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# **The Objectivity of Moral Judgements**

**By**

**Adrian Brockless**

**(MA by Thesis)**

*University of Durham Department of Philosophy*

Year of Submission: 2006

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**29 NOV 2006**

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## **Abstract**

The problem I wish to address is one that is widespread in analytic moral philosophy *viz.*, that of transcending individuality in an attempt to develop theories and arguments that generally explain what occurs when we make moral judgements. I argue that none of these attempts is plausible on the grounds that moral judgements are necessarily personal, but in a way that still allows for moral objectivity. Such objectivity, I argue, is grounded in what it is for one's moral understanding to deepen, and involves considering morality as more than purely a guide to conduct. Moral subjectivity implies a lack of understanding of the meaning of one's actions in terms of the humanity of others, and also of what one becomes as a consequence of those actions. I reject the notion that objectivity can only be found through impersonal thinking such as that of propositions and mathematics, and suggest that the grammar of objective moral understanding differs from impersonal propositional forms insofar as it does not admit of external justification. On this basis I argue that the cognitivist / non-cognitivist models of moral thought are misguided. In support of my argument concerning the nature of moral objectivity, I draw on Wittgenstein's later conception of the nature of language, and use it to examine concepts such as trust, cynicism, sentimentality, love and maturity. I maintain that such concepts are legitimate and can be used objectively, even though they have no absolute standards and thus cannot admit of external justification. I argue that it is not rational to dismiss them in favour of formal argument or to try to impose formal argument upon them. The latter strategy, I claim, violates the grammar that gives them sense *viz.*, (among other things) the context in which they are uttered that includes the individuality of the speaker. Thus I conclude that since moral judgments contain such concepts, it makes little sense to transcend individuality in an attempt to be objective or develop explanatory arguments based on theories.



## Preface

I had originally intended that this work should include an examination of aspects of Kierkegaard's philosophy – specifically, those areas relating to direct and indirect communication in Volume I of his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which, I believed, could be linked to much of Wittgenstein's philosophy in a way that would assist and clarify my argument. However, I subsequently found that I did not have room for a discussion of sufficient detail, and thought that anything less would lack transparency and beg too many questions. I therefore decided to omit it altogether. Nevertheless, many of the ideas contained within this thesis are heavily influenced by Kierkegaard's thoughts on communication and language.

I hold a firm belief that philosophy is not a discipline that can be turned on and off at will. It is something that is inextricably linked to the individual engaged in it, in a way that does not allow for it to be put to one side after the department lights have been extinguished at the end of the day. It comes from the individual, and I hope that the spirit of this is reflected in the argument.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Scope, Structure and Themes*<sup>1</sup>.

In this thesis I argue that moral judgements are necessarily personal, but that they are not simply personal – that is to say, within them remains the possibility of objectivity insofar as we can appreciate value over and above our immediate feelings. The necessarily personal claim that I make relates to an individual’s humanity and his ability to recognise and understand the manifestation of such humanity in others when making a moral judgement – a truly moral judgement relies on this; that recognition and understanding, I argue, takes time to achieve, and is part of what it is to live a human life. I also argue that it is not something that we can know in a formal sense. A simply personal judgement is one in which the humanity of another is not properly recognised or understood. In some cases this is of no consequence, such as when I have the simply personal desire for a coffee; in other cases, such lack of recognition and understanding of an ‘other’s’ humanity can be of the gravest importance; for example, a violation of somebody else’s life that entails the perpetrator of an action having not recognised the dignity and importance of another human being<sup>2</sup>.

The mistake that is made, I argue, is that in claiming the existence of objectivity in moral judgements, philosophers immediately assume that there is an objective realm around which we can all unite i.e. (to use Thomas Nagel’s expression) a view from nowhere. Now, it might seem odd to use the word ‘unite’ in this respect, but it is important for later discussion to identify the difference between describing a chair in the next room i.e. something that exists as ‘other to’ the agent (and about which meaningful propositions and formal arguments can be produced) and an ‘other’ human being. The otherness of a human being is difficult to illustrate so early on, but I rule out at once the thoughtless argument that we can identify a human being in the same way as we can identify a chair in the next room – that is to say, we cannot point to another human being and state, “There is another human being!” in the same way that we can point to a chair and state, “There is another chair!” Now, of course, it is possible to point out other human beings like this, but that wholly misses the point.

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<sup>1</sup> Where I use a source more than once, I refer to them using acronyms such as ‘TPE’ (*The Personal in Ethics*). In the bibliography the acronyms are specified next to the author’s name. Where a source is used only once I give the usual bibliographic particulars next to the quotation, as well as in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> I do not yet have the conceptual apparatus in place to provide a succinct definition of ‘humanity’ without question begging.

What I am trying to say, is that a human being is not merely an object like a chair; he or she has (among other things) the capacity to move, be moved, inspire, wonder at the limits of another human life, love, make moral judgements, hate, appreciate evil and so on. These are not properties like the properties of a chair (four legs, used for sitting on or whatever) - they are not properties of a human being, they *are* (what makes) a human being. The human being is not separate from them and in this sense I have been paradoxical by referring to them as such (this should become clear). One might argue that one can identify a dead human being as a human being, and of course that is right – but that is also precisely why the word “dead” exists in our vocabulary namely, to describe such a form as distinct.

I aim to decisively demonstrate that objectivity in moral judgements is not impersonal (or ‘other to’ the agent), and that it need not be so in order for there to be meaningful disagreement between individuals. I should make clear that I am not making any claims on behalf of the particularist, generalist, cognitivist or non-cognitivist; in fact it is my aim to challenge the authority of all theories (or ideas) in moral philosophy by examining the *point* of theorising in ethics; that is, I see no reason for the assumption that there are genuine choices in moral philosophy (between, say, cognitivism and non-cognitivism or virtue ethics and consequentialism) - moral philosophy should limit itself to trying to describe what goes on when one comes to a moral decision, and to weeding out corruption in moral thought where it occurs. In other words, its chief concern should be to achieve greater moral understanding. I employ the term ‘moral understanding’ a great deal throughout this thesis – there is no strict definition for it, since its underwriting concepts (such as love, good, evil, remorse and the like) cannot be externally justified. However, it refers to the idea of an understanding of others as I understand myself – i.e. as a being capable of loving and suffering grief, despair, euphoria, emptiness and so on. I *do not* want this expression to be taken as ‘understanding *what to do*’, since that implies morality as simply a guide to conduct; neither do I want it to be taken as ‘understanding how the world works’ or ‘understanding general principles of psychology’, since this could be understood as propositional knowledge – a position that, in terms of moral understanding, I am opposed to. I also argue that it is a mistake to consider morality purely in terms of a guide to conduct, but that is not to say that I think morality should not affect (or even effect) conduct. And I am not discounting the possibility of moral guidance. In short, my suggestion is that morality provides

certain limits to our actions derived from our recognition and understanding of the humanity of another human being; in other words, a profound moral understanding has a necessary and unavoidable influence on action.

Consider, for instance, the phenomenon of racism: racism is (obviously) a form of exclusion and denigration; it is also a substantial moral issue. If one possesses a profound moral understanding, it is impossible to be a racist. As human beings we inhabit a common conceptual space (that allows for love, good, evil, remorse, grief, emptiness etc.) in which we understand others as being (potentially) subject to the same kind of awareness as ourselves. By seeing a gap between ‘ourselves’ and certain races – in the sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ – one is automatically excluding and denying ‘them’ access to such space. As such, one is not seeing ‘them’ as potentially subject to the same kind of life as ‘us’. It is in this sense that I consider moral understanding as having a necessary and unavoidable influence on action that extends far beyond and deeper than an action-guiding instruction manual. One can, of course, look at psychological principles with regard to racism and use them to explain to the racist why he is in error, but such explanations can never *show* the full human being to the racist – i.e. they can never show the subject of their exclusion and denigration as (for instance) fully vulnerable to the same sort of despair at losing a loved one as they themselves are. Certainly, such explanations can (and do) state that all human beings can potentially “feel” as deeply as the racist himself - and one can be in possession of many such facts (or explanations), but this in itself is not enough to guarantee understanding. One can be in possession of many such facts, but (as I argue in Chapter 3 onwards) facts can (potentially at least) be given all at once, whilst moral understanding cannot be; I also argue that an accumulation of facts is not enough to grant depth or moral understanding. A racist needs to genuinely reform, and this involves more than simply tracing over a series of explanations again and again of why he should not be racist; he needs to wrestle with his own preconceptions about his victims and deepen his understanding in terms of appreciating their ability to love and grieve, and that is not something (as it is in science) that can be underwritten by external justification. In this respect, the understanding of the racist is *personal* (as only he could wrestle with his preconceptions), but not *simply personal*, insofar as full appreciation of the humanity of his victims necessarily involves a realization of a common conceptual space and consequently, a realization that many values that result from such understanding are extensively shared (if not always in the same way) by

others with an appreciation of the humanity of others. – And this is what I mean when I employ the expression (as I do throughout this thesis): ‘personal without being simply personal’.

Overall, the thesis has a Wittgensteinian theme and I draw on a number of his works, however I do not include much critical discussion of them, since my interest lies chiefly in his method of doing philosophy as applied to ethics. Within this, I follow closely arguments advanced by Peter Winch in his essays ‘The Universalizability of Moral Judgements’ and ‘Moral Integrity’, Raimond Gaita’s essay ‘The Personal in Ethics’ and Rush Rhees’s essays ‘Religion and Language’ and ‘What are Moral Statements Like?’ I also draw considerably from Raimond Gaita’s book *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*.

The first chapter is divided into seven subsections that focus mainly on the notions of subjectivity and objectivity within moral philosophy and the idea that moral judgements are necessarily, if not simply, personal. I begin to make the argument for the possibility of objectivity within moral judgements, and argue that such objectivity is not necessarily only contingently attached to individuals. I aim to demonstrate this firstly by examining themes in Thomas Nagel’s book *A View From Nowhere*, in which Nagel sets himself up as an advanced exponent of objectivity necessarily being impersonal, and then, through the rest of the thesis, illustrate why this need not necessarily be so. I also highlight the difference between what is sometimes referred to as public morality (such as a democratic government’s decision to go to war) and personal morality, and I examine what I believe to be problems that can often be taken to be moral when they are, perhaps, confused with political ones – although I do not deny the existence of a link between the two.

I also introduce the theme that morality should be considered as more than purely a guide to conduct as well as examining how far the scope of a moral dilemma extends. In chapter two I concentrate on morality as a calculus of action and develop the argument that sees morality as more than just a guide to conduct. I also examine the notion of the universalizability of moral judgements and draw heavily on Peter Winch’s essay ‘The Universalizability of Moral Judgements’. Within this I begin to look at what the consequences of such universalization are for moral philosophy in terms of the personal nature of moral judgements. Chapter three examines those aspects of our lives that directly affect our moral sensibilities – such as the human capacity for being moved and an ability to appreciate mystery. It is in this section that

(by examining such aspects) I provide substance to my claim that moral judgements are necessarily, but not simply, personal and, within this, discuss what it means to be reasonable within ethics.

Nevertheless, I do not want to be interpreted (early on) as advocating a kind of subjectivism. My position is not subjectivist, as I maintain that an individual with a understanding of the reality of the concepts that underpin morality such as love, evil, grief and the like, identifies them in the light of recognizing what it means to be a human being; as such, he possesses a sense of value independent of his will by accepting that all human beings occupy a common conceptual space in which the possibility exists that they can wrong and be wronged. Moreover, those with such understanding will necessarily share those values born from an appreciation of an 'other's' humanity<sup>3</sup>. That said (and as I have already mentioned), the objectivity that I am advocating is *not* a kind that is only ever contingently attached to the individual i.e. impersonal.

I then examine in more detail the notions of moral cognitivism and non-cognitivism and try to show why neither is satisfactory in terms of providing an account of what occurs when we make moral decisions. I also begin to examine what it means to morally communicate and discuss the difference in grammar between speaking scientifically and morally and what it means to be conned. With regard to this I discuss Wittgenstein's early and later conceptions of language. In chapter four I develop this linguistic theme and connect it to earlier discussions about objectivity in moral judgments and how such judgements are not simply personal. I consider Rush Rhees's argument (in his essay 'Religion and Language') that specific aspects of life require specific ways of speaking and argue that there is, in this respect, a necessary moral language. I continue by suggesting that to violate such a language by talking in the third person corrupts its grammar and leads us to think in ways inappropriate to proper moral thinking – the latter point involves considering the language of academic moral philosophy. I also look at the concepts of wisdom and what is involved in its acquisition – why wisdom is not just a case of 'regularly getting it right', how wisdom might fall away, what is involved in getting it back, and why we should not see wisdom as just a case of propositional knowledge. The discussion of wisdom is necessarily late on in my thesis, as earlier on, I do not have the necessary arguments

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<sup>3</sup> Although such values may not always result in similar behaviour.

in place to be lucid. I also reject the charge of relativism as providing a coherent objection to my argument. Finally, in chapter five I specifically examine what it means for a moral judgement to be corrupt.

More generally, I argue that each one of us is necessarily embedded in a unique perspective. As a bald statement, this may sound facile, since everyone can only look at the world through his or her own eyes; no one else can see the world exactly as I do, due to my spatial and temporal position and so on. I would characterise this take on things as my point of view rather than perspective, and indeed, my point of view goes a long way in shaping my perspective; but a perspective is not just a point of view. My perspective is innumerable different points of view which are derived from (and go to make up) my biography. Thus the meaning of perspective I have in mind, is not one that has perspective as applicable to a precise or particular role in life (say a doctor); approximately (at this stage), it is one's whole perspective within which it is possible to have such different points of view or, more clearly, elements. For instance, a doctor will see a person's malady in a different way from someone with no medical knowledge; within the doctor's perspective there are symptoms and treatments, but this is not so with the layman. The doctor has, in this respect, been trained to see what is there, so why should we think that one cannot be trained in morality as in medicine? – Firstly, the doctor's training is founded on a series of facts and hypotheses that can essentially be put into propositional form and, as such, theoretically granted to anyone instantaneously (rather like transferring information from one computer to another). Consequently, such learning is contingently attached to the doctor, meaning that anyone with the requisite cognitive capacities could learn to recognise the symptoms of illness *et cetera*. Secondly, there can be nothing in a doctor's medical training that grants him enhanced and more sensitive access, or a better ability to deal with concepts such as love, hatred, grief, compassion, soul-searching and so on, despite the fact that advice such as how to break bad news to patients is often given in a doctor's training. Is it feasible (or sensible) to ask whether a doctor is better at love or hate than the layman? This can be illustrated well by an example that I use in more detail in the first section of Chapter 3: in his book *A Common Humanity*, Raimond Gaita describes how a nun's genuine compassion for incurable patients in a mental hospital shows up that of some of the doctors, who claimed non-condescending compassion, as less than fully genuine. The nun had little medical training, yet she was more sensitive to certain

aspects of humanity than the doctors. Thus, in terms of judging how to break bad news to patients, or relatives of patients, it is ultimately the individuality of each doctor that determines how they exercise the relevant skills.

One further basic point of clarification needs to be made here (the essence of which I hope to demonstrate later on): one particular point of view may be better than another (for instance, the doctor's over the layman's when it comes to illness), but this has no bearing at all in terms of talking about perspective; in such terms, one perspective is not better than another as this equates to knowledge based on propositional understandings – something that I strongly argue against later on. I realise that my perspective claim is a strong one and also that the notion of perspective is philosophically treacherous, but I believe a sound case can be made by examining various themes concerning language and philosophical method in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. I examine how our perspective can affect our moral outlook and the significance of the moral decisions that we make, and also how such significance can affect our outlook and change us as individuals. In addition, I consider how individuals relate to the world, and whether such a relationship is mediated through propositions; this examination also sheds light on how objectivity is not necessarily impersonal, and provides an account of the significance and status of ethics and moral judgements in the world in terms of what it means to possess moral understanding.

## CHAPTER I

### 1.0. *Moral Judgements: Subjective or Objective?*

Traditionally, moral philosophy involves discussion of questions such as: is a moral judgement subjective or objective? - i.e. is it the privilege of the individual to declare what is right and wrong, or is there a realm of moral facts that exists independent of us? What *ought* we to do? What *ought* I to do? – Is there a question of community norm? I certainly believe that there is fellowship inasmuch as we are all human and thus subject to human grammar i.e. our ability to utter meaningfully, and receive and understand in a way that deepens our understanding of what it is to be a human being – in other words, to live a human life. To talk of community norms is, I think, a different question and should not be confused with what I have just said – community norms do bear upon each of us (significantly) in terms of shaping our moral understanding, but it is a kind of secondary bearing, insofar as it plays a fairly large part in the development of our respective (individual) biographies – for instance, my attitudes to women and homosexuals depend on my having grown up in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and not in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>4</sup>. However, I argue that it is individual biography that is ultimately responsible for our moral outlook. I hope to have, in part, answered these questions by the end of this chapter.

Such questions have shaped moral philosophy inasmuch as they have been responsible for the development of ever more ingenious and complex arguments (for instance, the ever more complicated arguments advanced by cognitivists and non-cognitivists) that are increasingly abstract from the human being i.e. from what actually goes on. This might seem sweeping and unfair, but I aim to show in my discussions on the grammar of moral statements, that such abstraction actually distorts a proper examination into what goes on when we make moral judgements, and that much moral philosophy has suffered from such distortion. I believe that it is not, and cannot be (as will become clear later), the task of moral philosophy to further ideas of rightness and wrongness (bound up in this is the idea of *ought* and *ought not*); it should limit itself to giving an account of what goes on when a moral judgment is made and when two individuals conflict in their moral position concerning the same situation. Now, if I disagree with a particular individual relating to a moral position that he has arrived at and I voice my concerns, am I not also offering him guidance?

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<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, it is because individually achieved biographies are based on more than community norms that changes in such attitudes (and 'norms') take place.

That is dependent on the nature of my disagreement, but if it is a moral one (as I have suggested), then the guidance would be implicit in my attempt to achieve a greater moral understanding in my interlocutor.

