work for on account of your merit, the poor need food, so I would judge it right to tax you to buy them food. The exceptions to the general principles that we adopt indicate that there is a higher principle that we have already adopted -- doing right --

that these lesser principles imperfectly serve. Thus commonsense seems to indicate that our desire to be honest is based, contrary to Smith, on a desire to do what is right. As for caring, my just-so story of people being motivated to do what is right, described below, is consistent with people having other non-derivative (that is, direct) motivations to care for children, friends and some others. It is, after all, possible for a person to have more than one non-derivative desire. In fact, because people have the non-derivative motivation of caring for kin and friends, they sometimes act in a way that they judge to be wrong. For example, a mother might protect her son, whom she knows to be a mass-murderer.

In addition to the genetic heritage that predisposes humans to have altruistic instincts, we presumably are influenced by social factors, some of which are designed to influence us to act responsibly and be cooperative with others. It would seem that one of the most efficient ways of reinforcing helpful behaviour would be to teach the young a moral code that includes a rule such as "Do right to others, unless they do wrong to you."[59] If this is internalized, then it becomes a direct motivation to do right. So we now see how humans might acquire the non-derivative motivation to do right. If this teaching takes hold, then they will have the motive to do what they judge to be right. If this teaching does not take hold, then they will lack this motive. Thus, moral people, as opposed to amoral ones, will be motivated to do what they judge to be right. But this does not imply internalism, since it is not true that *any* rational person who judges x to be right will be motivated to do x. As Robert Hare says about psychopaths (who are instrumentally rational),

> Learning to behave according to the rules and regulations of society . . . is a complex process. . . . [Socialization] contributes to the formation of what most people call their conscience, the pesky inner voice that helps us to resist temptation and to feel guilty when we don't. . . . [For some] the social

> experiences that normally build a conscience never take hold. Such people don't have an inner voice to guide them; they *know* the rules but only follow those they choose to follow . . .[60]

It is a contingent fact that most people are moral, and so will be motivated to do what they judge to be right. This could explain the effort that we put into raising our young to have the desire to do the right thing. It may be that if this desire is not gained early in life, it will not easily be gained at all.

Human beings, in addition to their indirect specific motives to be honest, generous, etc., may have some of these motives in a direct form. But this does not detract from the externalists' ability to explain our reliable "tracking" of motivations onto judgements if we do have the desire to do the right thing. It does show that in some cases it takes time for someone to do the right thing because she still has to shake off certain direct specific desires. For instance, someone's constant honesty to the point of bluntness, when a tactful lie would spare people pain, may be a habit that she comes to realize is harmful, and which she knows to be compulsive. However, it might take her some time to give up her desire to be honest all the time even though she wants to do the right thing. Thus, her moral desire (to do the right thing) is in conflict with a habitual specific desire.

We have shown that externalism is possible despite Smith's objection. However, externalism is not only possible, but plausible as well. This can be shown by examining an externalist account of motivational change. It seems that we usually switch desires directly, and not derivatively through the desire to do the right thing. Yet appearances can be deceiving. It appears to us that the sun travels around the earth; yet we know that this appearance is due to the rotation of the earth on its axis. Until scientific evidence to the contrary was forthcoming,

people believed that what appeared to be so was so.

Perhaps the case is similar in the case of motivational change. Our minds may be capable of fooling us about the nature of our beliefs.[61] Suppose someone has the direct desire to do the right thing and the indirect desire to cross a picket line because she judges doing so to be morally acceptable and, insofar as it helps her feed her family, even morally required. Later, she might judge that supporting the union is morally required and crossing the picket line is morally prohibited. Then, since she is motivated to do what is morally required, she will have a change in her indirect desires. However, desires do not come with labels "direct" or "indirect" when we experience them; we simply have the desires. Thus, if we change indirect desires, we feel the same way as if we had changed direct desires. To use a Freudian model, the background desire to do what is right may be in our preconscious, and thus available for introspection. On the other hand, it might be in our subconscious, since it is drilled into us at such an early age. In the latter case, it would not be available for inspection upon introspection, and thus some people who had the desire might be unaware that they had it or that it was influencing their other desires. And unless, in reflecting upon past desire changes, we recalled that we have the constant background desire to do the right thing, we might assume to be true the simpler explanation that we altered direct desires. Since there is no way to tell phenomenologically whether we changed direct or indirect desires, and reflection upon past desire changes is also inconclusive, we cannot support internalism with the argument that upon introspection we do not find the 'one thought too many'. That would be to commit the fallacy of appealing to ignorance, for our inability to find that extra thought does not mean that it does not exist.

Indirect changes are most clear when a philosopher changes her moral theory, or when

someone radically changes her political or religious allegiance; she retains the desire to do right, but now has different views on how best to do that. This process could still be operating in others, but not explicitly. People who change their moral beliefs do not usually say or even explicitly think to themselves "I want to do the right thing; x is now what I think is the right thing; therefore I want to do x." Still, this could be the process occurring (unconsciously for the most part) in all moral agents, for all we know. So Smith's argument is inconclusive. It may seem that the externalist account gives us "one thought too many", but perhaps the extra thought is simply hidden.

In his reply to Brink's criticism of his book at the Eastern American Philosophical Association meeting in 1996, Smith explained how he had changed his own desires from utilitarian ones to those that sometimes favour helping family and friends even when there is no utilitarian justification to do so.[62] If the accounts, detailed in Chapter II, of how empathy might have originated as a desire to help one's kin is plausible, Smith's example is a bad one, since it is on those accounts not surprising that all (or at least most) of us naturally desire to help family and close friends. Thus, the fact that Smith has non-derivative desires to help his family and friends does not show that he chose this desire as a result of deliberation. In fact, it seems implausible to suppose that Smith had no non-derivative desire to help out family and friends in a partial manner even when he was a utilitarian. Furthermore, his psychological self-description, if the non-derivative *de dicto* desire to do the right thing is unconscious in some people, is consistent with his being self-deceived.

So let us take a different example: an originally pro-choice woman decides to become pro-life because she becomes convinced that fetuses have as much right to life as born humans

and that the right to life overrides a pregnant woman's right to choose. It seems at least plausible that this woman is primarily concerned with "doing the right thing", and that her particular moral desires follow from that desire and from her belief in what she considers the right thing to be. Since this description is plausible, Smith's appeal to psychological plausibility does not rule out externalism.

B. Non-deceitful selfishness

1. Social factors

Although the question "Why Be Moral?" is shown to be a coherent and important question, an egoist faces many practical difficulties. I argue that these difficulties are not insurmountable, but require some restrictions on an amoral agent's behaviour.

It is not easy to live life as an egoist. There are natural and social sanctions that apply to all behaviour: Jeremy Bentham describes four sorts of sanctions against behaviour with an example:

> A man's goods, or his person, are consumed by fire. If this happened to him by what is called an accident, it was a *calamity*: if by reason of his own imprudence (for instance, from his neglecting to put his candle out) it may be styled a punishment of the *physical* sanction: if it happened to him by the sentence of the political magistrate, a punishment belonging to the *political* sanction: that is, what is commonly called a *punishment*: if for want of any assistance which his *neighbour* withheld from him out of some dislike to his *moral* character, a punishment of the *moral* sanction: if by an immediate act of *God's* displeasure, manifested on account of some *sin* committed by him, or through any distraction of mind, occasioned by the dread of such displeasure, a punishment of the *religious* sanction.[63]

We can expect an amoral agent to be as prudent as a moral one in avoiding physical sanctions, and, as the existence of religious sanctions is doubtful, this leaves moral sanctions and

political sanctions. I believe the latter to be an extension of the former, and will investigate the social factors that comprise what Bentham calls moral sanctions. These sanctions are routinely applied against fellow citizens who are openly selfish, including bullies (on or off the schoolyard), muggers, and tyrants. These people attempt to obtain what they want directly, and do not care, or even seem to care, about the wishes of others. In some cases, as when the bully is big and powerful enough to avoid punishment for his behaviour, his strategy may be successful, but people have means of dealing with bullies.

Members of a community enforce the norms to which they as a group feel allegiance, so that there will be strong social pressures upon an individual within that group to conform to those norms, including the moral norms. Thus, an openly selfish person is likely to face being snubbed, losing friends, and failing to receive help. And, as Robert Frank, previously mentioned in Chapter II, has noted, one who is openly selfish will gain a bad reputation.[64] This will make it less likely for those who have heard of her selfishness to wish to enter into cooperative ventures with her, unless watertight guarantees (such as legal penalties) against reneging on such deals exist. Thus, the openly selfish person is unlikely to profit from taking unfair advantage of the cooperative nature of others. Support for this view can be found in social psychology, as will be shown below.

2. Social psychology - a defence of the methodology

Recent work in social psychology has brought to light the great extent to which people can affect one another's actions and beliefs. This research shows the strength of the pressure to conform to a society's norms, and how difficult it is to succeed as an openly selfish person.

Before I cover the details, I wish to defend my reliance upon the findings of social psychology. It is true that it is a relatively young science, and any discipline that is concerned with the study of human behaviour will not be as exact in its findings as the hard sciences are able to be. Human beings are complex, somewhat unpredictable, and are capable of acting differently if they know that they are being studied. There are also ethical concerns about using human beings as subjects that make it hard to do revealing experiments. While I do not devise any new experiments myself, I do rely upon the experiments of others, and some of those experiments are, in practical terms, unrepeatable, because it has been determined that it would be unethical to repeat them. This means that I must rely upon completed studies relevant to my thesis, and accept the fact that relatively few exist. The limited number of studies means that I sometimes must extrapolate beyond their results. In addition, people may act differently in their everyday lives from the way they would in the laboratory, and hidden influences in the lab may invalidate the conclusions of some of those experiments. Finally, given the relative youth of social psychology as a discipline, I cannot be certain that human beings have always been, or will always be, influenced by groups in the same way that they were in the 20th century, or that cultures other than those studied in experiments in social psychology are relevantly similar with respect to how people are influenced by groups. Nevertheless, one must start somewhere. While I do not have available to me (nor do I expect people ever to have available to them) a perfect knowledge of how and why people are influenced to conform to social norms, I believe that I have enough information to justify the notion that there are strong forces at work to encourage conformity. If conformity is enforced, it follows that there may be forces at work that encourage moral conformity as well. This remains to be seen.

3. Influencing us without our being aware of it

First let us look at cases of conformity in general. F. H. Allport[65] showed that subjects in groups tended to give less extreme judgements of odours and weights than subjects tested separately, which led to the suspicion that humans in groups try to converge in their judgements so as to be similar to one another. M. Sherif[66] showed that people use others' estimates to form a frame of reference when estimating how much a light had moved.

S. E. Asch[67] made the amazing discovery that subjects will conform to obviously erroneous responses, if these erroneous responses are given by a group. He used a group of confederates whom the subjects of the experiment believed to be fellow experimental subjects. He then asked the group to say which of three lines was the same length as a standard line, with the confederates giving incorrect responses. The experimental subjects, more often than not, went along with these responses. In a similar experiment, Deutsch and Gerard[68] discovered that there was still a 23 percent conformity rate even when the responses of the subject were private and anonymous, supposedly reducing the pressure to go along with the crowd. In addition, Milgram, Bickman, and Berkowitz[69] found that 84 percent of pedestrians passing a city street corner would gaze up into space if a group of confederates did so. The effect of copycat suicides is well-documented.[70] It was revealed that after a well-publicized suicide, the number of commercial airline crashes increased by 1000 percent, and there was a similar jump in single-passenger fatal car accidents. In addition, well-publicized murder-suicides result in an increase in fatal car crashes when others are in the vehicle.[71]

Minority influence, if consistent, can also change one's judgments. When a minority of confederates called blue slides green, the majority could sometimes be influenced.[72] It is also

notable that, after this experiment was over, the subjects were more likely than a control group to perceive ambiguous blue/green slides as green, as if the dividing line had been redrawn for them. This latter effect was even stronger among those that had earlier resisted the minority in the experiment. This shows that others can affect one's judgments even when one thinks one is resisting social pressures.

Bringing the topic to a more down-to-earth level, Garfinkel "asked students to act at home for 15 minutes as if they were boarders: that is, [to] be polite, speak formally, and speak only when spoken to. Their families reacted with astonishment, bewilderment, shock, embarrassment and anger, backed up with charges of selfishness, nastiness, rudeness and lack of consideration."[73] This shows that human beings in certain roles are expected to behave in certain ways, and others will react strongly to a violation of one's role. Humans can face particularly forceful sanctions if they give up the role of the moral person. This is confirmed in a group Prisoner's Dilemma study by Dawes, et al., in which those who defected on an agreement were yelled at, and felt so intimidated that "they remained after the experiment until all the cooperators were presumably long gone" so as not to risk any physical confrontation with angry cooperators who felt betrayed by the defectors.[74] Thus, even if the amoral agent can resist the unconscious pressure to conform to others' moral expectations, most people will conform, and will react negatively to those who openly violate such expectations.

It has also been shown by Wolosin, Sherman, and Cann[75] those who observed Asch-like experiments thought that they would not yield to the group pressure as much as would be expected by the research evidence. This indicates that human beings are not as resistant to group pressure as they think they are, a point that may give some would-be amoral agents pause.

It suggests that they are likely themselves to overestimate the ease of acquiring and maintaining their selfish stance. And whatever psychological pressure they have to deal with in order to maintain their selfish stance should be added to the cost of being amoral.

4. Laws

We have laws against stealing, murder, violations of contract, fraud, and other forms of self-advantageous behaviour. Some laws can be seen as an extension of the social expectations described above. Laws have the advantage of being backed up by punishments for non-compliance with people's wishes. Thus, if one robs a bank, one faces a good chance of getting caught and going to jail. This acts as a partial deterrent. It is not a perfect deterrent, of course, as some people believe that they are unlikely to be caught, and criminals sometimes evade the police. But those who are openly selfish (as opposed to deceitful) are more likely to be apprehended if they break the law. Exceptions occur if they can intimidate their victims into not reporting their crimes, and thus not using the legal institution designed to deal with law-breakers. But, for the most part, laws, like social forces, act to deter would-be law-breakers. They cannot eliminate selfishness, of course. But while goodwill itself cannot be regulated, actions can. And it may be as Hume thought, that laws help us to interact well with people who are strangers, and also to mitigate the favouritism we tend to feel for those we know well and care about.

Most citizens obey the laws to which they are subject, and many of these laws prohibit selfish actions. Of course, there are exceptions. For example, in the United States during the 1920s, it was illegal to sell or own certain alcoholic beverages. Many Americans did not so

much protest against the law as ignore it. They thought that this law, if not unjust, was, at the very least, unnecessary. The penalties for disobedience were stiff, but that did not deter them. That law proved difficult, if not impossible, to enforce and was eventually repealed. Citizens could thus resist legal sanctions in this case. But note that this is not a case of a group acting selfishly. Too many Americans believed that the law, which was no doubt intended to guide moral behaviour, was, on the contrary, making illegal what was not immoral. Furthermore, it is likely that lawbreakers gathered support from each other, and thus were relying upon their fellows' solidarity in order for them to gather the courage to break the law. Thus, social influence can in some cases be stronger than legal deterrents. In most cases, however, humans obey the law of the land. This is true in part because they believe that most laws approximate social expectations, and they wish to meet those expectations. Thus, they lack the motive to ignore the law that some Americans had in the prohibition era. It would be much harder to be a law-breaker if one did not have a group of fellows supporting one's endeavours. The personal egoist who is openly selfish, flouting both laws and social expectations, is unlikely to find such support.

The pressures to conform to a norm operate at two levels. First, other people react negatively to an openly selfish person, denying him many opportunities to benefit as a free rider.[76] Second, these forces will influence him psychologically, putting internal pressure upon him to fit in with the society's moral norms. The first seems to negate or significantly reduce the chance of benefiting from being a free rider. The second seems to add an extra psychological stress to the openly selfish person's life. Taken together, there seems to be little advantage, and considerable disadvantage, to being openly selfish in a moral society.

Let us consider what any social group must require of its members. People expect others to obey the code of that group, and also to conform to various important social expectations. And, for the most part, people do meet those social expectations. In addition, people expect their fellow citizens to have a certain level of good will towards one another, or at least an absence of ill will.[77] People are expected to act in accordance with this good will, even when the specific actions in question are not required of people in order for them to conform to some social requirement (aside from that of good will itself). People are usually allowed to be imperfect, but they are not permitted to be so immoral that they cannot be trusted. No society will tolerate a bully or brigand for long. This seems to be reflected in the penalties criminals are given for a first offence, compared to that given for a second offence of a similar type. In addition to legal penalties, openly selfish people can expect to alienate their friends and lovers, lose their jobs, and fail to be sought out as partners or otherwise benefit from trust. Such amoralists lose the benefits of approval, comfort, security and recognition. This would seem to leave the openly selfish personal egoist's way of life to be clearly inferior to that of a moral person's. Even in strictly material terms, the moral agent is likely to fare better.

C. The deceitful selfish person

What about a person whose selfishness is not subject to sanction because it is secret? It may be that people in earlier societies, and ancient societies in particular, were not as concerned about moral behaviour as I assume. In Plato's *Republic*, Glaucon's story of the Ring of Gyges tells of a shepherd who finds a ring that renders him invisible and uses it to profit at the expense of others.[78] The assumption is that most people would, if they could remain undetected, be

unjust whenever it profited them to be so. Furthermore, Glaucon's claim is that people who lack the ability to commit undetectable crimes pretend to support morality, but secretly believe that those who are moral when they do not have to be are fools. This feeling may have been common in ancient Greek society; perhaps most or many Greeks were, in general, of the opinion that morality was a punitive system that they would not feel bound by if they could commit immoral acts without needing to worry about discovery. Plato seems to think that the view was worth addressing. Perhaps the wish to profit from secret selfishness is shared by people today as well. Thus, it should be determined whether secret selfishness can thrive.

1. Deceit and the free rider problem

I wish to emphasize the sharpness of the divide between the moral person and the egoist. Meeting even the minimal moral expectations of others is still taking a moral stand, and being moral. If one were to consciously choose to adopt a moral character (if such were possible), one would still decide from within that framework what this entails, and will be aware of any failure to meet moral standards as a failure, one that requires an explanation (to oneself at least) beyond the amoralist's "I do not care." One who has a moral character to some degree, consciously adopted or not, will sometimes be motivated to act for purely moral reasons. The person who meets even the minimal moral expectations of her society is different in kind from the person who decides to be selfish and only to act as if he were considering other people's interests because it is in his own interest to do so (for instance, building a reputation for being moral, avoiding jail or social censure, etc.). The former person is sometimes motivated to act for purely moral reasons; this is never the case with the latter person, who will act selfishly whenever he

thinks it possible to escape retribution.

It may be objected that to draw the line between a slightly moral person and a completely amoral person is not an interesting distinction. For it would be better to have arguments for a more robust moral character than a slightly moral character. My reasons for drawing the line as I do are threefold. First of all, since completely amoral persons exist, it is important to see what the advantages and disadvantages are of such a lifestyle. And since amoral agents are not shown to be irrational, it is necessary to look at their position closely. If it were shown that the completely amoral person does better than any moral person, then my thesis would fail. Second, there is an important difference between slightly moral agents and amoral agents. The former are subject to moral reasons for acting, while the latter are not. Thus, one can, without danger of vicious circularity, appeal to moral reasons to convince slightly moral people to act more morally than they have previously acted. They may respond with excuses, but note that these will be pleas to be excused from a particular moral requirement, not rejections of the requirement to be moral people. Finally, this line is only an initial demarcation. The arguments in the next chapters will provide one with reason, not merely to be slightly moral, but to be about as moral as one's society expects one to be.[79] However, the exact demarcation of this second level of morality is not sharp, and could vary between social groups. And in order to make the argument for the second level of morality, I first have to make the argument for the first level, distinguishing the amoral person from all moral people, including slightly moral people.

That distinction made, I believe that most people are concerned with being moral, where this means more than avoiding punishment. However, Glaucon's example of the Ring of Gyges does show that, if one is a personal ethical egoist, one need not be open about one's selfishness.

Even without such magical aid, one could become a moral poseur, who pretends to respect social norms but will be selfish whenever it is unlikely that such selfishness will be detected. Although such deception does not always work, some people might be very good deceivers. They could then avoid many of the legal and social penalties that their openly selfish cousins face. They would seem to gain both the benefits of living among moral citizens and of being selfish themselves.

One possible answer to this is that we are beginning to describe an unreal person.[80] Namely, we have to use as our exemplar someone who is strong-willed enough to resist the psychological pressures that urge him to conform to society's norms (for, while society's open censure is not applicable to one who avoids detection for her selfish deeds, her society's continual psychological reinforcement of moral norms is brought to bear on everyone, including the moral poseur). But this person also has to be clever enough to calculate the odds of keeping his selfishness undetected, and the relative benefits he could obtain from selfishness versus the penalty of apprehension. He must be charismatic, a good liar, and lucky. Such people are rare. Jails are filled with people who thought that they could get away with deceitful selfishness. Most selfish acts are not a result of a careful strategy undertaken by such an egoist; most selfish people lack both the ability to ignore their consciences completely and the level of skill necessary to avoid detection. So, given that people are often not as clever as they think they are, it might be prudent to assume that one's selfish character would eventually be exposed.[81]

Nevertheless, some people are able to evade detection, and are strong-willed enough to resist the psychological pressures that others can bring to bear on them. Frank has shown this to be so in principle, as noted in the previous chapter, and unfortunately these people are, although

rare, all too real. Furthermore, it would be better to find a reason to have a moral character that does not rely upon one's inability to deceive others successfully. One reason to be moral that is not based upon such an inability has been noted by Nielsen. It it is unlikely that the selfish person will experience the full benefits of the warm feelings of companionship and love for others, which require putting their interests before her own.[82] John van Ingen points out that, in addition to Nielsen's point, the personal egoist cannot satisfy the psychological need to identify herself to others. As a corollary, she can never have a true personal confidante.[83] All these points show that the personal egoist would be giving up a lot. Yet they do not show that one has sufficient reason to be moral, since the moral person gives up the benefits attained through being secretly unjust in a just society. Thus, the "Why Be Moral?" question is still open.

2. Difficulties posed in justifying morality after adopting a Humean model of beliefs and desires

Since I support both externalism and a Humean model of beliefs and desires as separate entities, I must provide a reason to be moral that has its roots, however indirectly, in a desire that most rational people have contingently, rather than one they should have necessarily *qua* rational agents. Since different humans have different desires, no desire I choose will be universal, save those basic desires (for food, warmth, etc.) that do not by themselves lead to a motivation for having a moral character. On a Humean model of desires and beliefs, a person can be perfectly rational without having any particular desire, since rationality for Hume requires only that one be efficient in achieving those of one's desires that are achievable, whatever those desires may be. And given a Humean characterization of desires and beliefs, it is, of course, possible to think of a

being who lacks whatever desire I use to ground moral behaviour. Given these constraints, I have to find a desire that most reflective humans would endorse, without presuming that the desire is universally shared. This limits the audience whom this thesis would convince, but I am more concerned with giving a moral person a reason to consider herself rational in pursuing her moral course, than with trying to win over an antecedently selfish person.

I do not believe radical conversion is possible for most people, as I think that one's character is, for the most part, set at a fairly early age. Even if a completely selfish person were convinced that it would be in his interests to have a moral character, this might not alter the selfish person's behaviour. At best, he might regret the character he has. Conversely, it is just this sort of regret that I am trying to forestall in the moral person, if I can find a desire that the moral person is likely both to have and not to regret having. Thus, my thesis is not a thesis of conversion, but is designed to provide intellectual comfort to those who have moral characters.

3. A dilemma

David Gauthier raises a dilemma that occurs when one attempt to justify morality. One the one hand, "[the] individual who needs a reason for being moral which is not itself a moral reason cannot have it." If one appeals to prudence to find a reason to be moral, one will fail whenever prudence and morality dictate different actions in a particular case.[84] One cannot give a self-interested reason to accept a genuine disadvantage. On the other hand, it is circular to attempt to justify moral actions by moral reasons, unless they can be justified, ultimately by non-moral reasons.[85]

Nielsen, however, points out that serving one's self-interest is not in and of itself rational,

any more than serving one's moral interests would be.[86] He follows the strong Humean line that one's primary desire set (that is, the set containing desires that are not had merely because satisfying them is seen as instrumental to satisfying other desires) cannot be judged as irrational. This primary desire set might contain selfish desires or it might contain other desires. One could create the parallel question: "Why be self-interested?" which would face a similar dilemma to the one Gauthier raises with respect to the question "Why Be Moral?". Unless one could discover sound arguments for hypothetical egoism (which seems unlikely) one would have difficulty finding reasons that do not already rely upon one's being self-interested. Of course, most human beings are already somewhat self-interested, but most human beings are also already somewhat prone to be moral. This would leave us with two non-intersecting systems of justification for action, and leave unanswerable the question of whether egoism or morality is the better course of action.

Gauthier later suggests a way out of this problem in *Morals by Agreement*, where he states that: "The disposition to keep one's agreement, given sufficient security, without appealing to directly utility-maximizing considerations, makes one an eligible partner in beneficial co-operation, and so is itself beneficial."[87] He is attempting to provide a rational alternative to short-term prudence, namely a form of long-term prudence. His idea suggests a parallel argument that it might be beneficial, and therefore prudent, to have a disposition to be moral. Rather than attempt to justify a particular moral action, one might be able to justify having a generally moral character by appealing to prudence, even though the person with the moral character tends to respond to moral reasons when he acts, and not merely prudent ones. Thus, while prudence might justify having a moral character, one with such a character would

not appeal to prudence as her general justification for acting; her reason for acting morally would not be merely that it is prudent to act in this way. As Richard Whately says, "Honesty is the best policy; but he who is governed by that maxim is not an honest man."[88] Still, it does resolve the dilemma outlined above if we can use a self-interested reason as a justification for having a character that acts on moral reasons.[89]

4. Values

In this chapter, I have tried to show that there is a form of egoism that, as a fundamental principle for an individual's actions, poses a credible rival to moral principles. I have also shown that one who practises the deceitful form of personal ethical egoism could avoid many sanctions against selfish behaviour. While the egoist must give up some things, this may seem to be a price worth paying. Thus, I have to find something that an egoist gives up that, in the opinion of those moralists who reflect on the question "Why should I be moral?", is not a price worth paying for the benefits of selfishness. To do this, I shall investigate how desires are related to values, whether a personal ethical egoist can have values, and how values are related to having a meaningful life or a sense of self.

Endnotes

1. For a more in-depth treatment of the nature of morality, see Catherine Wilson's "The Biological Basis and Ideational Superstructure of Morality" in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supp. Vol. 26 (2000): 211-244. Note that some might want to separate the motive to serve a principle from the motive to serve others' interests. C. D. Batson notes that 'principlism' may be a separate motive from altruism. See his "Why Act for the Public Good? Four Answers" in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 20 (5) (1994): 603-10. Batson does not know whether or not principlism reduces to egoism, and raises concerns that the abstract nature of principles permits an agent to rationalize almost any action as obeying such a principle. For the purpose of this thesis, I will concentrate on the motive to act in other's interests as being moral, as distinct from the motive to act in one's own interests.

2. I follow the taxonomy of John van Ingen in *Why Be Moral? The Egoistic Challenge* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), itself adapted from that of Kai Nielsen, "The Voices of Egoism", Ch. 7 in his *Why Be Moral?* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989). Nielsen's paper appeared originally in *Philosophical Studies* (1987): 83-107. Pagination will refer to the former.

3. Brian Medlin, "Ultimate Principles and Ethical Egoism," in David Gauthier, ed., *Morality and Rational Self-Interest*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, inc., 1970), 58-9.

4. Ibid., 57.

5. Ibid., 63.

6. Jesse Kalin, "In Defense of Egoism," in Gauthier, ed., *Morality and Rational Self-Interest*, 74.

7. George Carlson, "Ethical Egoism Reconsidered," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1973): 29.

8. John van Ingen disposes of Universal Egoism in a similar fashion. See *Why Be Moral?*, 41-48. Incidentally, Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism, if it truly does advocate that everyone cease to care for anyone else's interests, boils down to either I or IIA, and thus comes across as either unlikely or incoherent, respectively. I believe that Objectivists may not be as selfish, in my sense of the word, as they are often made out to be, since they could define the 'self' in selfish to include those that form a major part of their lives, such as family and close friends. Their 'selfishness' would then count as a form of morality, albeit a rather limited one, and the sort I hope to address in my final chapter.

9. Nielsen, "The Voices of Egoism", 157.

10. Medlin, "Ultimate Principles," 58.

11. I will not attempt to define morality, but hold that a necessary condition for one to be motivated to be moral is that one must sometimes be motivated to act solely in others' interests. What is relevant here is that personal ethical egoism fails to have a condition necessary for morality (as opposed to one necessary for moral motivation): prescriptiveness to others.

12. Kalin, "In Defense of Egoism," 67.

13. Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral?" Ch. 8 in his *Why Be Moral?* 172. Originally in *Methodos* 15 (1963): 275-306. Pagination will refer to the former.

14. The view that selfishness is in some way irrational is held by many moral internalists, including Michael Smith, whose views I shall consider.

15. R. Jay Wallace, "Moral Motivation" in *The Routledge Encylopedia of Philosophy*, Edward Craig, general ed., (London: Routledge, 1998), Vol.6, 522, first sentence under sub-heading "1. Internalism and Externalism."

16. Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason" 373-387 in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard and Peter Railton, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Originally from *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 5-26. Pagination will refer to the former. This quotation is from 375.

17. Bernard Williams also makes useful distinctions, although Brink's are more relevant to the present discussion. See Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" 363-371 in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, Darwall et al., eds. Also in *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge Press, 1981). Pagination will refer to the former.

18. David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 40-1.

19. This is the view that Korsgaard allows for in her "Skepticism about Practical Reason".

20. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (1739). Reprint. Book II, Part III, Section III, L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 415. Other accounts of beliefs and desires are possible, but I believe that a parallel version of some form of instrumental rationality, without built in moral motivation, could still be given on those accounts, although it might have to be expressed in a complex manner.