Generally speaking, in moral philosophy, subjectivist and objectivist accounts of ethics are pitted against each other – they are considered as conflicting and, accordingly, the idea that both are needed in the same explanation in order to demonstrate what actually happens, seems incoherent. This is not so. What is forgotten is the character of the problem – i.e. the fact that a moral dilemma is a problem of different character and grammar to that of, say, a navigational one; when this is forgotten, deliberation becomes – as Raimond Gaita remarks, ‘...simply deliberation with a moral subject matter, that its being *moral* deliberation is external to its character as deliberation.’ (Gaita.TPE. p.127 (emphasis orig.)). Nevertheless, *why* should we think the problems are different? Why not accept that the morality of the deliberation *is* external to the nature of the character of the deliberation? I address these questions throughout the thesis, particularly when I discuss individuality, character, and how they can affect the grammar of a (Wittgensteinian) language game. However, a good place to start is to take a clear example such as Sartre’s student (featured in his lecture ‘Existentialism and Humanism’), in which a student comes to him for advice over whether to fight in the war or take care of his mother. In this example, we are basically presented with two options. The cognitivist might say, “give me more detail about the situation and eventually we’ll come up with the right answer, because there *must* be a right answer (e.g. my brother can look after mother while I go off to fight). – However, I could reply: “I can also provide more detail that would retain the equilibrium between the two obligations (e.g. my brother is not always reliable)”. Thus the disagreement between the cognitivist and my position here comes down to a difference in optimism about whether compromise or compensation can always be found. I can consequently acknowledge that if the cognitivist is obstinately optimistic, my arguments are not going to get much purchase. In other words, to meet the cognitivist on his own grounds, I am required to use the same form of argument and, as such, there is no way I can *refute* his arguments. I do not want to do this. What I am appealing to is a reader who has enough experience of genuine dilemmas in his life, dilemmas where no solution was discernable before *or after* the choice, dilemmas where no further detail would be relevant enough to resolve the dilemma, dilemmas where there might be more than one *respectable* answer offered

by different people who were sufficiently informed, sufficiently rational, and sufficiently eager (serious) to look for a solution in the situation.

Directly relating to this (and in support of it), is the understanding that the individual is aware of a moral dilemma when confronted by a situation, and in so being lends the situation its moral aspect. However, that is not to suggest a kind of blank canvas upon which we (as individuals) paint (or project) our moral aspects, nor is it to suggest that there is any kind of temporal issue contained therein. The situation is as we see it, but ‘becoming aware of’ can mean an aspect that we are subsequently made aware of. The awareness of another aspect does not mean that the situation has necessarily through time *become* something different – I may just suddenly understand (or see) something differently without entailing a gradual development of my fresh position.

But what does this “becoming aware of” mean? – Certainly it sounds as if we have looked at the situation and then, scrutinizing it in more detail, have seen something that we had previously overlooked. By couching the issue in these terms, one is automatically predisposed to assume that the element which was overlooked was a part of the situation, in the same sense as, say, one of its subtler theoretical or physical attributes - an attribute that would be there regardless of the presence of a witness. – But suppose there is a human being lying at the side of a road in terrible agony and no one knows that he’s there – what then? For the moment I shall only say that this human being is suffering.

There is a crucial difference here between a moral and non-moral dilemma, firstly because of its implications for morality being used purely as a guide for conduct, and secondly because its character (grammar) affects the individual’s relationship with the world. The most obvious and (perhaps) intuitive reaction to this is to suggest that one finds the appropriate and correct response to the moral problem in a similar way as finding out whether I should turn right or left at the next junction. This (again as Gaita indicates) is mistaken – for in a non-moral case I can defer to a third party or manual of some kind; it makes little difference which I defer to, provided the manual or person involved is an authority on the topic of my enquiries. In the case of a moral deliberation however, the problem is ‘non-accidentally and inescapably mine’ (Gaita.TPE. p.128) and, as such, it is essential that I deal with it. One might consider that the navigational problem I have is still *my* problem in a very personal sense, and that it is still my problem to decide whether I should turn left or

right. This however, misses the point: the choice as to whether I turn left or right is in one sense my problem, insofar as I am the person to whom such a decision matters (in the same way as I can add four and four together and come out with eight), but it is not my problem in the same sense as a moral problem. It matters in a sense that I find the best way (perhaps the quickest or least rough etc., etc.) to my intended destination, perhaps due to time constraints, or emergency, or my particular mode of transport etc., but the issue here is that there is a definite right answer to each of these requirements and, as such, precisely the same navigational problem could belong to anybody. Moreover, it can be related to propositional knowledge. My argument is that moral knowledge – I would prefer to call it wisdom – is not of this nature (which is why I would rather call it wisdom than knowledge) and, as such, personal in a *profound* way rather than an *accidental* way. The moral dilemma is mine and, consequently, that dilemma has embedded in it all the concepts bound up with my character that I have acquired during my lifetime, and that is what is meant when the moral problem (unlike the navigational one) is characterised as *profoundly* mine rather than *accidentally* mine. Nevertheless, it's not clear how 'concepts' can be bound up in someone's character. What does it mean for concepts to be 'bound up' in an individual's character? – The short answer (at this stage – it will be extensive later on – section 4.0. – when I discuss the necessarily public nature of concepts but with the possibility of privacy within some) is that if the concepts we hold are somehow incidental to our respective characters (i.e. not bound up in them), then it follows that our characters are superfluous to what it is to be a moral being; if this is so, then it follows that the recognition of another human being as a moral being, is in no way reliant upon his character. I aim to show that concepts are intimately bound up with the character of their holder, by arguing that to neglect character in an analysis of moral thought is to provide an incomplete account of what moral thought actually is. One of my main assertions in this thesis is that moral deliberation is of a special kind and, as such, possesses its own grammar that allows for objectivity of its own kind. However, I first want to look at Thomas Nagel's assertion that objectivity is necessarily bound to the impersonal and divorced from individual perspective, as I hope this will make my own position more transparent.

### 1.1. Nagel's Impersonal Objectivism

Nagel considers that objectivity can only be achieved in the realm of the impersonal,

A view or form of thought is more objective than another if it relies less on the specifics of the individual's makeup and position in the world, or on the character of the particular type of creature he is. The wider the range of subjective types to which a form of understanding is accessible – the less it depends on specific subjective capacities – the more objective it is. (Nagel, T. 'VFN'.p5).

Intuitively, it seems that Nagel is probably right insofar as we cannot let our characters or emotions influence (for instance) scientific investigation. Moreover, this view is seriously tempting if one examines the way we talk. For example, "X is wrong" certainly *sounds* a lot like "X is blue"; "I wish I knew the shortest way out of the woods" certainly *sounds* a lot like "I wish I knew whether to lie to her". – It is this kind of similarity that is the guiding light behind the thinking that acquisition of objectivity involves transcending 'our particular viewpoint and [developing] an expanded consciousness that takes in the world more fully' (ibid)<sup>5</sup>. - And indeed, Nagel believes that deliberation is of the same kind in the moral realm as it is in the scientific one – he compares the two:

The standpoint of morality is more objective than that of the private life, but less objective than the standpoint of physics. (ibid)

It is this kind of thinking that drives Nagel to perceive an underlying tension between the subjective and objective; he sees it as an impossible task to reconcile them completely in a way that allows for a 'unified world view' (Nagel, T. 'VFN' p4), and believes that one has to tolerate such an 'internal-external tension' (Nagel, T. 'VFN' p6). Nevertheless, that is not an excuse for philosophical idleness and, in some cases, (according to Nagel) it is necessary for the subjective to be in some way involved, and it is down to our cognitive capacities to deliver us (in the same way as one might ascertain the existence of planet X) and eventually determine to what extent.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a very fine example of what Wittgenstein means when (in the *Philosophical Investigations*) he asserts that 'Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language' (PI: 109). This is discussed in detail in section 4.0.

Even those who regard philosophy as real and important know that they are at a particular and, we may hope, early stage of its development, limited by their own primitive intellectual capacities and relying on the partial insights of a few great figures from the past. (Nagel, T. 'VFN'. p10)

This passage raises another interesting point *viz.*, that philosophy is capable of making progress in the same way as science; it is interesting because it reiterates Nagel's belief that the kind of deliberation involved in both disciplines is identical, and presupposes the existence of concepts outside humanity that will make this possible. In other words, such concepts have to be underwritten by the possibility of external justification. One could certainly not use humanity itself as a form of justification, as part of what constitutes humanity is individuality and (consequently) it would leave us unable to distinguish personal from impersonal.

Now, in terms of ethics, Nagel perceives that 'the duality of perspectives is too deep for us reasonably to hope to overcome it. A fully agent-neutral morality is not a plausible human goal' (Nagel, T. 'VFN'. p185); the 'duality of perspectives' (*ibid.*) being subjective (personal) and objective (impersonal) in constant conflict with each other. What we can hope for however, is a process in which we strive for objectivity and, in so doing, correct our formerly more subjective views that were based on more personal perspectives. Certainly, Nagel thinks, the more we manage to escape from the subjective and embrace the objective, the more likely we are to recognise agent-neutral reasons for acting morally.

From the objective standpoint, the fundamental thing leading to the recognition of agent-neutral reasons is a sense that no one is more important than anyone else. The question then is whether we are all equally unimportant or all equally important, and the answer, I think, is somewhere in between. (Nagel, T. 'VFN'. p171).

Perhaps this is how we will be able to measure moral progress? – In other words, assuming we manage to achieve a reasonably objective perspective (without too much subjectivity) or, as Nagel puts it, without relying too much 'on the specifics of the individual's makeup and position in the world, or on the character of the particular type of creature he is' (Nagel, T. 'VFN'.p5), we should be able to develop agent-neutral and deontological reasons upon which we can fall back, and which go to make up a general platform of reasons from which we can move forward (thus making for

moral progress). – But, Nagel wonders, are we all ‘equally unimportant or all equally important’? (Nagel, T. ‘VFN’. p171). – He perceives the answer to be ‘somewhere in between’ (ibid.) and thinks that this has an influence on the development of agent-neutral reasons inasmuch as he sees tension between the subject just getting what he wants, and values that come ‘as close as possible to being universal’ (ibid.); the latter he equates to the impersonal.

It is Nagel’s overall position concerning the necessarily impersonal nature of objectivity and the notion that there is only one kind of deliberation, that I fundamentally disagree with. Why – for instance – should we consider individuals as equally important or unimportant? – Why not instead base one’s moral considerations on an appreciation of the capacities of other human beings to grieve, love, hate, forgive etc., in a way that one does oneself and, in this respect, pay attention to the particularity of individuals rather than attempting to develop a series of impersonal (Universalizable) reasons or principles that one can just fall back on and apply irrespective of the individuality of the agents involved? When one commits an act that is morally reprehensible and comes to an understanding of the dreadfulness of what one has done, as well as what one has become in the process, one’s guilt represents more than the breaking of a few principles or moral directives - it is concentrated on the individuality of victim and perpetrator; indeed morality itself is, to a degree, informed by such individuality. If this were not so, where would we start? My argument is that moral deliberation is distinct from, say, scientific or mathematical deliberation, and that proper moral deliberation is not achieved through hoisting the grammar of scientific deliberation upon it.

### 1.2. *The Personal Character of Moral Problems I*

There is a curious, and largely ignored paradox when one sees morality purely in terms as a guide to conduct: What I have done (as the moral element in the situation) is to plant a moral obstruction in place and, through it, given myself the task of *finding* a resolution that overcomes it; it is generally agreed that if there is no human element involved, then there is no moral element either. So, ‘would it not be far simpler and more rational to be shot of the thing altogether?’ (Winch. MI. p.173.). I think that Winch touches an issue here that is very important *viz.*, that a formal argument which suggests a certain course of action or a certain conception of the nature of morality, is not always the reasonable (or rational) argument, or rather, its

conclusions are not ones that we would or *should* (as human beings and not merely rational agents) seriously consider adopting. There is a lot in the last sentence that needs to be elucidated, but for the moment I have (for the sake of clarity and because of the current lack of the necessary conceptual apparatus) to concentrate on the conception of morality as a guide to conduct.

When I talk of “finding”, it is in a different sense to the one in which I find the right answer to, say, my navigational problems – for although the notion of discovery is common to both, in the case of moral dilemmas the answer is not already out there waiting to be discovered – hanging on some objective realm as it were. Now, one might argue that the answer to my navigational difficulty is not ‘out there’ either, insofar as there are different paths or roads I could take; it only becomes a problem for *me* when I want to get home as quickly as possible. But the point is (and I touched on this earlier) that while getting home as quickly as possible is a problem for me, it need not be, in the sense that it is only accidentally mine; the nature of the reason as to why I have to get home quickly is irrelevant (it is a different issue). In other words, anyone else could have *precisely* the same problem. Now in terms of the answer to my navigational difficulty being ‘out there’, what I mean is that there is a definite right answer to – for instance – the question: “Which is the quickest way out of the woods?” One either knows, or does not know the answer and, in the case of the latter scenario, there are definite measures that anyone can take to rectify one’s ignorance – and the answer can be thus formed: “The quickest route out of the wood is X.”

### 1.3. *Moral and Non-Moral Problems*

A moral problem and the deliberation involved in finding a resolution to it is distinct from that of a practical problem in the ordinary sense, such as the one I have been discussing. A practical problem (such as my navigational difficulty) has, at the end of it, a definite answer that can be put into propositional form; this is not so with the moral answer. Accordingly, the two should be treated differently; but is that to suggest that there are no right moral answers? The answer to this question is both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ and I provide clarification of this assertion later on when I look at the nature of moral thought, and argue that the conception of such thought is often corrupt. For the time being it suffices to say that there are no absolute right moral answers if we treat moral thought and understanding as possessing the same (or similar) grammar as that of thoughts relating to (for instance) my navigational

difficulty; however, the answer is in the affirmative if we treat the two kinds of thought and understanding as grammatically distinct. To treat the two kinds of problem differently also rather neatly accounts for why there are many experts in the field of (for instance) navigation, but none in the field of morality – the latter being inherently personal. In this respect, evidence suggests that moral deliberations are of an extraordinary kind. The moral problem is a special kind of problem, the nature of which I shall try to make clear.

#### 1.4. *Morality: Practical or Theoretical Problem?*

A practical problem is normally contrasted with a theoretical one, i.e. as in two kinds of problem; practical problems are essentially conceived of as involving action and agency, and moral problems seen as a kind of subset of the practical. Principally, on this conception, morality is seen as a guide to conduct. I have been trying to make the distinction between the non-moral (navigational difficulty) problem and the moral problem, which I believe has a special kind of character (although I have not specified it as such thus far). There is a clear sense, I have argued, in which there is an objectively shortest route out of the wood – whether or not I happen to discover it, whereas there is no similar sense of a singular answer to a moral problem.

Now, there are forceful ways in which this distinction can be doubted. Firstly, there is a sense (it can be claimed) in which the consequences of my moral choice may reveal that I did do the right thing, in the same way that I can check a map when I have returned safely home to ascertain the shortest route out of the wood in which I was lost. Secondly, because both navigational and moral decisions are practical ones, and therefore involve action, all action is to be partly conceived as an appreciation of value in the world. Someone who supports this line would subsequently argue that even a trite non-moral example of choosing Ketchup X over Ketchup Y in Morrison's supermarket involves antecedent values (e.g. one being cheaper than the other) that allows such choice to be meaningful (in this case an expression of my desire to save money). Looking at it this way, my earlier navigational problem is only a problem for *me* when I seek the *shortest* way as opposed to the fastest or prettiest way, which is what others might be seeking. And in this respect, the traditional conception of a practical problem can be seen as having theoretical associations; that is to say, a solution to such a problem can be hypothesised in a theory that is made up of a series

of propositions which subsequently can be validated or invalidated. This is to miss the point however, as well as tacitly considering morality purely as a guide to conduct.

I shall deal with the ‘missing the point’ charge and address my belief that morality should not be seen as a guide to conduct in a later section. As I have already mentioned, the problem need not be mine in any sense other than that I happen to be the unfortunate victim of my own navigational ignorance, and I put this in terms of the problem being accidentally mine. – I could say that it is mine by chance. I think confusion arises here as a result of believing that this issue is *manifestly* mine because at that time it *happens* to be mine and that because I have need to exit the wood by the shortest or quickest route, that that (other) need (whatever it may be) weighs in on behalf of the argument that such a difficulty or dilemma is mine in a profound sense<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, the need that necessitates I find the shortest way out of the wood may well be profoundly mine; but even if that is the case, it has no bearing on the nature of my navigational difficulty. The point is that the navigational difficulty need not be *mine*, and that it could be someone else’s without any change in its character and without the character of the individual concerned having a bearing on it either. Now, in terms of antecedent values, we are dealing with a conception of thought in which everything is truth-valued against everything else. I think this is where the problem lies and I look at this in detail presently.

Where does the answer to a moral dilemma come from? – If one says that a response to a moral dilemma is personal in the sense that one has (as Sartre famously thought) to choose and invent one’s morality – and it is tempting to do this in light of the notion that the answer is not already out there – then, intuitively, it somehow seems to cheapen the value of the moral positions one arrives at. I feel that whilst I have sincerely committed myself to the right position, deductively speaking (i.e. from coming to understand that morality is wholly mine and that somebody else’s morality is wholly theirs), it makes no sense to think or believe this. Nevertheless, Sartre supposed that this is precisely why moral judgements mattered so much. He saw that each of us uses freedom in different ways – including different moral ways – and that I (for instance) choose to see wrongness or offence in a particular act, whether as the perpetrator or the victim; I choose to allow my guilt to cripple me, to express

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<sup>6</sup> The meaning of profound I have in mind, is one that suggests that there is no possibility of the problem being anyone else’s in precisely the same way. Such a possibility does exist in terms of a navigational difficulty.

righteous indignation over an act, and so on. People choose differently in response to the same situation – hence morality is relative. Now, it *matters* insofar as when I choose in this way, i.e. for myself, I am also implicitly choosing for others; my action therefore constitutes a recommendation for others and, as such, matters greatly. One's decisions can also, in Sartre's view, matter personally as well. The example that Sartre gives in *Existentialism and Humanism* concerning the student who comes to him for advice over whether to fight in the war or take care of his mother, is relative in that there is no correct solution to the dilemma: "You are free, therefore chose – that is to say, invent." (Sartre 'E&H' p.38). No matter what the final decision he makes, it will have huge implications for his life, not only in terms of the subsequent events that will transpire in choosing one over the other, but also in how he comes to see himself as a result of having done so (see difference between guilt and shame). Consequently his moral judgement mattered because, in this case, it will influence the framework against which he will make all other judgements in the future. His decision has, as it were, become a part of his individuality<sup>7</sup>. My area of disagreement with Sartre lies in the idea that we are free to rid ourselves of, for instance, crippling guilt. If one has, say, given way to temptation and consequently committed a morally reprehensible act for which one feels extreme guilt, one is not subsequently free from guilt. – One's guilt is a necessary manifestation of coming to a full understanding of what one has done and we cannot free ourselves from such understanding.

Equally, one might take the view that if one acts in a wholly rational way in response to a moral problem, this will reveal certain independent moral facts; these facts might be derived from – for instance - the Kantian Universalizability thesis or the Consequentialist argument. I realise that the word 'rational' is a philosophically dangerous word, but I am using it here in a way that is, at least, a sign of formal argument; so, for instance, one might contrast a supposed paradigm of rational behaviour such as self-interest with that of moral behaviour<sup>8</sup>. Thus we might say (cheaply) that it makes sense to speak of acting from self-interest but not from moral reasons, since the use of concepts that exist within our moral vocabulary are purely emotive, irrational and highly subjective, while (it is said) we can argue objectively and in a 'logical' way which can be formalised in terms of our own self-interest; it

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<sup>7</sup> Sartre is certainly not saying that anything you choose is acceptable, as I hope to have made clear. For one's choices matter in terms of how they matter for others, as well as for one's own future decisions.

<sup>8</sup> I am aware that Kant and many others would not agree with the content of this example, but that is not the issue.

makes sense to talk of self-interest as it is something that can be understood as selfishness. Both these answers have aspects in them that are correct. In the latter answer, for example, there is the desire for elimination of error through objectivity by way of appealing to deductive argument (often at the expense of the personal), and in the former there is a desire to place individual moral affection at the heart of any account of moral judgement. Nevertheless, I argue that we should not side with one or other camp, no matter how sophisticated their arguments. Moral judgements are necessarily, but not simply, personal; there is the possibility of genuine disagreement within ethics and thus of value and significance – implicit in this latter assertion is the possibility of objectivity and, accordingly, that an individual's moral position can also be wrong. But how is this so? In the following section, I begin to discuss what I see as incorrect conceptions of the nature of moral thought, and that such conceptions are born from fear of error; this will be a theme that I develop throughout the thesis. This is one of the major factors in my attempt to demonstrate that moral judgements are necessarily, but not simply, personal and that we should not consider morality purely in terms of a guide to conduct.

### 1.5. *Objectivity, Moral Thought (1) and 'Otherness'*

In order to dispel completely the notion that (moral) objectivity is necessarily bound up with the idea of 'otherness', and to allow for it in judgements that are necessarily personal, it is essential before moving on, to clarify the difference in the kind of thinking that takes place in a moral dilemma that is significant for an individual, from one that is no different from a practical one i.e. one that is set (for instance) as a problem for philosophy students.

When I suggested in the previous paragraph that I wished to dispel the idea that objectivity is completely bound up with the idea of 'otherness', I was using the term 'otherness' as indicating something that exists outside the human. This form of 'otherness' would, for instance, be characterised by a situation in which money had been stolen and everyone who was present at the time of its disappearance starts firing off about how awful it is that, in a trusted group of people, this sort of thing can happen and so on. Eventually, it is decided that the problem must be looked at objectively i.e. in such a way that each one of us "stands back from the problem" and allows for a general consensus to be reached concerning the best course of action. Now, this sort of thinking is perfectly legitimate provided that one (following Wiggins

in 'NVT' p173) finds the right amount of detachment with which to view it. Inappropriate detachment can result in cynicism, sentimentality and so on. This is a seemingly arbitrary process however, and is not one that can just be accepted without question; that said, I believe that 'appropriate' detachment as opposed to complete detachment is what marks the boundary between sanity and madness (I shall investigate these claims in detail later on). So what does this mean in terms of objectivity and 'otherness'? Essentially, what I am trying to get at is that a *view from nowhere* represents a purely cognitive view of the world by treating human beings as simply other entities in the world; as such, one separates the cognitive from the non-cognitive. The idea of objectivity as equivalent to 'otherness' and the separation of cognitive from non-cognitive in this respect, can be demonstrated nicely if we consider an anthropologist who gives an overly emotional account of a particular culture or race of people, or a scientist who provides a flawed account of the lifecycle of a Puffin. In such cases one can extract the cognitive content from the non-cognitive content and, at the very least, see how and where each went wrong. Perhaps, for instance, the scientist studying Puffins found them particularly endearing birds and allowed his attempted objective account to suffer as a result of a tendency to anthropomorphise them. Now, one might still be able to extract the raw data from this account, or a new attempt at providing an account might have to be made. Whatever the case, such non-cognitive / cognitive distinctions are very useful in diagnosing such problems insofar as one can extract such subjective, human tendencies (such as the propensity to anthropomorphise) from providing a completely dispassionate account of the nature of something. That said, to anthropomorphise is part of what it is to be a human being and should not be dismissed as something we should always attempt to eradicate in order to be better human beings. That such a characteristic can be obstructive in certain situations, is doubtless true (as in above example) – but it is also, among other things, a vital tool in our conceptual apparatus that allows appreciation of other creatures, and can also afford us great comfort in times of loneliness even if such comfort is corrupt<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Consider, for instance, a young child and his favourite teddy-bear; that the soft toy can be imbued with human qualities is obviously a corrupt form of thought, nevertheless it can often bring great comfort to that child in times of need (e.g. parents rowing or divorcing, death of a family relative and so on). Would any reasonable person say to the child that he should stop being ridiculous and face the fact that such comfort is completely false, because of course the teddy-bear is purely inanimate? I do not think so.

Another way of viewing this characterisation of objectivity involves returning to my earlier example of someone with a navigational difficulty. In this case, the problem was only accidentally the problem of a particular individual and there definitely existed right and wrong answers to the question of the quickest or shortest route out of the wood. In other words, the solutions to such difficulties would have been identical for anyone lost in the same area of woodland, regardless of the character of the particular individual involved. As such, one can understand that the problem can be viewed objectively in the sense of excluding human characteristics, and in such a case it would make no difference whether we were human or computer.

Nevertheless, the understanding just characterised is not the kind that I refer to when I consider the possibility of moral judgments being objective. However, that is not to say that one should make a definite distinction between two kinds of objectiveness – far from it. The character of objectivity remains the same, but the grammar of our understanding that allows for it may vary. A good way to begin to explain what I have in mind is to consider the idea that, whilst the above characterisation of objectivity allows for the increase of knowledge, it cannot be of any use in terms of the capacity for potential depth of character (and what it is to allow for one's understanding to deepen) that every human being has. In his memoir of Wittgenstein, Norman Malcolm records some of the conversations he had with Wittgenstein. In one of these, Wittgenstein comments:

Doubt, belief, certainty – like feelings, emotions, pain, etc. – have characteristic facial expressions. Knowledge does *not* have a characteristic facial expression. There is a *tone* of doubt, and a tone of conviction, but no tone of knowledge. (Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*. OUP. p75).

This, I think, helps to highlight the accidental nature of factual knowledge (such as the kind involved in my navigational example) insofar as it suggests that knowledge of facts does not require any particular individual – it is knowledge no matter who possesses it, and thus, on its own, is not enough to bring about an increase in depth of individual character. The otherness that I am trying to illuminate is that in which one clearly recognises another's humanity and, as such, recognises the 'preciousness' of

such a life<sup>10</sup>. And this is not achieved merely through recognising another human being as a series of properties, even if one never treats those properties as means to ends. It must be sincerely recognised between one human and another that right and wrong, courage and cowardice, sincerity and trust, friendship and animosity and so on, exist in the world, insofar as they manifest themselves in humanity; yet they are not “properties” of a human being and, as such, should not be treated as knowledge that is propositional in kind. They are an aspect of humanity (as is shown in our critical vocabulary when, say, we talk of someone as a friend) that separates us from purely thinking things. Consequently, it should now be possible to grasp that one can appreciate the possibility of objectivity in a way that does not always require a purely cognitive view of the world. – But where does this leave subjectivity? – Surely all I have done is describe subjectivity and labelled it objectivity? I would answer that subjectivity in ethics should more or less be equated with selfishness; this selfishness would show up in many of one’s moral judgements - such judgements can be said to have the property of subjectivity. Thus, if one is a selfish person, many of one’s moral judgements will possess the property of subjectivity. More complexly, subjectivity conveys a lack of understanding of an ‘other’s’ humanity, and I would suggest that these two characteristics are closely related; for although most people have at least one person in their lives who they respect, it does not necessarily follow that they accord that person the same capacity to grieve, be hurt and torn apart, love and so on that they have themselves. That is to say, a selfish human being does not see others as fully as he sees himself and, in this respect, I would equate selfishness with a lack of understanding; this I would label subjectivity. Gaita however uses the example of an individual suffering from a dangerous pathological condition who cannot grasp the reality of murders that he has committed, but who, nevertheless is aware of being wronged. Now, Gaita sees this kind of pathological condition as a kind of blindness to the reality of what it means to be another human being, and I would advocate that this is a kind of helpless subjectivity. This is some way removed from the average selfish person however, and I do not wish to be understood as equating the two. The point I am trying to make is that the possibility of objectivity exists in more than just taking a human-neutral approach and that, in the way I have just described, objectivity and subjectivity are possible within ethics in terms of selfishness and appreciation of what

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<sup>10</sup> I borrow the term ‘preciousness’ from Raimond Gaita’s book *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*.

it means to be an 'other' human being. This is what I meant when I said earlier that moral judgements are necessarily, but not simply, personal. They are not simply individual preferences (although they can be if one is selfish); rather they are necessarily personal in a way that involves full appreciation of an 'other's' humanity. I hope to have at least created doubt about the conception of moral thought that has everything truth-valued against everything else<sup>11</sup>.

### *1.6. The Abstract Moral Dilemma and Public and Personal Morality*

What is confusing with abstract moral dilemmas, is that it is *possible* to give them to philosophy students and for them to spend time attempting to find the right position to adopt or thing to do, in the same sense as finding the right direction in which to travel when lost and confronted by a crossroads, or trying to find the right way out of the wood; they deliberate, discuss with each other, and attempt to find out what to do, and in most cases there is often a great deal of disagreement. Here, I think, it would be prudent to distinguish between two overlapping ideas *viz.*, personal and public morality; although this is not a topic I wish to spend a great deal of time on - since my main concern is describing what occurs when each of us makes moral judgments and that such judgements are necessarily but not simply personal - it is nonetheless necessary to address it to avoid certain objections. Needless to say, personal moral judgments are of the kind where a particular person is implicated in the choice. Public (or political) morality, by contrast, deals with a situation where no particular person is implicated in the choice, but where a coherent public policy has to be adopted - the big issues in the media provide good examples of this. These kinds of problems must be worth discussing with philosophy students - indeed, with anyone come to that.

Intuitively, it is tempting to speak of collective moral decision, and suggest that any such decisions are based on some sort of utilitarian mandate. Putting aside political cynicism, on this intuitive conception, government decisions in healthy democracies are generally based on affording the greatest satisfaction to the greatest number under its jurisdiction; whatever the case in terms of difference between political or public moral decisions and personal moral judgments, consequentialists will see no inconsistency there, insofar as they believe that this should be the case

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<sup>11</sup> In the same way as (for instance in mathematics)  $2+2=4$  makes sense because of its relationship with  $2+1=3$  and  $2+3=5$  and so on.

personally as well. However, some philosophers reject consequentialism on the individual level, but endorse it politically i.e., they might believe that while individuals should never perpetrate acts of evil for a good outcome, politically speaking, acts of evil can be justified in terms of considering the greater good of the country as a whole. Indeed, some might speak of political obligation in this way, and would consider a government negligent or foolish if, when required, it refused to act in such a fashion. My point is that one cannot separate the political from the ethical, since one's conception of political responsibility itself relies on one's ethical conceptions; but that is not to deny that there are separate issues between the public and personal, nor is it to deny that political issues can throw up moral ones. Nevertheless, I would intuitively suggest, that to hold out for consequentialism politically but not personally, is to show that either one's view is inconsistent, or that one's whole ethical conception contains underlying consequentialist sympathies. Is this right? – Are we all, at the end of the day, consequentialists? There are similarities between fair and just politics and personal moral judgements, the most important of which I take to be the recognition of right and wrong in both moral spheres. One can judge the actions and motives of a government as being terrible or evil – consider for instance the regimes of Saddam Hussein or Adolf Hitler; these regimes chose to do evil rather than being forced into a situation where they were required to do it. One can also judge governments of other countries in terms of whether they acted in the right or wrong way towards such terribleness and evil. Perhaps one thinks of responses as proportional to the nature and depth of the wrong committed; certainly that is the case in terms of individual crime. If, for instance, we consider the crime of murder, generally speaking, the punishment for such a crime is life imprisonment; and this is not simply a shallow and thoughtless consequence of wanting to rid society of a dangerous lawbreaker, it is bound up with the very notion of what murder actually is *viz.*, a form of evil which can only (without sentimental anthropomorphising) be attributed to human beings. Such evil is a violation of what is just, and an appreciation of evil or wrong done, and the demand for justice in the face of it, entails punishment. Thus punishment should be seen in the same light as good, evil, and justice – or indeed, as a part of justice. The consequentialist, I think, would employ political examples to show that, since one can establish definite connections between personal and public morality, that personal morality must be made of the same stuff.

In other words according to the consequentialist, we must at all ethics 'levels' be fundamentally consequentialist.

If we accept this however, then it forces us to dismiss from consideration the possibility of the profound appreciation of otherness (i.e. over and above welfare) and, consequently, punishment would be merely a way of ridding ourselves of undesirable and / or dangerous elements in our society. Now, I'm not denying that part of the reason for imprisoning criminals is to stop them harming others, but if it were the whole reason, then why not imprison all criminals, from petty thieves to pathological killers, for the rest of their lives<sup>12</sup>? After all, although it is possible that they might not re-offend once released, it is quite possible that they will, and thus still be a menace to society and, formally and inductively speaking, this might well be the way to proceed. But the point is that it is not the *reasonable* or just way to proceed, and that is because part of what it is to be human, is to have a sense of justice<sup>13</sup>. If the authorities were to act in the way just described, we would think them mad or insane – this is a very important point and one that I will return to when I discuss the nature of moral thought.

Nevertheless, it seems that we are still faced with the idea that political decisions are fundamentally consequentialist, and also with the close connection (through concepts such as evil) between such decisions and personal moral judgments. I accept that there is a concrete connection between public or political decisions and personal moral judgment – indeed, I would argue that the existence of a politic is fundamentally ethical insofar as it has, pervading through it, a sense of right, wrong, and justice, and must have this in order to be political<sup>14</sup>. However, that is not to say that all aspects of politics are brimming with justice – some are highly unjust, but they are recognised as such and (certainly in our political system), generally speaking, opposed. In oppressive totalitarian regimes there is very little, if any, justice in the upper echelons of power, and certainly no occasion for opposition as, by and large, the ruling despot seems to have very little understanding of the humanity of others (his subjects). Such despots *must necessarily* see their subjects as “not as human as themselves” in order to act the way they do, but that is not to say that they

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<sup>12</sup> In many cases, pathological killers cannot be rehabilitated and so are imprisoned for life.

<sup>13</sup> Pathological killers are a slightly different and (interesting cases) in that they fail (as a result of cerebral malfunction) to recognise fully the humanity of another human – although they are quite capable of recognising when it is they who have been wronged.

<sup>14</sup> Such a sense of justice can often be corrupt (or corrupted) however, but that is a different issue.

would not be able to recognise their subjects as human beings from photographs or books on biology; rather, it means that they fail to understand what it is that makes a human life i.e. a sense of justice, right, wrong, courage, cowardice, the capacity for friendship, love and the appreciation of beauty *et cetera*. No doubt they recognise these traits within themselves when they occur, which is how (the way in which) they are so selfish (and subjective), and further authenticates the claim that they must necessarily look upon their subjects as “not as human as themselves”.

Naturally there will be times when, politically, a government is pushed into the disagreeable position where it has to decide between two courses of action that will involve the deaths of innocent people; such decisions consequentialists use to advance their argument. However, they miss what is important *viz.*, that fundamentally, justice remains at the heart of the decision, even if those who have made the decision have only thought about it in terms of the best possible outcome. For in this case, the government is trying to come to a decision that will minimise the loss of innocent human life. The point I am making here is that whilst such extreme decision-making is in agreement with the consequentialist argument, not all decision making will be so; there will be times when the demands of justice conflict with the best outcome for the many. However, it is interesting to note how the consequentialist employs such extreme examples; they attempt to persuade us that a political situation in which some form of wickedness is necessary, is itself a moral consideration and that, as such, moral considerations are therefore consequentialist. I shall try and make this clearer. Suppose a political situation arises in which the taking of innocent human life becomes unavoidable. The politicians are thus forced to consider which course of action will spare the most lives, but that is not a decision that rests within morality - it is a political decision that is connected to morality only by a sense of humanity and justice. In such a case, morality is in opposition to politics (public decision making) because a moral consideration – i.e. one within morality - would never *require* wickedness. In this way, morality exists outside of politics – for one cannot (morally) weigh human life in terms of quantity saved; to do so would be to trivialise its meaning. This point can be extended to examples that are less ‘public’ or ‘political’, and in this respect I want to take an example that Nagel provides in his book *A View From Nowhere*.