21. Brink argues that purely instrumental rationality ignores the fact that we do evaluate our desires, thinking that some are better than others. See Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, 64-5. I believe that, for most people, values are an important part of our evaluation of desires, but will argue that the personal ethical egoist does not have these values. Thus, her desires would be evaluated only in terms of how strong they are, and how well they can be achieved, or achieved together. Even if the personal ethical egoist could have values, however, there is no reason why all instrumentally rational agents must have them. An agent could lack the

ability to evaluate her own desires in terms of importance, in the sense of importance relevant to values. I will discuss this sense of importance, and values, in greater detail in the next chapter.

22. It could be argued that my thesis, in the end, does give one reasons to be moral. However, I am appealing to instrumental reasons designed to appeal to the antecedent desires of most agents. I am not appealing to reasons that are themselves supposed to motivate any rational agent simply by virtue of being reasons. I argue that an agent that wants a meaningful life, or a sense of self, will want to have a moral character. However, my thesis will not provide reasons for a personal ethical egoist that does not want either a meaningful life or a sense of self to change her behaviour, or character, in any way. Such an agent could be fully rational according to the purely instrumental sense of rational I am using, since her desires simply do not include the motivations to which I am appealing. Fortunately, the desire to have a meaningful life and a sense of self is widespread.

23. Otherwise Plato's *Republic* would be shorter.

24. A similar simplification of my thesis occurs if one postulates an omniscient and omnipotent deity that will punish anyone who does not have a truly moral character and reward anyone who does.

25. Christine Korsgaard, "The Sources of Normativity," 389-406 in Darwall et al., *Moral Discourse and Practice.*

26. Ibid., 390.

27. Ibid., 392.

28. Ibid., 392.

29. In that chapter, I will investigate whether one can have a sense of identity if one does not have values. I do not think it possible for humans, but the sense of identity I refer to is non-standard and so this examination must wait until Chapter VI.

30. Christine Korsgaard, "The Sources of Normativity," 394.

31. I do not hold such a strong view of endorsement. Still, I would at least go so far as to say that one would need to be confident that some others in one's community would agree to any values one subscribed to in order to guide one's actions. This is discovered by finding out whether one is in a community in which there are others who so agree.

32. Christine Korsgaard, "The Sources of Normativity," 396.

33. Ibid., 397.

34. Ibid., 397-9.

35. Ibid., 399.

36. Ibid., 403.

37. Ibid., 404.

38. The arguments in this section were among those presented in my "A Defence of Externalism," (Western Canadian Philosophy Association Conference, University of Winnipeg, 1997).

39. Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 61.

40. Ibid., 156-61. Williams's account is found in his "Internal and External Reasons" reprinted in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101-13.

41. I have benefited from discussion with Kari Coleman. There is also the possibility of an agent having a master desire to preserve its own existence at all costs. Smith argues that ideally rational agents in the same circumstances would end up with the same desires, but his claim seems dubious, given the possibility of a personal ethical egoist agent with an instrumental sense of rationality, but no desire either to convince others of her reasons for action or to acknowledge anyone else as having reasons for action that she is, or has instrumental reason to be, normatively bound by. Such a person has no instrumental reason to make her instrumental reasons for action converge with anyone else's. Thus the instrumentally rational agent has no reason to be rational in the sense of such a potential convergence of her desires and those of other real or hypothetical agents. See Smith, 173-81, for more on his account of rationality.

42. While I eventually wish to argue that the moral way of life is better than that of the personal ethical egoist, I maintain that the rule by which the latter lives is at least a coherent one.

43. Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 67.

44. Ibid., 67.

45. Ibid., 68.

46. Ibid., 68.

47. Ibid., 69.

48. For examples and studies of "acquired sociopathy" see Hanna Damasio et al.,"The return of Phineas Gage: Clues about the brain from the skull of a famous patient," *Science* 264 (1994): 1102-5, and Antonio R. Damasio et al, "Individuals with sociopathic behaviour caused by frontal damage fail to respond automatically to social stimuli," *Behavioral Brain Research* 41 (1987): 81-94.

49. Martha Nussbaum, "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible': Literature and the Moral Imagination" in her *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford

University Press, 1990), 148-67. Originally in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, A. Cascardi, ed. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 169-91. Pagination will refer to the former. The reference is to page 156.

50. Nussbaum, "Finely Aware", 148-67.

51. The last example is taken from Nussbaum, "Finely Aware", 149, and refers to Henry James's *The Golden Bowl.*

52. Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 74.

53. Ibid., 76.

54. Ibid., 151.

55. Ibid., 156, 158-9.

56. Ibid., 173.

57. Ibid., 153-4.

58. Ibid., 159.

59. This is similar to a layman's version of tit-for-tat.

60. Robert D. Hare, *Without Conscience*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1993), 75.

61. Daniel C. Dennett, in *Consciousness Explained*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991) even thinks that our mind fools us into believing that we have a centre of consciousness. See especially Ch.5.

62. Smith, "Response to Brink and Sayre-McCord," Eastern APA meeting, 1996, 14.

63. Bentham, Jeremy, *An Introduction To the Principles of Morals and Legislation,* (1780). Reprint. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart, eds., (London: University of London at the Athlone Press, 1970), Ch. iii, Sec. 9, 36.

64. See the previous chapter.

65. F. H. Allport, *Social Psychology* (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1924).

66. M. Sherif, *The Psychology of Social Norms* (New York: Harper & Ross, 1936).

67. S. E. Asch, "Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgements," in *Groups, Leadership and Men,* H. Guetzkow, ed. (Pittsburgh,: Carnegie Press, 1951), 177-90. Asch, *Social Psychology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1952). Asch, "Studies of

independence and conformity," *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 70 (1956): 1-70.

68. M. Deutsch and H. B. Gerard, "A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgement," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 51 (1955): 629-36.

69. S. Milgram, L. Bickman, and L. Berkowitz, "Note on the drawing power of crowds of different size," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 13 (1969): 79-82.

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73. Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice- Hall,1967), 47-9. Referred to in Michael A. Hogg and Graham M. Vaughan, *Social Psychology: An Introduction*, (New York : Prentice Hall, 1998), 261.

74. Robyn Dawes, Jeanne McTavish, and Harriet Shaklee. "Behaviour, Communication, and Assumptions About Other People's Behaviour in A Commons Dilemma Situation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35 (1977): 7.

75. R. Wolosin, S. Sherman and A. Cann, "Predictions of own and other's conformity," *Journal of Personality* 43 (1975): 357-78.

76. I will discuss the free rider problem later in this chapter.

77. This is noted in Peter F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 187-211.

78. Plato, *The Republic*, G. M. A. Grube, trans., rev. C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works*, John M. Cooper, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), Book II, 359c-360d.

79. Whether total moral sainthood can be argued for will be investigated in Chapter VII.

80. Nielsen raises this concern in "Why Should I Be Moral?". Bernard Williams also briefly raises it in *Morality: An Invitation to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 23-4.

81. The saying: "You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time", attributed to Abraham Lincoln, has some merit. See *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p.314, Sec. 14.

82. See Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral?" and "Why Should I Be Moral? – Revisited." The latter is Chapter 12 in *Why Be Moral?* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 295-300. Originally in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21(1) (1984): 81-91.

83. John van Ingen, 171.

84. Indeed, as H. A. Prichard notes, a direct appeal to something like an agent's happiness in order to motivate moral behaviour would seem to be missing the point of what a moral motivation to act is. See Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?", Ch.1 in *Moral Obligation: Essays and Lectures* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949). Originally published in *Mind* 21(81): 1912.

85. David Gauthier, "Morality and Advantage," George Sher, ed., *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996), 47-8.

86. Nielsen, *Why Be Moral?*, 181-2. He makes reference to John Hospers, *Human Conduct: An Introduction to the Problems of Ethics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace And World, 1961), 194.

87. David P. Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). Excerpt printed in Darwall et al., eds., *Moral Discourse and Practice: Some Philosophical Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 341-361. Pagination will refer to the latter. The reference is to 344.

88. Attributed to Richard Whately in his *Apophthegms*, 219. Quoted in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 565, Sec. 28.

89. Robert Frank also believes that a "self-interested person may want to be motivated by moral sentiments" in his "A Theory of Moral Sentiments", ch.5 in Jane Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond self-interest*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 91.

Chapter IV

Now that it has been shown both that it is possible to have a genuine moral character, and that a totally selfish character is not ruled out as a rational alternative to it, I will begin to examine what benefits a moral character can have that a selfish one lacks. This chapter will show that one of these benefits is the ability to hold values, as they are described in this chapter.

A. The nature of values

When something exemplifies a value, it is important because of its connection to that value, and when a person is said to hold a value (as opposed to being valuable), she has a desire to pursue or promote something that has value. It is, therefore, necessary to determine what sorts of things values are, and what consequences follow from their mode of existence. By values I do not mean mere social conventions, such as the agreement in some societies to have vehicles drive on the left side of roads[1]; nor do I mean to use the term "values" as a synonym for desires. Such social conventions and desires lack the element of importance that is a necessary component of values, an importance that not only facilitates one's existence, but might, as will be shown in the next chapter, justify it. But before such a justification can be made, this sense of values must be clarified.

There is a tension in the definition of values that in turn leads to a dilemma. As one element of this tension, we like to think of values as being independent of human beliefs, desires and practices.[2] We want to say that a sunset is beautiful, and that the value of this beauty is independent of humans. Human beings also like to think of the value of sentient life as objective. And we want a morally good act to remain morally good regardless of how people perceive it or what desires they have with respect to it. This way of thinking about values

implies that they are objective.[3]

Proponents of the view that values are objective include Mark Platts, Nicholas Sturgeon and Richard Boyd. The intuition of the non-philosopher, as well, is that values are objective, and this is reflected in our language. We refer to the wrongness of murder as if it were an objective fact. In addition, the average person has strong feelings about the evil of, for instance, the Nazis. To believe that values are objective is to believe that whether or not something is valuable has nothing to do with people or their conventions, practices or beliefs.

If values are objective, then it becomes easier to explain their importance, and to justify an action because it promotes a value. But it becomes necessary to explain how we know what things are valuable. An extreme case describes values as outside the world we know, existing in some abstract world as Platonic forms. While few philosophers hold such a view today, it is still true that the connection between objective values and our knowledge of them should be explained.[4]

However, some people hold that values are not objective, but are in some way dependent upon human practices. For example, different cultures might have different views on the rightness or wrongness of polygamous marriage.[5] This way of thinking about values implies that they are inter-subjective. Proponents of the view that values are inter-subjective include Simon Blackburn and Gilbert Harman. And, given our knowledge of human evolution, it is possible to think of genetic and social advantages for humans to construct values, especially moral values, even if there are no objective values. To believe that values are inter-subjective is to believe that they are in some manner created and maintained by groups. The denial of an objective value system could be likened to the denial of an objective language. The desire to explain how we know values forms the other element of the tension described at the begining of this chapter.

The idea that values are inter-subjective makes it easier to explain our ability to know what is valuable. But critics of this view hold that values seen as "merely" human constructs are not truly values at all.

Of course, supporters of either concept of value have ways of showing that the apparent weaknesses of their concept are only apparent. This chapter will examine the debate between those who hold that values, particularly moral values, are objective, and those who believe that they are inter-subjective.[6] It will be shown that theories supporting the view that values are inter-subjective, as well as theories supporting the view that values are objective, are both tenable, and that either view requires that a person gains reinforcement from others to determine what counts as a value. The latter point will prove important for the definition of a meaningful life which appears in the next chapter. This chapter is neutral as to whether values are objective or inter-subjective. There are strong intuitions on either side of this dispute, and the question of whether values are objective or inter-subjective remains an open one.

In lieu of arguing for a particular viewpoint, I argue that values have two features. The first is that a person needs other people to help reinforce his values. This is acceptable to those who hold an inter-subjective theory of values, but its truth according to an objective theory of values needs to be defended. The second feature is that values are in fact important; being able to link one's life in some way with one or more of these values can help to give one's life meaning. This feature is acceptable to one who holds an objective theory of values, but its truth with respect to inter-subjective values needs to be defended. The definition of a meaningful life will be deferred to the next chapter, but it is fair to say that if no values are actually important, then one cannot have a meaningful life. If values both are important and need some sort of reinforcement of that importance from other people, then my thesis holds whether values are

objective or inter-subjective.

B. Reasons to be agnostic with respect to the objectivity or inter-subjectivity of values

There is a divide between those who believe that values are objective and those who believe that values are inter-subjective. The dispute is made more acute because of the strength of the convictions on both sides. Either view is consistent, despite some common objections raised by proponents of the other view. Against the Inter-Subjectivists, those who believe that values are objective have some strong arguments in their favour. In addition, the burden of proof seems to be on those who deny moral objectivity, since common language refers to moral terms as if they are objective.[7] Thus, those who think that values are inter-subjective must both provide arguments for their claims and explain why our common language treats moral values as objective.

There are many plausible explanations, assuming that values are not objective, for our "objectification" of these values. J. L. Mackie notes a few of them.[8] First of all, it is a common human tendency to project qualities of our own feelings onto objects in the world. For instance, a fungus that disgusts us is characterized as foul. So, too, we could project our subjective moral attitudes into the world. Another possibility is that "we need morality to regulate interpersonal relations, to control some of the ways in which people behave towards one another, often in opposition to contrary inclinations. We, therefore, want our moral judgements to be authoritative for other agents as well as for ourselves: objective validity would give them the authority required."[9]

Simon Blackburn has another way to explain why our moral language treats moral values

as objective.[10] A language using moral expressions "needs to become an instrument of serious, reflective, evaluative practice, able to express concern for improvements, clashes, implications, and coherence of attitudes." The English language accomplishes this by "inventing a predicate answering to the attitude, and treating commitments as if they were judgements, and then using all the natural devices for debating truth."[11] Thus, even if there were no objective values, and even aside from the issue of the seeming authority attributed to objective values, it would be natural for us to develop an objectivising language.[12]

However, those who believe that values are objective also attack the Inter-Subjectivist's views directly, rather than relying solely upon the burden of proof. One objection is that, if values are determined by people in some manner, then we should have a perfect correlation between what is agreed to as right and what is actually right. Yet it is natural to make mistakes. Furthermore, these mistakes can arise not only through a failure to understand one's social values, but as a result of following social values that, in hindsight, themselves needed improvement. For history seems to show us that a society can progress and have increasingly more correct moral views by reviewing and amending past errors. Gilbert Harman has a reply to this objection couched in his own version of inter-subjective values as constructed through a number of implicit agreements between members of a group. He explains how a society can progress as follows: A society could have general implicit agreements, but have specific disputes on how to apply these agreements to particular moral judgements. Furthermore, some of these applications could later be seen as wrong. Alternatively, an implicit agreement, or set of implicit agreements, can itself be "inconsistent, incoherent, or self-defeating".[13] Once this is pointed out, new agreements are made and a society improves so long as these new agreements avoid the pitfalls of the old ones.

Applying this idea more generally, it seems possible that a society might condone actions that, were all the consequences of its values made clear, would be unsupportable. When the consequences are later perceived, judgements alter. I will give a more detailed description of how social change can occur, and the place of the rebel in social change, in the next chapter. For now, suffice to say that a society can improve with respect to its own values, even if there are no objective values.

Another problem Inter-Subjectivists face concerns the potential difficulties involved in referring to such values indirectly. If values are constructed by humans, then to say "x is wrong" is to participate in the construction of the wrongness of x. This could also be thought of as expressing a value. Peter Geach is a realist.[14] The question he poses to the Inter-Subjectivist is: How do we talk about moral expressions when we are not expressing them directly? Geach provides the following syllogism, and it seems to be valid. 1) It is wrong to tell lies. 2) If it is wrong to tell lies, it is wrong to persuade your little brother to tell lies. 3) It is wrong to persuade your little brother to tell lies. The second statement seems to be a conditional statement, rather than a statement that constructs or expresses values. Yet the first two statements together imply that it is wrong to make your little brother tell lies. And it seems odd that the two premises should be different in kind. The answer is that the two premises are not different in kind – both are expressions, or constructions, of value. If, as Blackburn believes, "a moral *sensibility*...is defined by a function from *input* of belief to *output* of attitude"[15] then one can have moral endorsements or projections about relations between sensibilities, such as the relation given in the above conditional. One would morally disapprove of someone who on the one hand thinks it wrong to tell lies, but on the other hand thinks it acceptable to ask his little brother to do so.[16] From Blackburn's viewpoint, to speak indirectly about an ethical stance is to take an ethical

stance. However, one could have a consistent inter-subjective theory with the weaker notion that one can construct or express values that concern the relations of other constructions or expressions of values.

Another brand of objection to the various inter-subjective views argues that, if moral statements merely express attitudes, even societal attitudes, as part of the process of constructing values, then there should be no difference, when trying to persuade others to share one's attitudes, between using good arguments or using manipulations and lies to convince others. This results in a seemingly valueless free-for-all at the level of convincing others to adopt values. Yet we make judgements concerning how one is and is not permitted to convince others. Education is acceptable. Hypnotism or the use of force is not. Thus the Inter-Subjectivists have to explain this inconsistency between the apparent implications of its theory and common human practice. But once again, the problem dissolves if we allow inter-subjective values to be applied at the second-order level. Charles L. Stevenson suggests that Mr. X would not want to use manipulation or lies to convince his son of something that he believes is good for his son, because X also values truth-telling, and the relationship with his son in the future. X does not want to encourage a habitual blindness in his son, nor face possible resentment from his son if his ruse is discovered. This is a case of a moral attitude itself being the subject of a moral attitude. "It will be evident that if personal uncertainty [about which moral attitude one should take] involved only first-level attitudes, F1, F2, etc., directed to the objects O1, O2, etc., then the ethically relevant reasons, helping to remove the uncertainty, would need to explore only (!) the nature and consequences of the O's; for the new F's that were thus brought into play would need no special scrutiny. But when second-level attitudes also enter, directed to the F's, then the reasons must also explore the F's and the consequences of letting them continue as parts of one's

personality."[17]

Another objection is that inter-subjective values are not really values at all. Inter-subjectivity implies that an individual cannot hold a real value that is not supported by some segment of her society -- at least one other person whose views she knows. An individual's value-candidate is not a real value because it lacks the justificatory importance that we associate with values. However, it could be argued that inter-subjective values, being merely the sum total of the values of individuals, also lack justificatory importance. We might gain a perfect knowledge of the values a particular society, including one of which we are a part, holds. We might even, with some effort, be able to refine and improve upon this set of values, making it more consistent.[18] Such knowledge and refinement may allow people to function together with a minimum amount of acrimony and frustration of personal desires and needs. But it appears that the question whether this set of values is worth respecting can still be asked. In the end, the debate turns on a premise: values have to be objective in order to be truly important, and hence to justify other things.

The next chapter will show that a person can have a meaningful life, even if the values she uses to orient her life are not objective. A medieval Christian's life is meaningful, even if the objectivity of the values that she believes in requires the existence of a God, who (for the sake of argument let us assume) does not exist. The justification of the importance of the values is no longer tied to the values being objective, just as, according to some epistemological theories, knowledge requires only justified beliefs, not justified true beliefs. But even if one accepts that the Christian's life was meaningful, one may also argue that it was so only because she herself believed that the values she followed were objective. While it may be argued that it is an error to suppose that values must be objective in order to provide meaning to life, others

could say that without at least a belief in objective values, any possible meaning to one's life becomes smaller, more restricted, and generally inferior. So now I will show how a life can, possibly, gain meaning from inter-subjective values, recognized as such.

To make this point, I will borrow some analogies from Simon Blackburn, an anti-realist who defends the importance of values.[19] One such analogy compares the nonobjectivity of values to the nonobjectivity of arithmetic. "There are anti-realist views of what we are doing when we practise arithmetic. But they need not and should not lead to anyone wondering whether 7 + 5 is 'really' 12, for that would be an expression of first-order doubt which would not be a consequence of the second-order theory. [If arithmetic is shown not to be about objective entities, arithmetical] practice would remain as solid and certain as could be, but explained without reference to an independent mathematical reality."[20] Another analogy is humour. Blackburn points out that a woman who finds a man's moustache funny will not cease to find humour in it simply because she is told, or even believes, that humour is an inter-subjective construction.[21]

A third analogy, not Blackburn's, examines aesthetic values in particular to make a more general point about values. This analogy is superior to those previous for two reasons. First, many more people hold that mathematical truths are objective than believe that aesthetic values are objective. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is a well-known statement which is credible to many outside the field of philosophy. Second, many people orient their lives in some part, sometimes a large part, around promoting or pursuing aesthetic values. While (I will later argue) one cannot, in a modern society, gain a meaningful life solely through this pursuit, aesthetic values can play a large role in making people's lives meaningful. If it can be shown that aesthetic values can contribute to making one's life meaningful, even if those values are not

objective, then this shows that values do not have to be objective to be important.

Imagine someone who makes sculptures that capture the human form. The sculptor devotes her life to this work, and derives satisfaction and a sense of purpose through accomplishing it. Living in modern times, she is well aware that scientific accounts show that the standards of beauty vary from culture to culture and from century to century, and that what does not vary can be explained by evolutionary factors rather than any objective value of beauty. Yet she still thinks that her statues are examples of beauty and are important because of this. This seems, on the face of it at least, an example of someone who has a meaningful life despite the fact that she believes that at least some of the values she uses to justify her actions are not objective, and, perhaps, not even permanent. In other words, one can believe that one's values are inter-subjective, and yet be able to use them to give one's life meaning.

So it seems that the Inter-Subjectivist camp can meet the objections of those who hold that values are objective. However, the view of the Objectivists may also be correct. For the charges brought by the Inter-Subjectivists against their view can also be met. The first of these objections is the argument from relativity.[22] Simply put, different cultures often judge moral matters differently.[23] Thus, either some cultures promote alleged moral values that are not moral values at all (and it becomes difficult to decide which culture is incorrectly perceiving values, since we are biased towards our own culture) or values themselves vary between different groups. A possible reply to this argument is that the basic principles behind the separate judgements are the same. The applications are different, but that is because of the special situations in which a particular culture finds itself. Thus, different cultures might revere the dead, but do so in differing ways. However, as Mackie notes, such general principles are far from the commonly held notion that one's derived values (which are in common parlance

referred to with an objectifying language) are objective. It was this objectifying language, however, that put the burden of proof in the first place on those who think that values are not objective. Suppose an action x is permissible in Culture A, but forbidden in Culture B. Suppose that this apparent difference can be explained by a more general principle, y, that applies to both cultures but that, when considered in light of the special circumstances of each culture, makes x permissible in A and prohibited in B. Most people in A will not think of action x as permissible because it derives from a more general principle and the special circumstances of their culture. They will think of x itself as permissible, period, and use objectifying language to discuss x.[24] Even on the Objectivists' account, some acts whose perceived moral status between cultures varies, owing to the special circumstances of those cultures, are still, within each culture, subject to objectifying language. This counter-argument weakens the claim that humans speak of values as objective because they are objective. The burden of proof to explain how Inter-Subjective values co-exist with objectifying language seems to be discharged.

A variation of the argument from relativity is developed by Bernard Williams in "Ethical Consistency".[25] He appeals to the existence of conflicts between basic moral values, even within one culture. These conflicts are, in an important sense, insoluble. Of course, in the end, most people choose one course of action over another, but this does not imply that the moral value underlying the rejected course of action is itself rejected. One may have regrets about one's action, even though one would not change it. In short, there may be genuine moral dilemmas in the deepest sense. If so, this invalidates any argument for the claim that values are objective which takes as a premise the alleged fact that moral questions have definite answers, and that, if two societies differ on a basic moral issue (that is, upon the basic moral principles that underlie their decisions), then at least one of the societies must be incorrect. Williams's position leaves

open the possibility that there are cases in which one cannot determine the correct result. Two societies may favour different principles without there being a higher principle according to which one could decide between the two. This is not a fatal blow to the Objectivists, since they might hold that objectively correct truths need not be determinable. However, one of the psychological motivations for believing that values are objective is the belief that they are determinable. The fact that they may not be determinable could erode some support for Objectivism and lead to a less antagonistic consideration of Inter-Subjectivism.

Nevertheless, one could remain an Objectivist and abandon the claim that all moral questions have definite answers. If so, one allows for the possibility that objective values can come into conflict in a particular situation, without one overriding the other(s). Mark Platts seems to hold just such a view. "There are *many* distinct ethical properties whose occurrence can be detected . . . and there is no reason *a priori* to assume that they cannot conflict."[26] He holds that we detect moral aspects of phenomena by regular observation. Our attention and observation constantly helps us to refine our moral beliefs. Since the world is indefinitely morally complex, this process will never end.

Platts believes that deep moral conflicts may be due, not to the absence of a higher-order principle of adjudicating between values, but to our ignorance of such a principle. His view seems to be that in a perfect world we should hold the same moral, scientific and historical beliefs, but that we are far from that world. "We are tawdry, inadequate epistemic creatures struggling with an indefinitely complex world, and the dialogue between competing, but *competing,* views may make us attend to features of that world which we would otherwise have overlooked."[27] He thinks that the interaction between groups that resolve conflicts between values in different ways may help us to discover some ways of adjudicating between principles.

This leaves open the question of whether or not the moral view of omniscient beings would be pluralistic, but gives good epistemic reasons for moral pluralism among mere humans, even if values are objective.

However, one could go farther, and hold that there may be conflicts between values that have no means of resolution, not because we are ignorant of such means, but because there are no higher-order objective ways of resolving some of those conflicts. But this is consistent with there being objective values. For just as values might be inter–subjective even if all humans everywhere agreed on what these values were, so values might be objective even if there occasionally arose situations in which these values came into conflict, with there being no objective means of resolving the conflict. The idea that moral values could be objective and yet in conflict is an interesting one. It suggests that some questions can be decided one way or another depending upon which value one decides to consider more important, but that there is no independent method of judging the overriding value in the case of conflict. Thus, it allows for different societies to follow different values (or more likely, give different prioritizations of these values) with neither society being wrong, and yet with all the values existing independently of those societies.

An additional argument against the existence of values that are independent of humanity is the 'argument from queerness' (so dubbed by J. L. Mackie), which comes in two parts.[28] First, there is a metaphysical oddity to the existence of objective values, since such things must be "utterly different from anything else in the universe" because they have the power to motivate us simply because we are aware of them.[29] One could reply, as Mark Platts does, that there are many strange things in the universe, such as subatomic particles or modern paintings. So merely saying that something is different from other things, or would be if it existed, is no argument

against its existence. As to how we discern moral values, Platts holds that, quite simply, "we discover moral truths in the ways we discover most (if not all) truths: by attention, perception, and reflection."[30] "[W]hy should it not just be a brute fact about moral facts that, without any such further element entering, their clear perception does provide sufficient grounding for action?"[31] Note that once Platts speculates merely that something could be (rather than is) a brute fact, he gives up the attempt to argue that values must be objective, and can only claim that, given certain premises, values may be objective. Furthermore, simply to assert as a brute fact that moral facts are action-guiding in this sense assumes more than an externalist accepts. On an externalist's account, the motivational component of moral values can be separate both from their existence "out there" in some sense, and from our perception of them, assuming that they are objective.[32]

This brings us to the second, epistemological, part of Mackie's argument from queerness. Even if there were objective moral values, then "if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else." And it does seem that moral values are different from the physical objects that we can detect with our senses.[33] Another way of putting the argument from queerness is to ask: what is the relation between, for example, a physical act of cruelty such as causing pain just for fun and that act's wrongness? How in general do natural facts link up with moral facts? And how do we perceive such a connection? What else is there to perceive besides an event that we condemn as cruel, and the natural fact that we condemn acts of cruelty? If values are objective, then we have not only to perceive them, but also to be able to determine how they link with natural facts. As Mackie states, "How much simpler and more comprehensible the situation would be if we could replace the moral quality with some sort of

subjective response which could be causally related to the detection of the natural features on which the supposed quality is said to be consequential."[34]

It is a common strategy to find analogies or differences between moral values and other entities, either to defend the view that values are objective or to attack it. Gilbert Harman argues against the objectivity of moral values by positing a difference between ethical and scientific accounts of observation.[35] While the belief held by a scientist that, for instance, a certain visible trail in a cloud chamber was left by a proton may be best explained by the presence of objective phenomena, in this case protons, there are no corresponding objective moral phenomena needed to explain our beliefs about morality. Using the case of someone observing some young hoodlums setting fire to a cat, he holds that "Certain moral principles might help to explain why it was wrong of the children to set the cat on fire, but moral principles seem to be of no help in explaining your thinking that that is wrong."[36] One might add support to the point by imagining a group of Nazis observing a fellow Nazi torture a Jew, and their finding nothing morally objectionable about it. Assuming that it is an objective fact that the act is morally wrong, this has no effect on their thinking. In the absence of moral beliefs, moral facts do not explain our thoughts or actions. In addition, false moral beliefs can explain our thoughts and actions even though there are no moral facts underlying those beliefs (since they are false). It seems that it is not moral facts, but moral beliefs, that explain our moral thoughts or actions.

This line of reasoning follows Mackie's epistemological version of his argument from queerness. Harman argues that a realist's account must explain the role that moral principles play in the actual formulation of our moral beliefs, and why these principles, if they exist, sometimes completely fail to have this causal effect. "The observation of an event can provide observational evidence for or against a scientific theory in the sense that the truth of that

observation can be relevant to a reasonable explanation of why that observation was made. A moral observation does not seem, in the same sense, to be observational evidence for or against any moral theory, since the truth or falsity of the moral observation seems to be completely irrelevant to any reasonable explanation of why that observation was made."[37]

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord expands upon Harman's concerns with respect to the explanation of our moral beliefs and the implications for moral realism. As he sees it, Harman's claim is that we could make the moral judgements we do regardless of whether they were accurate, what the moral facts were, and whether there were any.[38] Sayre-McCord says that Harman is implicitly relying upon an Explanatory Criterion, one form of which is that "a hypothesis should not be believed if the hypothesis plays no role in the best explanation we have of our making the observations that we do."[39] The claim is that, with morality, "all the explanatory work seems to be done by psychology, physiology, and physics."[40] This can be shown more clearly when someone observes an act and judges it wrong, when we do not share his judgement. For example, a bigot seeing a mixed-race wedding could well think it wrong, but here, since the act is not objectively wrong, there is no objective wrongness to play the explanatory role that a realist claims to play a role in correct moral judgements.