You have an auto accident one winter night on a lonely road. The other passengers are badly injured, the car is out of commission, and the road is deserted, so you run along it till you find an isolated house. The house turns out to be occupied by an old woman who is looking after her small grandchild. There is no phone, but there is a car in the garage, and you ask desperately to borrow it, and explain the situation. She doesn't believe you. Terrified by your desperation she runs upstairs and locks herself in the bathroom, leaving you alone with the child. You pound ineffectively on the door and search without success for the car keys. Then it occurs to you that she might be persuaded to tell you where they are if you were to twist the child's arm outside the bathroom door. Should you do it? (Nagel, T. 'VFN'.p176).

Leaving aside the callousness of the grandmother locking herself in the bathroom and leaving her grandchild (she was supposed to be caring for) alone to face the perceived horror outside, the issue here is that Nagel's example is comparable to the political decisions I described that require wickedness. In other words (assuming that the only possibilities are that either the child's arm gets twisted or the passengers in the car fail to get to hospital), some kind of harm is necessary, and in this respect, whatever decision is made rests outside morality. Nagel invokes the call to morality at the wrong point.

The consequentialist however, would argue that we should see the requirement to commit an act of wickedness as a moral requirement, in terms of choosing the option in which the fewest number of people are harmed or killed. In other words, the consequentialist sees a consideration that is in opposition to a moral consideration *as* a moral consideration. If we are to accept the consequentialist line as proper moral thought, then a necessary consequence is that human life is quantity-valued. And how can one weigh a single human life against ten or a thousand?

In this section I have sought to show the difference between public and personal morality; public morality essentially belongs to the realm of political decision and, while much of the time the two happily harmonize, there are times when they come into conflict. When this happens, one must take care not to treat a political decision that requires necessary wickedness, as existing within the realm of the moral. So where exactly does the boundary lie between public (political) decision and personal moral judgement? To talk of exactness in this realm is, I think, misleading – for we are then compelled to think in terms of propositions, i.e. in terms of finding a formula that establishes a standpoint from which all considerations can be determined as fitting into one or other camp. This, I think, is one of the classic cases in which one

should employ Wittgenstein's maxim for philosophical method in his *Philosophical Investigations* - namely: 'Don't think, but look!' (PI:66). In subsequent examinations of the nature of moral thought, I look at the role that the proposition plays in such thought and examine whether it has a part to play in moral objectivity. I also spend longer arguing against the notion that morality should be seen purely in terms of a guide to conduct.

### 1.7. *The Scope of a Situation*

However, what is unique about a moral dilemma is that it is only truly vital to those actually involved in the situation in which the dilemma is apparent. Nevertheless, this surely depends on what one understands as the scope of the situation – for instance, I can be concerned about my 15-year-old daughter's choice of how to deal with her pregnancy without actually being involved in *her* choice. I would suggest that to consider my concern as a moral dilemma is to fall foul of an error similar to that of the one I described the consequentialist as making in the previous section. A slight variation exists here however, in terms of what counts as consideration. With the political example in the previous section, there was an actual consideration *viz.*, to find a way to spare the largest number of innocent lives. In this case, I may be concerned that my daughter does the right thing in terms of herself and the unborn child and thus show my moral sensibility but, providing I do not interfere with her decision making beyond offering advice I am, so to speak, out of the moral loop. The moral requirement is on my daughter and, in this sense, the moral scope of the situation only extends as far as she does; the decision is fundamentally hers<sup>15</sup>. The politicians that were required to make a decision involving an act of wickedness were also outside of the moral loop in terms of moral consideration. This is essentially what I mean by moral scope. What causes confusion, as Gaita highlights, is that the kind of thought bound up in moral thinking is different from that involved in non-moral thinking, but is not conceived as such; rather, anything that doesn't come under the realm of impersonal thought is believed to be located elsewhere:

The perplexity arises because one treats the difficulty of seeing what (morally) to do as a difficulty for thought which is no different in kind for the person whose problem it is than for

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<sup>15</sup> Naturally one might say that, in a situation such as this, a father has a moral obligation to advise his young daughter. That is, no doubt, true, but in such a case the moral onus is on the father and not the daughter thus making it a different (albeit closely related) moral problem.

a class of moral philosophy students rehearsing an exercise in ‘practical ethics’. And this is because of a general conception of what thinking is and of the way in which it is impersonal: thinking has to do with propositions, their truth-value and their logical bearing upon one another, and these can be assessed by anyone with the requisite capacities of mind, none of which make necessary reference to the individual who has them. Hence it is felt that, if we are to understand the way in which morality is personal, then we must locate its personal character somewhere other than in thought. (Gaita. TPE. p130-1)

What needs to be made explicit then, is in what sense moral thought is thought. Before this is done however, it is worth mentioning some of the consequences of believing that anything that is not thought, in the sense that it can be assessed ‘by anyone with the requisite capacities of mind’ (ibid.) is located elsewhere. Suppose that one is in a situation in which there is a deep-seated moral issue that one is wholly serious about, and that it is insufferably difficult to know what to do<sup>16</sup> - what often happens in moral philosophy is that while the existence of a moral dilemma is recognised, it is forgotten that the person who is actually involved stands in relation to a reality that a class of moral philosophers (or anyone else for that matter) do not, *viz.* access to that person’s whole life in an intimate and profound sense<sup>17</sup>. Now, this is not relevant to public or political decision of the kind I described in section 1.6, but it might be argued that a class of moral philosophers can have access to enough of the relevant parts of another person’s life – for instance, if the person involved is a trained lifeguard or a doctor then they can expect him to do things that others would not – to be sufficiently connected to that person’s life in terms of making such a decision. Moreover, it can be argued that in some cases, my close friends know me better than I know myself. I shall address this last point first.

I have already highlighted the differences between practical problems such as navigational difficulties and moral problems; there are definite answers to navigational problems (consider the shortest or quickest way out of the wood, for instance) that are propositional in form and can be remembered in a way that allow an individual to claim that he is knowledgeable. As such, I can be an authority on the navigational complexities of my local patch of woodland and it would be sensible to

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<sup>16</sup> I use the word “insufferably” deliberately in order to convey how heavily the (moral) dilemma must weigh on the individual. Critical concepts such as this one are largely ignored in moral philosophy and wrongly so. I deal with this neglect in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>17</sup> In the same way as (say) a man has access to his love for his wife in a way that no one else does (even if she had another lover).

ask me for advice on that topic if visiting the area for the first time. To ask my best friend (or anyone for that matter) for moral advice is a completely different story and can be demonstrated firstly, by the conspicuous lack of moral ‘experts’ and moral instruction booklets and secondly by the individual nature of moral response. I might later say that the advice I received from my friend was sound, but that is not the same thing as saying that my friend imparted knowledge to me. First of all, it was *my* moral response to the initial problem and, in the face of insecurity and uncertainty, *I* subsequently went to my friend for advice; I think this is why people often claim that moral responses are entirely subjective. To assert that my friend “knows me better than I know myself” is, I think, more an expression of admiration of the appropriateness of the advice he gave me (and that obviously includes admiration of his insightfulness into a particular aspect of my character). To suggest that he actually knows me better than I know myself is absurd since that would involve him having two characters mutually analysing each other (i.e. mine and his); moreover, the two characters would each possess unique biographies and, as such, exclusive historically achieved individualities. So, not only are the class of moral philosophers outside the scope of the *moral* aspect of the situation (as in the case of the father and his pregnant 15-year-old daughter outlined earlier), but they have comparatively little insight into the character of the protagonists. As such, they will only be able to look at the problem in terms of seeing morality as a guide to conduct and for that they will no doubt appeal to various ethical theories. Seeing morality purely in terms of a guide to conduct is, I argue, mistaken since one cannot treat it as such and simultaneously see the human being as a sensitive moral agent able to understand the requirements of right and wrong and what it means to be wicked. Such moral affection is uniquely personal as is the guilt engendered by an action that is understood by the perpetrator as being morally suspect. Guilt itself is a phenomenon peculiar to morality and what it means to be a human being; everyone has the capacity for guilt, but it is not something that can be shared except in a sense of false fellowship.

All the same, what about the sense of guilt felt by modern Germans for atrocities committed by their country in the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? – Surely that is collective? Such guilt, I think, would be better understood and characterized as shame; guilt is closely related to the actions and thoughts of particular individuals and manifests itself through an understanding (by the perpetrator) of the violation of his victim’s humanity and, simultaneously, what he himself has become. – And this, in

turn, is intimately related to the particularity of the victim. However, the grandsons of those who were responsible for a country's misdemeanours share their grandfathers' sense of national identity – indeed it is such historical influence (among other things) that conditions a sense of national identity. The grandfathers provide their grandsons with a sense of heritage which is necessary for a properly conditioned sense of national identity; as such, the sons and grandsons can be (and indeed should be) ashamed of their grandfathers' participation in their country's atrocities<sup>18</sup>. – But that is not to say that such (active) shame should persist forever – it should last no longer than three or four generations; for once more than three or so generations have passed, the acuteness of wrongs done begins to disperse and wane in the currents of cultural change. One can still acknowledge wrongs committed, but it would make no sense for me to feel actively ashamed of my country for acts committed two-hundred years ago, unless no (or inadequate) recompense had been given in the spirit of repentance; or unless shameful actions persisted. Ultimately, one can only properly take pride in one's country's achievements if one also accepts the possibility of being ashamed of its misdemeanours.

Raimond Gaita describes the false fellowship of the guilty as 'a guilty collective' (Gaita, 'TPE' p.129), and goes on to argue for the radically personal nature of guilt by pointing out that while it is possible for one individual to recognise another's guilt and share in it to the point where both parties realise they have perpetrated an immoral act, there exists only 'corrupt consolation' (ibid.) in such fellowship – the nature of the guilt itself being 'radically personal' (ibid.). The point that I am trying to raise is that the individual recognition of guilt displays the moral sensitivity of the agent, but also (more importantly) shows the moral understanding of that individual as being incomplete before he perpetrated the act that caused him such guilt. As such, morality and guilt are inextricably linked and consequently moral understanding extends far beyond the point of guiding conduct (unlike the navigational problem). For if one treats morality simply as a guide to conduct, then right and wrong become nothing more than another set of guiding concepts – the same as those involved in how to find the right way out of the wood; that is not to allow for deepened understanding of the meaning of one's actions. Merely following a series of propositions does not in itself ensure understanding in this respect.

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<sup>18</sup> And indeed, those who committed acts of wickedness should be haunted by their guilt.

Now, in terms of the argument that a class of moral philosophers can have access to enough of the relevant parts of another person's life to be sufficiently connected to that life to make moral judgements, it is an argument that still considers morality purely in terms of a guide to conduct. Certainly they can expect the lifeguard or the doctor to do things that they cannot not do, and maybe this will affect the action taken at the time a dilemma occurs. The point is however, that such concerns are extraneous to the moral problem in a similar way to the political decision (see section 1.5.). The doctor or lifeguard may see it as a requirement to exercise their specialist skills, but the moral requirement is to try to save a life and this is extraneous to being a doctor or a lifeguard<sup>19</sup>. This is quite clear if we consider that a doctor's or lifeguard's conception of good and evil is not radically different from our own. Granted, their biographies and capacity for depth may be different from yours or mine, but that is not a difference that is determined by whether they are a doctor or a lifeguard, and certainly has little effect (over and above their respective unique biographies and characters) on their potential for deepened moral understanding. Why not substitute the example of a doctor or lifeguard for that of a philosopher? Surely they have relevant skills in knowing what morally to do?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> It might be the case that a doctor or lifeguard is more likely to save a life in a particular situation, but this is a different issue.

<sup>20</sup> (I think not!)

## CHAPTER II

### 2.0. *Misconceptions of the Nature of Morality and Morality as a calculus of action.*

One of the effects of considering morality as a guide to conduct is that the philosopher falls back on some form of universal theory such as the Universalizability thesis or Consequentialism: “Do what would bring about the most happiness and keep pain and unhappiness to a minimum etc., etc.” - The point here is that this approach may very well not suit the individual concerned and any action based on it may leave him morally uncomfortable. Why is this so? This question will be addressed directly later on; for now, I wish to consider in more detail the effects that treating moral problems with impersonal thought - rather than allowing for a moral deliberation being of a special kind - has on moral philosophy. In considering these effects, I shall also make explicit in what sense a moral ‘thought’ is thought.

The kind of impersonal thinking being discussed runs deep in moral philosophy and, in looking at it and its attendant consequences, I follow closely the arguments advanced by Winch in ‘UMJ’. Winch concentrates his attack on the Universalizability thesis (i.e. that a correct moral position should be applicable to all) and in particular on the form developed by Henry Sidgwick in his book *The Methods of Ethics*; in doing so, he uses Herman Melville’s story *Billy Budd* in an attempt to show that Universalizing moral judgements is not plausible<sup>21</sup>. Sidgwick argues:

We cannot judge an action to be right for A and wrong for B, unless we can find in the natures or circumstance of the two some difference which we can regard as a reasonable ground for difference in their duties. If therefore I judge any action to be right for myself, I implicitly judge it to be right for any other person whose nature and circumstances do not differ from my own in certain important respects.

If a kind of conduct that is right (or wrong) for me is not right (or wrong) for someone else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases, other than the fact that I and he are different persons. (Sidgwick. H. *The Methods of Ethics*. P.384-5. Quoted in Winch. ‘UMJ’. 1972).

Sidgwick here maintains that I am obliged to be consistent in my (moral) judgement of actions perpetrated by different individuals; that is to say that if I act in a way that I deem to be right - having asked the question: what *ought* I to do? - and my best friend

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that Sidgwick’s version of the Universalizability thesis is derived from Kant’s *Categorical Imperative*. Many of the objections made are equally relevant to Kant.

acts in a different way in a situation not relevantly different - then I cannot (unless I have changed my mind in the interim) judge my friend to be right also. Now Sidgwick might respond by saying that the situations *are* different and thus his universalizability still holds. If however one suggests that the situations are different purely in terms of the agent, then this negates the possibility of an applicable universalizability thesis since every agent is different; it follows that, in such a case, universalizability could only exist in a speculative theory with no practical application. I do not imagine that Sidgwick would argue for this, since he thinks that actions are only accidentally connected to particular agents. Winch however, argues that when an agent responds to such an *ought* question:

[T]here is nothing in the meaning of the word 'ought' which logically commits him to accepting as a corollary: 'And anyone else in a situation like this ought to do the same'. (Winch. 'UMJ'. 1972).

Now, if one takes what Winch says prudentially, then it is quite a simple matter to show that he is wrong; for instance, if it rains, I can say that "you ought to take an umbrella!" and this is a statement that can be applied to all human beings, given certain physical facts about them (and umbrellas). However, the argument only carries weight if one sees morality purely as a guide to conduct with every thought truth-valued against every other. If this was the case, then one could be morally knowledgeable, as the right course of action would merely involve drawing on a bank of propositions or, at most, deducing the correct course of action from what one already knows. The mistake (as alluded to earlier) that Sidgwick makes, is that he sees moral dilemmas as being subject to the same kind of thought (grammar) that one employs with non-moral dilemmas (such as navigational difficulties). Such thought truth-values particular thoughts against all others and demands consistency. He does not believe that the kind of agent making the judgement has any logical bearing on what ought to be done. Of course, the identity of the agent is irrelevant to the correctness of the judgement that what he did was wrong: it was theft, and I don't care whether he is a prince or a pauper, it is still wrong. The question that needs to be looked at is that which asks why theft warrants moral consideration and *moral* condemnation. Winch comments:

For Sidgwick, ethics is a sort of calculus of action, in which actions are considered as events merely contingently attached to particular agents. (ibid.)

It is the calculus of action, seeming neglect for the character of the problem, and the conception of morality that apparently has no room for what it means to deepen one's moral understanding (insofar as it is only considered as a guide to conduct) that are problematic for Sidgwick. One can see quite clearly that the condemnation of theft is not just the condemnation of an action; it is a remark that indicates an understanding of the meaning of an action – indeed it says very little purely in terms of the action alone. The perpetrator of a theft can be seen, I think, as a paradigm of the kind of subjectivity that I outlined earlier *viz.*, that he will not have thought too much about the meaning of his (future) action or, if he has, then he has no more than a diminished understanding of the humanity of others. That is not to say however, that he would not consider stealing as wrong; if he were asked whether such behaviour was wrong the response would, most likely, be the affirmative. And he would, no doubt, feel aggrieved were something similar to happen to him. Now, if the thief is sensitive to the nature of the wrong he has committed, then he will feel guilty about his actions – and he will see that what he has done extends far beyond the act to the disregarding of another's humanity; it hurts him also. If he is not sensitive to the nature of the wrong he as perpetrated then, either he suffers from a condition that prevents such perception (which is a different case), or he is supremely selfish and lacking in understanding. Such a condition can be changed by various means, but I think someone who suffers selfishness to the point where they do not feel guilt – providing they do not have a mitigating medical condition – discards all care for other human beings. – And I would suggest that in such cases, the perpetrator cannot be *tempted*, since this would imply an understanding, no matter how distorted, of the meaning of his intended action; he would realise that temptation means straying away from what he would consider as proper behaviour, or as something that would be in line with how he would normally act. Now, if one is tempted (and thus shows oneself to be morally aware) to commit an act that one believes is morally questionable, then it is often the case that one does not grasp fully the meaning of what one is doing. Gaita demonstrates this nicely in *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* when he talks about the evildoer 'getting more than he bargained for' (Gaita.G&E. p231). What this means is that by not fully understanding the meaning of the action one has been

tempted to commit, one acquires, or becomes, something that one had not considered. Someone who is tempted to steal (all the time realising that stealing is wrong), because they are bewitched by the prospect of becoming rich, whilst acquiring what they desire, also becomes something else *viz.*, a thief. The understanding of what they have become is not something that they considered prior to committing theft; and even if they retain what they have gained through the theft, the money can be in no way be as sweet as first hoped, precisely because of the guilt (or remorse) weighing against such sweetness. The money becomes tainted with the reality of that fact that one has become a thief. In such a case, a good person forfeits what he thought he would gain through material wealth and thus hurts himself also. One might conjecture that if such an individual understood exactly what he would be doing to himself (as well as others) – and thus fully, then he would not commit the crime.