Nicholas Sturgeon[41] argues against Harman's version of the argument from queerness. He holds that it is quite possible that moral facts are reducible to physical facts, and that moral properties might supervene on physical properties. This does not, however, imply that we can dispense with moral language, any more than the supervenience of biological properties on microphysical ones implies that we can dispense with describing plants and animals in biological terms. Sturgeon notes that we use moral explanations frequently to explain both moral phenomena and our belief in these phenomena. "It would be difficult to find a serious work of

biography, for example, in which actions are not explained by appeal to moral character."[42] And moral facts seem relevant to our explanations: "I do not believe that Hitler would have done all he did if he had not been morally depraved, nor, on the assumption that he was not depraved, can I think of any plausible alternative explanation for his doing those things. Nor is it plausible that we would all have believed he was morally depraved even if he hadn't been."[43] As for Harman's example of children burning a cat, Sturgeon holds that the important question is: "Even if the children had been doing something else, something just different enough not to be wrong, would you have taken them even so to be doing something wrong?"[44] He holds that, for most of us, if the children were not, in fact, doing something wrong (if they were petting the cat instead of burning it), then we would not believe it to be wrong, and that, therefore, it is the wrongness of the burning of the cat that explains why most of us would see it as wrong. "[In] order for the action not to be wrong it would have had to lack the feature of deliberate, intense, pointless cruelty, and . . . if it had differed in this way you might very well *not* have thought it wrong."[45]

Sturgeon does not ignore the role our beliefs about what is right or wrong have in explaining why we believe certain acts to be right or wrong, nor the possible severing of the link between what is right or wrong and our basic moral beliefs. We could be very mistaken about what is right or wrong. "It is true, I grant, that if our moral theory were seriously mistaken, but we still believed it, and the non-moral facts were held fixed, we would still make just the moral judgements we do. But *this* fact by itself provides us with no reason for thinking that our moral theory *is* generally mistaken."[46] Sturgeon's argument draws strength from comparing it to the case of the scientist, since we could similarly grant that, if the scientist (and the rest of us) were seriously mistaken about the nature of physical phenomena, he might believe that a vapour trail was caused by a proton even if there were no protons. However, this possibility of being wrong

does not mean that the person is wrong, and Sturgeon holds that Harman needs a separate argument to show that we were radically mistaken about our moral views and, failing that, we can use moral explanations relying on the existence of objective moral values just as readily as a scientist can use his explanations relying on the existence of other objective phenomena.

Another attempt to show that we can understand, and improve our understanding, of moral values by scientific means is made by Richard Boyd. Boyd defines human goods as "things which satisfy important human [physical, medical, psychological and social] needs."[47] These goods are fairly well known to us, but not perfectly so. They would include, though not be limited to, those things which are morally valuable. Knowledge of human goods requires knowledge of human psychology, and sociology, and, just as we can improve our knowledge in these two disciplines, so there can be advancement in the knowledge of human goods. "Much of this knowledge is genuinely experimental knowledge and the relevant experiments are ('naturally' occurring) political and social experiments."[48] For instance, we could not have discovered the good of democracies until democracies were developed, nor, until this understanding was in hand, could we understand the depth of the wrongness of slavery. This advancement in knowledge shows that moral theory, like scientific theory, can progress and is increasingly reliable. This may seem like a subjective account of ethics, but human needs are not the same as human desires, and could be determined independently of particular opinions, theories or desires.[49] Thus, Boyd directly opposes the view that knowledge of the facts about the world does not tell us what is important from a moral point of view. This could be used to defend the possible objectivity of moral values. Boyd's account is plausible if one accepts that that which satisfies human needs is a real and objective good, and that that which satisfies human needs can be determined objectively. But an Inter-Subjectivist could reply that to declare

that which satisfies human needs as an objective good first requires the belief that there are objective goods. Thus, Boyd's account is not, nor does it claim to be, a refutation of Inter-Subjectivism, but merely a defence of the plausibility of the objectivity of moral values.

In the end, we are left with the possibility that values are either objective entities or inter-subjective ones. Each account is consistent, and fairly plausible. The proponents of objectivity hold that values, and in particular moral values, not only exist independently of human opinions and practices, but can be perceived. The argument from relativity is defended against, or not seen as a threat. The argument from queerness is either responded to with the claim that it is simply a brute fact that values are different entities, and there is nothing wrong with this, or else that values, by supervening on natural properties, are not, in fact, that queer. Similarly, the Inter-Subjectivists can answer the claim that it is hard to explain the nature of second-order statements about value claims, if values are not objective. They also explain how mistakes are compatible with values not being objective, and why people might objectify values in language even if values are not objective. Finally, they maintain that inter-subjective values are still real values – that is, they are still important enough to contribute to making one's life meaningful. I will now argue that, whether values are objective or inter-subjective, it is true both that a person requires other people to reinforce her values and that values are important enough to grant meaning to one's life.

C. Objective values and other people

Let us begin with theories of objective value. These imply that a proposition that states that something is a value is a proposition that can be literally true or false.[50] Human opinions and social practices in no way determine what the values are. Furthermore, these theories hold

that some values exist.

We may assume for now that it is decided that the Inter-Subjectivists' arguments are flawed and values may be objective. Even if values are objective there is an important issue concerning the human perception of values. Let us suppose, with the Objectivists, that values can in some manner be perceived. Nevertheless, we are not infallible in our perception of values, and most of us know that we are not. Some people are evidently wildly off the mark when making value judgements. For instance, a criminal or Nazi makes mistakes in his perception of moral values, and is not aware that they are mistakes. Using more common and better human beings as examples, there are cases where we hold something to be morally acceptable (or unacceptable), and then change our minds. These phenomena indicate that we cannot be sure that what we think of as moral or nonmoral values are values; nor can we be sure that the way we think values apply to a particular case actually apply in that manner. This is not just the awareness that none of us have an indefinitely fine-grained perception, able to pick out all the relevant nuances of the most complex of situations; sometimes we are simply wrong. This implies that, whatever our means of perceiving values, it is not always accurate.[51]

Fortunately, we have a ready method of checking our judgements. This is to observe the opinions of others, and see whether their value-checking apparatus agrees with our own. Relying upon others to check our observations happens frequently in ordinary life with respect to sensory perception. A person may ask another if a figure down the street is a mutual friend, because he is not sure of his own sensory judgement in this case. Scientists repeat experiments by other scientists to reduce the chance of any bias, including perceptual bias, from affecting the results of the first experiments. Therefore, it should not be surprising that, even given the existence of objective values, we rely upon others to verify our observations.

Verifications can sometimes be given to us by experts. When an art or wine critic comments about a piece of art or wine, she is not merely claiming to give her own opinion. If that were the case, then there would be little reason to listen to her opinion over anyone else's. The critic sometimes claims to be pointing out objective features of the subject, and some of those features will have values attached to them. Thus, she may claim that a piece of art has great aesthetic value, perhaps because it is, in her opinion, liberating, or passionate.[52]

As lay people, we listen to what critics have to say. We assume that their experience with the subject matter has trained their perceptions to see more than the average person. Yet, we are aware that sometimes critics disagree. If they are disagreeing over supposedly objective features of a subject, then they are each claiming that the other's perceptions, or judgements based upon those perceptions, are in some way deficient. If the critics agree, however, then they are verifying each other's perceptions.

For an example of the use of verifications in the field of morality, imagine that a person feels angry that a co-worker with less experience was promoted ahead of her. She desired that promotion herself, but there is more to it than that. Complaining about her situation to her friends, she receives feedback that says what happened to her was unfair. Thus, she gets reinforcement that her grievance is in fact at least partially based on a shared value for fairness that seems to have been ignored. On taking her grievance to her employer (or union), she may find more information that shows that what happened to her was not unfair (or at least could be interpreted as not unfair). On the other hand, she might succeed in her grievance and get the promotion that she thinks she deserves.[53]

Although values may be objective, the verification of values is different from the verification of more concrete observable facts. First of all, a scientist can measure how much

something weighs, whether it reacts to the presence of chlorine, etc. It is harder to quantify the presence of values in a particular situation. We have a rough idea, of course. For example, we can usually know that there is something wrong with one person killing another without provocation, and that this act is worse than one person stealing from another. Most societies have developed a system of laws that inflict greater punishments on those who defy their society's values more strongly. But a valuemeter to measure how valuable an activity is is far from realized.

In addition, a scientist conducting an experiment tries to simplify it so that the result either confirms or disproves a theory over the cause of a given result. Scientists are good at doing this, so the chance of perceptual bias is usually quite small. It is much more difficult to simplify a situation so that only one value is applicable. And one cannot separate a value from the situation in which it applies except conceptually, while physicists can, for instance, physically separate electrons from atoms. Finally, the verification of our perception of values is an ongoing process, occurring whenever we interact with one another or observe others interacting. Scientific experiments are not nearly so pervasive.

The claim that we look for verification of values among our family and friends, in the media, and through knowledge of our laws, suggests that values are culturally relative. While values may be inter-subjective, inter-subjective verification needs to occur even if values are objective. In that case, our perceptions of the objective values need to be verified. To accept that the need for the verification of one's perceptions from others is compatible with the objectivity of values, we have to accept: a) that our perceptions of objective values are fallible, and b) that others' perceptions can be used to correct our own. This corrective process may occur either through a large number of members of our community holding a value which one

initially does not perceive, or through certain such members with highly attuned perceptions making us aware of some values we had not yet seen (or, on the contrary, making us see that what we thought of as valuable was not so. That may be one of the functions of the comedian.)

The idea that we need others to verify our value judgements is compatible with most theories of objective value. It is not compatible with the view that values are directly observable, and that a person can, in theory, be certain of avoiding error (although he may retain vagueness in some judgements). However, the notion that most normal adults could be infallible observers of values seems impossible, given how imperfect humans are, and their level of disagreement. In fact, the view that even one person is an infallible observer of values seems highly unlikely.

One objection to the view that we must rely upon verification from others to ascertain our own accuracy in perceiving objective moral values is that we have no guarantee that others' value judgements are any better than our own. It could be that we are all vastly mistaken about some moral value. While this cannot be ruled out, the same considerations that make us able to see values at all, if we are able to do so, are likely to make us fairly (though perhaps not completely) accurate about them. If different perceivers make different sorts of perceptual mistakes, then feedback from others can help us correct our views. In the simplest case, if Albert perceives that Y and Z are important, but not X, Betty perceives that X and Y are important, but not Z, and Chris perceives that X and Z are important, but not Y, then by a simple majority judgement in each case, all could modify their views, acknowledge that they are in error, and come to judge X, Y and Z as important. Alternatively, they might agree that the lack of unanimous support for any of X, Y or Z means that none of them is important. Of course, the procedure of verification of observations is much more complex than that.[54] As one example of

such complexity, the disagreement among Albert, Betty and Chris may cause them to enter a dialogue in order to reach agreement, rather than be satisfied with abiding by, for instance, simple majority judgements.

D. Inter-subjective values and importance

I now wish to see what consequences follow if values are inter-subjective. I am including among theories of inter-subjective values any value theories that speak of a "conventional objectivity" or "objectivity relative to a culture". The basic idea is that values are not completely independent of human opinions and practices.[55] Inter-subjective values depend upon reinforcement from other people. They can be improved upon, by showing new, previously unthought-of ways to apply values, or showing how to resolve apparent inconsistencies of values. Thus, while an individual can simply be wrong, it is also possible for an individual to be correct about a value's application in a society that is wrong. A classic example is of the individual who speaks out against slavery in a society that practises it. In this case, the individual is trying to show that the scope of the values of human dignity and freedom also applies to the slaves, using the hopefully widespread recognition of the values of justice and of equality, and the recognition (which in that society is not widespread) that slaves are not relevantly different from free people.[56] In this case, the value of equality is held by the society, but most people in that society extend the scope of the application of that value only to non-slaves, because of their erroneous belief that slaves are sufficiently different in character or mental ability to warrant different treatment. The realization that most people in that society misperceive certain facts relevant to the scope of the application of a value held by them can engender the new belief that a social practice is wrong.

Support for the idea that people rely on the views of others to assess value can be found in accounts of how human thought processes can be as efficient as they are. Humans tend to use rules of thumb in order to make quick decisions in real time. One such rule of thumb offered by Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson is what they call the Reason Rule.

> One party's expressed beliefs and wants are a *prima facie* reason for another party to come to have those beliefs and wants and, thereby, for those beliefs and wants to structure the range of appropriate utterances [which] that party can contribute to the conversation. If a speaker expresses belief X, and the hearer neither believes nor disbelieves X, then the speaker's expressed belief in X is reason for the hearer to believe X and to make his or her contributions conform to that belief.[57]

Thus, we tend to reinforce others' beliefs through communication (and, presumably, through being observed acting according to our beliefs), for we can assume that the Reason Rule would also give a hearer who already believes X a reason to continue to believe X. And we, in turn, have our own beliefs reinforced by others. Some such beliefs may be about whether certain things are valuable or not. So one's fellows influence one's beliefs about what things are values. In order for one to be able to call one's value-candidates values, one needs people to observe one speaking for or acting in accordance with one's value-candidates, with the implication that they will (hopefully) endorse, or at least not oppose, one's words or actions, and thus the value-candidates with which they are associated could be considered (or continue to be considered) values.

The distinction between actions and desires that serve values and those that do not is significant. An agent can find out that certain of her desires, while strong, are not important because they are not guided by any values. For instance, many activities, such as doing

crossword puzzles, going to night clubs, collecting stamps, etc., occupy her time, and she derives pleasure from them. However, she can learn from many sources that these activities involve interests, but not necessarily values.[58] People discover most of this from a very early age, but in those cases where anyone might be in doubt, others around her verify or denounce any possible value-candidates. Kant describes the will to do good as 'shining like a jewel with its own light', since it has value in itself.[59] However, in order to see this light shining in her particular desires and actions, a person needs other people to help confirm that the light is there. So, whether values are inter-subjective or objective entities, other people are needed, either to help reinforce and verify one's judgements of values, or to be the sources of the pool of humanly constructed values which one can draw upon.[60] But, whether values are objective or inter-subjective, they give to actions that promote those values, and to people who pursue them, importance and meaning, in a way that will be further explored in the next chapter.[61]

The notion that one's values, or one's perceptions of values, receive reinforcement from others is not without controversy. It allows two independent subjects to view each other as such, and, thus, to accept each other's judgements as reasonable, while, at the same time, making their own. And even as one makes a judgment, either a qualitative judgement about something as having value or a quantitative one about how valuable something is, one's judgement is itself subject to the judgements of others. Jean-Paul Sartre, on the other hand, holds that it is not possible for two subjects to recognize each other as subjects while recognizing themselves as such.[62] If Sartre is correct, then it is impossible for people to reinforce each other's values. On Sartre's view, if one is a subject looking at another (or the Other, as Sartre would put it), the Other becomes an object and is incapable of judging anything. This is true even if one has the power to make the Other do and say what one wants, since one will know that this is not done

freely. If, on the other hand, one lets the Other be a subject, then the Other's look (or in other words, the Other using her subjectivity to judge) makes one into a mere object, and thus not oneself a source of normativity.[63] Thus, one cannot make the Other freely recognize one's own freedom from being a mere object. And, thus, one cannot have another person recognize one as a person, much less a maker of judgements. This means that the Other cannot reinforce one's judgements of what is valuable, since the Other either is not a judge, in one's eyes, or else cannot see one as a judge, in her eyes. The only way to gain proof of the Other's freedom is to be looked at, but then one is reduced to objecthood oneself.

One might reply that people seem to reinforce each other's values all the time. But Sartre holds that a notion of reciprocal consciousness in the form of an idea of "we" is not a solution.[64] He gives an example of how the apparent reciprocal reinforcement of a group is actually a mere collection of individual consciousnesses, each facing the above dilemma. A group of people are in a café and all of them see some incident outside. In a sense, one could say that there is a "we" that could be described as seeing and forming judgements about the event, and people in the group might even think this. But this is not a case of a shared mind. Even here, if a person, Simone, is in that group, she is merely one individual in the group. She may think of herself as part of the group, but she does so independently of whether others in the group think of themselves or her as such. Thus, it is not a group consciousness. For a "we" to be a real "we", Sartre holds, we still first need the experience of Other as a subject recognizing one's Self as a subject. Sartre maintains this to be impossible.

One answer to Sartre's problem can be found in the consideration of voting. There is a formal presumption that everyone in the voting pool 'has a say', if one is not consciously trying to rig the vote. The awareness of one's act of voting does not require some strong sense of group

consciousness, but merely an awareness of others in the group as fellow voters. Voting appears to be a case of recognizing a group of subjectivities, oneself among them, coming to a decision about something. If others in the group agree to abide by the result of the vote, then each of the voters recognizes all the others as subjectivities. Thus, Sartre's worry seems unfounded. The reinforcement of values by each other is a viable practice, whether this reinforcement is part of the construction and maintenance of those values or is a means of verifying them. In fact, we rely heavily upon each other for judgements of what is valuable and what is not.[65]

That values require reinforcement from others can give a person with values a reason to see others as subjects, as opposed to either mere obstacles to remove or evade, or resources to exploit, when one aims to attain one's goals. The latter point of view is the position of the personal ethical egoist described in Chapter III as the only feasible sort of egoist in a (fairly) moral society. One such argument against the ability of the personal ethical egoist to accept the reinforcement of values from others is as follows:

A. <u>The argument from prescribing for others</u>:

1) To accept the reinforcement of values from others, one must recognize that others hold those values.

2) To accept that others hold some of the same values as oneself (and thus realize along with one that these values are important) is to accept that these values are binding on others.

3) To accept that some values are binding on others is to accept that there are things that others should do.

4) In order to be a personal ethical egoist one cannot prescribe what others should do.

Therefore, 5) One cannot accept the reinforcement of values from others and remain such an egoist.

Premise 3 says, in effect, that if John gains the sense of the importance of promoting or pursuing value x because of reinforcement from others that x is important, then John is accepting that both he and those others should promote or pursue x. For if not, then they are not bound by this value, and so it is not a value for them and they cannot reinforce x as a value for him. If, for instance, it is important to John that beauty be promoted and pursued, and John gets this idea from others around him, then he should recognize that it is important that those others promote beauty, should they ever be in a position to do so, and he must therefore believe that there are things that these others should do, in some situations.[66]

As stated in Chapter III, the personal ethical egoist's theoretical framework does not allow for notions of what others should do.[67] What they should do is irrelevant to the egoist precisely because they, as people, do not matter to her. And if they do not matter, then it does not matter what they do with respect to their own judgements, and so their judgements do not matter and cannot provide any reinforcement of values for the egoist. Thus, the egoist cannot recognize others as fit reinforcers of values. Others' judgements cannot matter as judgements, but, at best, function merely as instrumental predictions of others' actions.

A similar argument against the proposition that the personal ethical egoist can have values is as follows:

B. <u>The argument from valuing those who value things</u>.

1) If one is to get reinforcement for values from others, one needs to respect the judgements of others concerning what is valuable.

2) If one is to respect the judgements of others concerning what is valuable, one must value the makers of these judgements intrinsically, *qua* makers of these judgements.

Therefore, 3) One must value others intrinsically in order to get reinforcement for values from others. (From 1 and 2).

4) To follow the program of the personal ethical egoist, one must refrain from valuing others intrinsically.

Therefore, 5) To follow the program of the personal ethical egoist, one cannot get reinforcement for values from others. (From 3 and 4).

6) To have values requires reinforcement for values from others.

Therefore, 7) To have values is inconsistent with following the program of a personal ethical egoist. (From 5 and 6).

Premise 2 is itself in need of support. Its truth or falsity is determined by whether it is possible for others to function as value-detectors, value-judges, and value-reinforcers, without being intrinsically valued themselves. For instance, assume that Alice recognizes that Bert and Carol have the ability to recognize the value of beauty. Is it a requirement of Alice's acceptance that Bert and Carol truly recognize beauty's value, coupled with Alice's own valuing of beauty, that Alice also value Bert and Carol for being able to appreciate the importance of beauty?

In one sense, this claim seems too strong. Certainly we do not have to value every art critic's judgements in order to recognize that art is valuable. But if values, or the verification of our perceptions of values, ultimately come from other people, then we have to give credence to some people's judgements of the value of art in order for us to hold art as valuable. What remains to be determined is whether one must value the very people whose judgements (about art or other values) she gives credence to. The answer is yes. For if the other valuers do not matter, then their judgements should not matter either. And if their judgements do not matter,

then she is unable to draw reinforcement of her purported values from them.

The account of Korsgaard given in Chapter III showed that her argument for why we must be moral relied upon the truth of moral internalism, as defined in that chapter. But an externalist can still draw some useful items from Korsgaard's account.[68] She holds that, if our judgments that something is important are to be taken seriously, we must believe that we are ourselves important enough for our judgments of what is important to matter.[69] Similarly, premise 2 of argument B holds that the judgements of others would have no validity unless they were, in turn, valuable as makers of those judgments. For if one did not recognize others as subjects, they would be useless in helping to determine what is important. It is precisely in their role as subjects, as judgers of value, that we need to see others as significant if we are to accept their judgements of what is valuable in a way that reinforces our own conceptions of what is valuable.[70]

Argument B also shows the contradictions inherent in cases in which one does not value either oneself or other people, but does allegedly value something else. Consider a colony of artists who value only art, and allegedly not themselves or each other. Such people would need to reinforce the value of art to each other so that a member of this colony could recognize art as valuable. In addition, argument B shows that members of such a colony would also have to value the recognition of the value of art. And this would require them to value themselves and each other as beings with this power of recognition. While this is an interesting result of argument B, it is enough for the purposes of my thesis that the personal ethical egoist is demonstrably unable to have values, if values are either objective or inter-subjective entities.

I have argued that, even if values are objective, we still need to rely upon other people to reinforce our perceptions of values, and thus to confirm that what we think are values are in fact

values. I have also argued that, even if values are only inter-subjective, they are still important enough to allow people the possibility of having meaningful lives, if only they connect their lives to these values in the right way (I will describe what this way is in the next chapter). I have also argued that the personal ethical egoist cannot have values. Thus, my agnosticism with respect to the objectivity or inter-subjectivity of values does not harm my thesis. If a knock-down argument is forthcoming that proves either that values are objective, or that values are inter-subjective, my thesis will still hold. However, my thesis will not hold if values can be created and maintained by an individual, without the help of others (the view of the pure Subjectivist) or if there are no values (the view of the Nihilist). I will in the next section argue against the plausibility of both of these views.

E. What values are not

1. Pure Subjectivism

An individual cannot simply make up her own values, independently of the people around her. There are those who think otherwise. One might think that while a person's attitudes are often strongly influenced by those around her, she sometimes feels a conflict between an attitude she "inherits" from society and one that is "peculiarly" her own.[71] This would imply that an individual can declare that something is valuable, regardless of what her society thinks. However, if her values were entirely subjective, they could not retain their authority. If, as in the case of the reluctant cannibal from the song of the same name,[72] one has no support for a certain view (in this humourous example, the view that it is wrong to eat people) then, if one cannot gain support from elsewhere, one cannot be said to have a value. It would be equivalent to someone in our society saying that it is morally wrong to eat with utensils.

One argument against the subjectivity of values is that such values would be too unstable to be reliable. For what was created by oneself could as easily be uncreated.[73] However, this objection is not strong enough to counter the pure Subjectivist. Insofar as one can self-legislate, one could arrive at provisional values that would be fairly stable, although still subject to change from one's occasionally reviewing them. One could fail to meet them, and feel badly about doing so, just as one could regret forgoing long-term prudential concerns in order to pursue short-term goals.[74] Purely subjective values do not have to be unstable. One may have desires that are long-term, and if no other argument against the possibility of purely subjective values can be found, one could imagine that some of these long-term desires could be considered to be governed by long-term values that one has created oneself.

Fortunately, there is a better argument against the pure subjectivity of values. When one is governed by values, one, by doing so, follows laws or guides to action. One follows these laws, not to determine which actions would lead to a more satisfying fulfilment of one's long-term goals (although that too is desirable), but to enable one to pursue a goal that one considers to be qualitatively better than one's other goals. However, a pure Subjectivist would have some difficulties to surmount when explaining how one creates values to live by. For one thing, with respect to the creator of values, there are other people who seem to be equally capable of judging what is valuable. From a purely subjective view (as opposed to the inter-subjective view) their opinions would simply be ignored by the first value-creator, and there are only two suitable reasons for justifiably ignoring them. First of all, she may believe herself to be somehow better at making such judgments than others. This seems doubtful and highly arbitrary.[75] Second, she may hold that everyone is entitled to make their own value judgements. With this view, no person has to respect the value judgements of others. This latter reason seems likely to water

down the concept of value considerably, as it is difficult to see why value candidates should have any legislative power with you that, in theory at least, they lack with anybody else. It would be impossible to determine whether such candidates were really values at all, or merely compulsions. While desires, compulsions, and long-range plans could all vary among individuals, the importance attached to values indicates that they should be prescriptive to people other than oneself.

The values that we have are reinforced early in our development, so it is actually quite difficult to give a plausible example of a person who lives in a society like our own but who appears to have a value that no one else shares. Let us picture a person who suddenly desires to paint things blue. When we ask her why she does this, she does not merely say that she wants to, but that there is a value to blueness itself that she wishes to promote. To us, it would seem like a mental illness of some sort, or at least a compulsion, but not a value. For her part, she would not be able to determine why promoting blueness was important. Nor would she have any phenomenological way to distinguish a strong desire for blue things from a desire governed by the value of blueness as important – that is, important in a way that the goals of her lesser desires were not.

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord holds that the danger of abandoning standards external to oneself is that "it reduces moral theory to mere rationalization (in the pejorative sense). It robs the theory of its object, and so of much of its interest."[76] I agree with these sentiments. Even for those views that maintain that, for instance, ethical attitudes are not reflected in objective moral facts, it is still necessary to have some standards outside oneself against which to measure one's ethical views.

For one can feel the strength and weakness of one's desires, but, if one is not relying

upon anyone else's judgement to supplement one's own, then one cannot tell that what one thinks to be important is important, as opposed to merely strongly desired. Verbalizing to oneself "this is a value" does not seem to be enough to make it so, nor will it capture the force that the value is meant to have. The problem is made worse for the introspective person, for the more one is aware of the possible arbitrariness with which one determines what counts as a value, the less force one's purported values seem to have as values. The ability to identify values with any confidence comes only through corroboration from others. And if one cannot tell the difference between what is a value and what is not, and one is supposed to be the source of values, then the term "value" becomes a label with no meaningful extension. Therefore, values cannot be purely subjective. This means that values are either objective or inter-subjective, or that there are no values. I will argue against this last view now.

2. Nihilism

To hold that there are no values is to believe that the existence or nonexistence of values is independent of the activities of human beings, but that no such values exist. If such a view is true, then there would be no ultimate importance to anything, and thus no real importance associated with one way of life over another. Nihilism is a consistent, albeit pessimistic, viewpoint. However, the burden of proof is on the Nihilist to show that there are no values. For one thing, a Nihilist would have to explain why we use moral language as if there were objective values. The best explanation a Nihilist could give is that people mistakenly think either that their alleged values have an objective source, or that the "values" talked about as having inter-subjective support are real values instead of pseudo-values. The first mistake is attributed to believers in the objectivity of values, while the second mistake is attributed to believers in the

inter-subjectivity of values. Another difficulty with Nihilism is that the Nihilist cannot give a reason to accept her view without giving up some part of it. Since not even truth has value according to Nihilism, Nihilism's truth would give us no reason to accept it as a theory.

Yet some people are Nihilists. And since the view is consistent, I do not intend to refute Nihilism with a knock-down argument. However, I think that most Nihilists are reacting to a perceived failure in the theory that objective values exist. This reaction fails to take into account other options, such as inter-subjectivity. Since inter-subjective values can be as important as objective values would be if they existed, this may eliminate some of the problems the Nihilist has with insisting that values must be independent of human thought and action in order to have real importance. Indeed, Nihilism, for the most part, seems to be a theory born out of a frustrated search for values. For it is in our nature to seek values. Most of us judge some actions as being better than others, and not merely instrumentally better at satisfying our desires, but also better in kind.

This is not to deny that Nihilism might be correct, but rather to show that the target audience to whom my thesis applies may include those who are Nihilists out of frustration. To them, the idea that values are inter-subjective may be an acceptable alternative if it is shown that such values are important, just as the objective values they have sought and failed to find were thought to carry importance. For the Nihilist cannot deny that people often live according to what they think of as values, and that some people (like the sculptress in the example in section B of this chapter) live according to admitted inter-subjective values. Therefore, while Nihilism may be true, there is no reason to believe that it is, and many alleged Nihilists might draw comfort from the views of the Inter-Subjectivists.

This chapter attempted to demonstrate the following. First, values exist, and may be

either objective or inter-subjective. Second, if values are objective, then they can justify one's activities, and indeed one's life. Third, if values are objective, one requires other people to verify that one accurately perceives these values. Fourth, if values are inter-subjective, they could still justify one's activities and life; their justificatory power comes from the reinforcement of the value's status itself, given by one's society: typically one's friends, family, co-workers, the media one is exposed to, and some of the laws that one is supposed to obey. Fifth, whether values are objective or inter-subjective, some sort of reinforcement from other people is required to verify that one is not deluded about what is important, so that one pursues values, rather than acting in accord with compulsions. Sixth, this need for reinforcement means that one cannot both hold values and be a personal ethical egoist, if values are objective or inter-subjective. Finally, values are not purely subjective, and, contrary to what the Nihilist fears, there are such things as values (which by default must be either objective or inter-subjective).

Endnotes

1. This is the sense of values used by Ken Binmore in his *Game Theory and the Social Contract*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). Binmore also has a different sense of empathy than what I use. According to him, empathy consists of being able to see how others think in order to be able to predict their behaviour. My sense of empathy requires that one believe others, and others' opinions, to be valuable. I believe that my use of "empathy" and "values" is a more natural reading of the terms than Binmore's. And the difference between my account and Binmore's has significance for determining what the egoist can and cannot do. An egoist can have values and empathy in Binmore's sense. However, it will be shown in this chapter that an egoist can have neither values nor empathy in the sense in which I use those terms. For Binmore's sense of empathy, see volume I, 28 and 290. For his sense of values, see volume II, 358, 470.