I hope to have shown here, that ethics is far more than a calculus of action; it involves an understanding of the meaning of one's actions and, if one is sincere, a desire to deepen such understanding. But how does this show that actions are not 'merely contingently attached to particular agents'? (*ibid.*). If actions were only accidentally attached to particular agents, then an understanding of right and wrong would not be necessary in each case; the agent would just need knowledge of a bank of right and wrong propositions from which they could deduce the correct course of action. The idea of an acquired maturity and character (something that cannot be granted through a series of propositions) would be superfluous, and this is why, in short, such an account can never explain what it means for moral understanding to deepen – for greater moral understanding is acquired through depth of character which, in turn, only comes with maturity.

### 2.1. *Moral Language and Learning by 'Being Moved'*

This is why we have different vocabulary to describe people, their depth of character, sense of justice, their love and so on. It is through such language that one can, for example, reflect on another person's life, learn and achieve a greater moral understanding.

There is a profound (and simple) difference, for instance, between what we mean when we describe someone as immature rather than sensible, or mature rather than silly or juvenile. We might say that a child possesses a very mature attitude in the light of the death of his father, and this is to make the child an exception in our eyes.

His status as a child is, if only in terms of his attitude in the light of his father's death, defying his years, and this neatly captures what I am trying to say *viz.*, that such vocabulary is not just whimsical expression – rather it is necessary and, as such, cannot be reduced without corruption. A child is distinct from an adult in the sense that a child is childish and there is nothing exceptional in this; an adult, whose behaviour or attitude falls short of standards of maturity that one might expect, runs the risk of being termed childish and here there is exception - there is the expectation of a level of maturity associated with adulthood. If an adult is incapable of exercising such maturity, then it is generally thought that they suffer from a condition which places them outside the norm, and appropriate vocabulary exists to describe this also<sup>22</sup>. Our moral vocabulary is similar, in that it possesses at its most extreme levels, pure Good and Evil with various diluted versions occupying the ground in between. Paradigms of either are seldom if ever seen, and should be treated more or less as the umbrella terms under which meaningful moral discourse is possible; I think Gaita treats the Holocaust as the result of pure evil – and perhaps he is right, but even here there is debate, with various polemicists denying its existence. I am not going to stand on one side or other with this particular issue, but it does raise some interesting points concerning the nature of much western moral philosophy. One of the most significant is its propensity to try to avoid direct encounters with vocabulary such as “evil”; indeed, there are some who attempt to deny its existence altogether. My argument is that such modes of description should be actively embraced as, I believe, they occupy the same area of language as, say, the child whose attitude is “mature” beyond his years. One does not need to define such maturity in a child, one merely needs the sensitivity and relevant critical capacities to recognise such instances of it, and the light in which they occur; in the example above, it was maturity in the light of the death of the child's father. For absolute understanding and recognition of the child's mature attitude we also need to see the love that the child has for his father and appreciate that the child has a complete understanding of what his father's death means (these are the relevant critical capacities). This is not to find a universal amount of detachment from which we can all view and correctly criticise such scenarios – for that one would just require a theory or formula that could be put into practice at such times. Likewise, when I talk of moral understanding, I mean a kind of understanding

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<sup>22</sup> There is nothing in what I have said here that should be taken as an opinion about how to behave towards such people.

in which we have been moved in a way we cannot call knowledge, in the same way as none of us can be said to have knowledge of maturity; we may possess a mature outlook and be sensitive enough and critical enough to recognise genuine manifestations of it in others, but that is not knowledge – although it might be wisdom that manifests itself in an ability to be rational. If one did have knowledge of maturity then it would be perfectly possible to explain it to others in the same way as explaining, say, the answer to a mathematical problem to a child. Thus, when I speak of moral understanding I am speaking of a phenomenon that is, in a sense, mysterious – not in a way that suggests we could have such knowledge if only we did not possess such limited intellects, but in a way that cannot be penetrated by explanation. – And this, I think, is where our capacity for moral understanding emanates from – that is, our capacity to learn by being moved.

We can be moved by experience to become cynical and we can be moved in far more immediate ways, such as by beautiful poetry or music; and our respective characters are such, that we are not all moved by the same things. Our capacity to be moved by beauty or someone's love is, I think, a part of what makes us human beings; love is most certainly a human characteristic, though (as a phenomenon and as something from which we can learn) it seems to have been largely ignored in the realm of western moral philosophy<sup>23</sup>. There are many ways in which we can be moved by someone's love – it may have nothing to do with love for ourselves, or the love we feel for another; we might (for instance) be moved simply to appreciate the sanctity of all human life by the recognition of one human being's love for another. – And different people may be moved to recognise the value of life in different ways. I am not in any way suggesting that love is the only phenomenon from which this happens – there is awareness of justice and fairness (for example), but I think that they are all very closely associated. In relation to this (and the earlier example), I believe that such aspects of humanity come into play when we critically judge a particular child to possess a mature attitude in the light of the loss of his father. Thus, concepts such as love, fairness, and maturity are all concepts that are involved in moral understanding and, moreover, can (and should) be used critically. The more we critically exercise such concepts in pursuit of moral understanding, the greater that understanding will become (such understanding is not attained through the acquisition

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<sup>23</sup> Kant, for instance, says very little about where the sanctity of human life actually comes from.

of propositional knowledge). Another example of how we learn by being moved is to consider the love that one human being has for another, and the power that such love has to move them (to marry for instance). If an individual loses someone very dear to his heart, then for a while at least, he may feel a great void in his life; this cannot be rationalised in a way in which he can completely account for his feelings of loss and emptiness. In other words, such things cannot be put into propositional form, no matter how complex. It is our being moved, in ways such as this, which accounts for our belief in the sanctity of human life. Those who fail to see such things can be considered as holding a subjective attitude i.e. not fully recognising the humanity of another and thus unable to be properly objective in moral matters – unless of course they have some medical condition.

If we accept that one can learn by being moved – and I think one has to – then we are faced with the prospect of acquiring the capacity to judge through what we have learned in this way, and have come to believe. Wittgenstein comments: ‘What we believe depends on what we learn’ (Wittgenstein, L. OC: 286), and in such a sense our moral beliefs are likely to change over time; for learning involves far more than acquisition of facts. Suppose, for instance, that a child is told by its parents that a particular attitude or way of behaving is always morally wrong. The child may believe this unquestioningly for sometime; eventually however, he is forced to acknowledge that in a particular circumstance (to which he is privy) his parents are wrong – he is moved in such a way as to realise this and is certain that he is right and his parents wrong. Through this on-going process he achieves what Gaita terms ‘an historically achieved individuality’ (Gaita. TPE. p135) and maturity; and, depending on his sensitivity, a deeper moral understanding.

## *2.2. Universalizability*

Another objection to Sidgwick (not made explicit by Winch) - in terms of his opinion that the kind of agent does not have any logical bearing on what ought to be done - is that I (the moral agent) have a problem that is non-accidentally mine, making it the kind of problem it is, and consequently (and necessarily), it has a particular shape (or grammar). Moreover, the Universalizability thesis necessarily requires that a particular problem has the same character for all members of the class directly related to it, which (if we accept that it is the agent who gives a situation its moral implications) must in turn, require that all those involved have identical conceptions

of right and wrong; if this is not so, then the problem is relevantly different. Nevertheless, one must be careful with such criticism insofar as the universalizability thesis can make room for people having different conceptions of right and wrong – for instance, that some of them are incorrect or incomplete. Since we cannot know whether this is the case or not, it seems difficult to see how we can apply the Universalizability thesis with any certainty. Thus if I decide I ought to do X in response to a situation and my friend, faced with a situation not relevantly different in the eyes of a spectator, decides that he ought to do Y, it may be – indeed it is probable - that the problem is relevantly different, insofar as it *strikes* my friend differently. This notion of *striking* is important; however, in order to provide a full explanation as to why, it is necessary to outline the story of *Billy Budd* to make clear the type of moral dilemma that we are dealing with; in short however, it is a kind of dilemma that exists inside morality – that to say it is a dilemma in which the person involved is faced with two moral ‘oughts’ pulling in opposite directions.

Billy Budd is a sailor of upright character on board the English battleship H.M.S. *Indomitable* in a time when there was a high probability of mutiny; he is the victim of a ceaseless campaign of thoroughly unjustified persecution, perpetrated by a superior officer; this persecution takes the form of being falsely accused of attempting to incite mutiny. These events culminate in his being brought before Captain Vere (in charge of the ship) on such a charge. When questioned, Budd is struck dumb, and in frustration lashes out at his persecutor causing him to fall and hit his head – the blow kills him. Vere brings Budd before a court-martial, – charging him with hitting a fellow officer – he realises Budd in no way intended to kill his persecutor; however, under naval law at that time, even the hitting of a superior officer was an offence punishable by death.

Vere is faced with a moral dilemma. Every law requires application and interpretation, and always allows for mitigation, extenuation and mercy. The other officers on board had misgivings about the haste with which Budd was executed – indeed, it is probable that Vere could have had him locked up until they returned to port, and then handed him over to a proper court martial, without great risk to his career. Then, of course, it would not be his problem. But, it *is* his problem and this is what is so important; the problem was not one that – in a moral sense – could be given over to someone else for a ‘crack at [its] solution’ (Gaita, TPE p130), and Vere, I think, felt that such delegation was not morally acceptable. Some might question

whether there is a difference between Vere handling the situation and a proper court martial back at port; but the important aspect to grasp is that Vere feels that he has a moral responsibility towards Budd insofar as he recognises that he (Budd) is profoundly innocent before God. Moreover, Vere was very close to Budd and believed that a court martial would find him guilty and hang him; consequently he thought that if Budd were to be hanged, the responsibility for the processes that lead to such an event should be laid at his door. I think this demonstrates that he is a morally serious character, and hopefully also shows what I mean by the phrase ‘moral seriousness’. Nevertheless, there is always the danger that the phrase can be used trivially – for instance, if you ethically disagree with me, it is perhaps a little too easy for you to deflate my claim by suggesting that I am not being properly (honestly) morally serious. There are a few issues here (relating to ‘UMJ’) in terms of the universalizability thesis that I shall address in the following paragraph, but there is one important question that needs to be raised first: What are the criteria for distinguishing the morally serious from the morally trivial? I shall answer this question in full in the section on general grammar; for now it suffices to say that the worth of what is said relies not only on the communicator, but also on the sensitivity and trust of the receiver and his capacity (in such terms) to distinguish genuine belief from mere rhetoric. – And this, I argue, goes to make up the grammar of the situation. In such communication (i.e. moral communication), one cannot separate the content of a claim from the manner in which it is expressed.

Yet there is a profound sense in which Budd is not guilty (before God) and Vere realises that the demands of martial law are in direct opposition to certain aspects of morality; however he ‘does not see it as to be contrasted with morality sans phrase, but as something to which he himself is morally committed.’ (Winch. ‘UMJ’. p.156.). In other words, the dilemma that Vere possesses lies inside morality inasmuch as it is not a conflict between what ought to be done in a legal sense and his moral inclination – for then there would be no real dilemma for Vere. The point is, that Vere knows Budd to be innocent and is thus experiencing a dilemma between two incommensurable moral obligations i.e. two moral “*oughts*”, rather than an obligation between his moral convictions and the law; he believes, he *ought* to acquit Budd and ensure justice is done, but he also *ought* to uphold the law: this is how his moral obligations pull in two completely different directions. It is not a case of making a choice between morality and the law - if this were so, then it would be just a simple

matter of following what the law stated ought to be done. An 'ought' in legal terms however, 'need have very little evaluative force; we may have simply a statement of facts about what is contained in the code'. (Winch. 'UMJ'. p.158.). Does this not leave open the possibility that Vere is just trying to make an exception in his own case to appease the guilt that he thinks he might feel afterwards? – It is this charge that Sidgwick avoids; for by maintaining that there is a right position to adopt and (consequently) a wrong one also, the Universalist leaves no room for an agent to make such an exception, yet:

[T]here is nothing in the meaning of the word 'ought' which logically commits him to accepting as a corollary: 'And anyone else in a situation like this ought to do the same'. I am not denying that some men, in some situations, may want to go on like this; I am not claiming that those who do are speaking unintelligibly; I am not claiming that there are no cases in which anyone would be morally justified in going on like this. I am denying only that, in all cases, a man who refuses to accept such a corollary is thereby misusing the word 'ought' (Winch. 'UMJ'. P.161).

There are a couple of important points that need to be raised in connection with this: firstly, only in circumstances where the agent is not completely morally serious about the situation do we need to worry that they will try to make an exception in his own case; in such a case, it is clear that the agent is less concerned about finding the right moral position and more concerned about finding – and justifying - a way out of the problem in some way that avoids their avoidance being noted. Vere, for instance, could have just hidden behind the law. The important thing is that he did not do this - being a man who was morally serious, he was sincerely concerned about finding the right position, but puzzled as to what it was. It is this kind of moral dilemma that I am concentrating on. Secondly, - and I'm thinking more of Kant with regard to this point - Vere's dilemma involved two oughts and it is precisely this state of affairs that negates the application of a universal rule insofar as they '**...are both taken as uncompromisingly universal.**' (Winch. 'UMJ'. P.162. (my emphasis)).

It is interesting to note Vere's behaviour after Budd's execution when he himself is facing death (and thinking about Billy Budd); that he shows no sign of remorse for his decision to condemn Budd to death, attests to the assertion that he had indeed come to what he thought was the right decision. – But had he come to the *right*

decision? Winch maintains that, faced with the same dilemma, he would not have been able to condemn Budd to death:

I believe that I could not have acted as did Vere; and by the 'could not', I do not mean 'should not have had the nerve to', but that I should have found it morally impossible to condemn a man 'innocent before God' under such circumstances...It is just that I think I should find the considerations connected with Billy Budd's peculiar innocence too powerful to be overridden by the appeal to military duty. (Winch. 'UMJ'. P.163).

In a moment I want to return to the difference in the kind of thinking that is involved in a moral judgement from that which is involved in a non-moral problem. Before I do however, there are two more things to be said here concerning the difference between Vere's and Winch's respective moral judgements on the same situation. Firstly, that by contradicting Vere, the Universalist necessarily maintains that Winch has judged Vere to have made the wrong decision, and secondly, that if one argues that this is not so, then surely it's just a simple case of relativism – in which case, it doesn't really matter.

Now, in terms of the dilemma that exists within morality (i.e. of two moral *oughts*) and of Vere's wish (having arrived at his conclusion) to hold Budd's court martial prior to returning to port, one needs to examine what is morally possible for him and for someone (like Winch) who might disagree. First of all, as Winch remarks:

If he [Vere] were asked to give an account of what the possibility or impossibility consisted in, he could only again rehearse the moral arguments which led him to his decision. But somebody else in such a situation, considering those very same arguments, might conclude that the moral possibilities were different without necessarily making any further judgement about what the corresponding possibilities were for Vere or for anybody else and without being committed to any such further judgement. (Winch. UMJ. p169)

This demonstrates a possibility for learning that is more than purely propositional i.e. more than what it takes to explain, say, a mathematical problem to a child. Such learning, its consequent associated beliefs, and the kind of thought involved is derived from maturity. We learn, for instance, to be cynical if our biography is littered with particular kinds of occurrence in which our beliefs are found to be false – particularly those beliefs that are founded on trust. I am not in any way suggesting that our moral senses are founded on, or derived from either trust or cynicism – my point is that a

thought tainted with (for instance) cynicism or trust is not a thought that can be reliably entered into a system of thought that sees everything as truth-valued against everything else; moral thought, I think (and as I have attempted to indicate in earlier sections), is the same kind of thought. A cynical thought is different from a non-cynical thought in a way that does not allow for the cynicism to be extracted and for the thought to become pure. Sometimes we can be too cynical or too trusting, and sometimes we have to exercise our skills in ways that rely on a form of judgement or criticism that does not have recourse to a theory or formula. David Wiggins remarks:

Criticism often involves finding the right distance from the point of view of a direct participant; and there is no limit that can in advance be set upon that right distance, except that it must not reach into incomprehension. (Wiggins. NVT. P173)

Now, in terms of finding (and exercising) the right amount of detachment, what does it mean to think properly?<sup>24</sup> A good way to demonstrate that such judgement is necessary and – moreover – to show why sometimes one should reject intellectual purity, is to examine what goes on when one person introduces himself to another<sup>25</sup>. If my response to people who introduce themselves to me is always to immediately question whether they are telling me the truth then, no doubt, I would be considered at the very least paranoid – and perhaps insane. Nonetheless, inductively speaking, it would make sense for at least a hint of doubt to exist inasmuch as I am aware that people occasionally lie. However, apart from anything else, this kind of thinking is generally thought of as bad, and indeed the vocabulary is there to show this – for instance “paranoid”, “insane” and so on.

Returning to the Winch / Vere disagreement and the universalizability thesis; we have two different historically achieved individualities and the emphasis placed on moral thinking by the universalizability thesis demands that either Winch or Vere is wrong. At this stage I shall advance no further arguments concerning the universalizability thesis, suffice to say that if we are to treat it as plausible, then there must be recourse to some kind of cognitive or formal theory. Now:

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<sup>24</sup> I am not arguing for any type of sensibility theory such as those advanced by Wiggins or McDowell.

<sup>25</sup> I borrow this example from Chapter 17 of Raimond Gaita's book *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*.

Since we cannot know everything about another actual person's concrete situation (including how it strikes him, which may make all the difference), it is nearly always presumptuous to suppose that another person's situation is exactly like one we have ourselves been in, or even like it in the relevant particulars. (Hare. R.M. 'Freedom and Reason', p49. Quoted in Winch. UMJ, p169)

Consequently, even if we accept the universalizability thesis, the chances are that a particular – and relevant – aspect of a situation is different, for instance a person's disposition, personality and so on; if such things as character are indeed relevant in terms of individuals being struck by the same problem differently, then surely this makes it almost impossible to apply the universalizability thesis with any certainty.