2. See Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's Introduction to his *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988), for a useful definition of objectivity along these lines.

3. This form of the objectivity of values should not be confused with Ayn Rand's Objectivism. The latter is a defence of selfishness, the former a metaphysical position on the status of values.

4. Of course, as argued in the last chapter, knowledge of these values does not guarantee that one will choose to have values govern one's desires. The example of the amoral agent shows that it is conceivable that one could know about objective values and yet be unmoved by them.

5. Naturally, those who believe that values are objective have explanations for such variations.

6. The former view is called moral or ethical realism, and the latter moral or ethical anti-realism. I will usually not use the terms "realism" and "anti-realism". Note that the arguments in this chapter are meant to apply to all values, not just the moral ones.

7. J. L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). Reprinted in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, Darwall, et al., eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 89-104, and *Essays on Moral Realism*, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 95-118. References will be to the latter. This reference is to page 109.

8. Ibid., 114.

9. This explanation raises the question of whether, if one argues successfully against the objectivity of moral values, they lose this authority. I will later argue that values do not have to be objective to be authoritative.

10. Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

11. Ibid., 195.

12. See Simon Blackburn, "How to be an Ethical Antirealist," in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, Darwall, et al., eds., 167-78.

13. Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," *The Philosophical Review* 84 (1975): 16.

14. This is a reference to Geach in Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 190.

15. Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, 192.

16. Ibid., 192-3.

17. Stevenson, *Facts and Values*, 202-3. This meta-attitude critique seems similar to Harry Frankfurt's notion of a person as one who can have second-order desires about his desires, such as a person who wishes that she were not addicted to nicotine. See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 5-20.

18. Part of this refinement would come from applying a theory's own values in a second-order form, to our concepts of first-order values. These could be moral values, or non-moral values as to what makes a better theory.

19. Blackburn's view is an unusual form of anti-realism, but his analogies can be used without assuming his particular views.

20. Simon Blackburn, "Errors and the Phenomenology of Value," 1-22 in *Morality and Objectivity*, Ted Honderich, ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 11.

21. Ibid., 9.

22. I am relying on the argument as put forward by J. L. Mackie.

23. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," 110.

24. Ibid., 111.

25. Bernard Williams, "Ethical Consistency," Ch. 2 in *Essays on Moral Realism*, Sayre-McCord, ed.

26. Platts, "Moral Reality," Ch.12 in *Essays on Moral Realism*, Sayre-McCord, ed., (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 284.

27. Ibid., 290.

28. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," 111.

29. This argument assumes that values must motivate upon being perceived. That assumption is challenged in Chapter III, in the defence of externalism. If externalism is true, values are not metaphysically queer because they do not have the power to motivate that Mackie attributes to them. Granted, a story would have to be told of how people come to have the motivation to follow these values. For if the motivation to follow objective values does not come from the values in and of themselves, then the role that these objective values play should be explained. The "Just-so" story from Chapter III is one possible explanation. Human beings gain the desire to do what is right through education, and then (perhaps) use their moral sensibilities to discover the right thing to do. If there are objective values, this moral sensibility would be used to detect them. And other general sensibilities may be instilled that would lead one to be motivated to pursue other values.

30. Platts, "Moral Reality and the End of Desire," in *Reference, Truth and Reality*, Platts, ed., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 72.

31. Platts, "Moral Reality", 295.

32. See note 29.

33. Mackie discusses an objection put forward by Richard Price, namely that other areas of ontology have the same problem. Among the things that we assume exist without being able to detect them directly are causation and number. Mackie here denies the analogies that Price makes, for the most part, and believes that "satisfactory accounts of most of these can be given in empirical terms" See 112.

34. Ibid., 113.

35. Gilbert Harman, "Ethics and Observation," ch. 6 in *Essays on Moral Realism*, Sayre-McCord, ed., 119-24.

36. Ibid., 123.

37. Ibid., 122.

38. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Moral Theory and Explanatory Importance," Ch. 11 in his *Essays on Moral Realism*, 262.

39. Ibid., 267.

40. Ibid., 268.

41. Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations", ch. 10 in *Essays on Moral Realism*, Sayre-McCord, ed., 229-255. Originally in *Morality, Reason and Truth*, David Copp and David Zimmerman, eds. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1989), 49-78. References will be to the former.

42. Ibid., 244.

43. Ibid., 245-6.

44. Ibid., 247.

45. Ibid., 249.

46. Ibid., 253.

47. Richard Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," 105-32 in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, Darwall, et al., eds. Originally in: *Essays on Moral Realism.* Edited by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. References will be to the former. This reference is to 122.

48. Ibid., 123.

49. Ibid., 105.

50. I am borrowing freely from Sayre-McCord's definition. See note 2, this chapter.

51. In any case, it is dangerous to hold a view that values are objective without taking into account the necessity of support, in some form, from other people. It is far too simplistic to believe that one has (or can find) all the answers to moral dilemmas. Following such a belief can lead to fanaticism, and a lack of tolerance of other viewpoints. Furthermore, it is dangerous to base a meaningful life on the view that anyone who disagrees with one's moral views must be wrong. History has shown us how often those absolutely convinced that they possessed the truth about the objective moral values were wrong. In this case, some Socratic humility is in order.

52. The precise delineation of aesthetic values is beyond the scope of this thesis.

53. The value of fairness itself would have been internalized in her (and others) during childhood, perhaps in supervised play sessions. For instance, a parent may have told her that it was not fair to keep a family toy from her little sister. This, and numerous other reinforcements, would have instilled the idea in her that human interactions should be fair. Such social interactions are continual and promote the verification of values that a person holds.

54. For one thing, we must allow that a majority in a society could, in rare cases, misperceive a value. Furthermore, while there are few cases in which people disagree over whether a basic value, like freedom, is important, there are, of course, many cases in which a society is divided

over how these values apply to particular situations. In the case of capital punishment, one of the issues is whether the scope of the application of the value of human life extends to humans who themselves have taken life, or if the value of justice requires that they die to pay for their crimes. Abortion pits the value of a pregnant woman's freedom of choice against the possible application of the value of human life to a fetus. The debate over homosexual marriage is a debate over whether it threatens the integrity of a family or reinforces it. I do not aim to settle these issues here. But the existence of such debates does not mean that people on one side of a debate hold a value while people on the other side do not. If babies were caused solely by some method other than pregnancy, such as growing on trees, there would be no strong advocacy group for cutting down the trees. And there is no strong advocacy group preventing citizens from having operations to remove cancerous growths. Freedom and life are two values strongly held by almost everyone in our society, whether they are pro-life or pro-choice. The debate is over how these values apply in particular situations, and how to resolve apparent conflicts between them.

55. Values are independent of an individual's opinions, however. This buffer is meant to prevent inter-subjectivity from facing the problems associated with pure subjectivity, as I will show later.

56. Of course, it may take a lot of time and effort to convince members of a community that slaves and free men are not relevantly different. One would have to appeal to similarities (both care about their families, both have hopes and aspirations, both can laugh or cry, both can hold things to be important, etc.). One would also have to show that any differences (such as skin color, country of origin, being on the losing side of a war, etc.) do not themselves give reason to enslave one group and not the other, while potential differences that might (an inability to appreciate freedom, failure to be able to act without supervision, etc.) do not apply. Among the relevant facts are that slaves can appreciate freedom, and can act without supervision, if given the chance.

Mind you, humans often tend to be more rationalizing than rational, and if they have an interest in maintaining slavery, it may prove to be difficult to convince them that it is wrong. Thus, many social changes are slow. Slavery still occurs in some parts of the world today.

The society that has slavery is not necessarily a society that does not value freedom. It is a society that believes that the scope of the application of this value does not extend beyond a certain group. Thus, freedom could be an inter-subjective value of a society that practises slavery. It is this valuing of freedom that may give some chance of success to arguments against slavery using the idea of the similarities between the enslaved and free, as outlined above. The idea can be verified by empirical fact, which will help to convince others.

57. Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson, "Speech act Structure in Conversation: Rational Aspects of Pragmatic Coherence," ch. 2 in *Conversational Coherence: Form, Structure and Strategy*, Robert T. Craig and Karen Tracy, eds., (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983), 57.

58. This is pointed out by Susan Wolf in "Happiness and Meaning," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14 (1997): 210. Of course, further arguments could be made in particular cases to show why, for instance, it is valuable for an agent to do crossword puzzles, but one could substitute other pleasurable but unimportant activities without altering my points.

59. Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on The Theory of Ethics.* 1785-97. Reprint. 6th ed. Translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott. New York: Longman, Green and Co., Ltd. 1873. Reprint 1907, 10.

60. Such reinforcement is needed to show the value of following a moral principle. Thus even if one wishes to distance the motive to serve others' interests from the motive to follow a principle, inter-subjective validation of these principles (and of the rationality of following them) is still required.

61. We would not necessarily use all the values that are available to give our lives meaning. The conflicts between inter-subjective values, or inter-subjective judgements of objective values, or even, possibly, objective values, make it unlikely that we could hold all of the values, at least to the same degree. At the very least, we would need to prioritize them.

62. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 1943. Reprint. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956).

63. Ibid., 511.

64. Ibid., 536.

65. It might be thought that, since to have values requires reinforcement from others, then, if one accepts some values from others, one must accept all of the values that those people hold. This is false, as one can in theory accept some values and not others. Thus, in theory one can accept reinforcement of aesthetic but not moral values. However, see below for arguments that there are other reasons to believe that the need for the reinforcement of any values leads to the need to recognize the value of others, a moral value.

66. It is often the case that someone holds that even people who do not share her value of x should still promote x. That issue merits more discussion than can be given here, but is not needed for my thesis. All that is needed is that the very people who provide reinforcement for someone's values as values are themselves bound by those values, in the judgement of the person whose values are reinforced.

67. This is explained in detail in Chapter VI of John van Ingen's *Why Be Moral? The Egoistic Challenge* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

68. In addition, her idea of a "practical identity" as a description of one's self seems to be similar to the narrative account of identity which will be described in Chapter VI, although more would need to be said about what a practical identity's "description of one's self" comes to, and also whether such a description, in which 'actions are worth undertaking and life worth living', must be narrative.

69. Christine Korsgaard, "The Sources of Normativity", 389-406 in *Moral Discourse and Practice*, Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Originally from *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 15, Grethe B. Peterson, ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994). References will be to the former. This reference is to 397.

70. Note that this argument demonstrates problems not only with the personal ethical egoist having values, but also with the position of the individual ethical egoist in general. For the latter person, presumably, wants to value herself. Yet, the only way she can do this is to also value others, which would invalidate her egoist position. Note also that a seeming consequence of this argument is that, if we rely upon others to reinforce our values, we should have our confidence in these values shaken in cases of hypocrisy. As examples of those who preach values that they do not practise, imagine a curator who takes bribes and so picks paintings to exhibit based on money and not the relative artistic merit of the paintings, or a moral figure (president or priest) who exhorts us all to obey the laws (or scriptures) and then is revealed to disobey them himself. When such things happen, we sometimes have to stop treating these people as proper proponents that these values should be reinforced, and look to other authority figures (or just to society in general) for reinforcement of those values. If we had an "emperor has no clothes" situation where it turned out that nobody actually considered aesthetic "values", for instance, to be important, then they would lose their purported status as values. However, we do not in general have such extreme levels of hypocrisy. Rather, some of our alleged proponents of values are revealed as frauds, but our society continues to hold those values which the imposters reject.

71. See, for instance, Charles L. Stevenson, *Facts and Values* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 203.

72. Michael Flanders and Donald Swann, "The Reluctant Cannibal", Song 2, Side 2, *At the Drop of a Hat: An After Dinner Farrago* [record] (Toronto: Angel Recording 35797, 1959).

73. Jean-Paul Sartre gave an example of a reformed gambler who has to decide yet again that he will not gamble, every time temptation presents itself. Although his example was designed to show that his version of existentialism is true, I believe it serves to show that if a value were that unstable, there would be reason to question whether it was a value at all. See his *Being and Nothingness*, 69-70.

74. As stated in Chapter III, Christine Korsgaard takes the view in "The Sources of Normativity," that the prudent person could self-legislate in just such a manner.

75. Of course, the personal ethical egoist ignores the judgement of others, but she does not hold any values herself, unlike the Subjectivist's purported creator of values.

76. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Coherence and Models for Moral Theorizing," in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1985): n. 35.

Chapter V

A. Why people wonder about meaning

Like other animals, humans have a strong instinct for survival. Beyond our ability to heal wounds and mental traumas, we have an drive to continue to live despite adverse conditions. There are obvious reasons for us to have this drive. Among other things, creatures with the genetic predisposition to survive are more likely to do so long enough to pass on their genetic heritage. Thus, this drive to survive is prevalent among all animals.

What is unique to humans is the drive for some justification of survival. We ask, in various ways, what the meaning of our lives is. The question is partly an extension of our general tendencies to ask "Why?" which is learned early in childhood. Asking questions can have a pragmatic value. One can use the answers to determine whether an object or course of action will help or hinder one's chances of surviving and prospering. Asking whether a plant is poisonous could be one example of asking such a pragmatic question. Asking questions also tends to elicit answers about other fields that may have an indirect bearing upon one's survival, since, for the most part, the more information one has, the better one is able to prosper in one's natural and social environment. But "Why?" questions are not restricted to particular subjects. It is natural that, as we mature, we will occasionally ask more general questions, some of which are not easy to answer. Thus, the questions about particular things such as "Why is the sky blue?"and "Why do I have to go to bed so early?" give way, later in life, to questions such as "Why am I here?", and "What is life all about?"

One such question, "Why is there so much suffering in the world?", can lead one to

speculate that perhaps, all things considered, the instinct to survive has no real justification and that, to avoid further suffering, one should commit suicide. Yet this very instinct to survive can fuel our urge to find a justification for continuing to live, despite the suffering we are likely to experience.

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair McIntyre claims that meaning comes when individuals have narratives of their lives that are intelligible to them.[1] "When someone complains . . . that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or a *telos*. Hence the point of doing any one thing rather than another at crucial junctures in their lives seems to such persons to have been lost."[2] McIntyre believes that this telos or guiding purpose in life is usually to be found within the living traditions of one's culture. However, through reflection, some find ultimate purpose in efforts to change or extend certain traditions.[3]

McIntyre's point is well taken. Almost everyone needs to feel committed to something that she values or considers to be truly important. Its importance will, in turn, help her to define what her life is about, and help her to structure her life story.[4] Value, in this sense, separates humans from other animals. People want more than survival; they want a justification for the desire to survive – a reason to live. Many have attempted such a justification, and their attempts have led to various accounts of what gives life meaning. I shall present and argue for my own definition of a meaningful life as part of my greater project of justifying the possession of a moral character.

B. A definition of a meaningful life

I begin with three, hopefully plausible, assumptions. First, a meaningful life is possible for some humans to achieve. Second, not all adult and mentally competent humans have meaningful lives. Finally, a person may sometimes erroneously believe that her life is meaningful.

With the acceptance of these assumptions, one can define S's life as meaningful if, and only if, the following conditions are met:

> a) S has desires strong enough to dispose her to act; b) At least one of these desires must be for something S believes to be truly important (and thus governed by a value); c) S must believe that her value-governed desires are for some thing(s) at least possibly attainable, in whole or in part; d) S must be able, upon reflection, to justify her values by connecting them to, or identifying them as part of, the pool of base values -- that is, the values that a group that she considers herself to be a part of either holds (and uses to justify other values), or collectively believes to be the objective values; e) S must conceive of herself as governed by this value – that is, she must be aware that her desire is governed by this value *qua* value, not simply a norm, and that she, *qua* agent, is acting on that desire.

These conditions are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for S to have a meaningful life.[5]

I now wish to defend the definition's clauses. Condition a) is quite simply intended to rule out the possibility that the fully apathetic or completely unmotivated person is capable of

having a meaningful life. Engagement of some sort, at the level of creativity, passion, or by some other means, seems to be a vital part of what can make a life meaningful. A desire is an appetite. Desires motivate one to act, if they are strong enough to overcome one's inertia and are not outweighed by stronger desires. If we take all desires sufficient for action away from a person who seems to have a meaningful life, we are left with a person who never does anything, and hence who never does anything worthwhile.

Condition b) rules out the mere satisfaction of one's desires as being sufficient for meaning. If a person simply acts, without any belief that any of her actions are justified, then her actions cannot be judged by her to be worthwhile. Indeed, they could not be judged so by anyone. We might be grateful for a wanton happening to act upon some charitable impulse, but still would classify such a wanton as living a meaningless life.

Point b) implies that a person's beliefs are relevant to whether her life is meaningful or not. It follows that if a person, after considerable reflection, comes to believe that her life lacks meaning, that nothing in her life is important or worthwhile, then she is correct. There is a similarity between the person who is too depressed or apathetic to have any motivating desires, and the reflective person who feels that none of her desires is justified. Both fail to hold that their lives are meaningful, and both are right. A person who thinks that nothing is worthwhile, or at least that nothing she wants is worthwhile, will have no justification for her life, even if others would find, contrary to her view, much of what she is doing to be worthwhile.

As an example, let us imagine an artist who makes a sculpture that she considers to be worthless, but that others come to admire. I would compare this to a sculpture formed through wind erosion on a mountain top. We might admire the work of natural beauty, just as others

might admire the artist's sculpture, but such admiration by itself does not add meaning to either the existence of the wind that created the natural sculpture or the life of the artist that created her sculpture. The artist must believe that her sculpture has value, or she can derive no meaning from it. If she can derive no meaning in her life from anything, then her life has no meaning. A person who believes that her life is currently meaningless is not, however, a hopeless case. She may be motivated to seek out something that would make her life meaningful, and perhaps the quest for meaning may itself become important enough to her to make her life meaningful.

If someone does not regard her life as meaningful, however, then she may not be in a position to be influenced by any value – even that of having a meaningful life. Susan Wolf gives an example of a person who is immune to influence by societal values: "When we focus on someone whose life is so devoid of meaning that she sees no reason to live, it does seem absurd to say to her that she should go out there and maximize utility . . . the deeply depressed person might well reply 'Why should I? Why am I responsible for the well-being of the world or the whales? Why can't you give the job to someone else and leave me in peace?' So far as I can tell, the moralist has nothing to say in answer."[6]

A depressed person does not have to react as Wolf describes; a depressed person may accept a value but not have sufficient motivation to act on it. But we could imagine a depressed person who does not recognize any value in morality. For example, she might believe that the inevitable death of the entire human race makes it pointless to do anything, much less help humans. We might argue that moral actions can nevertheless provide meaning. If we are successful, we may give the depressed person a reason to accept morality as a norm, and perhaps increase her desire to follow that norm. She may then get out of bed, having recognized

something as important, and begin to make her life meaningful. But our efforts may not succeed; the depressed person will first have to want to discover a way to make her life worthwhile, and she may be too depressed to want to attempt even that. In addition, contextual factors may themselves prevent one from having beliefs relevant to gaining a meaningful life. For instance, a person may fail to have a meaningful life if she lives in brutal circumstances and must worry about simply staying alive (and thus not have time to pursue anything valuable).[7]

So what does it mean to say that one's desire is for something one considers to be important? If a desire is not a simple appetite (such as hunger) or a conditioned appetite (such as a person's addiction to an endorphin rush gained through strenuous exercise), then the desire is governed by a norm. A norm is a rule that one adopts, through which one or more of one's desires are mediated. Since one chooses to accept a norm, that norm itself must be desired, either through conditioning or because of a desire governed by another norm. Similarly, a previously held norm may be rejected. A norm that is accepted acts as a mediator for one's desires in the following way. In effect, it causes one to judge various states of affairs according to how well they satisfy the norm, and, because one desires that the norm be followed, causes one to desire those states of affairs that one believes best satisfies that norm, other things (especially other norms) being equal. Thus, one may desire to practice the piano daily, not through any direct desire to practice, but because one has accepted a norm of developing a musical talent. Therefore, one might say "I do not really want to practice the piano, but I should." Norms may be moral, aesthetic, prudential, etc.

Some, but not all, norms are also values. Values can provide meaning. Norms that are not values cannot. A value is a norm that one either believes to be justified by another value or

that one believes to be a base value. This justification amounts to a value acting as a norm for another value. Thus one might desire to pay for a traffic ticket because one values obeying the law, and one may justify the value of obeying the law by appealing to some higher principles that the laws are meant to serve.

Adopting a norm allows one to justify a desire to one's self, but if a norm is not a value then one does not require that such a justification be endorsed by anyone else. Unlike values, the justification of a norm *qua* norm does not have to be anything more than an appeal to one's long-term desires. One might adopt the norm of writing at least two pages a day in order to finish a novel, but one does not have to attach any further significance to writing at least two pages a day. If one does not try to attach a justifying reason to writing the novel, but merely wants to do so, then writing at least two pages a day could be in one sense important for the author (because she wants to finish her novel) but not important in an ultimately justifying sense (because she does not believe that it really matters, ultimately, whether she finishes her novel or not). A value, on the other hand, is meant to have significance in that it is meant to grant this special importance to some of one's desires. Hence, it requires justification, either by another value or through its status as a base value.

Condition c) is important because, contrary to some views,[8] one cannot gain meaning in pursuing something that one believes to be impossible, unless there are benefits in making the attempt. For instance, one might try to scale a wall that is too steep and slippery to climb, not to get to the top of the wall, but in order to build up one's muscles, assuming that there was any value to doing so. But that would be a case of a person pursuing some other value through an indirect means. If a goal is not even partially achievable, and if no other valuable benefits

accrue from attempting the impossible goal, then to attempt that goal anyhow is not valuable but merely a waste of energy that could be applied to other, possibly valuable, goals.

Condition d) is intended to stop a potential infinite regress in my definition of meaning. The base values of a group are the values that the group either holds or collectively believes to be the objective values. They ultimately justify all the other values that the group holds, but do not themselves require or admit of further justification. Without some sort of base values, then my definition would have desires that are guided by values, which are guided by values, etc. In that case, if the person holding such values attempted to justify them, she would eventually reach a stage of values for which she could not conceive further justifications. Without an appeal to the base values held by her social group, she would be vulnerable to accusations of arbitrariness in the choice of her values. Since base values are not invented by a single person, this accusation of arbitrariness is muted. If pressed as to why she holds a particular base value to be important, she can with some legitimacy reply, "It simply is important and everybody (or at least everybody in my group) knows that." If almost everybody in her group indeed knows, or at least believes, that those base values are important, then we have finally reached an authority outside the individual that can provide support for one's values without needing to be itself supported by some other value.

Humans typically consider themselves to exist as part of groups of people, and identify these groups. For instance, one could consider oneself to be a Canadian, or a British Columbian, or a Christian, or a member of a particular Christian church. The base values are those values that the members of a group, of which one considers oneself a part, believe can and do justify, either directly or indirectly, all other values held by all or most[9] members of that group. The set

of base values may vary from group to group, and, to some extent, within a group composed of smaller groups. However, a large number of base values seem to be consistently held across almost all known social groups, or societies. Some examples of such widely held values are some appreciation of beauty, and some form of respect for others. Note that not every member of a group has to hold a base value for the group to hold it.[10] But it is to the base values of one's group that one will appeal, ultimately, when attempting to justify a desire or action.

The set of base values held in common between groups is large enough that some philosophers hold that there are objective values, which means that some values would exist whether or not any humans existed. One who believes that values are objective could hold that a social group's base values are a more or less accurate reflection of these objective values. On the other hand, one may hold that values are not objective. One who believes that values are inter-subjective could hold that a group's base values are simply those used by that group to justify their other values, without themselves requiring justification. This issue was visited in the previous chapter.

Some might argue that there is a price for accepting any of one's social group's base values as an ultimate justification for one's other values. If such an argument is sound, then one could quickly argue that anyone who accepts any base value, such as the value of art, must also accept the moral base values of her social group. This argument is that, barring the special circumstance of rebellion, one usually would be rationally forced to accept all of one's group's base values. They might be prioritized differently from person to person, but even such differences of prioritization would have their limits. For, if one does not accept all of one's group's base values, then one is in danger of seeming, even to oneself, to be arbitrary in one's

rejection of some base values and not others. For instance, a member of a society which had the base values of life, art, and obedience to God might want to accept the first two, but not the third. Thus he would not hold that obedience to God was important, or justified any other value or any action. If, in one's own opinion, some base values do not ultimately justify other values, then it is harder for one to believe that the other base values, that one accepts, retain this ability to ultimately justify other values. Yet that is precisely the function of the base values that one does accept. Thus, the argument runs, accepting one base value can itself provide a reason to accept the other base values in one's group, assuming that one wants a base value to justify one's values, desires and motivations.

However, this argument is unsound. There are important reasons why accepting one base value does not imply accepting all of a group's base values. First, one may be a member of more than one group, and thus may be able to take base values from different groups. If some of the base values of one group conflict with those of another, this would imply the rejection of some base values. For example, a person may belong to a second group that values total freedom, which conflicts with the value of obedience to God. Second, one simply might not be aware of all the base values of one's group, even if one holds one or more base values. After all, in theory, a society could have a multitude of base values. We would still consider such a person to be living a meaningful life. Third, until we know more about the nature of the reinforcement of values by one's group, we do not know whether or not the reinforcement of one base value is independent of the reinforcement of another. The means by which a person came to adopt some base values, such as art, may not require the adoption of other values, such as obedience to God. Therefore, it is possible, as far as can be determined at this point, for a person to gain social

reinforcement for one base value that she holds without needing to hold all the base values of her group. Finally, since, by definition, one does not need to justify one's base values apart from this process of reinforcement, one cannot, without further facts about the nature of reinforcement, use a base value to justify other base values. For if the latter could be justified in this manner, they would be values, not base values.

One could object to clause d) being sufficient, along with the other conditions of my definition, for a meaningful life. For one could say that all of a group's values are arbitrary, and so have no justificatory force. However, this is not how our intuitions lead us in our accounts of meaning. A Canadian who tries to do what is morally right, by the standards of Canadian society, would seem to be able to live a meaningful life even though the base values of Canadian society might simply be either a guess at what the objective values are (if there are any) or an invention that occurred over a long period of time, whose longevity (in some people's eyes) gives it a pretence to an authority that it does not have. It seems that following the base values of one's group can provide meaning in one's life. Thus, the base values provide a useful starting point. In addition, it is easier to see how we can connect our desires to values and in turn to the base values of our group than it is to see how we could connect to values, if they exist outside of a social group and that group plays no role in the confirmation of those values. Even if there are objective values, it certainly seems as though other people guide our acceptance of such values. For, as the last chapter showed, it is through others that we verify our own perceptions of what is valuable. We rely upon others to verify to ourselves that what we think of as valuable is in fact valuable.[11]

I have not given a knock-down argument here that non-objective base values can exist, or

can provide meaning to one's life. Nor have I given a knock-down argument that, if objective base values exist, any society's guesses at them are at all accurate. For all that I have said about the base values of a social group being sufficient to justify one's values, and hence some of one's desires and actions, it is still possible to hold both that values have to be objective and known in order to provide sufficient justification for one to have a meaningful life, and that there are no such objective values, or that if they exist they are unknowable. What would follow from this is that no one could have a meaningful life.[12] I have earlier stated that one of my postulates is that a meaningful life is possible for some humans. However, one who disagrees with this postulate could well be in the peculiar situation of not being able to justify any of her desires (thus being similar to the mere seeker of pleasures) but wishing that, *per impossible*, she could find some such justification.

Dostoevsky presents a brilliant concept of what such a self-consciously meaningless life is like in his *Notes From Underground.*[13] His Underground Man (UM), cannot find anything important to which he can attach himself. He is disenchanted with the traditions of his time and sees that they are flawed, but cannot find anything that would serve him as a base of meaning in the way that these traditions serve the "stupid people" who still believe in them. Yet he is aware that having only desires for what is good for him, without having desires for something of higher value, does not satisfy him. He perversely desires what is bad for him, and, to him, the latter desire is not worse than the former desire for what is good for him. Yet this does not satisfy him either. Rather, his choice of desires is to make the point that there is nothing inherently more important, in a grander, meaning-granting sense, with one desire than the other. UM finds nothing either within himself or in the world at large that can create value. So UM is not content

to become a normal stupid man; yet he knows that his perverse desire will not provide him with meaning either. "Though I did say that I envy the normal man [who at least thinks of his life as meaningful] to the point of uttermost bile, still I do not want to be him on those conditions in which I see him . . . Eh! But here, too, I'm lying! Lying, because I myself know, like two times two, that it is not at all the underground that is better, but something different, which I thirst for but can never find!"[14] UM's problem is that he cannot find anything that is important to attach to his life. So he despairs that his life is meaningless, and feels contempt for himself because of this, and for normal men because they do not realize that their lives also do not have any real justification.

As I have said, I can no more give a knock-down argument that the base values of a group are, if the other conditions of the definition are met, sufficient to render a person's life meaningful than I could hope to argue an entirely apathetic person into having desires. At best, I can point out that if there are no values that can sufficiently justify a human life as meaningful, then we end up with a stand-off between the totally selfish person, the altruist, and indeed any other position. In practical terms there would be no reason to adopt, or not adopt, any of these modes of life.[15] Since my thesis is addressed to those who are already moral, then they could take some small comfort in the fact that at least there is no justification for becoming or being totally selfish. I will, however, be operating on the assumption that it is possible to have a meaningful life, and that, therefore, some values exist that are capable of rendering a life meaningful.[16]

Let us review the relation between desires, norms, values and base values. Humans have desires, which can be simple appetites, conditioned appetites, or appetites mediated by some

idea, called a norm. This norm may or may not be a value. If it is a value, then it is either a base value or is itself mediated by a value. All values that are not base values are mediated, either directly or indirectly, by base values. The importance of values is derived from that of a group's base values. One justifies adherence to a value by appealing to a broader value and showing that adherence to the latter requires adherence to the former. This process of justification can continue until one uses a base value so to justify another value. These base values are held to confer importance through being important, without there being any need to justify the importance of the base values themselves. Thus, the process of justification in one sense is a logical one – one might, as an intellectual exercise, connect a desire to a value, and then to a further value, and so on, until finally one reaches a base value, all without adopting any of the values in the chain of justification or holding the desire. However, for a person to justify her own desires, she must be able to make such a connection, in her own mind at least, using desires and values she holds. This may not be easy. One may think that one holds a value, when one actually is merely adhering to a norm, either because the final justification (that is, the purported base value) is not a base value, or because something goes wrong in the chain of justifications leading to the desire (that is, the state of affairs that one desires does not in fact serve one of the values in the chain of justification). Furthermore, disagreements about what constitute base values will lead, naturally, to disagreements about whether certain states of affairs are justified by base values.

Condition d) of the proposed definition can lead to some consequences that may at first seem odd. A person could act upon desires guided by norms, and believe that those norms are (or are directly or indirectly justified by) base values. If values are objective, and the person,

although following her social group's view of what the base values are, incorrectly perceives a norm as a base value because her group does so, then the person will still, contrary to what one might think, have a meaningful life. The justification of one's norms need only be good enough to connect with the purported base values of one's group. That being said, such a person may be vulnerable to an argument that shows that what was thought to be a base value is not one after all. If such an argument succeeds, then the person's life will lose meaning unless she can find alternative base values with which to connect her norms. For instance, someone might adopt a norm of honesty, justifying it as obedience to the will of God, such obedience being thought by her to be a base value. If she is later convinced that there is no God, she might still be able to justify her norm of honesty by appealing to another value, perhaps that of increasing the general welfare of her society, or of being an honourable person. Alternatively, she might try to treat honesty as a base value. However, given that honesty was previously justified by another value, it would dispose a person to continue to need to have that value justified by another value. Furthermore, she may not get reinforcement of honesty as a base value.

Another odd consequence comes to light when we examine the case of the rebel. The rebel seems to be a counterexample to the idea of a group's base values determining whether or not one's life is meaningful. After all, rebels' lives seem to gain meaning precisely through fighting against their groups.

I maintain that even rebels need to appeal to the base values of their groups. Rebels who share base values with the groups they grew up in believe that such values justify different actions than those that their groups currently feel are justified. Rebels thus either try to reveal a contradiction implied by an accepted value system as it stands, or to show that certain empirical

facts of which many are ignorant, taken together with their group's base values, imply a different set of values and worthwhile actions than most members of that group believe. As an example of the latter, a rebel may adopt her group's base value of equality, but wish to extend equal treatment to others who were not previously considered by that group to be equals. This is what happened when arguments were made to extend voting rights in Canada to women. Canadians previously held the value of equality, but had not formerly extended it to women in this manner. This sort of difference is often based on different empirical beliefs. In this example, the rebels were trying to show the rest of their group the truth of the empirical fact that women are as capable of political decision-making as men. Each man was already considered to have the right to have a vote in an election, and one that counted equally with the vote of any other man. So the rebels were not arguing for a new base value, but for the extension of the scope of a base value their group already held. This sort of rebel I call the reformer; such a rebel accepts at least one of her group's base values, and tries to use agreement with that base value and some other facts to influence others' values, desires and actions.

Alternatively, a rebel may try to change a group's base values. Such a rebel I will call a prophet. The prophet is unable to appeal to arguments, since base values are by definition justificatory without needing to be justified. A prophet might try to convince others that a norm that they do not yet accept is a base value by merely telling them what the purported base value is and that they should accept it as such. The prophet is thus trying to give her group a new set of base values. She may, for instance, adopt a base value from another group. An art-lover may follow aesthetic values that she knows other artists favour, even if she lives in a small community in which no other member attaches any importance to art. She may try to influence

her community to see the value of art. But if she fails, she could still draw some reinforcement of art as a base value from knowledge of the existence of other artists that hold that value. In this case, she is considering herself to be a member of the group of those artists. Finally, a prophet may hold that one of the alleged base values of her group is not a base value at all, but merely a norm. She must then try to convince her group that what almost everyone sees as obviously important is not so. One way to do this would be to persuade others around one to believe both that they were accepting a purported base value because of some hidden purported values and facts, and that either the justification was flawed or that the relevant purported facts were not true. According to my proposal, if a rebel does not appeal to at least one base value of her group (and so is not a reformer) and does not convince others that her own purported base values are base values (and so is an unsuccessful prophet), then she does not have a meaningful life. She has not gained the necessary context from which she could hold values.

If one's community does not support one's value-candidates (or their hierarchy) within some limits, then in order to have a meaningful life one must alter one's society, find a new society that does support one's views, or else give up the value-candidates as such. The first choice is the course chosen by a moral reformer or prophet, the second that chosen by, say, an unappreciated artist who seeks out a group of artists with whom to interact. The last choice is the choice of the conformist. The conformist thus either gives up believing that her value-candidates are values, or accepts that she has to change her value-hierarchy, perhaps introducing values into this hierarchy that are new to her.

Can one adopt a base value that no one else believes to be a base value? No. Unless an individual can convince others that the norm she is following and claiming to be a base value is

really a base value, she will be seen as, at best, deluded and thus not gain any justification for following the norm. Without validation from others, she cannot know that she has values. If she believes that her norm is a base value when it has not been validated as such by others, then she is deluded. However, if she does convince enough people that her norm is a base value, then she will receive from them the justification that in following her norm she is living a meaningful life. For once others accept it, the prophet will have a basis for believing that she is not simply deluded about what is truly important.

A failed prophet will not have a meaningful life, for a person cannot arbitrarily invent base values; he needs a group of people that come to share those base values to provide him with assurance that they are base values. But what if he is insane, and believes in a non-existent group of people that then provides him with base values? This might be the case with some prophets who believe that members of such a group have provided them with access to a new base value. An observer could judge the insane prophet to have a meaningful life, but one whose meaning is in a sense fragile and coincidental. If the lunatic were cured of her delusions of others (Martians, perhaps) that share her purported base values, then she would no longer be able to justify her values in that way, and would need to find another justification of her purported values (or find other, justified, values) in order to have a meaningful life.

Some might object to the need for a person to be able to herself justify her values in order for her life to be meaningful. They think that sometimes a person's life can be made meaningful after her death. For example, history might judge that a prophet was right, but that prophet might have been unsuccessful during her lifetime. A future society might, in a sense, include her as a member. Unfortunately for prophets, this doesn't help them. A person's life

can inspire others without itself being meaningful. The alternative is to believe that a person's life can be made retroactively meaningful, even if the person had no inkling that her ideas would be adopted by others, long after her death. There are problems with allowing for retroactive changes to whether one's life was meaningful at a given time. For if one future society is allowed to imbue a person's life with meaning in such a manner, then a society even further in the future could take away this retroactive meaning by judging the previous society to be mistaken. Thus, whether a prophet's life is meaningful or not becomes subject, in this sense, to fashion. Yet future generations cannot rob any meaningful life of its meaning; therefore, they cannot grant meaning to a meaningless life. It makes more sense to consider the unsuccessful prophet to have led a meaningless life, even if she does happen to inspire others after her death.[17]

The requirement of some kind of reinforcement from others ensures that meaning is never an all-or-nothing affair. A person's life can be more or less meaningful. First of all, since one's desires are not always guided by her values, one could judge her life to be more meaningful, if her desires that are guided by her values are relatively strong compared to her other desires. In addition, one is relying upon one's group for one's base values, and so various factors can influence how much justification one's actions can gain from adopting a value. These factors include the relative or absolute numbers of one's group that adopt a base value as such, and which base values are supported when they conflict with other base values. For example, most societies prohibit murder, and it would be no defence to claim that a murder was committed in a particularly artistic manner, even if that were true. This seems like a prioritization of possibly incommensurable values, in this case of life over art. Another factor that affects the amount of meaning in a person's life is the level of reinforcement one gets from

those one is in contact with. Since a particular person will be more influenced by certain people (by virtue of degree of contact and closeness of relationship, among other things), then reinforcement from them matters more to that person.[18]

Condition e) of the definition indicates that one needs to be aware that sometimes one acts because of desires guided by values.[19] This could mean that Sue may be acting on desires that Bill thinks would be proper to act on under the circumstances, because of values that Bill holds. But if Sue does not think that her desires are guided by any values, or, in more colloquial terms, does not think that her desires are for anything important, then Sue will not gain a meaningful life from having those desires.

Note that this means, specifically, that a person who, as in the aforementioned case of the unsuccessful prophet, dies without getting reinforcement for her norms as values, but whose norms are accepted as values after her death, or who dies before she becomes aware of the reinforcement of such norms from others (even if, unbeknownst to her, others accept her values while she is alive), will not have had a meaningful life and does not gain one retroactively. This is an important point. My definition of meaning makes it a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for a person to have a meaningful life that she believes that something is valuable. It is concerned with the person's beliefs at the time of her life about which we are enquiring.[20] While others are needed to reinforce one's conception of the base values, the opinions of others cannot make one's life meaningful unless one both accepts those base values and is aware that others accept them too. An example of failing the former condition is the artist who happens to be able to create paintings that make others weep, but who does not value art at all and paints only to pay the bills. Assume that she does not derive meaning by conscientiously living

according to some other value, one that *she* values. She is not living a meaningful life, no matter how valuable her paintings are. And an example of failing the latter condition is the unsuccessful prophet. She will have had a meaningless (and likely unhappy) life, regardless of how future societies view her norms and her.[21]

Situations sometimes arise in which a person may think that her life is meaningful and another person is judging whether this is in fact the case. It might seem that my definition not only makes a person's belief, true or false, that she is acting in a way justified by base values a necessary condition for having a meaningful life, but also makes it a sufficient one. It is, therefore, prudent to investigate various scenarios in order to see how belief is relevant to meaning. The example of the theist who bases her adopted value of honesty upon obedience to her God shows that we could judge others who have similar values to us, but different base values, to have meaningful lives. However, there are harder cases. The observer might share neither values nor base values with the subject. For instance, the subject might be a devout Aztec who believed in the value of human sacrifice, because it served the will of his God. In this case, it seems to matter whether there are objective values are not. If there are, and the observer believes that she knows what they are and that they prohibit human sacrifice, how can she then credit the Aztec with having a meaningful life? She can because the Aztec's society is providing its best perceptions of the objective values, if there are any, as values. If these perceptions were corrected later, it would mean only that one could no longer have a meaningful life by living according to the old Aztec code, because one's present group cannot support the base values of the past group and, in modern times, one cannot consider oneself a member of the latter. But those living in that past society could still have had meaningful lives, even if it

turns out that they were (according to the judgments of modern groups) at least partially wrong (assuming that values are objective) in their collective judgements of what the base values were. Of course, the observer could still judge the Aztec's actions to be wrong, despite the Aztec's beliefs that what he does is right and good. Living a meaningful life encompasses a broader range than living a meaningful and morally good life.

Consider an evil dictator. He might have a meaningful life, secure in the belief that what he was doing was justified by his values. Suppose his purported values are reinforced by his supporters as being values. Living a meaningful life, then, is consistent with being judged by others (though not by oneself) to be evil (either by objective standards, if such exist, or from the standpoint of groups of which he is not a member). It is important to remember in these cases that it is the person's beliefs that she is doing something valuable and important, along with the reinforcement of those beliefs by others that she has contact with and considers herself to be part of a group with, that are most relevant to her living a meaningful life. The judgement of outsiders will not affect the meaningfulness of her life, though, by the same token, her life's having meaning does not obviate the outsider's possible judgement of her as immoral. It is not a sufficient qualification for being a good person that one merely has a meaningful life.[22]

There are other special cases. Imagine that the observer's values are well-justified, that she shares those values with the subject, but that the subject cannot give a good justification for those values (although he believes that he can). In that case, the subject has a meaningful life by mere coincidence, and such meaning is very fragile because it is vulnerable to someone pointing out that his justifications are not well-founded. Of course, if he had access to the observer's justifications, then he could correct such vulnerability. Even if he does not correct his

vulnerability and is shown not to have a justification involving her values, it does not mean that his life never had meaning. This case is one of giving the subject the benefit of the doubt. The observer allows that any subject without a satisfactory justification of his values will, upon reflection, realize that his values are not justified in the manner in which he thought they were, and will seek out another justification. We assume that the person's justification process is sensitive to evidence. Since we do not require that people actually have a justification of all their purported values in the forefront of their brains every waking moment, it seems prudent to allow subjects in the example above the benefit of the doubt, in order to extend the same courtesy to all who believe that their desires and actions are justified, but have not actually derived that justification to themselves and tested it in the face of the available evidence. Thus, meaning can be lost, but is not retroactively lost. A person who has a fragile meaningful life and who is then made aware of the flaws in his justifications will no longer have a meaningful life, but will still be able to say, truthfully, that his life previously had meaning.[23]

Fragile meaning occurs when a person incorrectly believes that her justificatory faculties connect (or would connect) to the base values of a group she identifies with, and it is possible for her to realize that she is wrong. It may be possible to show her that her justificatory process is wrong in this case, and that her held base values do not justify her current actions. Or she may possibly be shown that her group does not in fact support the base values she thinks it does, or (in the case of the insane person) that her group does not in fact exist. Yet a fragile meaningful life is still meaningful as long as the person does not realize that she is in error. Thus, a person who holds the irrational belief that her values are valid because aliens endorsed them could still be justified and purposeful and fulfilled in her actions. And she would have a less fragile

meaningful life if others happened to share her values, but not her base values (for instance, the base value that one should obey the will of the aliens). For, in that case, if she becomes convinced that there are no aliens, she could adopt the base values of those other people without having to change her values much, if at all.[24]

A person with a stable meaningful life has justifications that can stand up to scrutiny. However, one cannot know with certainty whether the meaning of her life is stable or fragile, even though it is meaningful. One has more reason to think that one's life is meaningful and that this meaning is stable if one explicitly justifies her actions, desires and values. But even this is no guarantee, as one might have a flaw in this justification pointed out to one at a later time.

It is clear that meaning is not necessarily stable. Viktor Frankl, when talking about his fellow concentration camp survivors, stated "Woe to him who found that the person whose memory alone had given him courage in camp did not exist any more!"[25] But one could come to feel that one had been living for the sake of an illusion of a different kind. "When, on his return, a man found that in many places he was met only with a shrug of the shoulders and with hackneyed phrases, he tended to become bitter and to ask himself why he had gone through all that he had."[26] So not only the removal of the object of importance, but the lack of social reinforcement for the validity of the person's suffering, can shake one's feeling of meaningfulness. The definition of meaning given in this chapter explains how it can be lost in these ways.

Indeed, one's life could temporarily lose meaning in many ways. One could lose one's desires. One's purported values could stop being reinforced as values (as seems to be the case in the second example in the above paragraph), thus giving one reason to doubt whether they were

really values at all. One could fail to live up to one's values, or come to realize that one is so failing. One could realize that a certain valued goal is impossible to achieve (as seems to be the case in the first example in the above paragraph). Finally, one's values could change such that one's life no longer fulfills one's new values.

My definition leaves open whether base values are objective or inter-subjective. Wolf argues that the values used to justify one's life as meaningful must be objective. She holds that if something makes a life meaningful, then it must not only be seen to be worthwhile or valuable, but must actually be so; otherwise a person could not change her mind about whether her life was valuable, and be right when she did. Her examples in support of this argument include "a woman who has dedicated her life to the care and comfort of a man whom she now finds has been using her"[27] and a successful corporate executive who, later in life, sees her material goals as shallow and worthless.

It is unclear that the lives of the wife and the corporate executive would necessarily have been meaningless if they had died before their respective moments of truth. The wife's case is similar to that of a nun who dies with her faith in a [for the sake of argument] non-existent God intact.[28] Imagine that the supportive wife dies ignorant, but that a third party finds out that the husband was exploitative and immoral. The wife's life still was filled with a sense of purpose. She still had a reason to live, and something to strive for that she felt was important.[29] Similarly, the nun's life does not lack meaning. On the other hand, upon finding out that the husband is a cad, or that there is no God, neither woman could continue with the same concept of what is worth living for, and each would have to find something new to live for or confess that her life was now meaningless. These would be examples of fragile meaning, but a meaningful life that

is fragile in its meaning is still a meaningful life. In the end, Wolf offers a false dichotomy between a meaningless life and one guaranteed to be meaningful. The category of a fragile meaningful life, described earlier, is useful in exposing its falsity.

The corporate executive is a special case, as it is hard to imagine anyone believing her own material success to be important in any deep and meaningful way, though it is easy to imagine that some strongly desire such success. But suppose it is seen as important because it is a furtherance of women's rights that she, as a female executive, breaks into the ranks of the corporate elite. What occurs later is a new prioritization of values such that she is now not living up to her most important values. But before this occurs, her goal of equality drives her as much as the nun's faith or the wife's devotion.

Wolf holds that the objectivity of value alone can explain why we approve of meaningful lives as such and of those who care about meaning in their lives. But this can be explained, for the most part, by shared values between the person living a life and a person observing it. And when values differ it is still, for example, possible for an atheist to observe a Christian's life and see it as meaningful, and even be glad or envious that it is so. The reason Count Leo Tolstoy gave for his conversion to Christianity was precisely because, as an atheist, he perceived this meaning in Christian lives.[30] So Wolf's examples can still be explained by the theory that holds that one's believing that a value one holds is objective or inter-subjective (i.e. not merely one's whim) is more important than its actually being so.[31]

Wolf has another, more chilling, example to bolster her theory, however. "Were a child-molester to claim that his life would lose all meaning if he could not molest children, it would be in order to reply that if this were really true then his life would be meaningless anyway.

Child-molesting, since it is lacking in value, is not the *sort* of thing that can give meaning to one's life".[32] This certainly holds true if there are such things as objective values, and if, as seems obvious, child molesting is not an exemplification of these values. And no nation or organization condones child-molesting as a base value, in no need of further justification. Indeed, I only know of one that condones it at all.[33] Yet my definition seems to allow that, at least in theory, one's beliefs that child-molesting is justified could give one meaning. Can I argue that, on my definition, a child-molester's life having meaning would require, not that child-molesting be valuable, but that it be believed to be so?

This case differs from that of the dutiful wife given earlier. In the latter case, although the wife was deceived, and so misapplied her devotion, it is still held to be in general important and worthwhile to support one's spouse and other family members. Child-molesting, on the other hand, is, as Wolf says, "not the *sort* of thing that can give meaning to one's life."[34] It certainly satisfies the desires of child-molesters, but it is not seen as objectively worthwhile or socially acceptable. So it seems that objective values, or at least societal endorsement, plays a role after all. One cannot simply believe in anything as valuable; rather, one's choices of what can be seen as valuable are limited by what those around one claim to be valuable. One cannot simply postulate values without justification.

But what if one gives as an example a colony of child-molesters? Could they, like the supporters of an evil dictator, give justification to their shared values? In both cases, one could imagine base values quite different from our own, values that would then serve to reinforce that these people's lives are meaningful.

I think that it is important to distinguish actual child-molesters, and how they would try

to justify their actions, from what I will call "mythical" child-molesters. The former group, if they try to justify molestation at all, appeal to other values. They do not claim molestation to be a base value. They might, for instance, appeal to an alleged improved quality of life in ancient Greece, and try to connect this to molestation. In that case, we could show them (unless they were recalcitrant) that their justification process in support of this purported connection was flawed, or that the quality of life was not better in ancient Greece. Base values, on the other hand, are very general principles, since they exist to justify other values. Child-molestation is too specific an activity to be a candidate for being a base value. And, of course, in the modern world it would be very difficult for a colony of child-molesters to be completely isolated from the larger societies that forbid child-molesting, thus reducing any reinforcement such a colony might seek. However, since base values themselves are not subject to justification, I have to allow that it is theoretically possible to have a group that holds almost anything as a base value, and this could include a group that holds child-molestation as a base value. We would judge such a group to be evil, but it might be possible for agents in it to derive meaningful lives.

One's beliefs about one's values are important in determining whether one has a meaningful life. Yet the concept of fragile meaning allows one's values to change. People usually follow their goals. Attempting to succeed in one's goals could give one a sense of meaning, if one believes that it is important that one do so. And on achieving a goal, one may use the same values that made one see the goal as important to fuel another goal, thus allowing one to continue to have a meaningful life. Alternatively, those who achieve their ambitions may find that they have changed their minds about what is important. In addition, some may change their minds before fulfilling a goal. In both cases, achieving the old goal will not provide

meaning anymore.

That one's idea of what is important can change, having a radical effect upon one's view of what makes life meaningful, is beautifully shown in some of the stories of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.[35] In "The Powder Blue Dragon", a young man saves up all his money to buy a top-of-the-line sports car. Realizing that the car alone does not change who he is, he destroys the car, and feels glad that he 'killed' it. What was killed, in addition to the car, was his belief that having such a car was an ideal worth pursuing. In "The Package", a couple returns from a vacation to their new automated house. The husband is a rags-to-riches success story, and gets a chance to show off his house (and his life) to an old college classmate to whom he formerly felt inferior. In every material sense the owner of the house is a success and the guest a failure, until the owner finds out that the guest spent the last three decades pouring all his money into, and working at, a hospital in China. Then the house, and the material success of the man, lose much of their value for him. In "Runaways", the dream is of love. Two teenagers run off to live together, against the wills of both sets of parents. They are fuelled by all the songs on their car radio extolling the virtue of reckless love. Yet when the parents relent and encourage them to get married, the teens realize that love is not enough for them, and they part. It seems that they realized the importance of other ideals. Goals are one way to show us what our desires are, and what we think of as important. However, as shown above, goals can change.

Looking at it another way, giving up on accomplishing one's goals can sometimes seem like giving up on one's hopes, or one's desires for something worthwhile. This may make it impossible for one to experience one's life as meaningful. There may be a connection between abandoning attempts to achieve one's valued goals and diminishing one's sense of identity,[36] as

often those who "sell out" consider themselves, and are considered by others, to have betrayed themselves in some sense. Shakespeare's line "To thine own self be true" resonates in our consciousness. Giving up on one's goals seems to be one way to fail to be true to oneself. But changing one's idea of what ambitions are worth fulfilling is not a betrayal of one's self; it is, more accurately, a revision of one's self-concept. There is an important difference between ceasing to pursue an ambition because one no longer values it and ceasing to pursue it because one gets distracted by one's other desires.

I have described cases in which the observer's base values differ from the subject's, and this has led to a discovery of the idea of fragile meaning. So far, these examples have not shown us a subject who believes that her life is meaningful but who is objectively wrong to do so. But imagine that the observer and subject share the same social group, and so should share the same pool of accessible base values. Assume for simplicity's sake that the subject has only the purported base value y (say, to obey the will of the king) and the purported value x (say, to join the armed forces), apparently derived from y. The subject in this case uses the purported value x to justify a desire, but the observer does not agree that the desire is justified. If the observer is correct, then this could be because a) the subject improperly thinks that her particular desire is justified by value x, b) the subject improperly thinks that purported value x is derivable (directly or indirectly) from base value y of the group that she and the observer share, or c) the subject incorrectly thinks that purported base value y is a base value. The observer and the subject may engage in a discussion, and the subject may see the wisdom of the observer's points and relent, thus agreeing that her original desire was not justified (but leaving open that other desires could be justified by the group's shared base values). However, if both her reasoning process was

faulty and she was recalcitrant, the subject might not accept a, b or c, and thus might continue to think incorrectly of her desire as justified. Assuming that all her desires were so unjustified, and that she was not responsive to her group's contention that she is simply wrong, then I would deny that that person's life is meaningful. This is a case in which a person's beliefs are not sufficient to make her life meaningful. Note that this is different from the case of the mad-woman given earlier who invented a group. For the mad-woman, at least, could respond to evidence that her invented group is a myth by giving up her belief in that group, assuming that such evidence is available. The principle of giving people the benefit of the doubt only goes so far. Ignorance may provide one with a fragile meaning, under the right circumstances. Willful ignorance will not give one a meaningful life. Part of the justification process involves the willingness to change one's views if one's justifications are shown to be inadequate. If one demonstrates that one cannot adapt one's views in the face of evidence, then one is proving oneself unable to justify one's desires and actions, even dispositionally.[37] Rather, one is stating dogmatically that they are valuable. And this is not enough to provide one with a meaningful life. This is why a belief that one's life is meaningful is a necessary but not sufficient condition for one's life being so.

Now that the terms of my definition have been clarified, I wish to examine what it does not include. It does not include any reference to any god or gods. Yet most of those alive today seem to draw a great deal of meaning in their lives from their religious beliefs. And most seem to draw meaning from the notion of something living on after they are gone. Also, my view of meaning excludes anyone drawing meaning from pleasure or material goods *qua* pleasure or material goods. I also emphasize meaning as a process rather than a goal, since I emphasize the

importance of having desires for states of affairs rather than achieving those states of affairs (although I also do not think that impossible goals can grant meaning). My general strategy will be to show that, while some of the above can grant meaning, they do not have to, and when they do, it is because they are in an arrangement consistent with my definition. In the sections that follow, I shall look at prospective candidates for base values, such as pleasure, art, and God. I shall see which can act as base values, and investigate whether any particular base value is necessary for one to have a meaningful life.

C. Pleasure as a possible base value

There is a wide variety in what can make a life meaningful. It seems clear, however, that it takes more than simply to have, pursue and fulfill any desire at all. One could postulate a group that elevates the gratification of one's basic desires into the realm of values (perhaps a special sort of Epicurean society), but then such a group would still be basing the meaningfulness of such gratification upon its value, not its mere function in satisfying one's desires.

In particular, it seems clear that a life cannot be made meaningful merely by having a net balance of pleasure over pain.[38] There are many cases in which people have good lives in that sense, but are still not satisfied with those lives. Peter Singer relates that this is the case of the bored 1950s housewife in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*[39] when he notes that "having it easy...was little consolation; in reality it was precisely the problem."[40] While, in one sense, having more pleasure than pain is something that most of us want, people want more than just that, especially when they are contemplating whether or not their lives are meaningful.

It seems that pleasure, or the satisfaction of desires in general, does not by itself provide meaning. Partly this may be due to the need humans have to justify themselves and their actions when they are seeking meaning in their lives. If the final link in the chain of the justification of an action x is simply "because I want to do x" or "because it would give me pleasure to do x", this might explain why one performs the action, but it will not justify that action.[41] Values, on the other hand, are by their nature justificatory. Because of this, they make far better candidates for justifying, and providing meaning for, one's life and actions.

In addition, if something gives meaning to one's life, then that thing, whatever it is, may be worth suffering or even dying for.[42] But it seems unlikely that anyone would want to die to acquire some material goods, even if they give her pleasure. And, although we can imagine cases in which someone would rather live for a short time with a pleasurable life than a long time with a painful one, it does not make sense to think of someone who sacrifices his life for a momentary pleasure as experiencing a meaningful life, either in the moment he does so or in his previously acquiring the disposition to so sacrifice himself.

D. Eternal existence as valuable

One possible reason to seek a meaningful life is that one fears death, and wants to be reassured that something about one's life is important enough that one will be saved from death somehow, or at least that one will not be forgotten. Many accounts of the meaning of life are responses to the fact of our mortality, and the likely obliteration of all our works; they attempt to answer the question of why life is worth living, if it must end. The Bible's *Ecclesiastes* contains an early account of the meaninglessness of material existence. In it, material accomplishments

are seen as meaningless because nothing new will be accomplished, those that accomplish anything will die, and both the people and their accomplishments will be forgotten.

According to my definition, it is sufficient that a mortal's life is meaningful while that mortal is alive; assuming that the mortal dies and has no afterlife, it will then still be true that her life was meaningful, so long as eternality is not simply stipulated to be important and a necessary ingredient in anything else that is important. My definition is concerned with what a person was striving for during her life, and it more easily captures our intuitions about meaning than one that looks only at the results of that life. That permanent results do not seem necessary is shown in the following example. My godmother lived what seems to have been a meaningful life. She drew meaning from raising a family. Her death does not change the fact that her life was meaningful, even if there is no afterlife. Furthermore, what seems significant is that she raised the family and drew meaning from that, not that her family survives forever. If five generations from now her family dies out, it seems strange to say that her life will then have become meaningless. The importance that a life may have is not connected to its being eternal, or producing something that is eternal. Eternality is overrated as a criterion of meaning.

However, it would be easy for one to believe that eternality is necessary, and, furthermore, that human finitude renders all human existence meaningless. The argument seems to run as follows: a) X's life is not meaningful unless she or her works exist forever. b) She or her works will not exist forever. Therefore, c) X's life is not meaningful. Note that this argument does not claim that an eternal existence guarantees meaning. An eternal amoeba does not have a meaningful life.

Note also that a variant on the first premise would require, in order for X's life to be

meaningful, that X believe that her life or works were eternal. A Christian in a godless universe might have a meaningful life according to the variant argument, but not the original one. In earlier sections it was shown that belief can be relevant to meaning. But does a belief that one's life is eternal make it meaningful? Certainly one can have a belief that something is important, be engaged in pursuing it, and seem to derive meaning from that. However, supporters of the original argument would hold that those who see their lives as meaningful could be wrong – that which they consider to be important is not important, because, contrary to their beliefs, it is not in fact eternal.

This seems to raise an absolutist argument: If X is not connected to something of permanent value, it is worthless. This is not reflected in our legal system: that a person will someday die does not excuse anyone from murder; the victim's life has value. Further, we commend heroes who save lives, even though those who are saved will one day die. In practice, it would be very difficult to live, like Dostoevsky's Underground Man, as if nothing had any value, which is one of the two options the absolutist leaves. [43]

When people change their beliefs and no longer think of something as important, they are likely to experience a shock and, for a time, may doubt that anything is important. Specifically, this may occur if they think too long on the finitude of their lives and works while placing specific importance upon eternality. But then they will often (if they do not commit suicide) return to living their lives, and seek out something else that they can consider important, as opposed to merely satisfying their unregulated desires. The eternalist has to conclude that all such people are deluded – that what they think makes their lives meaningful is insufficient to do so.