In this section, I have sought to lay the groundwork for the argument that shows that the kind of thought involved in moral judgements - and an individual's capacity for judgement - requires more than a purely formal (or cognitive) approach; it requires an understanding about what is required.

## CHAPTER III

### 3. *Moral Depth, Human Judgement and Mystery.*

When one thinks morally, what is it that one is trying to do? – I would argue, in line with Gaita, that it is in some sense an attempt to deepen one's moral understanding. Now, if one adopts, say, the Universalist approach to moral judgements, can this happen? – If we consider morality purely in terms of a guide to conduct – which the universalist must do, since they consider that there are Universalizable right and wrong answers to moral questions - then certainly we can develop and learn morally, since it can be reduced to a case of becoming acquainted with scenarios and being trained in which way to react. But if this is so, then there should be moral experts, since it is precisely the same sort of learning that is involved in learning to take a right turn just after the pillar box in order to take the shortest and quickest route to the pub. In other words, I learn morally in the same way as I would learn how to get to and from various places in London as a cabbie. Of course, (with this kind of thinking) it is not plausible to expect even a highly morally educated man to know what to do in every situation, in the same sense as it is not reasonable to expect a London cabbie to know all the quickest and shortest routes to and from all places in the world from any given location. The difficulty with this kind of thinking however, is that I don't really need more than a good memory in order to be morally aware. But in theory, at least, it would be possible for any cabbie to find out any route from any location. It should be noted however, that a good doctor (for instance) not only has a good memory of the relevant facts, but he has the relevant skills, and he has been trained to look at his patients in a special way. Such skills and ways of looking at patients and the ways in which they are exercised, make the difference between an ordinary doctor and a good (or great) doctor. But these are not skills that can be taught; they come with experience and maturity and are also the product of a kind of sensitivity and critical awareness of the medical problems about which one has learnt. Consequently some doctors are better than others, even if they have similar levels of medical erudition; they are better able to judge the needs of their patient. To speak of such judgement is to return to Wiggins's point that I highlighted earlier, concerning the right level of detachment required in order to make good judgements. Nevertheless, in opposing this idea of morality and the nature of moral thought (as

propositional and as a guide to conduct) associated with it, I am not saying that there is no such thing as moral knowledge, for none of us is morally ignorant.

So what is it for one's moral understanding to deepen and why is it important in the sense of understanding the rightness or wrongness of a moral judgement? - Gaita maintains that:

Much moral thinking is not thinking *what* to do and, even when it is, it is also an attempt to understand the significance of what one would be doing, which rarely means thinking of the empirical consequences of what one would do, or of how one's principles stand in relation to those consequences and to one another. It is, most often, an attempt to achieve a deepened understanding of the meaning of one's action. (Gaita. TPE. p133.(emphasis orig.))

In Gaita's terms, it is now no longer problematic for Winch to argue that:

...[I]f *A* says '*X* is the right thing for me to do' and if *B*, in a situation not relevantly different, says '*X* is the wrong thing for me to do', it can be that both are correct. That is, it may be that neither what each says, nor anything entailed by what each says, contradicts anything said or implied by the other. (Winch. 'UMJ'. P.164. 1972.)

In what sense is this no longer problematic? – Surely Winch still faces the charge of relativism<sup>26</sup>? What needs to be understood is, that being morally serious *is* attempting to understand 'the meaning of one's action' (ibid.) and where such understanding is achieved, one can be said to have arrived at the right answer.

But is an attempt to understand enough to distinguish serious from non-serious in this context? I believe so, for the seriousness that I am describing is of a kind in which the problem really *matters* to the individual, as does finding the right moral position with regard to it. Whilst an individual who is not serious might give thought to a resolution, it would not disturb him in the same way – i.e. it would not be a case of coming to the right position at all costs. And, in such contexts (e.g. Vere's dilemma), we might consider the non-serious individual to have a diminished moral sensitivity and understanding. In terms of the meaning of one's actions, I assume no theory of meaning; to do so would mean adopting some sort of (testable) hypothesis and this would consequently remove the possibility of learning by being moved, since to be moved is the manifestation of a form of mystery, and rationalisation takes this

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<sup>26</sup> I deal with the charge of relativism directly, later on.

away. The fundamental point here (as I have previously mentioned) is that morality should be seen as more than purely a guide to conduct. Nevertheless, to talk about the (moral) meaning of a human life in terms of ineffability is, I think, to describe those moments in life when one learns by being moved i.e. (in Gaita's terms) in a way one cannot fathom; but it is not a consequence of this that we surrender our critical faculties<sup>27</sup>. This is an area in which we are often drawn into believing that one can only be critical if we have everything formally defined i.e. everything can be justified with each thought truth-valued against every other – one might describe this as a kind of philosophical scientism. There are however, aspects of humanity (to be explored in subsequent sections) that admit of no external justification and these aspects are often thought of as mysterious - such as the mystery involved when we love or wonder at the scope of a human life and its capacity for compassion in a way that does not in any way demean its receiver. Sometimes we speak of someone as a victim of compassion, and this, I think, describes a kind of faulty compassion that *does* patronise its victim. In *A Common Humanity* Gaita provides a very fine (biographical) example of both kinds of compassion comparing the compassion of a visiting nun with that of psychiatrists in an Australian hospital. Many of the psychiatrists, Gaita claims, treated their incurable patients 'brutishly' (Gaita, R. 'ACH'. p18), but a few worked tirelessly to make life as good as possible for their incurables and these psychiatrists 'spoke, against all appearances of the inalienable *dignity* of even those patients.' (ibid. emphasis orig.). One day a nun visits the hospital and,

‘...showed up the behaviour of those noble psychiatrists. She showed that they were, despite their best efforts, condescending, as I too had been. She thereby revealed that even such patients were, as the psychiatrists and I had sincerely and generously professed, the equals of those who wanted to help them; but she also revealed in our hearts that we did not believe this.’ (ibid).

This kind of recognition i.e. of the faulty compassion exhibited by the psychiatrists, as contrasted by the nun's genuine compassion, is an example of what I meant when I talked of some aspects of humanity not admitting of any external justification. In such a case as this (if one is sensitive), one is moved to recognise and learn from such things but not in a way that can be explained. In this sense what occurs is mysterious

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<sup>27</sup> One must be careful, when using the term 'ineffability', not to employ it as a blanket term on which to uncritically dump things that we cannot rationalise.

and it is here where the concept of mystery occupies a legitimate place in the grammar of humanity i.e. it is a facet of our humanity. Compassion is not separate from moral sensibility i.e. it lies in an area of understanding in which we can see other human beings as irreplaceable. But I am not suggesting that we should treat such mystery as somehow beyond life – to do so would be, I think, to surrender in the face of deepening understanding; and certainly it makes no sense to speak of this kind of mystery as somehow emanating from beyond a human life. I just want to make one more thing clear here *viz.* that the kind of mystery I am talking about is not that which, with greater levels of erudition we could understand; neither is it, what I would call, “puff mystery” – that of ghosts and fairies. It is inherently mysterious insofar as it is a part of what makes us human, but at the same time cannot be penetrated by strictly cognitive faculties; it is what moves us in ways we cannot understand.

Both Vere and Winch had reached an understanding of what their actions would mean i.e. the significance (meaning) of what they would be doing; consequently both reached a moral understanding about what they would be doing and, as such, discovered the right answer. It should now be far clearer as to why a moral agent might feel uncomfortable if he has, in desperation (and some might call weakness), fallen back on a universal theory such as the Universalizability thesis or Consequentialism<sup>28</sup>; moreover this also explains why every moral theory has failed to prove decisive, which is why there is continued disagreement in moral philosophy. Of course, moral theories can generate unambiguous answers but that says absolutely nothing in terms of being an objection to what I have just said. The point is that none are collectively accepted absolutely by all.

### 3.1. *Moral Thought, Sanity, Madness and Rationality.*

Why has moral philosophy seemed to fail to describe adequately what it means for moral understanding to deepen? – Gaita argues that it is because concepts such as madness, admiration, remorse, weakness, (moral) strength etc. are to a large extent overlooked as evaluative concepts. Now, at first glance, these concepts don't seem to add up to much. After all, madness could just be a lack of rationality. Admiration is the appropriate reaction to right action, and remorse to wrong actions.

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<sup>28</sup> Where I use the term ‘desperation’ I am speaking of a moral agent who is so distressed by trying to find the right moral position that he eventually breaks down and recoils behind a theory in the same sense as Vere could have hidden behind the law (and might well have done had he been morally weaker).

There is much to be unpacked here, and I deal with corrupt forms of such concepts. I have already begun to prepare the ground for the argument that we should use concepts such as love, strength and madness etc., when I talked about the mature attitude of a child after his father's death in the light of his (the child's) love for his father; for now I wish to examine the concept of madness and consider how it sits with that of rationality. When one talks of rational argument, it is often the case that one thinks of entirely impersonal, objective argument untainted by subjectivity of its participants. In a sense this is right, and in a sense it is not. It is right in the sense that, in rational or reasoned debate, one tries to minimise subjectivity in order to give one's argument more weight on an objective level. The sense in which it is not right runs far deeper and is closely associated with what it is to be morally objective. A common (and I believe erroneous) conception of what it is to be objective hinges on the idea that it must be completely impersonal, devoid of any significant human input – and it is here, that I believe the confusion arises; for it does not take much to see that (seriously) adopting this approach would end in madness. In this sense, one takes objectivity as following an argument wherever it leads, even if one does not like its conclusions; it is almost a case of saying: "One must be brave!"

There are many instances when such "objective" or (to use Gaita's phrase) intellectually pure arguments yield conclusions that, if seriously adopted, would result in madness. Here I return to Gaita's "name" example. If every time someone introduced themselves to me I automatically questioned whether they were telling me the truth I am, inductively speaking, perfectly justified in acting in this way because people do (sometimes) give false names; but humanly speaking (were I seriously to adopt this attitude as reasonable in all cases) I would be considered at the very least paranoid and possibly mad. This is where the difference lies i.e. between intellectually speaking and humanly speaking: I doubt I would be considered objective if I became a paranoid doubter in terms of believing people when they gave me their names but, strictly speaking, I am being impersonal and following an argument wherever it takes me. The point is that, in a case such as this, I have to exercise personal judgment – i.e. find the right amount of detachment – in order to be rational, and I hope that no one would seriously suggest that I am a paradigm of subjectivity for doing so (unless they're mad). It is perfectly rational that I trust (or unquestioningly believe, if that is the right way to put it?), that a person gives me a correct name upon introduction; it is also right that I have my sanity questioned if I do not act like this. Trust, I believe

(and this is explored later), plays an important part in the logic of rationality. Nevertheless, to wholly trust leads as much to madness as to continually doubt, and it is the capacity to judge when we should trust and when we should doubt or exercise caution that is part of what it is to be a human being and exercise rationality.

In moral matters, the picture is more complicated. When I speak of something as morally reprehensible or vile (or perhaps of my friend as having ‘moral depth’) I am, you might say, speaking from a moral outlook; and I might be criticised for not being objective or rational. Some might say that what *I* say reveals how *I* saw an action and that there is no objectivity here; they are right if they believe objectivity to emanate only from intellectually pure argument. Now, I cannot answer such a challenge because it would involve abandoning my moral judgment (in a general as well as a particular sense) – and consequently my outlook also – and treating the concepts involved to intellectually pure analysis. Once this is done, morality would necessarily become propositional since, in order for it to be intellectually pure, it must become externally justifiable. The reality of this would mean that any mystery associated with morality – such as that of love or compassion – could be penetrated by our cognitive powers; and it would follow that one could then *reasonably* dismiss any moral learning acquired through being moved or in ways we cannot fathom, since we could be confident in the knowledge that, one day, our cognitive dimensions would deliver us and discover the facts. Moreover, if morality could be entirely penetrated by our cognitive capacities, then all moral problems would only be contingently attached to particular agents – anyone with the relevant knowledge and cognitive capacities could solve them. I think that abandonment to intellectual purity in this sense represents a damaging kind of cynicism and also an almost paranoid fear of error insofar as we cannot bear to trust our own judgement. I hope to have shown here, that it is not possible to consider moral judgements on purely intellectual terms but that, at the same time, it is not possible to argue with an intellectual purist on such matters on his own terms.

Moral matters are among the aspects of humanity that I referred to earlier as admitting of no external justification, and my point is to highlight the possibility of madness if we consider rationality and objectivity in moral matters (although not only in moral matters) only in terms of intellectual purity. To do so, is to try and dismiss the human element altogether and thus avoid any charge of subjectivity; but to do so is also to wholly deny an aspect of our lives that makes us what we are. In fact, it is to

deny morality. If I talk about morality as merely an (subjective) illusion and advance arguments along the lines that good and evil are no more than that, and if I then act on these conclusions I would, doubtless, be guilty of terrible atrocities (naturally within the scope of practicality) and branded insane. I would not be practising normal *human* behaviour. Were an intellectually pure argument – i.e. one that (in Gaita's terms) could have been 'written in the sand by the wind' (Gaita, R. 'G&E', p317) - to show that I should radically change my life, there is very little chance of my immediately throwing away my old life and adopting it, simply because I would not be wise to do so. Is an intellectual purist (some might call him a sceptic) who advances such arguments seriously suggesting that we should not be (morally) held to account for acts of killing until a satisfactory and intellectually pure argument has been found for the reality of good and evil, and thus of what it means to murder? – If we suspend moral judgement, we suspend the possibility of justice. To call on someone to be rational is not to demand, on pain of subjectivity, intellectual purity - it is to ask for well judged, profound thought within the scope of what is reasonable, intelligible and sane. Naturally, there are occasions when rationality does demand intellectually pure argument, and the onus is upon us to judge when that is and, in many cases, the demands are in plain view. But in some (such as in moral matters) they are obscured by our own confusion that arises from a desire for objectivity; in this respect, differing individual judgements and beliefs only serve to heighten it.

To meet the intellectual purist on his own ground in a moral argument one is required to use the same form of argument – i.e. argument that is propositionally based and (consequently) externally justifiable; in terms of human sensitivities - such as moral or aesthetic – argument of this kind cannot address the whole issue inasmuch as it has to rid itself of the human element, something that is simultaneously common to all of us. My point here is, that the grammar of intellectually pure argument is limited and abstract; to try to load it with human concepts is more than it can cope with and consequently, when one tries, corruption of human grammar occurs. One is trying to make abstract what is human.

### 3.2. *Conceptions of Thought.*

I believe this confusion to be a direct consequence of the perception of what thought is in (western) philosophy. It seems that, while it has been realised for some time that a complete account of language cannot be given in terms of words standing

for objects (propositions (sentences) standing for combinations of objects allowing propositions to be (given meaning and) shown as true or false etc., and various forms of logical inference to govern (or allow for) conditions), thought is still seen as operating in this way. In other words, although the logic of our language is far more complex than in the conception described above – and we now understand that our relationship with reality is by no means entirely mediated through the proposition – we still treat moral thought (when under scrutiny) as though this were the case i.e. with a propositional logic, which does not rely on meaning and understanding being determined by use in the same sense as language<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless, it would be very odd if we continued to treat thought in this way in an everyday sense, for then our language would be more complex than our thoughts and that, surely, is impossible. What does this mean for moral thought? – In what sense can one be morally knowledgeable? First of all, if moral thought were propositional in form, then it would also be the case that we could not speak of a person possessing moral depth (unless we considered the notion of ‘depth’ purely in terms of knowing many facts). Nonetheless, what is wrong with that? – Surely one possesses greater degrees of depth with greater amounts of knowledge? A short and pithy answer (but one that I have great sympathy with) is that many of the computers in the world hold far more in terms of facts than any individual can be expected to learn in his lifetime, yet we can’t speak of computers as possessing depth or of being wise – to do so would be absurd. Part of the reason for this is that, as human beings, our biographies are shaped in ways that are beyond propositional and beyond our cognitive capacities alone; we do not, as it were, remain exactly the same with an ever-increasing number of facts. We feel remorse, bitterness, euphoria etc., and we are moved to learn in unfathomable ways; these are not characteristics of facts or of just knowing many of them. A person may become cynical, but such cynicism is not merely a taint on the thoughts of an individual that can be removed to allow the genuine nature of the thought to emerge; one cannot, if you like, separate cognitive from non-cognitive content in the manner in which one might from scientifically flawed data. True, it might be the case that an individual’s judgement is skewed (which is why they might be referred to as cynical), but one cannot suggest that cynicism is the cause of what is wrong with his thoughts;

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<sup>29</sup> I will discuss this complex issue further in the following chapter when I look at what it means to make sense i.e. for meaning and understanding to be achieved and kinds of grammatical error that can occur (of the later Wittgensteinian variety).

rather cynicism *is* what is wrong with them and consequently his judgement. Now, it may well be that an individual has become a cynic through a series of circumstances in which he has come to form a number of inaccurate beliefs about the level of trust he can put in others; and he may believe that how he is, is the appropriate way to engage with the world. But cynicism is not in itself a belief and, as such, not truth-valued against other beliefs<sup>30</sup>. Thus to see a cynic's judgement as false over its being cynical would negate the place that cynicism occupies in the logic of our language, since (under this conception) it need not be considered as anything other than false. We can treat the concept of moral depth in a similar way to that of cynicism i.e. not as a belief, or as something that admits of external justification, but as something that is historically achieved; and this is one of the main reasons why we cannot speak of depth as merely knowing many facts. When I assert that my friend has moral depth, I am not implying that the validity of my claim can be measured against a background of other propositions that make up what it is to be deep.

Now, a question might be raised in terms of why an historically achieved individuality cannot just be a series of propositions that expands, as we grow older. Firstly, this question ignores what I have said above, concerning the nature of cynicism and how it cannot in itself be truth-valued; secondly – and just as importantly – there is individual loyalty to our respective pasts in terms of our appreciation that we have each lived individual lives and developed a unique maturity. Such maturity (like cynicism) cannot be determined by a series of propositions no matter how vast; it is not simply a case of, “I did x at a particular time and I thought this later...” with a purely contingent “I”. It is a question of understanding and appreciating the meaning and significance of decisions that one has made and also attempting to understand what one has made of one's life. In this way, grammar of purely propositional knowledge is insufficient to wholly describe and understand a human life – this will be elucidated in the following section.