Obviously, a challenge to the first premise of the eternality argument requires counter-examples. But if one goes by what most consider to be important, then such examples can be found in the widespread respect for art, learning and morality. It is rare even for believers in an afterlife to think of what happens in the world of finite beings as being irrelevant. Those who lose their religion often continue to value works of art, good deeds, etc., indicating that they may have been valued independently of any connection to eternality even while they were religious. Given the human tendency to value things whether or not they are believed to be eternal, we should not base our hope for meaning on the notion that we or our works are in some way eternal. We cannot know this to be true (although many have faith in it), and many think it is false, or may be false. So, if we are to find meaning, it would be more fruitful to base it on something to which we, as mortal humans, can aspire.

It is possible to find meaning in a finite life and those who do so are not sadly deluded. Evidence for this claim cannot be conclusive, since all who believe their finite lives to be meaningful might simply be wrong. But think of those who discover that they are going to die soon. Some give way to despair, while others see it as a 'wake-up call', a way of focusing their remaining days on doing something they consider to be important. Akira Kurosawa's film *Ikiru* provides a perfect example of the latter case with its dying man who dedicates himself to providing a park for children to play in.[44] This is a case in which awareness of his mortality made the main character seek, and perhaps achieve, a meaningful life. And this character does not seem unrealistic. It would seem odd that a heightened awareness of the very thing that is supposed to make one's life meaningless would, on the contrary, galvanize people to make their lives meaningful. To conclude, I reject the first premise, both of the eternalist's argument and of

its variant. Neither an eternal existence of life or works nor a belief in such is necessary for a meaningful life, and neither, of course, is sufficient.

E. Why belief in God is sufficient, but not necessary, for meaning

It might be thought from my argument against the eternalist that I have not only ruled out an eternal existence as being able to provide one with a meaningful life, but have also ruled out belief in God as doing so. Certainly the idea of the former is often linked to the latter, and those who think of God as only some sort of guarantor of eternal existence will not derive meaning from such a belief. However, most theists have additional beliefs about God, and these can provide meaning. If one thinks of God as having a plan for His mortal creations, then one can attach oneself to God's divine plan, and derive meaning from the importance of the latter. This plan will be important, not because God is powerful, but because God is infinitely wise, and thus a perfect judge of what is important and what is not. This also allows one to feel important simply for being created by God, since that too is part of God's plan.

I have postulated God as being able to know what the true objective base values are. It is usually the case the a belief in God carries with it a belief in objective values, but I suppose that one could postulate a supreme being who does not know the objective values because there are simply no such values to be known. In that case one could not appeal to such a God as an infinitely wise arbiter of what is objectively valuable and what is not. On the other hand, one might also postulate God as being the creator of values rather than simply a being able to recognize them. However, this seems to make the bestowing of values an arbitrary affair, and I think that to avoid such arbitrariness, most theists think of their God as following values, as

opposed to inventing them.[45] In the Christian model, this point can be brought home by a thought experiment as to what would happen to values if Satan triumphed over God during Armageddon. Would acts that were once evil suddenly become good? Or would it be more accurate to say that evil triumphed over good? If the latter is the case, then a status as a supreme being does not enable one to invent values, but merely (at best) to know what they are.[46] In either case, however, we mortals would react the same way towards values. We would do our best to perceive what they were, if we thought they were objective. We would do the same if we thought they were created by a God that we believed in.

While belief in God may allow one to live a meaningful life, it is not a necessary condition for one. The view that without faith in God life is meaningless is probably held by many theists (and some pessimistic atheists). It seems to be an example of the all-or-nothing view of meaning – that if one cannot attach one's life to something that is absolute, such as God and His plan, then one's own mortal desires must all be ultimately worthless. However, as discussed earlier, such an approach is a false dilemma.

F. Creativity does not necessarily provide meaning, but can do so

If belief in God can give one a meaningful life, what of creativity, one of the qualities often associated with God? Richard Taylor believes that the creative genius of some may allow their lives to escape absurdity.[47] Taylor's theory that creativity alone can provide meaning is an attempt to attach importance to what is new. It seems to address the feeling of being stuck in a rut faced by some who think their lives lack meaning. Creativity also requires some engagement by the creator, and such interest is necessary for one to think of one's life as meaningful, as

indicated in the first clause of my definition of a meaningful life.[48] But, as indicated in the very next clause of that definition, how one feels about one's acts of creativity must bear on how meaningful they are. As stated earlier, a person who can create brilliant works of art with little or no effort, and who does not care about them, is not likely to derive any meaning from them. This implies that creativity is not a sufficient condition for meaning. And there seem to be many examples of meaning that do not involve creativity, such as serving one's god, being moral, etc. The reason that creativity seems relevant to what makes a life meaningful lies in the nature of creative people. That which is created often is very much valued by its creator. This implies that one could justify one's creative activity with a value. But what makes the creative person's life meaningful, then, is not that she is creative, but that she values that which she creates.

G. On the fulfilment of one's capacities as the base meta-value

Joel Feinberg addresses the idea that different things will be meaningful to different people in "Absurd Self-Fulfillment: An Essay on the Moral Perversity of the Gods".[49] He holds that humans have varying natures, and thus varying capacities. "Given the nature with which he finds himself, . . . he must follow the path discovered in it and identify his good with the goals toward which his nature is already inclined."[50] Feinberg thus places a great emphasis on personal development, making the development of one's capacities into a meta-value. This view is not entirely correct. For instance, a great chess player but mediocre guitar player may find more meaning in playing his guitar than in playing chess; the latter may lose its value for him, if ever it had value. Feinberg is correct to state that different human beings will find meaning in different ways. The definition of meaning given in this chapter focuses upon a person's desires

rather than her abilities, although, since it is true that almost any person likes to do what she is good at, desires and abilities will often coincide.

H. Arguments for morality

This definition of a meaningful life relies upon the concept of base values. Some obvious candidates for such base values are art, knowledge and morality, as far as this definition itself goes. It remains to be determined if morality has any particular privilege as a base value – that is, whether it plays a larger role in determining whether a life is meaningful than other base values. For it may be possible to seek meaning in ways other than through morality. All groups have (and will influence people to conform with) many values other than moral ones. Groups may have scientific knowledge or art as values, or even base values. From this one might argue that non-moral values can provide meaning. Some argue against this, using a Kantian approach to ethics: "[The] recognition of human equality should lead one to pursue one's own goals and interests in a way that acknowledges the legitimacy of others' efforts to pursue their goals and interests."[51]

However, this argument for morality does not work. If, for instance, Albert is so depressed that he has no desires, then (as Susan Wolf claims)[52] it will prove difficult if not impossible to instill in him a desire to be moral. Yet if Betty has only the desire to live a meaningful life, plus the desire for whatever in particular makes her life meaningful, then Betty will not necessarily have the desire to be moral. Appealing to the fact that others, like her, want to live meaningful lives will not necessarily work. For Betty has no reason to recognize any value save that which gives her life meaning. Even if others share her particular value, she may

disagree with them in the manner of realizing it. Furthermore, even if others share both her value and the manner of realizing it, her motive is not to give those others meaningful lives, but to promote the value. This is a case of an amoral agent using non-moral values in order to gain a meaningful life without the moral baggage that purportedly accompanies it. There are problems with such attempts (which were explained in the last chapter), but these problems do not arise from the mere definition of what it means to live a meaningful life.

But to return to our example, the recognition of the importance to others of living meaningfully occurs within the moral sphere and, thus, using this recognition to justify moral behaviour would be circular. It may well be that human morality to a large degree consists of increasing (or at least not decreasing) people's chances to have meaningful lives, a calculation based upon meaning rather than upon, say, welfare or desire-satisfaction. But this fact will not justify being moral to an amoral agent. For Betty may recognize her equality to others in having ideas about what makes life worthwhile, and still not care about either their welfare or their chances of living meaningfully.[53]

It was stated earlier that those we judge to have been evil may live meaningful lives, since they can satisfy all the clauses of the definition of a meaningful life. Examples of evil people who thought they were good are not hard to come by. Either the doctor who performs abortions or the pro-life fanatic who kills that doctor are guilty of immoral acts (perhaps both are). Yet both believe that their actions are morally justified. And those who believe that their actions are morally justifiable because they serve the will of God, or the greater good of the people (at least the people with whom one identifies), can often be led to acts that are immoral. Witness the leaders of the Spanish Inquisition, who thought that they were protecting the world

from heretics and witches, or Palestinian suicide bombers who kill Israeli civilians in an effort to, in their eyes, reclaim their homeland from those who have taken it from them. But a person may not need to think that she is morally good in order to hold that her life is meaningful. Imagine a group that had only aesthetic values (or only the value of the pursuit of knowledge), and did not hold morality to be a base value, and thus did not consider it a sufficient justification for the lives of its members. Perhaps such a group might hold that acts of torture are aesthetically valuable (or necessary to expand the field of knowledge), and those in that group might volunteer to be tortured in the name of art (or knowledge). Ignoring the arguments given in the last chapter and looking only at the definition of a meaningful life, one might say that their lives would have meaning.[54]

How well does this example fit the real world? Bernard Williams and Michael Slote[55] both give the example of Gauguin, a painter who supposedly abandons his family in order to develop his talent. Our admiration of Gauguin's work, and of his drive to pursue his artistic vision, seems to indicate that we can openly admire selfish behaviour, at least if we like the results. But, it has been realized as early as in Plato's *Republic*, as related in Chapter II of this thesis, that if any social group is to prosper (relative to other social groups), it must have some moral norms that prohibit agents from serving only their individual interests. At the very least, social groups have the very powerful norm of reciprocity, with negative pressure against those who accept help without helping others in return.[56] Most groups, including our own, not only have moral norms, but consider them more important to follow than other values. Picture, for example, our reactions if Gauguin had killed his family in order to gain the freedom to pursue his talent, even if we imagine a case in which that was the only means by which he could do so.[57]

Admiration for his work would then seem misplaced. It would, in the eyes of almost everyone, have been better for this version of Gauguin not to have killed his family and not to have painted. Thus, the moral norm is likely to be the overriding in most real groups of people.

But even though our society will promote the moral norms over other values, there remains the question of whether these norms must intrude upon an individual's concept of a meaningful life. Gauguin, in this example, might see his own life as meaningful because he accepts his group's base value of aesthetics, and admit that it is not moral because he does not accept his group's base values regarding moral behaviour. Or he might consider himself part of a group that has aesthetics but not morality as a base value. Thus, the amoral agent might in theory be able to have a meaningful life according to the definition of a meaningful life.

Fortunately, one can combine the account of meaning given in this chapter with the arguments given in the last chapter that showed that, given the nature of values, one cannot be a personal ethical egoist while having values. One then obtains an argument against being a personal ethical egoist. First, one would assume that a meaningful life is preferable to one with material advantages, if one is forced to choose between the two. Second, a meaningful life requires one to have values. Third, if my arguments from the last chapter are sound, one cannot have values and be a personal ethical egoist. Therefore, one of the advantages of being a moral person, as opposed to a personal ethical egoist, is the possibility of having a meaningful life, which seems a greater advantage than any that a personal ethical egoist might have.[58] And if argument B from the last chapter is correct, then a member of a colony of artists, in order to get reinforcement for the value of art, will have to consider her fellow artists as valuable insofar as they are judges of value. Thus, the colony of artists will have to value each other after all, and

so need moral values as well as aesthetic ones. Thus, for Gauguin's life to be meaningful, he must at least value those human beings who value art.

To show why the account of values, and the element of reinforcement associated with holding values, given in the last chapter is needed to give an argument against personal ethical egoism, I will present for comparison an argument against selfishness that relies on an account of meaning that does not require a connection to such values. Singer claims that one finds meaning through setting goals. On Singer's account, goals differ from the aim of happiness itself; having the latter as one's only goal would lead to the paradox of hedonism, because humans are less likely to achieve happiness by directly pursuing it, than by pursuing other goals. Singer says that there are two ways in which one can make a life meaningful. One is to "live a meaningful life by working towards goals that are objectively worthwhile."[59] The other is to generate meaning through fulfilling one's subjective desires. Singer claims that former path is more secure.[60] His argument relies upon the idea that boredom can be antithetical to having a meaningful life.[61] If one is bored enough, then one is not moved by one's desires to do anything that one considers to be important, or one is stuck doing something that one does not consider to be important. And if all of one's goals are accomplished, one is left casting about for something to do next. If one cannot find a further goal, one may feel that one's life no longer has meaning.

Singer holds that living a meaningful life requires only having goals, not necessarily achieving them, though the goals should be achievable, at least in part. This may explain why short-term goals, including most subjective ones, will (according to Singer) lose their appeal after a while. On the other hand, the moral project of relieving the suffering of others, and generally ameliorating the human condition, can continue to be a goal that we can pursue (and

partially fulfill) without any danger of complete fulfillment in the foreseeable future.[62]

Singer's account of the pursuit of goals seems to be one method of attaining meaning. And Singer's basic method of starting with his definition and then using it, and some apparent facts about humanity, to show that humans do better through being moral, is similar to the method of this thesis, which uses both a definition of what would make a life meaningful, and an account of what people are like, both singly and in groups. However, his argument that morality is the best guarantee of a meaningful life ignores some possible objections. For, on his account, meaning is tied to the fulfillment of goals – any goals. But this makes it possible for an amoral person to have a meaningful life, if all there is to it is to find a goal sufficiently difficult to fulfill prematurely. Indeed, Singer's account allows for some to have meaningful lives even if they have only desires, and not values. On Singer's account, one can conceive of someone finding meaning in a non-moral life-project. For example, a person could be an amoral archaeologist. As a partial response to these objections, Singer allows that there can be other goals that allow one to find some meaning, but none with so firm a foundation or a guarantee of longevity as morality. But scientific curiosity could, like ameliorating the human condition, be another ultimately unfulfillable goal, since there is always more to discover, just as it seems that there will always be suffering to alleviate.[63] Singer's own account of meaning cannot justify morality, contrary to his expectations.

Singer's account also illustrates one of the problems with any attempt to link morality and meaning. In his view, one will always find fulfillment through the relief of suffering of others, and there will always be others whose suffering can be relieved. Thus, in theory, one should always have a meaningful life so long as one is relieving the suffering of others. Yet one

who is totally occupied with relieving the suffering of others could 'burn out' and lose the inspiration derived from being moral.[64] An account of meaning that allows meaning to be derived from morality must be one that allows one to derive value from one's moral acts without requiring one to be completely moral all the time. An account that incorporates base values has the advantage of using a person's social group as a touchstone. Since most real social groups expect a certain level of moral behaviour, but very few expect totally saintly behaviour, one could possibly have a meaningful life by being a regular moral person, rather than a saint, and by justifying such a life through appealing to values and, in turn, to base values.

This chapter's account of a meaningful life, combined with the account of values presented in the last chapter, gives one a reason to reject the path of the personal ethical egoist. The next chapter contains an account of identity and an examination of whether an argument against personal ethical egoism can be formed when one combines this account of identity with the account of values given in the last chapter.

Endnotes

1. Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

2. Ibid., 217.

3. Ibid., 221.

4. The relationship between what one values and how one identifies oneself will be explored in the next chapter. Meaning and identity are connected. It seems that one needs to see oneself as an acting self, not merely a being to whom events happen, if one is to experience one's life as meaningful. The more one can unify one's actions, through intelligible reasons, the better the chance of an intelligible self. But some reasons seem better than others. Awareness that one is eating because one is hungry does not do much to define who one is.

5. I am indebted to Peter Railton for the account of norms and values. I am following his account of norms given in "Rationality in Practice", presented at the University of British Columbia on October 12, 2000.

6. Susan Wolf, "Meaning and Morality," *Aristotelian Society Proceedings* 97 (1997): 307.

7. John Kekes makes this point in his "The Informed Will and The Meaning of Life", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47 (1986): 75-90.

8. See, for instance, Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus", 969-974 in Sommers, *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life*. Originally in his *The Myth Of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* (Alfred A. Knopt, 1955). Pagination will refer to the former.

9. A person can belong to more than one group, and a group may recognize that some of their members also belong to another group, with different values. Thus, not all members of a group have to have the same values, or even base values. However, the more a person diverges in this manner from a group, the less she will be seen as a proper member of that group. This can lead to tensions in individuals trying to accommodate divergent sets of base values, a tension which I will not explore here.

10. Consider, for instance, 'honorary' members of a group who are not able to have a full conception of the group's values (e.g. young children), or who specifically rebel against certain base values. Rebels will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

11. This is not to say that it is impossible for infallible connections to objective values to be made, but the issue of whether they can or not is a contentious one, as was shown in the last chapter.

12. An exception would be any life whose meaning was fragile and hence defeasible. I shall speak more of fragile meaning later in this chapter.

13. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground.* 1864. Reprint. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993). I am grateful to Earl Winkler for his helpful comments on this work.

14. Ibid., 37.

15. Thomas Nagel "The Absurd", has the view that if nothing matters, then this fact too does not matter. Thus the answer to the "Why Be Moral?" question would be "Why Not?" See "The Absurd", *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 727.

16. As an additional note, if (as some Buddhists think) it is possible to rid oneself both of one's desires and of one's self-concept, then I do not know what to say of such a being. Perhaps such a life would not be meaningful as I define it, but it would not matter to such a being that it was not meaningful. I will not be discussing the Buddhist position here as it does not answer the question of whether it is better for one to be totally selfish or somewhat altruistic, which is the focus of my thesis.

17. But see the special case of the insane person who believes in a non-existent group of people, described earlier in this chapter.

18. While one can know of the justification of one's norms, desires and actions without having to state one's justifications to others explicitly, the base values do, in a sense, come from others. In any case, those who believe that some of their norms are values are, through that belief, ready to justify their purported values to others explicitly if asked. These others serve as judges of whether one reasons soundly from base values to norms, desires and actions. This readiness does not imply that they are yet explicitly conscious of such a justification. One might hold that certain states of affairs are important while being vague to oneself as to what exactly gives them importance. Upon being challenged, however, one should be able to form a chain of reasoning leading to a base value.

19. One who has desires but is not conscious of herself as an agent (rather than as the passive recipient of forces she does not identify with) cannot, therefore, have a meaningful life.

20. Barring an afterlife, a person cannot have beliefs after she is dead. It follows, trivially, that she cannot have a meaningful life. But after she is dead she will have no desire or need to justify her survival, which is one of the original reasons why humans ask about the meaning of life.

21. This definition does not exclude from having meaningful lives those who think that they are, at least sometimes, directly influenced by beliefs that something is important rather than by desires. That is, those who are moral internalists, and disagree with the conclusions of Chapter III, can still have meaningful lives. Although, unbeknownst to them, they are motivated only by their desires, they can still justify whatever they believe is motivating them as being worth

motivating them. The chain of justification leading to base values would start at their actions, and go through what they believed motivated them (in this case, apparently, their beliefs and values). It is the justificatory values of which they need to be aware. Thus, if a society of stoics believe that they should simply do what is rationally required of them, without emotion, that is consistent with their living meaningful lives. Their desire to be rational is hidden from them, but their valuation of being rational is not.

22. Thus, one might argue that a dictator surrounded by cronies might have a meaningful life, while a lone philosopher reviled by her society might not. Then again, the dictator might not be able to consider even his cronies to be adequate judges of what is important (if he is a personal ethical egoist), and the philosopher either may believe herself to be the only person to truly comprehend what one must do if one is to follow her society's values (thus being a reformer), or may convince others during her lifetime of the value of what she alone previously considered to be important (thus becoming a prophet).

23. A person could mistakenly believe that a formerly meaningful life was meaningless, if her values change sufficiently. But she cannot take meaning away from her earlier life any more than future generations can. However, she would be correct in realizing that she can no longer have a meaningful life in the same way as before.

24. By contrast, if no one shared her values or base values, then she would have a more fragile meaningful life, since she would have to find new values, as well as new base values, upon becoming convinced that her earlier beliefs were flawed. Note that the belief that future generations would endorse one's values would not give one a meaningful life. One cannot get feedback from beings that have not yet existed to form such judgements. And no one can know what future generations will believe, or even if there will be any future generations.

25. Viktor E Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning.* 4th ed. Part one translated by Ilse Lasch (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 92.

26. Ibid., 92.

27. Wolf, "Meaning and Morality," 305.

28. That particular example is from A. J. Ayer, "The Meaning of Life" in his *The Meaning of Life and Other Essays* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), although I draw a different conclusion.

29. This reason to live is predicated on her beliefs, but is a reason nonetheless. A man could have a reason to drink a glass of poison that he thought was apple juice. In any case, if one does not like the term 'reason', then another term would serve, for, while feedback is needed to determine which of one's norms are values, feedback is not needed to tell one what one's desires or beliefs are. Thus acting according to incorrect beliefs about whether one's actions conform to one's (correctly known) values will not make one's life meaningless.

30. See Count Leo Tolstoy, "My Confession", 946-58 in Sommers, *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life.*

31. This is consistent with my assumption that at least some people have meaningful lives, for if Wolf is correct, then it is possible that we are all mistaken about what the values are, and hence all could be living meaningless lives.

32. Wolf, "Meaning and Morality," 306.

33. That would be the infamous National Man Boy Love Association. I do not know much about this group, nor do I care to. I assume that they try to argue their case like reformer-rebels. And they likely would consider the term "child-molestation" to carry negative connotations, and try to argue that children are not necessarily harmed by such acts. The burden of proof is certainly on them. Yet from their point of view, they consider themselves to be right and everyone else to be wrong, and I cannot deny that it is possible that their lives have meaning, if only in trying to convince others of what they consider to be the truth. Note once again that a meaningful life is not necessarily a moral one, and that my ultimate argument for being moral presupposes that one is living in a moral society.

34. Wolf, "Meaning and Morality," 306, (italics mine).

35. All the stories mentioned here are to be found in Kurt Vonnegut, *Bagombo Snuff Box* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1999).

36. The nature of identity is the subject of the next chapter.

37. This is probably the case with those child-molestors who are not able to see the flaws in their attempts at justification (assuming that any make such attempts) of child-molestation.

38. Kurt Baier argues that having more pleasure than pain is one way to attain a meaningful life in his monograph *The Meaning of Life* (Canberra: Canberra University College, 1957). A. J. Ayer also seems to hold that a life in which the pains outweigh the pleasures is by that token rendered meaningless. See his "The Meaning of Life".

39. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977).

40. Singer, *How Are We to Live?* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995), 197.

41. Of course, one might try to justify one's wants or pleasures as important, but then one's wants or pleasures would not be the end of the justificatory chain.

42. Susan Wolf makes this comment in "Meaning and Morality", 303, and attributes a similar position to Camus.

43. According to this chapter's definition of meaning, it is possible for agents not to believe that anything has objective value, and still to have meaningful lives. They could act based upon what they perceive to be valuable, even while knowing that there are those in other groups who may doubt that what we value is objectively valuable, and even admitting that those others may be correct in their doubts. Neither a recognition of fallibility nor the recognition of the possibility that values are not objective has to make a person's life meaningless. And it seems to be true that Inter-Subjectivists do not, on the whole, act like the nihilistic UM. People act because of the mental constitutions that they have. And a common trait among humans is to seek out things to call important and provide a focus to their lives.

44. Akira Kurosawa, *Ikiru* (to live), (Japan: Toho, 1952).

45. Plato makes a famous parallel argument on the relation between something being pious and something being loved by the gods. See his *Euthypro*, G. M. A. Grube, trans. in *Plato: Complete Works*. John M. Cooper, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997).

46. For more discussion on the nature of God and the Good, see Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, (London: W. Botham, 1706), Prop. I, Section 6, 109-112, and Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713, "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit" in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc.*, 1699. Reprinted. John M. Robertson, ed. (London : G. Richard, 1900), Book II, Part II, Section I, 305.

47. Richard Taylor, "Time and Life's Meaning," in *The Review of Metaphysics* 40 (1987): 675-86. This contradicts his earlier view that since all record of creative works must some day vanish, even such a life must be considered absurd. See Richard Taylor, *Good and Evil* (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1970), 264-6. Taylor talks of creativity at different levels. Mozart's and Beethoven's works are at one end, the creativity involved in everyday life at another (for example, raising a family). Taylor does not say that the former end is more important, but clearly it has produced creative works that are rare and famous.

48. This raises the question of whether one act of creativity is enough to render one's whole life meaningful. This thesis will not explore that issue, but will look only at whether creativity itself is the source of a meaningful life.

49. Joel Feinberg, "Absurd Self-Fulfillment: An Essay on the Moral Perversity of the Gods," in *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life: Introductory Readings in Ethics*, Sommers and Sommers, 980-1012.

50. Ibid., 1005. Note that this is a more specialized form of more general theories of man's function, put forward by Plato and Aristotle, among others. My reply to their general accounts is to ask whether there is any separate justification for fulfilling one's function, if one has one, rather than the mere fact that one is fulfilling one's function.

51. Wolf, "Meaning and Morality," 309. Christine Korsgaard makes a similar but more complicated argument, which I investigate in more detail elsewhere. See Chapters III and VI in this thesis.

52. Wolf, "Meaning and Morality," 308.

53. Does morality have no pride of place? David Hume points out that we respond favourably to those who are wealthy, beautiful, and/or eloquent, and he does not equate wealth, beauty or eloquence with moral character. Although Hume would personally rather have "a friendly, humane heart", he would "rather pass with the world for one endowed with extensive genius and intrepid courage, and should thence expect stronger instances of general applause and admiration." See David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1777. Reprint. With analytical index by L. A. Selby-Bigg, 3rd ed., 1893. Reprint. With notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Hume's comments show that, perhaps, living a moral life may carry some costs. However, his implication that his society does not value morality as much as genius and courage seems wrong. What Hume's (and our) society favours, perhaps, is a man who is fairly moral and brave, or fairly moral and a genius, as opposed to a saint. And perhaps our society would even favour the saint. It would not value an admittedly amoral brave man or genius, if for no other reason than that such a person would be perceived as a threat. Morality, in one form or another, is strongly valued in most real groups.

54. Such a group would not exist. If the arguments from the last chapter are correct, then to value others' judgements requires valuing others as judges, which seems to be a moral viewpoint. However, for the sake of argument let us assume that a colony of amoral yet value–reinforcing artists or scientists is possible.

55. Bernard Williams, "Moral Luck," in *Moral Luck*. (Cambridge University Press, 1981). Michael Slote, "Admirable Immorality," Ch.4 in *Goods and Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

56. A. W. Gouldner, "The norm of reciprocity," *American Sociological Review* 25 (1960): 161-78; N. Cotterell et al., "Inhibiting effects of reciprocation wariness on interpersonal relationships," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 62 (1992): 658-68; K. E. A. Meleshko, and L. E. Alden, "Anxiety and self-disclosure," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 64 (1993): 1000-9.

57. Joseph H. Kupfer makes a similar point in "Gauguin, Again," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 73 (1992): 63-72.

58. Rather than argue that morality is a necessary base value, the present argument is that the basic consciousness of others as subjects (rather than mere objects), the foundation of morality, is required for one to have values, and hence a meaningful life.

59. Peter Singer, *How Are We to Live?*, 195.

60. Ibid. Peter Singer's theory also addresses how our mortality can affect our chance to live meaningful lives. First, the mere fact that something will not last forever does not make it valueless. Second, our very mortality might help us to keep our lives meaningful, since it would be easier to become bored with life if we were immortal, and any projects we had to occupy our time would eventually be completed, thus leaving us with nothing interesting to do (see p. 217).

This latter point is unconvincing. One's mortality might give one a sense of urgency which would lead to greater involvement with one's projects, but I can conceive of an immortal being working to alleviate suffering or satisfying her scientific curiosity without either project being finite. Alternatively, such a being may go from old projects to new ones. Neither mortality nor immortality precludes the possibility of living a meaningful life.

61. A similar idea is presented by Bernard Williams as an argument against the possibility of an eternal life being meaningful. See his "The Makropulos case; reflections on the tedium of immortality" in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 82-100.

62. Singer, *How Are We to Live?*, 268-9.

63. I am indebted to Catherine Talmage for this suggestion, and for her example of an amoral archaeologist.

64. David Schmidtz concurs that one of the dangers of altruism, or any goal-directed behaviour, is being concerned with too many goals. See his "Reasons for Altruism," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 10 (1993): 52-68.

Chapter VI

In this chapter I wish to investigate a theory of personal identity that is proposed by Marya Schechtman,[1] showing that it is useful, important, and closely matches the everyday sense of the term. I will then investigate whether one needs values in order to have this form of identity.

A. A new concept of identity

Schechtman's account of identity differs from those that attempt to answer the "reidentification question".[2] This is the question of what criteria can properly be used to connect one object or person, at a given time, with another object or person, at a separate time, in such a way that we can call the object or person the same object or person at both times. The concept of identity associated with the reidentification question leads to discussion, not so much of persons, but of time-slices of a person; much creativity is needed to show how these time-slices are related to one another. But Schechtman is concerned with such questions as how one defines oneself to oneself and others, and whether one can consider oneself to be wholly the same person when one, for instance, gives up on a substantial number of one's ideals, etc. By giving an alternate concept of identity to enable us to understand how a person characterizes herself, Schechtman side-steps the problem of how to connect time-slices.

There will be some resistance to applying the term "identity" to the account of the self that Schechtman gives. Traditionally, theories of personal identity have focussed upon the question which qualities of a person or object are essential and which are accidental. They tend

to answer that question by specifying a sort of bodily continuity, or, in the case of persons, a type of continuity of psychological states, most notably memory. However, it seems that this conception of identity is too narrow, particularly when people use it to try to answer questions that more properly belong to another sphere. This other sphere is at least as well associated with the term "identity" in the minds of non-philosophers. The idea of having an "identity-crisis", or of assuming an identity (such as that of a married person, or a police officer), is more easily thought of as a matter of characterization than of reidentification. For that reason, I believe that it is permissible to use the term "identity" to refer to how a person characterizes herself, so long as it is clear that this conception of identity is not that which would be appropriate to use in response to the reidentification question.

There are many ways of characterizing this sense of identity. It is not uncommon for people to speak of trying to find themselves, to figure out what they are like, to find out who they really are, or even to go on a journey until they meet themselves. These people want to discover which qualities are the more important constituents of themselves, those which qualities are less important, and those that are incidental. These qualities could be character traits, but also events in their lives, values they hold, desires that they are prone to, etc. A quest for self-discovery can be a reaction to a challenge to their beliefs about what is truly important, or about the nature of events that happened to them. In extreme cases, these challenges can cause an identity crisis. So people look for, and usually find, a satisfactory way of characterizing themselves. This seems to be important to many people. This question of identity is not, strictly speaking, a question about who the person is, at least not in the sense that the person is confused over whether she matches the person named on her driver's licence and passport. Rather, it is a

question of what sort of person she is, an attempt to figure out her own make-up.

Usually, people have adequate characterizations of themselves, but there are times in their lives when they are prone to reevaluate those characterizations. There are many examples of this. First, a young adult decides whether to go to university or not, and what her academic focus will be if she does go. This is partly a function of what sort of person she wants to be in the future. Second, a man who loses his faith in God looks at his life and decides what sort of person he can be without his previous religious beliefs. Third, a person who retires, or loses her job, reevaluates who she is without that job. This can be a particularly painful process, since people often identity with a particular role in a society associated with the job, such as police officer or teacher. Fourth, a person wants to discover more about her parents, or her more distant ancestors, in order to develop a better sense of how she came to be the sort of person that she is. The last example (although this list is by no means exhaustive) is of the person who wishes to explain, and perhaps modify, her own behaviour. This is what many people do when they seek psychotherapy.

B. The narrative self-constitution view

Schechtman puts forward a theory of identity that she calls the narrative self-constitution view. According to this view, "[a] person creates his identity by forming an autobiographical narrative – a story of his life." Thus, "individuals constitute themselves as persons by coming to think of themselves as persisting subjects who have had experience in the past and will continue to have experience in the future, taking certain experiences as theirs."[3] To define this narrative she turns to psychologist Jerome Bruner: "A narrative is composed of a unique sequence of

events, mental states, happenings, involving human beings as characters or actors. These are its constituents. But these constituents do not, as it were, have a life or meaning of their own. Their meaning is given by their place in the overall configuration of the sequence as a whole – its plot or *fabula*."[4]

The importance of a characteristic to one's identity can be a matter of degree. "[T]o define a person's identity in the sense that is at issue in the characterization question, one must not only be able to know *which* characteristics are part of his history, but also their role in that history – one must know which of the included characteristics are central to who he is, and so part of his "true" identity, and which are incidental or misleading."[5]

Schechtman holds that each person's self-concept takes the form of a life story. "We expect a person's beliefs, desires, values, emotions, actions, and experiences to hang together in a way that makes what she says, does, and feels psychologically intelligible." She gives as examples fictional characters that are well characterized versus those that are not, just as biographies are well or poorly written. "Sometimes the collection of actions, thoughts, emotions, and characteristics ascribed to a character make sense – we can understand her reactions, motivations, and decisions – they pull together to present a robust picture. Other times, however, we are at a loss to put together the information we are given about a character."[6] And sometimes we are at a similar loss to put together the information we have about a real individual. "To be a person one must realize that one's beliefs, desires, values, and traits are *supposed* to support one another."[7] It is legitimate to ask someone to explain an action that seems out of character, and thus fit it within the framework of a person's identity.[8]

On the other hand, having a narrative self-concept does not mean that "one continually

carries one's autobiography in one's head."[9] One's past experiences can affect one's present self, not only through memories, but through (perhaps unconsciously) changing how we experience things in the present.[10] For instance,

> "The person, convinced by beatings and parental disapproval that the only thing that can make her worthwhile is to excel in athletic competition may well suffer much more intensely in losing, and be willing to go to far greater lengths to win, than the person who has come to believe that his athletic talent is just one of the many wonderful and lovable things about him, and that his life has many other rewards and adventures in store."
>
> "The sense of one's life as unfolding according to the logic of a narrative . . . is the lens through which we filter our experience and plan for actions, not a way we think about ourselves in reflective hours."[11]

For the most part, one's self-narrative is implicit, although it can ideally be made explicit upon reflection. A person's life story is more fully articulated, the better she is able to explain, when asked, why she acts, believes, and feels as she does.[12] So she should be able to make explicit some portions of her implicit self-narrative. However, she doesn't have to be perfect. The narrative self-concept is the approximation of an ideal. Sometimes, we will be unable to explain ourselves, either to ourselves or to others. Sometimes, the explanations we give will be wrong. Schechtman gives an example of a man "who sincerely insists that he feels nothing but respect and love for his brother, but nonetheless frequently behaves toward him in ways that suggest hostility – he may 'forget' his brother's birthday, 'unwittingly' serve his least favourite foods when inviting him to dinner, 'inadvertently' say things that humiliate him, and so on."[13] It would seem either that the person must come to recognize this unconscious hostility as such,

based upon what others tell him about how they view his actions, or that he must retain a blind spot and thus continue to be less fully formed as a person. In order to overcome the gap between his existing proposed self-narrative and the way others view him, he must recognize that he does not, in fact, value his brother as much as he thinks he does (though, on realizing this, he may then be able to work at strengthening this value).

The narrative self-constitution view gains plausibility as a theory of identity when we examine Schechtman's examples of humans who do not have a narrative, either because they have not yet gained it (infants) or because they have lost the ability to organize their lives as a narrative (for example, victims of Alzheimer's disease).[14] These are people who have experiences, but cannot put them together as part of a narrative extended over time. In effect, these beings are no longer (or are not yet) persons. The narrative self-concept view of identity helps to show why we value our survival as persons, and in particular our survival as narrators of our own lives. For many people, to suffer from a severe case of Alzheimer's disease would be a fate as bad as, if not worse than, physical death. "The loss of a self-narrative puts a stop to the kind of experience, actions and, [*sic*] interactions uniquely enjoyed by persons, and so the end of a self-narrative ends the experiencing subject and agent who was the person . . . The horror we feel at the prospect of losing our capacity to experience the world we do or to interact with others as persons is thus perfectly comprehensible and natural to our state."[15] Without a narrative structure to their lives, people would have no way to make sense of them. In effect, they would be cast adrift on a vast ocean, tossed this way and that by successive waves of experiences without a rationale.[16]

The human tendency towards the narrative comes in many forms. People want to tell

their side of a story, that is, their own narrative, with its particular relation of events to one another. Why is this need to give a personalized account so strong? One plausible answer is that many people have a strong desire to relate events, and accounts of themselves as connected to these events.[17]

Schechtman defends her account of identity as more useful than traditional accounts in certain areas. She holds that her theory of identity is more suited than the reidentification theories to address people's concerns over, for instance, personal survival.[18] She thinks that reidentification theories of identity that focus on psychological continuity are misapplied in these cases.[19] Many reidentification theories attempt to connect different time-slices of a person by saying that they are psychologically similar. For instance, Tina at time t_1 is most similar to the person named Tina at time t_2, an instant later, and a series of such instants can be connected to give an account of why Tina at t_1 is the same person as Tina five years later. The problem with using such an account to explain how Tina at t_1 survives is that, as Schechtman argues, "the psychological continuity theory collapses the distinction between someone being me and someone being like me . . .This is so because psychological accounts of identity must define personal identity in terms of relations between temporal parts that are really distinct from one another."[20] For psychological continuity amounts to psychological sameness over time. If psychological continuity is not a vacuous definition of identity, then this continuity must in turn mean qualitative sameness rather than numerical sameness. This distinction is important when we think of our wish for compensation for services rendered, or worries about our own future. When we are concerned about deciding who gets paid for whose work, we want the same person, not a similar person, to be paid for the work. When we worry about our pain in the future, it is

an important consideration to us that it is our pain, as opposed to that of someone similar to us.[21] As for our most pressing concern for our future, namely our personal survival, Schechtman gives the following example: "Surely I would rather wake up tomorrow with partial amnesia than be smothered in my sleep by the evil genius who has also brainwashed my next-door neighbour to exhibit my psychological makeup."[22]

Schechtman's approach is not to divide a person into time-slices, but rather to consider the "relation that holds between a *person* and particular *actions*, *experiences*, or *characteristics* that are hers."[23] Identity in her sense is "the set of characteristics each person has that makes her the person she is."[24] And her conception of identity can be used either when one attempts to determine one's own identity or when one reevaluates another's. For an example of the latter, think of a "woman who finds that her husband, with whom she thought she had a storybook romance, has had a series of tawdry affairs".[25]

Schechtman's account of identity also has the advantage of fitting the way that people normally think of themselves. People tend to see themselves, not as a collection of time-slices, or people-at-an-instant, but as beings with a past and future that affects how they see themselves in the present. When one thinks about looking after one's own welfare, one thinks of, and cares about, oneself as a whole. One does not think of one time-slice caring for another time-slice. Schechtman's account provides a natural way for us to conceive of why, for instance, we can suffer in the present in anticipation of future compensation, and why we speak of punishing a criminal for her past crimes (rather than for the crimes of a psychologically connected past series of time-slices).[26]

C. The uses of fiction in enriching our self-concepts

It seems likely that humans use a narrative self-concept in their everyday lives. Schechtman's theory shows us a way to understand how memories, anticipations, desires and values function in our self-concepts. Our ability to form narrative self-concepts also provides an explanation for our ability to draw, from fictional narratives, fruitful insights about moral behaviour and human nature. Indeed, these insights are sometimes more likely to be achieved through looking at certain narratives, rather than by only investigating various prescriptive ethical theories. According to Martha Nussbaum, one can learn more about what it is to be a person by examining well-written works of narrative fiction. And Nussbaum's argument for the relevance of fiction to moral knowledge in particular also serves as an indirect argument for the relevance of a narrative concept of identity to moral issues. Indeed, she makes the point that her arguments assume that "moral lives are 'stories'".[27]

Given that our identities are narratives, it is not surprising that our self-concepts can be influenced by fictional narratives. Nussbaum has examined works of literature for their relevance to our moral lives, and her findings indicate that there is a strong relationship between the narrative in fiction and one's concept of oneself. She argues that examining fictional characters, and the situations they are in, can give one insights as to how a person should act, if she wishes to be moral, and also how one might strive to reconcile differing values, both moral and non-moral. Thus, we can allow more complexity into our own life-narratives. As she shows, novels vividly reveal how values can be incommensurable.[28] Learning how to prioritize one's values is an important part of defining who one is. Novels can show one the options in dealing with the dilemma of choosing between two or more competing values dramatically. Nussbaum

examines examples of moral tension in Henry James' *The Golden Bowl*. First, there can be a tension between serving incompatible moral aims. In that case, one possible answer is not only to choose what one judges to be the lesser of the two evils (such as deceiving a friend in order to save one's marriage), but also to be fully aware of the fact that the lesser evil is still an evil. One should refine one's moral sensibilities, remaining aware of what one is doing in hurting another for a greater good. This level of emotional self-awareness can also help to strengthen one's sense of self, since one is able to define oneself not only by the value one serves, but by the values that hold a lesser place in one's value hierarchy.[29] The process of situating a person's values in a hierarchy, while still recognizing how the force of lesser values can shape how she sees herself and the world, helps her to strengthen her sense of identity.[30]

Yet the ability for narratives to help to enrich our own complex identities can continue indefinitely. To extend the above example, there seem to be cases in which this awareness of how one is hurting others is legitimately stifled. Nussbaum gives the example of two people in love, who should see each other as important to the extent of becoming "grossly insensitive and careless with respect to other, incompatible claims", willfully blind to some of the needs of others.[31] Love seems to be a socially sanctioned (and apparently legitimate) form of prejudice. Naturally, there are cases in which this form of prejudice goes too far. No society could sanction a pair of thrill-killer lovers such as are featured in the movie *Natural Born Killers*.[32] Yet narratives can illustrate that love sanctions many actions on behalf of one's loved one that would not be allowed if this love were absent, much less if the action were taken to benefit only oneself. For example, we might show more understanding and tolerance for someone who stole in order to buy a last birthday gift for a critically ill loved one than for someone motivated by the desire to

treat himself. When one's moral viewpoint should be wide enough to encompass everyone who is affected by one's actions and when it should narrow to focus on one's loved ones is difficult to resolve. Indeed, in many cases, this question may be unanswerable before one faces such a dilemma.

Characters in fiction can serve not merely as realistic models, but as ideals. Characters who see the importance of multiple values and who are motivated by all of them can help point the way for those of us who do not yet see all those values, or do not know how to reconcile conflicts between them.[33] By bringing these values and conflicts more sharply into focus, the author opens the way for readers of her works of fiction to improve their own awareness of what their values are, and how these values are situated with respect to each other.

Narratives can fine-tune our moral sensibilities by helping us to become better at seeing the moral complexity of specific situations. This fine-tuning occurs through looking at the narratives, partly because we can see a moral situation that is not clouded by the personal prejudice that we normally carry into our daily lives.[34] This is a trait that the novel shares with the standard philosophical "thought experiment". The difference is that the novel describes a complex, concrete situation, enabling us to refine our faculty of moral perception. The thought experiment, on the other hand, is kept simple in order to allow generalization to many cases. But even though no two concrete situations are exactly alike, the more clearly we can see how values affect a reasonably well-characterized and complex life, the more we can apply a held value in our own lives. Novels offer us the chance to examine possible consequences, either of emphasizing one value too highly or of balancing values appropriately. They can serve as ways for us to explore how our own values are ordered and to decide whether to change that order or

not. Narratives can thus help us to bring the value from the abstract, detached realm into our particular lives, allowing us to see more clearly when and how we are pursuing a value in a particular situation, since the value is more consciously integrated into our self-concept.[35]

In addition, noticing how characters interact can give us an idea of how people can try to understand, and perhaps adopt, one another's values. We can see characters interacting with each other according to their values and how values are reinforced in a character by others around her. Nussbaum shows how Henry James has two people successfully communicate, and reinforce, their moral values when they share "the world of the same picture", or "the same created world".[36] Moral acceptance of another does not require that the other hold identical values, in an identical hierarchy, to one's own. But the more similarities between values, the greater the reinforcement. Reinforcement requires people's viewpoints to be similar enough to allow one to assume the other's point of view. And if a person completely rejects another's purported values or value-hierarchy, no reinforcement will occur.

Narratives can help us to identify ourselves, insofar as we are holders of values. This raises the question of how great a role such narratives can play in directly validating one's own values, as opposed to helping one to situate those values within a self-concept. Literature and other forms of media usually do not directly validate a particular individual's value system, since the creators of such works cannot possibly know the particular reader. Sometimes, however, a fictional figure can serve as a role model. This is because the figure is popular, and the role model is thus repeatedly reinforced as a role model only because other people approve of the fictional figure's apparent value system. Without such inter-subjective support, a role model's norms will not be accepted as values.[37] On the other hand, the media can also provide role

models that can lead to a reformation of a society.[38] For example, a popular story about a capable female ruler may convince people in a patriarchal society that the right to govern should be extended to women. The dispute between those arguing that women's rights should be equal to men's and those maintaining that women should not have the right to serve as political leaders would turn on whether the role model could exist in the real world, not that she was unconnected to important things, such as honesty, good government, etc. Finally, sometimes the media are simply used as a forum for communication, such as an instructional video, in which case the reinforcement of values occurs just as it would with direct communication.[39]

Although the media can generate possible role models for one's actions, the particular situations and dilemmas one faces in life will differ from those with which the role models are portrayed as dealing. Therefore, feedback with respect to how one's actions express, fail to express, or violate, important values must to a very large extent come from those with whom one interacts, since it is they who will observe one's values being expressed in concrete situations. However, public narrative accounts can point the way to obtaining such validation. For instance, one could read about a heroine who is portrayed as holding certain values, and as getting feedback from others in the story (including, perhaps, the narrator) as to the desirability of those values. One could then be inspired by the heroine in the novel to try to be like her, and thus adopt the heroine's values as one's own. One would obtain feedback from others to determine how well one succeeds, and whether the value-candidates one adopts are really worth following – that is, really values.

The media can also play a more direct role. They can, as a portrayal of a group's views, promote or denigrate general values that an individual happens to have, and can also have an

effect on an individual when she is having her value system reinforced by some aspects of her society and denigrated by others. For instance, when a limited television series called "Queer as Folk" was shown on Canadian television, a gay friend of mine was thrilled to see homosexuals portrayed as normal people. He said that he felt "empowered". I think that part of this empowerment was a feeling of validation as a person that, because of prejudice, is not as strong as that of heterosexuals in our society. It is a case, I think, of reinforcing the idea that homosexuals should be given equal rights to heterosexuals, just as we believe that people of various races and different genders should be treated equally. Since there is already a homosexual community that promotes equal recognition and respect for homosexuals, seeing a treatment in the media of homosexuals as people first and homosexuals second can aid in the reinforcement of his value as a person. It provides more support because it indicates that a wide community shares such a value. But note that this form of reinforcement would not succeed unless it were taken as an indication that such values were held by a segment of one's society. If a film were shown that promoted a "value" that no one, not even the film's creator, was thought to hold as such, then it would provide no support for that value.[40] Thus, any support the media can give for a value is a function of one's belief that it reflects the held views of a society, or sub-society. In the end, we still need a belief that others share our values.[41]

Common to many well-written narratives is a character's struggle to attain something she considers to be important, which I argued earlier is fundamental to attaining a meaningful life.[42] In the next section, I will examine how the self, conceived as a narrative, is related to values.

D. The narrative concept of self, temporal extension, and values

At first glance, identity has a close connection to values, since people strongly identify themselves with what they consider to be important. It is easy to see how a reevaluation of one's values often requires a reevaluation of one's identity. Schechtman gives the example of a deprogrammed cult member who finds out that "she has been unwittingly making sacrifices for the wrong values, values that were not truly hers, but were imposed upon her." This is one example of an identity crisis – "the state of being unsure of what she finds most important, or what is worth making sacrifices for".[43] But while the narrative sense of self may best explain how one understands how one's values form a part of one's make-up, it remains an open question whether one can form a narrative account of oneself if one lacks values.

Charles Taylor is a major proponent of the view that values are essential to identity. As he says, value "plays the role of orienting us, of providing the frame within which things have meaning for us, by virtue of the qualitative distinctions it incorporates. Even more, it is difficult to see how anything could play this role which didn't incorporate such distinctions. Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not . . . The condition of there being such a thing as an identity crisis is precisely that our identities define the space of qualitative distinctions within which we live and choose."[44] A concept of the punctuated self as a collection of time-slices, and as something that does not have to have norms, much less values, is rejected by Taylor.[45] Against the view of the self as a collection of time-slices, he holds that the self is essentially temporally extended.[46] He claims that a punctuated concept of self is missing the element of "mattering" that a self must have. This is not just mattering to oneself, but also having things that matter, or are important, in one's field of view.

Against Taylor, one might try to defend a punctuated self as more suited to describe the fullness of experiencing a moment in one's life. According to such an argument, a narrative self-concept does not allow for an accurate description of fully experiencing the joys of life in the present, without worrying about the past or future. Furthermore, the proponents of the view of the punctuated self may hold that it is the experience of these moments that make a life worth living. This is not always simple hedonism, which was dealt with in Chapter II, but the view that human beings often let life pass them by and so live mechanical, unaware lives as if they were robots or zombies. This is a fairly good self-description of those who feel that they are stuck in a rut, and not pursuing anything important. Thus, it could be argued, the narrative account is not the best way to describe how one recounts one's experience of special moments of one's life. In fact, the argument would imply that a narrative account actually prevents one from experiencing a life as meaningful, since it is argued that these moments are what make one's life meaningful.

While it is possible to worry too much about the future, or to dwell too much on past events, an attempt to experience the present fully does not require giving up a narrative concept of one's life. To "live for the moment", when it does not espouse the joys of hedonistic thrill-seeking, seems a philosophy designed more to remind us to be aware of what we are doing at this time. It does not require one to forget one's connection to the past and future as such. One can be aware of what one is doing and also know why one is doing it. Thus, a narrative concept of the self is compatible with being richly aware of one's present experiences.

Nussbaum's work can be used to reply to such an argument. Her view is that a narrative self-concept is compatible with experiencing, and indeed is what allows us to experience, moments of one's life as fully as possible. She holds that "all living is interpreting . . .

throughout our living we are, in a sense, makers of fictions." The value of novels is that through them "we are led to imagine and describe with greater precision, focussing our attention on each word, feeling each event more keenly – whereas much of actual life goes by without that heightened awareness, and is thus, in a certain sense, not fully or thoroughly lived."[47] We can and do construct narrative identities by being selective in telling the stories of our lives. Well-written stories in fiction can help us make more coherent and complete stories of our own lives, and thus create a stronger sense of identity. For we want our life stories to be good ones, and thus the virtues of good fiction play a role in our having good narratives, and strong self-concepts. And part of these narratives is the rich description of moments of one's life, even as they are related in narrative form to other elements of that life. Therefore, the theory of the punctuated self is not needed to explain why we so strongly experience some moments of our lives, or why the strength of these experiences makes our lives richer.

That a self is temporally extended is necessary for it to be able to have values, since to have a value is to attempt to achieve (or maintain) something in the future that someone believes to be important. The past is relevant to explain how she acquired the value, and the future to show what she is hoping to achieve. Moreover, to think of oneself as a person in a temporally extended sense, it is most useful, and for a human psychological make-up, probably necessary, to have a narrative self-concept. Thus, to make sense of our values, and of ourselves, we must, as Taylor maintains, grasp our lives as a narrative.[48] "My sense of myself is of a being who is growing and becoming . . . as a being who grows and becomes I can only know myself through the history of my maturations and regressions, overcomings and defeats. My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative."[49] To do this, Taylor holds, one needs

to have a holistic view of self, not one that is arbitrarily divisible.

According to Taylor, "because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest'. . .[B]ecause we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our life in story."[50] Taylor's internalist view that "we cannot but orient ourselves to the good" does not seem to be correct. It is possible not to have such an orientation. Psychopaths may be living examples of beings who do not. But if this orientation to the good requires the rest of us to see our lives in narrative form, then this indicates that those who do not see their lives in this way will lack such an orientation.

To hold that those who lack a narrative self-concept have no values is a strong claim, and implies, if my definition of a meaningful life in the last chapter is correct, that those people would lack a meaningful life. So it is important to investigate whether humans without a narrative self-concept can adopt values. A preliminary examination suggests that those who lack a narrative self-concept are the same people as those who lack a sense of what their values are. Psychopaths, who completely lack moral values (and, seemingly, non-moral values), have difficulty in articulating their lives as narratives. Robert Hare notes that, when talking, they "frequently change topics, go off on irrelevant tangents, and fail to connect phrases and sentences in a straight-forward manner."[51] In addition to having difficulty with continuity, they often include logical inconsistencies in their statements. For example, when describing a situation they have trouble keeping their story straight.[52] It seems as if the different parts of any story they tell are disconnected. This problem carries over into relating their life stories. "[M]ost of us are able

to combine ideas so that they are consistent with some underlying theme, but psychopaths seem to have difficulty doing so."[53] Furthermore, they do not care if they are caught out as liars, and thus have little interest in matching their life stories to how society conceives of them.[54] It would seem that these living examples of amoral agents are also living examples of those who lack a narrative sense of self. This supports Taylor's claim that without a narrative self-concept one cannot have values.

However, it may be premature to assume that all those who lack values must, like a psychopath, lack a narrative self-concept. Psychopaths are impulsive, and resemble at given moments a person-slice existing for itself, rather than a temporally extended being concerned with other person-slices, either co-temporal or not. Psychopaths lack not only values, but also norms, and are thus less likely to be concerned for the future than the idealized case of the amoral character encountered in works of fiction. Thus, a psychopath's lack of values may not be the reason for her lack of a narrative self-concept, although the lack of a narrative self-concept can explain her lack of values. Later in this chapter, I will explore the possibility of a being that has a narrative self-concept but lacks values.

The question at hand is whether a being can lack a narrative self-concept, but have values. Schechtman holds that to be aware of one's values requires a narrative self-concept. To know that one has values, one must know some characteristics about oneself. Of course, there are many characteristics that one could know about oneself, such as that one is two metres tall, that seem to be available to one's consciousness regardless of how one views oneself. On the other hand, it is precisely those characteristics that one is least likely to identify as being part of who one essentially is. Values, if one has them and is aware of them, are an important part of the

make-up of oneself. This is because one's values are one's adopted norms that one believes to be important. But to know one's values is not only to know that something is important, according to those values. It is also to have some idea of why one believes that what one values as important is so. One should be aware, at least roughly, of how and why one came to hold a value. Even if one's account is only "I have held this to be important since my early childhood", one requires some sense of this value's history in one's development as a person.[55] Without such a view of one's values, and hence of oneself, one would be acting on values without knowing why. This may happen in cases in which people are unaware of the values they hold – one may not realize how important something is to them until it is taken from them, for instance. This is what allows an unconscious adherence to values. But to act on values without knowing why does not seem to match how individuals see themselves in relation to the values which they are aware of holding.

In response to this line of argument, one might imagine an amnesiac who has lost the history of how she came to have certain values, but retained a feeling that a certain subject was important without knowing why. This person, upon realizing that something was important to her in this way, would seek to find reasons to justify her beliefs. Otherwise the "value" might easily be dismissed as a mere impulse or compulsion. Thus, the amnesiac would be re-justifying, and in a sense re-creating the reasons for holding, her values. Impulsive desires are easier to explain than impulsive values. But if the adoption and awareness of values require a history as well as a duration, then it seems that people must see themselves in a way that is similar to how Schechtman's and Taylor's theories hold that people must, if they see themselves as adopting values at all. It is in our nature to be social. It is also in our nature to seek to justify our values.

The combination of the two results in our values being reinforced, or tested, through conversations and other interactions with others. These conversations and other interactions form part of the history of our values, a history about which we also have to have some awareness, in order to know what values we have.

If a narrative self-concept is required for values, are values required for a narrative self-concept? A closer examination of Doestoyevsky's Underground Man may demonstrate a possible narrative without values. It seems that we have a case of a person that lacks values, although he may be seeking them. Since he thinks that he can never find those values, his existence seems to be meaningless. Yet the question here is whether his life can be conceived in a narrative form. UM questions the reason for every action he takes. He contradicts his assumptions about himself and thus seems deliberately to reject any characterization of himself just as he deliberately rejects values.[56] He, therefore, has nothing to hold onto as a focus, and his existence seems to be a fragmented one. Thus, he does not provide an example of a valueless narrative.

One argument for the thesis that values are necessary for a narrative self-concept runs as follows: One's values are important in a way that one's other desires are not, and this importance makes them crucial to the constitution of one's identity. The more importance a value has for one, the more central it is to one's identity. A person is not being true to herself when other desires prove stronger than those guided by her central values, but at least she retains a sense of self. Those who entirely lack such values lack an important aspect of identity. Any narrative concept of their lives that they might try to make is inadequate because it lacks a driving goal. To attempt to characterize such a life would be to list the events that happened in it, but there

would be no connection of all these facts into a unifying whole.

A possible challenge to this argument is that it is possible to write a memorable work of fiction, and thus a narrative, about a character that lacks morals, (and perhaps lacks values). However this challenge does not defeat the argument. There are two sorts of narratives of a being's life: biographies constructed by others and autobiographies. That a narrative account can be drawn of a being (real or imagined) who lacks values is consistent both with Taylor's thesis that to understand one's values one requires a narrative self-concept, and with the proposition that a narrative self-conception requires values. For example, nature documentaries show that even lower animals' lives can be described in a narrative form. This is because we place a narrative structure upon the animals' lives. We say that this animal is trying to escape a predator, that one is trying to find a mate, etc., but often the narrative follows the animal's life until it finds some sort of ending that seems appropriate for the one constructing the narrative. A recent documentary showed a coyote that is ejected from his pack for trying to mate with the pack leader's mate. It wanders alone, finds a badger to hunt with, and then a lone female coyote, and finally joins a pack with the female as his mate. This can be described in narrative form, but it is not the life as the coyote conceives it, which is (as far as we know) episodic, and driven by instincts. This is not to say that a coyote lacks memories or desires, but there is no evidence that a coyote has a narrative sense of its life in the same way that humans have a narrative sense of theirs.

I should clarify the sense of identity that a lower animal can have, lacking a narrative consciousness. Many of the lower animals appear to have a form of consciousness. They are aware of their environment, they have memories, and so on. And lacking a narrative

consciousness does not mean that they are unable to identify themselves. Clearly, many animals can distinguish themselves from others. Some non-human primates can identify themselves in a mirror. However, this sort of identification does not go very far for those who, like humans, are introspective. Animals can tell each other apart, but humans can wonder about what sort of persons they are and what it means to be a person. Animals cannot characterize themselves. They do not have a sense of values. But they can be characterized by humans. Similarly, the fact that one can write stories about well-characterized amoral agents does not imply that real amoral agents see their own lives in a narrative form.[57]

However, I do believe that, in theory at least, it would be possible for a being to have a narrative self-concept without having any values at all. Returning to Railton's distinction between values and norms from the last chapter, it is possible for a person to have a temporally extended sense of self, but one which is guided only by norms, rather than values. Such a being would not place any special importance upon what she does in life, or the norms which guide her desires, but she could still have goals, and relate to them in a temporal sense. Her life would not have to be episodic, or even impulsive. Her sense of self would be weaker than that of a being with values, but the former could still characterize herself. Thus it is not logically necessary for an agent to hold values, much less moral values, in order to have a narrative self-concept.

Although values are not necessary for an agent to have a narrative self-concept, they seem to be necessary for an agent who is a human being to have a narrative self-concept. Perhaps the same flaw in the physical make-up of psychopaths that makes them incapable of feeling guilt or empathy, or seeing other people as subjects in their own right, also makes psychopaths unable to form a coherent narrative self-concept. And I do not know of any accounts of real (as opposed to

fictional) amoral humans (much less ones who lack values entirely) who are not psychopaths, which (assuming that they have a narrative self-concept) would disprove the thesis that humans cannot have a narrative self-concept without also having values.