Furthermore, words such as weakness, madness and remorse would be fairly unimportant, inasmuch as they would, like my discussion of cynicism above, just be treated as a cause of breakdown in a moral thought. Indeed such concepts *are often* treated as the breakdown of a moral thought, but that is only because one is erroneously trying to extract the cognitive content from the thought; such an exercise

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<sup>30</sup> Despite the possibility that an individual might hold a number of inaccurate beliefs that have led him to it.

is futile, since to make such a division (between cognitive content and superfluous matter) is to make a false division in a moral thought. – Why?

### 3.3. *Language and General Grammar.*

In the following two sections, I briefly examine the two Wittgensteinian accounts of language in order to acquire a full picture of what I mean by *General Grammar*. It is necessary to see why the Tractarian conception of language fails and how meaning and sense are possible outside such a propositional conception. Essentially however, *general grammar* is a conceptual space in which the possibility exists for common understanding between all human beings. Naturally, there are cases in which human beings can be so removed from each other's value systems that, as they stand, understanding is impossible - but that is to miss the point. Human beings share a desire for language, they possess (at least some sort of) aesthetic appreciation, have a sense of right, wrong and justice, even if such senses are radically diverse and so on<sup>31</sup>. These are all (though not exhaustively) aspects of what I consider to be general grammar i.e. what it is to be a human being; I use this term because I believe that much of what it is to be a human being is far closer to language and meaning than is often realised; this should hopefully emerge in what follows.

### 3.4. *The Tractarian Conception of Language.*

Wittgenstein's conception of language in the *Tractatus* was, broadly speaking, founded (largely by Russell and Frege) on an established idea of how language operated – namely, words standing for particular objects and combinations of these objects forming meaningful sentences. Artificial entities such as fictitious characters were dealt with differently by Frege and Russell - for my purposes it is unnecessary to detail such differences, suffice to say that they developed different explanations of accounting for proper names and descriptions within an essentially propositional conception of language. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein developed his famous picture theory in which words formed a model or picture of reality; this involved using the word “picture” in a broadened sense. Analogously, one might take a London Underground map as a picture of reality, and how (for instance) the stations are in

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<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, I believe that with enough effort, two radically different individuals can come to (at least) a kind of understanding, even if they subsequently disagree in terms of each other's value-systems.

relation to each other and to London<sup>32</sup>. Fundamentally then, a picture (like a proposition) signifies a possible ‘state of affairs’ in the sense that each component of the picture (words in the case of a proposition) represents an object; the overall picture representing objects in possible determinate relations<sup>33</sup>. Consequently, on this conception, it is always possible to compare a picture or proposition to reality as the objects that are represented by it must necessarily exist; indeed, it could be no other way insofar as that would involve the subsistence of something illogical, outside the ordinary. This leaves two options that are exhaustive: 1. The depicted state of affairs exists. 2. The depicted state of affairs does not exist. Any proposition that transgresses either of these options should be considered as beyond the limits of sense. Ethical statements, on this model, all fall into the realm of nonsense, since many of the terms within them are not given strict meaning. Nevertheless, there are still problems of ethics and this draws Wittgenstein into making the distinction between saying and showing.

‘6.522 There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.’ (Wittgenstein ‘TLP’ p89)

In other words, although propositions about ethics are beyond the limits of sense, what we try to say about ethics is shown by authentic propositions. Picturing the world in a proposition is only possible if it shares the same *logical form* as what it is attempting to represent - logical form itself cannot be put into a proposition and one cannot say what its relationship to reality actually is – it is something that can only be shown. There is no way of knowing what a proposition must share with reality that permits representation.

‘4.121 Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses *itself* in language, we cannot express by means of language. Propositions *show* the logical form of reality. They display it. (Wittgenstein ‘TLP’ p31)

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<sup>32</sup> There are problems with this theory however, such as how it deals with properties of objects – for instance, “my computer is large” only refers to one object and it is difficult to see how – on this conception – being large stands in relation to it (my computer). Largeness is not something that can be referred to, as it is a property rather than an object.

<sup>33</sup> The notion of possibility is vital throughout the *Tractatus*: ‘1.21 Each item can be the case or not while everything else remains the same.’ This differs significantly from the views of Russell and Frege who both disliked thinking in terms of what might have been otherwise – they saw logic as fundamentally general.

Consequently, if I were to actually speak of an individual possessing moral depth, I would on this conception of language be uttering nonsense; nonetheless, in a sense, moral depth, cynicism and the like can be shown in the proposition (through logical form), but it certainly makes no sense to *speak* of increased moral depth or cynicism in an individual. Neither does it make sense to speak of a language that admits of no external justification. In his later work however, Wittgenstein concludes that his original account of language is inadequate, and that meaningful discourse rests on more than just terms standing for objects, with meaningful sentences constructed from terms representing objects in various combinations.

### 3.5. Wittgenstein's later Conception of the Nature of Language.

Wittgenstein's rejection of the Tractarian account is fairly comprehensive inasmuch as he rejects the majority of its fundamental ideas *viz.*, that much language is responsible for confusion, insofar as it is logically flawed and hides the nature of reality. He also abandons the notion that some things cannot be said, only shown, and that philosophical propositions are, for the most part, nonsensical. Indeed, the new account of language and meaning is inextricably allied to his statement about philosophical method 'Don't think, but look!' (Wittgenstein. PI:66) and both revolve around his concept of a language game. In the following section I argue that one should treat language games and general grammar as virtually identical – i.e. that all language games possess particular grammatical forms that give them sense.

Certainly there are some conspicuous problems with the Tractarian account – for instance, what objects do the words “hello”, “perhaps” and “help” refer to? If I say “hello”, I could mean a number of different things – for instance, it may be a surprised exclamation in response to something unusual rather than a simple greeting; but there are also different kinds of greeting in which “hello” possesses slightly different meanings. Questions can sometimes be meant as commands such as the example Wittgenstein employs, ‘Would you like to...?’ (Wittgenstein, PI: 21). He then remarks, ‘ “What [is said] has the form of a question but is really a command” – that is, has the function of a command in the technique of using the language.’ (ibid). In this sense, meaning is context dependent and this can be contrasted with the Tractarian conception of language in which context has no influence in terms of meaning – for instance, the grammatical form of a question would negate the possibility of its being used as a command. This notion of context dependence is

developed into the 'language game' and essentially represents Wittgenstein's attempt to understand how language functions. Language games are principally examples of snippets of human life i.e. they incorporate characteristics such as intentional states (conditions such as fear, rage, ambition, anger sadness etc.), the ways in which we express ourselves, how we act as individuals as well as in groups, and ambiguities of understanding (meaning) within language - for instance, where the same word or phrase can have a number of separate meanings; thus they provide the context (grammar) in which meaning is possible<sup>34</sup>. The meaning can be settled by following Wittgenstein's instruction of 'Don't think, but look!' (ibid.), but what exactly is it pointing us towards? Wittgenstein uses two examples in paragraphs 21 and 66 of the *Philosophical Investigations* to demonstrate. The first involves a situation in which there are two individuals compiling a report about the number of slabs in a pile - person A writes down the information that is relayed by person B.

'Such as report might run: "Five slabs". Now what is the difference between the report or statement "Five slabs" and the order "Five slabs!"? - Well, it is the part which uttering these words plays in the language game' (Wittgenstein. PI: 21)

In other words, the meaning of such an expression is determined by the role it plays in the situation (language game); one has to *look* at the situation that will then allow us to identify the use and understand the meaning of the expression correctly. The second example in paragraph 66 concerns necessary and sufficient conditions and demonstrates how, contrary to the Tractarian conception of language, meaning is not necessarily reliant upon strictly defined terms within a proposition. Wittgenstein argues that when, for instance, we ask what a game is, we should not attempt to find some characteristic that all games have in common; in other words, we should not try and *think* of a characteristic that all games have in common, rather we should *look* and

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<sup>34</sup> Such snippets of life can include anything from specific little activities (the builders' exchanges at PI:21) to much broader ones e.g. a loving relationship between two people; there are also specialist language games e.g. those of the sciences. Although loving is not in itself a language game, the manifestation of love in an individual can have a profound effect on the grammar of a language game and thus influence understanding. In other words, the individuality of the person involved can affect the grammar of a language game (and, as such, the nature of understanding in a particular case). In addition, language games are not necessarily (though they can be, as in science) abstract entities in the sense of being divorced from culture and/or forms of life - religious beliefs can influence language games, as can a religious culture (consider countries with, for instance, Islamic governments). However, speaking a language is not a language game, but a form of human life which is a precondition for there to be language games at all.

see if they do<sup>35</sup>. In terms of games, necessary and sufficient conditions common to all are hard, if not impossible, to come by; rather we are confronted with ‘ similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that’ (Wittgenstein. PI: 66). Consider, for example, ball games (such as cricket or football), card games, board games, play-fighting, and mind games – here we find that there may be common characteristics between some of the various games, but also that ‘many common features drop out and others appear.’ (Wittgenstein. PI: 66). Nevertheless, one might contend that competition is common to them all, but then how does one account for such games as solitaire or bouncing a ball off a wall and catching it? Consider play-fighting: sometimes (especially as a child) one has play-fights that suddenly cease to be games and develop into something more serious. In what sense does the fight cease to be a game? – How does the grammar change? The answer cannot be determined by thinking in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions – rather we must simply look and see whether a play-fight remains a play-fight. Mind-games are different again in that they involve nothing material – and so we could continue. Thus, it is apparent that much of the grammar necessary for meaning and understanding emanates from within a particular language game. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that Wittgenstein does not wholly reject his earlier conception of language, only the assertion that it provides a complete account; there are many instances (such as occur in scientific investigation) in which meaningful discourse is best accomplished in this way. In this kind of discourse, the grammar of an assertion transcends our individual humanity i.e. it does not rely on the grammar of a particular context. I think Wittgenstein would, nonetheless, call this a language game, but one in which the logic or grammar is very simplistic.

There is one further brief point I wish to raise in connection with reducing all concepts down to a series of necessary and sufficient conditions. In *The Big Typescript* Wittgenstein remarks:

....The man who said that one cannot step twice into the same river uttered a falsehood. One *can* step twice into the same river. And that is what the solution of all philosophical problems looks like. Their answers will only be correct if they are plain and everyday. Provided you look at them in the right spirit, that won't matter. (Wittgenstein, L. *The Big Typescript* in (ed.) Kenny, A. *The Wittgenstein Reader*.p.265-6 )

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<sup>35</sup> Bravery is also a good example of where one has to look rather than think. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions associated with bravery (see Plato's *Laches*).

The question of whether one can step into the same river twice is the result of a philosophical confusion. It is thought that because the water in a river flows, one can legitimately question whether it is actually the *same* river as, at any particular point in its course, part of its make up (the water) is forever changing. – And this is precisely where the confusion occurs. Part of what is included in the concept of a river (i.e. what it is for something to be a river) is that the water in it flows; if the water was always in the same or similar place then we should not call it a river, but perhaps a lake or canal. In this respect, one has to judge as one sees ('Don't think, but look!' (Wittgenstein, PI:66)) – 'answers will only be correct if they are plain and everyday' (Wittgenstein, L. *The Big Typescript* in (ed.) Kenny, A. *The Wittgenstein Reader*.p.266) – and one must not 'try to grasp the *essence* of the thing.' (Wittgenstein. PI: 116). There is something incorporated in to the meaning of 'river' that allows for constant change whether it be in terms of water or perhaps occasional changes in course. Thus the river will always be the same – yet different in constitution; that however, is a river. – And that is what it is to look upon such problems i.e. 'in the right spirit' (Wittgenstein, L. *The Big Typescript* in (ed.) Kenny, A. *The Wittgenstein Reader*.p.266) <sup>36</sup>.

### 3.6. General Grammar

The particular grammar of a language game can, if necessary (although not always), extend to the character of the individuals involved. For instance, the particular character of an individual and their role in life can govern how we understand them – it might be the case that I am more cynical when listening to particular politicians than charity workers. Now, one might argue that this is because I am naturally cynical in terms of political rhetoric and sympathetic towards charity workers. But I am well aware that there are honest politicians and dishonest charity workers. My point is that personal disposition and character are all important in terms of the grammar of a language game, and consequently it affects meaning and understanding. When discussing Winch and the universalizability thesis, one of the points that he (Winch) makes (and that I tried to emphasise) is how difference in

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<sup>36</sup> Questions introduced to philosophy about whether – for instance – a 40 year-old man is the same person as he was at 4 years old (insofar as the cells he was composed of then have changed or been renewed) can be treated in the same way. They are misleading questions.

character can affect the way in which a situation strikes an individual. Now, that is also an aspect of the grammar of a situation and, as such, what occurs and what is said within it is (consequently) allied to it – thus words and phrases are inextricably linked to the general grammar of a language game. Similarly, being moved, the possibility to learn through it and the mystery associated with it, has grammar of its own. Gaita remarks,

In matters of value we often learn by being moved, and our being moved is not merely the dramatic occasion of our introduction to a proposition which can be assessed according to critical categories, whose grammar excludes our being moved as extraneous to the ‘cognitive’ content of the proposition. (Gaita. TPE, p136-7)

In other words, being moved does not just rest on novelty but, more importantly, the grammar associated with it sits outside a purely cognitive approach to meaning. Certainly, it is possible for people to be moved by the words of another – in a eulogy or an appeal for instance; the uncertainty in such cases lies in whether to take the words on trust. At times we can be mistaken - for instance, in a eulogy when we subsequently learn that the speaker may have disliked the person that he paid tribute to and only spoke as he did for political reasons; we may be offended by this and it may serve to increase our cynicism<sup>37</sup>. In other cases, the effects of being conned can be more harmful – for instance, there are many chronicled cases of people being taken in by those seeking dishonest financial gain through what appear to be desperate appeals. When we do take such words on trust and are then betrayed, we look for ways in which to (so to speak) plug the hole of possible failure and, unfortunately, this often bewitches us into attempting to find propositional content through which we can then determine the truth or falsity of a claim. As I have mentioned however, the grammar associated with propositional and cognitive content is simple and does not allow for (among other things) the possibility of learning by being moved. To abandon ourselves to finding cognitive content in everything we say wholly negates the role of trust and, more generally, judgement; and this in many ways leads down the path to insanity (such as questioning upon introduction whether a person has given their correct name). Gaita remarks, ‘to trust is both to judge something worthy of our trust and to judge ourselves to be worthily trusting’ (Gaita, R. ‘TPE’, p137); when we

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<sup>37</sup> Insofar as our disposition towards eulogies has been affected.

make mistakes, it is that we have perhaps been naïve or just young. In the latter case, this is what differentiates youth from the maturity expected of, and associated with, adulthood. Trust is a necessary aspect of human grammar (i.e. rationality) and the judgement that accompanies maturity (in terms of how much we do so) rests upon more than an ever-increasing bank of correct and incorrect propositions; for, as I have tried to show in previous sections, there is a kind of judgement involved that is not contingent upon greater amounts of propositional knowledge – rather, it is an individually achieved wisdom that is a characteristic of an individual's biography.

All this, I believe, goes to make up the grammar of a language game so that the nature of the grammar within it is often contingent upon the individuals involved. Of course, it need not always be so, and whether it is or not depends on what is trying to be said and understood. But how does one know whether aspects of the grammar in a particular language game are contingent upon the individuals involved or, indeed, ascertain when to employ the simpler grammar of the Tractarian model of language? – Finally, it is a case of applying Wittgenstein's maxim of 'Don't think, but look!' (Wittgenstein. PI:66) and by that exercising appropriate judgement i.e. finding the right level of detachment from the problem. The sensitivity of the receiver of a communication and his capacity for depth is also an aspect of general grammar – and this can make all the difference when listening to, or reading, something that requires such sensitivity in order to be appreciated properly. Consider for instance, George Meredith's poem *The Lark Ascending*. Now, I certainly see this as more than an elaborate description of the song of the Skylark, but I expect that to some that is all it is – merely an expanded series of metaphors and decorated adjectives in some sort of rhyme scheme. To me, it provides the perfect illustration of the Skylark's song; it was also, I believe, the inspiration for Ralph Vaughan-Williams' piece of music for violin and orchestra of the same name. The point here, is that the grammar of this poem is such that it demands a certain amount of sensitivity on the part of the reader or listener in addition to the skill and presence of the author – without both elements, the grammar would be incomplete. Those who fail these demands will find it essentially meaningless. – For meaning and understanding to be achieved, a grammatical scheme has to be complete and this can be demonstrated very simply even in basic sentences – consider for instance, many of the grammatical errors that school children make (punctuation, word order etc.). But, as I hope to have shown, grammar is more

complex than mere syntax – and sense demands correct applications of it, no matter what its intricacies.