It should be noted that Schechtman believes that a narrative account best explains how one can conceive of oneself as self-interested, which would seem to indicate that a totally self-interested man would, of necessity, have a narrative focus.[58] If a totally self-interested man would not have a narrative focus in Schechtman's sense, this apparent discrepancy needs to be explained. While humans without values lack a narrative self-concept, they are said to be self-interested. Our real examples of totally self-interested beings, the psychopaths, lack such a concept. But psychopaths are not typically concerned with the future, and, in fact, are more likely to act imprudently or in a thrill-seeking fashion without care for the future. People with values are also people who sometimes care about their own welfare. Few, if any, people who have values are completely without self-interest. It is this motivation of self-interest within normal people that Schechtman's theory explains. It does not describe the self-concept of real beings without values, though such beings are obviously selfish. Thus, my interpretation of Schechtman's claim that a narrative account best explains how we can perceive ourselves as self-interested, among other things, is that a narrative account may be a necessary condition for this ability, but that values themselves are a necessary condition for humans to have the ability to form this narrative account. Thus, the human who lacks values would lack the ability to see herself as concerned for her future. Her existence would be more likely to be episodic. And this seems to be the case with the best examples we have of humans who truly have no values, the psychopaths.

An objection to my claim that all humans with narrative self-concepts have values is that some people claim that there are no values, and yet seem to have narrative self-concepts. A similar counter-example might come from those whose values are challenged, and who think of their lives as meaningless. To address the apparent counter-example of Nihilists I wish to make a distinction between someone holding an intellectual position and someone subscribing to values. For many of the values we live by have been instilled in us from early childhood, and the intellectual belief that nothing has value will not make a person stop living according to those values.[59] And, as argued in Chapter IV, many people who claim to be Nihilists might be better characterized as Inter-Subjectivists, for what they are denying is that there are objective values. Thus, I would hold that many people claiming to be Nihilists can still form a narrative account of their lives. Those few who are able to take Nihilism to the extreme, like the Underground Man, may well lose that narrative. Similarly, most people whose values are challenged will have an identity crisis, but will then discover new values (or new justifications for old ones) and recover from such a crisis, regaining their narrative self-concept.[60] Therefore, neither the existence of purported Nihilists that seem to retain a narrative sense of their lives, nor that of individuals who have their purported values challenged, provides a counter-example to my claim that humans cannot have such a narrative unless they subscribe to values.

I could be wrong. It may be an empirical fact that, although a narrative self-concept is necessary for one to have a sense of what one's values are (as shown earlier in this chapter), it is not sufficient; real humans could have narrative self-concepts without values. If so, then one cannot argue for the desirability of holding values by stating that they are necessary for a human being to have a narrative self-concept. Fortunately, there is another argument that shows

independently that values are desirable to hold, since they are necessary for one to have a meaningful life (as shown in Chapter V). So, even if a narrative sense of identity does not itself require values, the thesis succeeds, if the conclusions of previous chapters hold, in providing sufficient reason to have a moral character, assuming that one wants one's life to be meaningful. However, given the desirability of a narrative sense of identity, the thesis is stronger if this narrative sense requires feedback, or reinforcement, of some sort, even if not values *per se*. For arguments similar to those given in Chapter IV can then be brought forward to show that having a narrative sense of identity is inconsistent with being a personal ethical egoist.

It was shown in Chapter IV that to be aware of one's values one needs to have feedback from others. Studies in social psychology support the thesis that people wish their behaviour to be consistent with their values, to the point where, when people are shown that their behaviour is inconsistent with their purported values, they will change their future behaviour to conform with these values.[61] Thus, insofar as values are part of the make-up of one's narrative self-concept, accurate feedback is important to the construction and realization of one's identity. I will now investigate whether the narrative self-concept requires such feedback independently of the values usually associated with a narrative self-concept.

E. On whether the narrative self-concept requires feedback from others

Feedback from others can at the very least be extremely helpful in developing and maintaining one's self-concept. An episode of *Northern Exposure* shows one of the characters, Holling, going through a mid-life crisis. It is cured when his wife performs a narrated puppet show that tells the story of his life. While this is fiction, it does seem to be a possible way to

resolve a mid-life crisis, which asks the questions: "What am I doing here? Have I wasted my life?" This seems to be a quest to help to affirm that one's life is meaningful through gaining a better narrative understanding of one's life. If one can strengthen one's sense of self by explicitly hearing (or creating) the story of one's life, this may provide the means to see one's life as meaningful once again, and defuse the mid-life crisis.[62]

Schechtman and Taylor argue that the narrative self-concept requires some feedback from others. Schechtman's concept of a person's identity requires both that the person "acknowledges her personhood and appropriates certain actions and experiences as her own" and that she has "a self-concept that is basically in synch with the view of one held by others." "To enter the world of persons an individual needs, roughly speaking, to grasp her culture's concept of a person and apply it to herself."[63] As stated earlier in this chapter, Schechtman holds that one should be able, to some degree, to make one's implicit self-concept explicit. Thus, one should be able to form an explanation of one's actions when one is accused by others of acting 'out of character', or not in accord with a previously stated or implied account of oneself.[64] In addition to the necessity of being able to explain oneself, which Schechtman calls the articulation constraint upon one's narrative self-concept, she postulates a reality constraint which requires one to make one's narrative conform both with the facts of the world, and with the more plausible interpretations of those facts. Thus, a person who believes that he is Napoleon violates the former version of the reality constraint, and a paranoiac who interprets innocent actions by others as hostile violates the latter version.[65]

Turning to Taylor, one of his arguments for the necessity of others in the framing of one's self-concept relies upon an important fact about language.[66] To have a concept of oneself, one

requires language (because we need a framework of articulation) and this requires others with whom to speak the language. The meanings of the words in that language are partially constructed by all the interlocutors. And even after the self-concept that one acquires in childhood is modified later in life, one will still need some interlocutors (those close to one) to help articulate one's (perhaps ever-changing) present self. "Even as the most independent adult, there are moments when I cannot clarify what I feel until I talk about it with certain special partner(s), who know me, or have wisdom, or with whom I have an affinity."[67] Taylor holds that we need a defining community: "Somehow I have to meet the challenge: Do I know what I'm saying? Do I really grasp what I'm talking about? And this challenge I can only meet by confronting my thought and language with the thought and reactions of others."[68] In addition, citizens are expected to play certain roles, such as teacher, or customer at a grocery store. We learn the expectations associated with a role from others, and we get feedback in the form of questions when we depart from a given role's set of expectations.[69]

There is a parallel between these social expectations and Paul Grice's cooperative principle (to be brief, clear, relevant and truthful) for speech acts. According to Grice, one wonders and sometimes deduces why any deliberate departure from the cooperative principle was made, and so picks up meaning that is not in the literal text of the spoken or written words.[70] For example, if a letter of reference says only of a candidate for a job that "He is very punctual", the implication is that the subject is not a good candidate. Similarly, any departure from what is expected of a certain social role also demands explanation. In both cases, a framework for meaning exists, and the narrative framework of identity gives some expectations of what a Self in a certain role in a certain society should be like.

To have a narrative self-concept requires more than to have a concept of what a self is; it requires that one understands what a self does. The actions of a self are then interpreted by others, and thus one receives feedback on whether one is acting 'in character'. To quote Jerome Bruner, "To be viable in a cultural psychology, concepts ('Self' included) must carry specification about how they are to be used both in action and in the discourse that surrounds action."[71] It has been shown in Chapter II that how others act can affect one's behaviour. It now looks as if how others see one affects how one sees oneself. How the world looks at us is how we learn to look at ourselves.[72] One's actions are an expression of one's norms, and thus part of how one gets feedback about one's identity. A person whose actions are successfully deceitful (in the sense that they appear to follow from norms which the person does not hold) is in danger of getting inaccurate feedback about her identity. She will get feedback about who she is pretending to be, rather than who she is.

The above views all suggest that the concept of what a self is requires other people. These people help provide the concepts that allow one to build a characterization of what a self is. In addition, an agent faces particular contexts that may cause her to be unsure of what a generalized "Self", or particular chosen role, is characteristically meant to do, think or feel in such situations. This suggests that others would be needed on an on-going basis to help one see how to meet the norms associated with being a person, or a particular sort of person, in one's social group.

This seems to be partially true. It is likely that an amoral human, assuming that she can have a narrative sense of self in the first place, is unlikely to have a strong sense of self because of a lack of feedback with respect to some of her actions, thoughts, and feelings in norm-related

contexts because of the need for secrecy that being a successful amoral agent requires. Yet it seems theoretically possible that enough of a sense of self could be maintained by other means to allow for a coherent self-concept. Such indirect feedback could be about what a person in a particular role, such as "teacher", generally does. One could even obtain some information from reading books about people in such roles. Such a self-concept would have gaps, and would likely be inferior to a narrative self-concept that is more open to direct feedback. However, a narrative self-concept without direct feedback about one's particular contexts is not necessarily an incoherent one. The sort of feedback that the amoral person with a narrative self-concept can obtain does not require her to assign any importance to the providers of such feedback. This is because it could be conditional. For instance, an amoral agent could understand that, if she wants to be a teacher, she is expected to do certain things and not others. Therefore, if *contra* the argument in the previous section it is possible for an amoral human being to have a narrative self-concept, such a self-concept would not require viewing others as people.

Yet to know one is holding values, one requires a deeper level of feedback. This is because feedback that purported values are actually values requires feedback about the element of importance associated with values in particular. This element of importance can only be provided by viewing other people in a particular way, as was shown in Chapter IV. So, if to have a narrative self-concept, one requires values, then one will require reinforcement from others, viewed as subjects. But if it is possible for humans to have a narrative conception without believing anything to be important, and thus without having any worthwhile goal or telos to direct one's life towards, then, perhaps, one would not need to see others in this manner.

So, assuming that it is desirable to have a narrative self-concept, and that this in turn

requires one to have values, this provides part of an argument for being at least somewhat altruistic. This consideration reinforces the argument found in Chapter IV, which showed that one cannot be a personal ethical egoist while holding any values, even non-moral values. I believe that one requires values in order to have a narrative self-concept. However, I do not have a knock-down argument to prove this, and so whether the desire to have a narrative self-concept provides one with a reason to want values, which in turn provides one with a reason to be moral, depends on whether humans need values in order to have a narrative self-concept.

Endnotes

1. Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

2. Schechtman proposes that the field of personal identity should be sub-divided, and a different conception of personal identity used for each sub-field. She introduces a special view of identity as the proper conception to use for one of the sub-fields, the characterization question, to be distinguished from the reidentification question.

3. Ibid., 94.

4. Ibid., 96. Schechtman quotes from Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 43 (Italics his). A person will sacrifice the opportunity to satisfy her other desires for what she considers to be important. Schechtman gives an example of a smoker who does not regret smoking. He knows that smoking is likely to shorten his lifespan, but he is committed "to the life of a bon vivant, to living fast and dying young, to staring mortality in the face and laughing". As another example, if a woman sacrifices the chance to satisfy some of her other desires in order to raise children, "[i]t seems wrong to describe this simply by saying that she wants to raise children *more*" (Italics hers) than she wants to satisfy those other desires (Schechtman, 82-3,). Rather, it seems that she considers the former goal to be important, in a way that satisfying her other desires is not. Being a mother is an important part of her self-concept.

5. Ibid., 77 (Italics hers).

6. Ibid., 97.

7. Ibid., 98 (Italics hers).

8. There are alternatives to having such a self-concept. One may, for instance, try to distance oneself from the very desires, values and other traits that make up our usual sense of self, in order to be free of this self-concept. This seems to be the path advocated by some Buddhists, and Derek Parfit feels that it is the result of looking closely at the identity question. (Schechtman, 101-1) Without judging as inferior such a Zen Buddhist state, Schechtman notes that whatever this state is, it is a detachment from what we consider to be personhood. The purpose of such a state is "precisely to free oneself from concern about personal survival, anxiety about the future, remorse about the past, obsession with compensation – in other words, to dissolve and transcend personal existence." But these four features (see note 18) are not merely illusions. Moral responsibility, for example, is based upon connections between different temporal parts of one's life, which connections (as far as one's experience as a person goes) are themselves created by one's narrative self-concept.

As to whether personhood or Buddhist non-personhood is better, it would be difficult to

judge, since, as Schechtman says, both systems seem to be self-justifying. (Schechtman, 152) However, insofar as one values having an identity and being a person, one would have reason not to adopt the Buddhist viewpoint. In any case, the Buddhist position is not an argument for personal ethical egoism, and so is not the subject of my thesis.

9. Ibid., 105.

10. Of course, this general idea is not new in the field of psychology.

11. Ibid., 112, 113.

12. Ibid., 114.

13. Ibid., 116.

14 Ibid., 148.

15. We have seen a close relationship between narratives in fiction and one's life narrative. There are others who support the narrative concept of identity. One notable defender of this view is Jerome Bruner. Since, as he shows, people remember events better as part of a narrative, then it seems likely that one could more easily conceive of oneself as the main character in a story than as a collection of time-slices. Indeed, there is evidence that this is precisely what happens in introspection, since introspection does not so much allow one to observe a ready-made self as to construct it in narrative form. See Schechtman 99-101, 111-114, 151-2.

16. Schechtman 149-162 contains more discussion of these issues.

17. Given the accounts in Chapter II of how moral behaviour might have sources in evolution, one might wonder whether the narrative view of self also has sources in evolution. I can only speculate, but perhaps a narrative view of self gave an evolutionary advantage through giving more purpose to the actions of those who had it. Certainly it is useful to have in a social group. If such a group has no members with a narrative view of self, it will not be able to function as well as a group whose members do have such a view. Keeping agreements could become more difficult in the former group, since there would be fewer conceptual connections within individuals to their own futures and pasts. And it would be easier for members of the latter group to communicate warnings to others in the forms of stories. Indeed, remembered narrative experience provides a basis for "cautionary tales", and one can imagine fables that our ancestors might have told each other. For instance, a story could be told about the foolish man who ate some red berries and fell under a curse, and this might warn people away from trying berries that are poisonous. Perhaps people take lessons to heart more readily if they are told in the form of stories. If people remember events better as part of a narrative, then it would be logical to assume that they better remember other information, such as any counterfactual, in such a form.

18. Schechtman note four major areas of concern: personal survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation. She calls them the "four features".

19. Such as, for instance, that of Derek Parfit in *Reasons and Persons*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

20. Schechtman, 53.

21. Ibid., 52.

22. Ibid., 53.

23. Ibid., 77. Italics hers.

24. Ibid., 74.

25. Ibid., 75. A similar example was used in Susan Wolf, "Meaning and Morality," *Aristotelian Society Proceedings* 97 (1997): 299-315.

26. Could one have two identical narratives describing two different people? If sufficient detail is added to each narrative, the answer is no. Everyone has their own life-story. I will not here address what would happen in a Twin Earth scenario, since that would take me too far afield. In any case, remember that this sense of identity is not meant as a response to the reidentification question.

27. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Flawed Crystals: James's *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy," in *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 142.

28. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 36-8.

29. Nussbaum, "Flawed Crystals," 134-5.

30. This works best with characters who have values that are themselves socially sanctioned. Such characters seem more akin to ideal humans, and thus serve as better models for us.

31. Nussbaum, "Flawed Crystals", 136-7.

32. *Natural Born Killers*, (film), Oliver Stone, Director. Alcor Films; Ixtlan Productions; J. D. Productions; New Regency Productions, Production Companies. 1994.

33. Nussbaum, "Flawed Crystals," 140. Although values can motivate one to be moral and provide some guidance on how to accomplish this, the complexity of a concrete situation may also requires a fine-grained sensibility and perception, as Nussbaum notes (Nussbaum, "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible': Literature and the Moral Imagination," in her *Love's Knowledge*, 156). A solution to the "Why be moral?" question does not necessarily carry with it a solution to the "How should I be moral?" question.

34. Nussbaum, "Finely Aware and Richly Responsible," 162-4.

35. When reading a novel, one also has to engage with the value-hierarchy of the author. Since the author's values may not coincide with one's own, one must be as ready to critique the author's viewpoint as to share it. However, looking at a complex situation thorough the author's eyes may bring factors to light that are relevant to one's own value-hierarchy. One does not have to agree with an author's views in order to gain something from his works.

36. Nussbaum, "Finely Aware and Richly Responsible," 153.

37. Of course people might imitate a role model without drawing any deep truths about any values. People do this whenever they pepper their conversations with quotes from a television show. But such imitation, while widespread, is not deeply felt.

38. For more on reformers, see the previous chapter.

39. When a fictional character seems to be positively endorsed by those who created the fictional character, the provision of a role model is coupled with some reinforcement of the purported values of that role model.

40. It might be objected that violence in popular movies could be seen as an endorsement of violence as a solution to problems, even if the creators of the movies do not believe that violence is a good way to solve such problems. The short answer to this is that such movies do not endorse violence as values so much as endorse something else as a value important enough to commit violence to obtain. The longer answer is that the audience for such movies consists of two groups. The first group realizes that the movie is mere entertainment and does not use it to reinforce the validity of using violence to solve problems or achieve goals. The second group may well be extremists who believe that some values justify the use of violence, in which case such people may reinforce each other's views by endorsing the values, and the means of pursuing them, shown in the movie. Thus, human beings are still needed to reinforce the idea that what is portrayed in the movie as important or legitimate actually is so.

41. This point is important in stopping a possible avenue that allows the amoral person to gain validation of her non-moral values. After all, there are stories about amoral people. Could they give an amoral agent feedback that would validate her life? It seems unlikely. First of all, such stories are in the minority and are usually told as cautionary tales. If the amoral 'hero' does not come to a bad end, the point of the story is to warn the rest of us that such amoral people exist. In addition, however, it would be difficult for an amoral agent to draw inspiration from any other person, including another amoral agent, because that would require seeing the other person as a source of values, and not as an object to be manipulated or avoided. And even if an amoral agent decided to try to take on a fictional amoral agent's value system as her own, she still would not get the feedback from her society that this purported value system was actually valuable.

42. Nussbaum points out that our sympathy is with the choice of Homer's Odysseus to live a life in which his virtues would be put to use, rather than an immortality in which nothing different

would happen from day to day. See *Love's Knowledge*, 368.

43. Schechtman, 85.

44. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 30.

45. Ibid., 49-50.

46. Ibid., 48.

47. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 47. See also her "Flawed Crystals," 147-8.

48. Taylor, 47.

49. Ibid., 50.

50. Ibid., 51. This is not to say that human beings will not rationalize many instances of falling short of their values. We tend to prefer to be the heroes of their life stories, rather than the villains. But it is still true that these stories usually contain values that the heroes allegedly pursue. And it is also true that sometimes people can be convinced that they are doing wrong, and sometimes they modify their behaviour to cease their wrong-doing.

51. Robert Hare, *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of Psychopaths Among Us* (New York: Pocket Books, 1993), 138.

52. Ibid., 125.

53. Ibid., 137.

54. Ibid., 47-8.

55. I have benefited from a conversation with Schechtman on this point.

56. Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground.* 1864. Reprint. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. Part I, sections 1 and 2.

57. It could be objected that some lower animals are proficient at characterizing others as friendly or hostile. For they can remember how other individuals act, and respond accordingly. But remembering some qualities about others is not the same as being able to construct a narrative about them. Furthermore, they do not seem to characterize themselves in this manner. One possible exception may come from primates that have learned sign language. I do not know enough about the work done with primates to know if or how they characterize themselves and others.

58. Schechtman, 154-7.

59. A similar idea is found in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739. Reprint. *Analytical Index by L. A. Selby-Bigge.* 2nd ed. 1888 Reprint. *With notes by P. H. Nidditch.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). Hume holds that he cannot help but believe in causation in daily life, though when he pauses to reflect on the matter, he rejects the thesis that causal forces are proved to exist. See Bk I, Pt. IV, Section VII, 268-9.

60. People who suffer from depression are prone to suffer periods, either where they are under-motivated to act in accordance with what they believe to be important (because they are under-motivated to act at all) and/or where they believe that nothing is important. Periods of the latter would count as temporary lapses of the narrative self-concept.

61. See for instance S. J. Kantola, G. J. Syme, & N. A. Campbell, "Cognitive Dissonance and Energy Conservation," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 69 (1984): 416-21.

62. This assumes, of course, that the other conditions for having a meaningful life are satisfied. The affirming of one's life narrative would fit, loosely, under the condition of understanding that one is living according to one's values.

63. Schechtman, 95.

64. Bruner indicates that it is common for humans to attempt to explain unusual actions by telling a story that "mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical pattern." See Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 49-50.

65. Schechtman, 119-30. In lesser cases, however, the critics are themselves open to criticism. "In cases where so-called errors of interpretation are relatively minor, it is far from obvious whose perception is really incorrect", 128. And one who claims to be constantly discriminated against may turn out to be justified in believing as she does. On the other hand, if the differences are minor, then there is enough common ground between different agents' self-narratives and concepts of each other that they can still interact. See 127-8.

66. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 35.

67. Ibid., 36.

68. Ibid, 37. Taylor's argument is predicated on a person wanting to know about herself. One who was not introspective and had no desire for self-knowledge would not need such confidant(e)s.

69. See Bruner's account of Roger Barker in *Acts of Meaning*, 48, and n. 22.

70. Paul Grice, "Meaning," (1948;1957). Reprinted as Ch. 14 in his *Studies in the Way of Words* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989).

71. Bruner, 117-8.

72. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his *Being and Nothingness*, also holds that one needs the other's gaze in order to gain a fuller understanding of one's self.

Chapter VII

A. Why a moral character is better than a selfish one

The arguments of the thesis can be summarized as follows. Chapter II shows that it is possible to have genuinely altruistic reasons for actions. Thus, it is at least possible to have a non-selfish character. Chapter III shows that, while to have a selfish character is not necessarily irrational, the only form of such a character that is both coherent and feasible as a way to succeed in one's selfish endeavours is that of the personal ethical egoist. Chapter IV shows that the nature of values is such that the personal ethical egoist cannot have them. Chapter V shows that a person needs values in order to have a meaningful life. Chapter VI shows that a human very likely needs values in order to be able to have a self (in the sense of identity defined in that chapter). Thus, the benefits of having a moral character, as opposed to a selfish one, include the ability to have a meaningful life and to be a person. Even if the selfish person is completely successful in deceiving everyone else into believing that she has a moral character, thus allowing her to evade punishment for her selfish deeds, she will forego some significant advantages. She may fool everyone, but she will not have a meaningful life, and she will probably not be a full person.

For comparison, let us look at the moral person. She acts according to her value-candidates, which are reinforced as important by other people and are, therefore, values. This allows her to gain a sense of meaning in her life from knowingly pursuing (or doing her best to pursue) her values. It also allows her to gain an identity and to be aware of it. What sacrifices she makes in not achieving as fully the goals of her more selfish desires seem a small price to

pay for what she gains. A reflective moral person, as a member of the target audience of my thesis, would want to retain the advantages of having a meaningful life and a sense of who she is. Therefore, independently of her moral reasons to wish to maintain her moral character, it is in her selfish interests truly to have, and not merely pretend to have, a moral character. This is a character that causes her sometimes to act solely in the interests of others. A person with such a character will, for instance, usually act for moral reasons when faced with those situations in which she can either act morally or selfishly.

B. How moral should one be?

This thesis was intended to show that the qualities of the moral person are worth more to her than any advantage a selfish person might gain over her. However, the thesis argues only that one should be a fairly moral person. Specifically, one has reason to be moral enough to meet the legal and social expectations of those with whom one interacts. That is, one should be (and not merely pretend to be) as morally decent as one's society says one should be. For once one accepts that others' interests, as well as one's own, are important, one must treat those interests with respect, and, where interests conflict, one needs some feasible way of adjudicating between such interests. As a baseline, one's society provides such a way, although at times a particular society's laws and customs should be changed, as moral reformers recognize. In any case, the laws and customs of one's society provide a lower boundary of how moral one is required to be to gain the benefits of a sense of self and a meaningful life, without facing punishment from one's society. And, since some subcultures will have morally very rigorous views and one may fall in with them, this lower boundary might be fairly high.

Do one's fellow citizens also provide an upper boundary? One might argue that some arguments apply against sainthood as a way of life. For if one is openly a saint, trying to be more moral than others require, one may face censure from them for challenging their norms. From Jesus Christ to Martin Luther King, many people have died because they were openly more moral than those around them, and were trying to reform the behaviour of others. Other moral saints are not moral reformers, but simply do what they believe to be right, even at great cost to themselves. Since the fairly moral person gains the benefits of a sense of self and a meaningful life, one could ask what the fully moral person gains in addition to this.

This is not the place for an accounting of the pros and cons of moral sainthood. However, once one has a moral character, even of the normal, everyday variety, one is subject to moral reasons. These moral reasons might lead one to act above and beyond the call of duty, or to develop character traits that lead to this. So, while moral sainthood is not required, it could easily follow from the moral views a particular person holds, given that she is a moral agent at all. Thus, unlike the comparison between the totally selfish and fairly moral agents, the comparison between the fairly moral agent and the totally moral agent allows moral reasons to be used in the comparison without danger of circularity.

Another issue that this thesis cannot fully address is that of discrimination. Collectivism, or the motive to act in the interests of a group, bears some similarities to selfishness, when one is a part of the group in whose interests one acts. C. D. Batson notes that "we care about collectives of which we are members, an *us*. Identifying with a group or collective in this way usually involves recognition of an out-group; an *us* implies a *them* who is not us . . . when this occurs, harming them may be one way to enhance the comparative welfare of us."[1] Matt Ridley

notes that "all human preliterate societies, and all modern ones as well, tend to have an 'enemy', a concept of them and us . . . Montagues and Capulets, French and English, Whig and Tory, Airbus and Boeing, Pepsi and Coke, Serb and Muslim, Christian and Saracen -- we are irredeemably tribal creatures."[2] "As for religion itself, the universalism of the modern Christian message has tended to obscure an obvious fact about religious teaching -- that it has almost always emphasized the difference between the in-group and the out-group."[3]

The treatment of those in an out-group by members of an in-group is often like the treatment of others by the selfish person – an in-group of one. Those in the out-group are not seen as human (or fully human) but rather as a resource to exploit, or as a hostile force, or at least as a possible obstacle to the aims of the in-group. It is undeniable that we are often motivated by this collectivism, a form of group egoism. And perhaps some forms of group egoism are acceptable. Ties of family and friendship are considered to be more morally significant than relationships with strangers. This may be justifiable, although there is a limit on how far one can favor those close to one over others. However, many forms of collectivism are indefensible. And this thesis has not directly argued against collectivism. Indeed, since one gains reinforcement for one's values from those around one, a person in an in-group may acquire her identity and meaning with the aid of others in her in-group, while maintaining discrimination against the out-group.

Given the prevalence of collectivism, is it a coherent viewpoint? The "universalized" version of such behaviour, a view that each group should serve its own interests, is subject to the same problem of incoherence as universal egoism. For members of such a group could not both serve their own interests and proscribe that others act in their own interests. But a group could

simply legislate for itself, without prescribing for other groups, and thus follow a program of serving the interests of those in their in-group only. Such a process would allow for the inter-subjective reinforcement of values for those in the in-group from each other. They would seem, however, to be morally arbitrary in their exclusion of those not in their group from their concept of people who matter.

Nielsen brings up the question of why one should not be morally arbitrary in this way, in parallel to the question of why one should be moral at all.[4] But note that few people ever justify their racist or sexist or other 'pro-in-group' attitudes, if they even admit to them, by saying that there is no reason not to be morally arbitrary. For they are not trying to be explicitly morally arbitrary, even within the confines of their own thoughts. They almost always try to argue that there is a legitimate basis for their discrimination. A common strategy of this type is to state that there is a non-moral difference that justifies different moral treatment of a certain group of people. This allows one to argue against the views of unreflective group egoists. If one can argue that there is no such non-moral difference, or that the non-moral difference does not justify differential treatment, one can, perhaps, change some people's views.

But the fact that most people motivated by collectivism do make such cognitive errors does not mean that one cannot defend a strong collectivist viewpoint. One might choose to embrace the morally arbitrary nature of collectivism, and favour those in the in-group over those in the out-group, knowing full well that there is no significant non-moral difference between members of these two groups. However, there is a relevant difference between the personal ethical egoist and the collectivist. The latter does support acting in the interests of at least some other people. Thus, she is morally motivated to some extent. This means that, unlike the

personal ethical egoist, she is subject to moral reasons. It is a normal human desire to avoid arbitrariness. People strongly desire to be able to justify their choices, when they reflect upon them. And once a person has opened the door to considering the interests of any others, such as those within her in-group, it becomes difficult to justify drawing a line to exclude others not in her in-group. The values that most people attach to their lives and the lives of those they care about also apply to those they do not care about, or even know. This may provide a means of convincing the morally arbitrary collectivist to widen their in-group to include everyone.

However, if these moral reasons do not prove convincing, then this thesis will not move a collectivist. Ultimately, there may be no non-moral reason for a person not to be morally arbitrary in this manner, so long as she lives in a society that tolerates such moral arbitrariness. Such a person may find it more important to "take care of her own" despite the non-moral similarities between others outside her in-group and those inside her in-group. If every member of the in-group feels the same way, there may be no way to convince them to extend their moral considerations.

Fortunately, while many people are often motivated by collectivism, few if any are supporters of moral arbitrariness. Indeed, such a group of people seems implausible. Therefore, although, in theory, the collectivist could attain the benefits of having an identity and a meaningful life which a practitioner of a more universal moral view would gain, the wish to avoid arbitrariness, combined with the collectivist being subject to moral reasons, shows the collectivist view to be inferior to a moral view that treats everyone as a full person with moral standing. This thesis has focused mainly on reasons for a totally selfish person to take the step of serving the interests of others. Hopefully, the above arguments have provided sufficient

reason for more steps to be taken, so that the importance of serving the interests of all others is realized.[5]

Endnotes

1. C. D. Batson, "Why Act for the Public Good? Four Answers", 603-11 in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 20(5) (1994): 605.

2. Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* (London: Viking, 1996), 165-6.

3. Ibid., 191.

4. Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral? – Revisited" in *Why Be Moral?* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 295-300. Originally in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21(1) (1984): 81-91. John van Ingen explores Nielsen's idea in his *Why Be Moral? The Egoistic Challenge* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

5. A final point is whether this thesis is an endorsement of virtue ethics. Certainly, the concept of identity used and the focus on moral (or amoral) character lend themselves to being compatible with virtue ethics, and even make it seem a more attractive option than other normative moral theories. However, this thesis does not dictate what the correct moral theory must be. It is compatible with Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism, Kantianism, and the Ethics of Care, each in their various forms. All such theories have points worth considering. I will not here argue which, if any, is correct.

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