### 3.7. *Moral Expression*

In terms of moral expression, one must not consider dividing how the speaker utters his moral thought from what he actually says - i.e. one must leave his manner, the style of language he uses to impart his moral position etc., to hang together with what we would consider to be the content of what he was saying. This is where the difference between mere rhetoric and a genuine presence behind the words that one utters, lies. It is difficult to provide examples of such differences that we can all appreciate; however, in his memoir of Wittgenstein, Norman Malcolm recalls Wittgenstein saying,

‘[T]hat once he [Wittgenstein] had tried to lecture from notes but was disgusted with the result; the thoughts that came out were ‘stale’, or as he put it to another friend, the words looked like corpses when he began to read them.’ (Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*. OUP. p23)

A more general example can be made. Consider for instance, the phenomenon of a “pseud” – i.e. a person who may act or say things in an affected way in order to cultivate a certain image or reputation. – But how can one identify a pseud? Ultimately, only by an individual who is genuine - a pseud can only be shown by example in the same way as a game (or cynicism or moral depth) can only be shown by example – it is another case of following Wittgenstein’s maxim of ‘Don’t think, but look! (Wittgenstein. PI:66). An individual who genuinely stands behind the words that he utters – Gaita describes it as being ‘present’ in what one says – is trying to say something that is born deep down with no thought of image cultivation. That he is heard as genuine demands sensitivity (in terms of being moved) and trust on the part of the receiver; a cynic may be moved, but nevertheless spurn an individual’s presence in his words – perhaps because he has been mistaken (and conned by the pseud) many times and is attempting to remove the possibility of error. In the case of the individual who stands behind his words, we should be moved to think of the words he utters as *his* words i.e. it is critical that we view them as inseparable from his individuality. – And this is how we can distinguish between someone who is morally

weary (or a pseud), from someone who is actively occupying their moral ground. Earlier, I mentioned that Wittgenstein did not wholly reject the Tractarian conception of language – he just saw it as incomplete, and as a model that did not recognise sense as ever dependent upon a particular context (or language game); it relied chiefly on picturing states of affairs that either were or were not the case. This model is ideal for science insofar as most (if not all) scientific thought primarily centres around hypotheses, theories and explanations. The main point that I wish to express here (by borrowing an example from Gaita's essay *The Personal in Ethics*) however, is that, due to its complete lack of dependence on the grammar of a context, a weary disinterested scientist – speaking on a scientific subject – is not necessarily compromised (in terms of his authority) to speak about it. Providing he is relatively up-to-date, his character is of no consequence insofar as any scientific utterance is only accidentally his and, as such, cognitive content can be easily separated from the manner in which it is expressed. If a scientist makes a new discovery, the fact that a particular scientist has made such a discovery has no bearing on the nature of it, or how we should understand it; such is the grammar associated with this way of speaking. When an individual is behind the words he utters, it means they come from the heart and have his depth of character within them. Someone else might say the same things and reiterate them over and over, but if they are tired, then no matter what effort the speaker imparts, his words will just remain words. Wittgenstein remarks,

*(Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 4.5.):* “The general form of propositions is: This is how things are.” – That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it. (Wittgenstein. PI:114)

A good example of this (although not involving moral statement) was the England cricket team's response to press interviews in the aftermath of their Ashes victory. Immediately following the match at The Oval, the players were euphoric and, although many of them said similar things (along the lines of how fantastic it was and how fantastic their supporters had been etc.,etc.) and repeated themselves, one detected a certain energy that made what they were saying fresh and vital, despite the fact that they were mentally and physically exhausted. Certainly what they were saying was no different from what a thousand other sports stars have uttered hundreds

of times, but nevertheless their words were bright. The following day during their parade on a bus round London however, the story was a little different. There was a certain jadedness to what they were saying – not because they had been celebrating into the small hours, but because the immediacy of the euphoria surrounding the reality of what they had done had waned and dropped away. They were merely restating the words of the previous evening over and over again and, even though you could sense pride in their achievement, their words lacked the ‘vital responsiveness’ (Gaita, R. ‘TPE’. P140) that carried them forward the previous evening. The grammar of their utterances had changed, and consequently the way in which they were understood changed also. Thus, the expressions of the English cricket team had a unique and genuine grammar, as did my capacity to receive what was said in a certain light – this, taken as a whole, reveals a unique language game. Nothing similar can be said of propositions because, as I mentioned earlier, their grammar is impersonal.

### 3.8. *Cynicism, Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism.*

In virtue of this, in many instances, we cannot (if we consider someone as standing behind what they say) separate what an individual says from the way in which he says it – to do so would be to violate the grammar of the language game and thus the meaning of his words and the sense in which they should be understood. If one accepts this, then there is the obvious possibility that we may be misled or – if that is not the case – misunderstand. As I mentioned a while back, trust is a necessary aspect of what it means to be rational, and certainly our lives are littered with examples of when we cannot be absolutely sure if we have been deceived (consider the example of being introduced to somebody). That said, in areas of life such as those of deeply held moral beliefs, trust seems less crucial for sanity i.e. if I am moved to believe that an individual is actively standing behind the words he utters in a moral statement, but abjectly refuse to believe what he says, then I am no worse than sceptical or distrustful (-but what if we all did this?). Moreover, there seem fewer compelling reasons to trust in this sphere of life than those upon which a smooth social structure depends. In other words, in terms of – for instance – believing someone when they give you their name, it is imperative for the sake of society that we do so insofar as if we doubted these basic requirements to trust, then any form of stability within a society would be impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, how do we judge precisely the levels of trust required for a stable society? Whatever the

conclusions we reach, there will always be those who will seek to cheat in some way and this, I think, is one of the factors that leads to scepticism over matters that do not require trust. Certainly if we all cheated (and were known to cheat), then social structures would break down, as trust would be impossible. But why assume that good reasons to trust only run so far as to enable a reasonably stable society to survive? Firstly, I don't think this is actually the case, as friends (for instance) put greater trust in each other than each would in the average person with whom they were unacquainted; moreover, such trust is not necessary to society in the same way as it is in certain areas – for instance, particular kinds of business dealings. In other words, friendships within societies act (among other things) as a kind of lubricant, but business dealings can be crucial to its stability. Secondly, and more importantly, were I to argue that reasons to trust only run so far as is necessary for the survival of society, then I would doubtless be accused of massive cynicism and also asked where the necessity for trust ends. Nevertheless, a hankering after enlightenment (and sometimes proof) through intellectually pure argument is evident. Certainly some moral philosophers, having noticed that words which occur in, say, mathematics – such as 'understand', 'correct', 'right', 'wrong' and so on – are also present in our moral vocabulary, think that we cannot judge them as possessing the same level of profundity in the realm of the latter – i.e. that our using such words morally, lends them a kind of subjectivism that, on such grounds, detracts from their significance in terms of truth and understanding. But to do this is to simultaneously assume that moral understanding is not really a proper form of understanding and that there is only one form of understanding *viz.*, that which is tied to factual truth. However (and this is important), the onus is on those who believe this to justify their beliefs.

Earlier I attempted to make the distinction between strictly formal argument and rational argument. I maintained that, in some cases, following an intellectually pure argument to its conclusions had the potential to lead to insanity, insofar as one abandons one's judgement to it. When we abandon our judgement in favour of an intellectually pure argument, we make a conscious effort to do so – for example, we ask: "what reasons do we have for believing individuals when they tell us their names"? But, in everyday existence this does not happen. Why? One reason might be, that we cannot wear our intellectual hats all of the time, but I think this reason is trivial. More importantly, it is not rational to ask such questions, but not just because we think that it is more than likely that someone is telling us their real name, since

people generally tell the truth regarding such things (although, no doubt this is the case as well). Indeed, if we actually think that it is “more than likely” in such situations, then we are displaying the same kind of paranoid insanity (or at the very least mental illness) that is evident if we disbelieve them. In the same way, I might perceive that an individual is standing behind the words that he utters in a moral statement, but this does not call for me to think and decide between rational judgement and relying on formal justification in order to determine whether I should believe him. I have to look in the way that is suggested by Wittgenstein’s maxim, ‘Don’t think, but look!’ (ibid.). – And indeed, it shouldn’t even occur to me that I have to do either. Similarly, when I put my trust in an individual, I do not think that my trust reflects just as heavily – if not more so – upon myself as it does upon them (even though it does) - i.e. that such trust is as much a judgment about myself being suitably trusting as it is about them being worthy of trust.

It is fear of error and being cheated (having one’s trust abused) that is responsible for a great deal of cynicism – and certainly it is natural and reasonable to search for ways in which one can reduce the possibility of being conned. A cynic however, is recognised as not trusting enough; yet there is no benchmark by which appropriate levels of trust can be found. Fear of error, I believe, is responsible for the desire for formal justification insofar as such justification has the power to completely eliminate the possibility of error and this is also, I think, a manifestation of a form of unrecognised cynicism. The problem is that, in aspects of humanity that do not admit of external justification, the possibility of error and / or lack of understanding is always looming for that very reason. The confusion arises, because in science there is frequently a very legitimate argument (often a demand) for formal justification insofar as there is a requirement to prove theories and hypotheses true or false. The nature of such truth or falsity transcends the individual. – Consider the possible existence of planet X. Scientists have, for years, speculated about the existence of a large planetary body orbiting the Sun beyond Pluto, on the grounds that the orbital path of Neptune contains a number of anomalies that cannot be explained by the presence of Pluto (Pluto is too small to possess a gravitational force significant enough to produce such effects on Neptune). Sooner or later, a definite answer will be found; in such cases, formal justification will remove all possibility of mistakes; i.e. the possibility of erroneous statements on the matter can be removed by cognitive enquiry and is only

contingent upon us having the requisite capacities to carry out such an enquiry. The individual is extraneous to the grammar of the enquiry.

Now, in terms of claims that require, as part of their grammar, sensitivity on the part of the receiver to discern whether what is being said should be believed or taken seriously, there is (as I have already elucidated) a need to take what is being said (and the manner in which it is said) as a whole. This does however, leave an extensive amount of room for error – there are for instance, issues surrounding the communicator, such as whether he is a fine actor; similarly, the receiver might be naïve, an idealiser or cynic and his understanding be clouded by these characteristics. This, I believe, has resulted in a division in schools of thought in moral philosophy *viz.*, cognitivism and non-cognitivism.

Cognitivism suggests that there is objectivity within ethics, in a sense in which the objectivity requires the transcending of individual perspective and sees thoughts as truth-valued against other thoughts; the reality of ethics, on this conception, can be revealed through cognitive penetration i.e. the truth or falsity of our moral beliefs can be determined, since the cognitivist believes that moral properties are inherent in things or actions. By contrast, the implication of non-cognitivism is that of a supremely subjective ethics with the emphasis on feelings and instincts – there is no objective content that can be separated from the thought itself. Essentially, non-cognitivist ethics reflects the likes and dislikes of each individual. Naturally, complex arguments have arisen to defend each school of thought. The non-cognitivist has the difficulty of explaining, for instance, the problem of moral reality, insofar as, if there is no moral reality then one's moral judgments cannot meaningfully be said to be true or false. Moreover, in aesthetics, there seem to be certain standards of correctness – for instance, there seems to be a definite sense in which one experiences value even though, from person to person, different values might be attributed to different arts or different genres within the same art. For instance, I may place greater value on the works of J.S. Bach than those of Mozart – you may think differently. The Cognitivist however, has the problem of the belief-desire theory. This theory asserts that moral action cannot simply be put down to belief; a series of beliefs is not enough to justify action, there needs to be desire (instinct or feeling) to act as a motivating force. Surely this is not too much of a problem for the cognitivist – why, for instance, can he not accept the belief-desire theory while maintaining his position that moral opinion can either be true or false? If the cognitivist accepts this however, then he is forced into

the rather odd position in which he might believe a moral action to be necessary, but at the same time see no reason why he should act upon his moral belief. – And so on.

I believe that this distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism is a false one, brought about by the fear of error and a misunderstanding concerning the nature of moral thought. It represents, I think, a lack of trust in ourselves and ‘an intoxication with a conception of reason’ (Gaita. TPE. p146) that is intellectually pure. Both these schools seem to consider morality purely as a guide to conduct; moreover the nature of moral thought seems to have been divided into a cognitive objective and non-cognitive subjective model. Am I suggesting that moral thought is partly cognitive and partly non-cognitive? No. If I accept the cognitivist / non-cognitivist model of the nature of thought, then I am implicitly asserting that I believe that thoughts are either truth-valued or mere subjective feeling; if I do that, then I am negating the possibility of (for instance) cynicism being any more than a cause of a thought’s failure – more, I am asserting that thoughts must be essentially propositional in form. If this is the case, then I must be arguing that our epistemic apparatus is no different from that of automatons and that, as such, we have no capacity for depth, for reasons I outlined earlier. I am not arguing for this.

One of the difficulties is, that cognitive thought is seen as necessarily transcending the individual; cognitive thought is accidental to any human being and non-cognitive thought is wholly concerned with the emotions and instincts of the individual, and is held to be mistaken by cognitivists. As such, one cannot speak cogently about not separating what an individual says from the manner in which he expresses himself. What I have said so far, particularly in this respect, probably smacks of having a foot incoherently in both camps simultaneously. What I shall try to show is that firstly, for something to be a cognitive utterance it does not (necessarily) have to express a belief that is a belief in the sense that it is truth-valued against other beliefs (if we assume cognitive to mean comprehensible and intelligible to others). Secondly, and more importantly, that the grammar of language games is significant down to the minute – for instance, the fact that I think person *x* says something significant and that it holds more weight than person *y* (who says the same thing) means that it carries more weight purely because the grammar of the language game is affected by the persons involved. Perhaps we might think person *y* is a pseud.

Certainly, in terms of the belief-desire theory, we can treat it in a similar way to cynicism. I argued earlier that cynicism is not merely a taint on one’s thoughts that

can be removed in order to reveal thought proper: it *is* the thought. The belief-desire theory can be considered in much the same way; its conception being the result of an approach to critical thinking that divides thought into primary and secondary modes. If we abandon this model then we find that belief and desire need not be divided up, and (certainly in the case of moral action) that there is no sense in trying to extract cognitive content (belief) from non-cognitive content (desire). In other words, there is no thought (belief) that needs something added to it (desire) in order for action to be taken. A thought that one wants to stop the wrong one is witnessing on the street *is* the thought in the same way as cynicism is not a taint on one's thought - it *is* the thought. One cannot separate cynicism from the thought's content and (similarly) one cannot "cognitively" separate belief from desire in a case such as the one above. Someone who said that they thought the occurrences on the street were wrong, but had no inclination to stop them because they lacked the desire that is required to accompany their belief would be seen, I think, as absurd<sup>38</sup>.

To treat a moral action as the result of thought is similar to treating the manifestation of cynicism as the result of thought, and not merely as a cause of its failure or as an emotion that is external to it. Since there is no absolute benchmark for cynicism, it is (therefore) not possible to independently measure what counts as cynical thought and, as such, not coherent to make a distinction between cynicism and thought proper. One cannot "cognitively" extract thought from cynicism, banality, sentimentality etc., so why should one attempt it with moral thought and action? – How then, can we distinguish between cynical and non-cynical thought?

In any case, our moral thoughts are informed by concepts such as love, cynicism, sentimentality *et cetera*, so it would seem odd if we treated moral thought in a different way to its constitutive concepts, i.e. in a way that divided thought from desire.

### 3.9. *Violation of General Grammar.*

Qualities such as cynicism, sentimentality and so on, manifest themselves in the grammar of a language game – thus sense is shown; consequently, if the grammar

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<sup>38</sup> This is distinct from thinking something to be wrong, but knowing one is unable to do anything about it. I might see a beggar being beaten and stabbed to death by a bunch of knife-wielding thugs, know the wrong in my heart, but realize there is nothing I can do. – And one could not lay the charge of cowardice against me for not risking sacrificing my life in an attempt to save the beggar; an attempt that I know would result in almost certain failure.

is changed then it is possible that the sense of the language game will change also<sup>39</sup>. Thus there is nothing that can be separated in terms of – for instance – cynicism and thought; the grammar of a language game (i.e. all its components) determines sense, and such sense may manifest cynicism. The very fact that we recognise examples of cynicism and sentimentality in others, attests to this and, to be shown by example, such qualities require a certain kind of grammar in a language game. Concepts such as cynicism, sentimentality etc., are not irrelevant aspects of our language that can be mopped up and dismissed from proper consideration with more careful thinking. In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein remarks,

When philosophers use a word – “Knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “proposition”, “name” – and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home? (PI: 116)

Wittgenstein is talking of a metaphysical reductionism that is necessary if we try to cognitively extract or separate the content of thought proper from, say, cynicism or sentimentality. What happens is that we try to pull such concepts into the abstract in order to develop a universal standard of meaning and this, in turn, requires universal standards. Now, I have already indicated that such a model is ideal in scientific investigation insofar as, generally speaking, the grammar of such investigation is relatively straight forward and rests on true and false propositions that can be arrived at through empirical research or theoretical investigation (e.g. advanced theoretical mathematical models of the universe). This is the grammar of the impersonal. As discussed previously, the grammar (i.e. that which provides sense and meaning) of some language games is more complex. Whilst no reduction of concepts is required in the scientific model, in terms of a language game in which, for instance, cynicism or sentimentality is made manifest by example, reductionism is necessary to extract cognitive content from the cynicism or sentimentality. Thus, in order to remain faithful to a concept of reason that believes cognitive content to exist outside the contingencies of a human life, there exists a requirement for reductionism. Consequently, such reductionism would never consider any individual as having an important effect on the sense of, say, an ethical statement; a particular individual

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<sup>39</sup> Again, this can be related back to Wittgenstein’s maxim (concerning philosophical method) of, “Don’t think, but look!” (ibid).

would not be seen as a grammatical constituent i.e. as something that could essentially and profoundly influence meaning. The responsibility however, is on those who maintain this conception to explain why they think that what is *truly* cognitive can only exist at an impersonal level.

By separating or neglecting certain aspects of a moral utterance we are, I argue, damaging the intended meaning and de-valuing its significance (not least because, with its reduced grammar, we won't understand it correctly)<sup>40</sup>. We are violating the grammar that gives sense. An agent's utterance, if genuine, is bound up with his character and, as such, with the kind of moral expression he makes, and *only* with this kind of expression; the expression, if sincere, is *his* expression. The difficulty arises in terms of judging sincerity; it is not possible to do so (as it is with the non-moral utterance) in terms of assessing the cognitive content as being true or false etc.. Now, it seems trivial to suggest that the words have to *come out* of the agent and perhaps untrue that such words *must* be bound up with the agent – for instance, my rejection of slavery doesn't have anything to do with slavery *per se* because I have never experienced it. But my zeal or energy associated with my rejection and sense of justice (my presence in what I am saying) – i.e. the manner in which *I* speak about it – is what I am asking to be considered here<sup>41</sup>. It is this kind of zeal and presence that (like cynicism and sentimentality) reveals, by example, false impressions of it. To speak of a kind of genuine authority (or presence) in what someone says would mean nothing if there did not exist bogus forms of it, and the question of whether someone really means what they're saying or whether they're a pseud would never arise. It is this genuine presence in what one says that, I maintain, must be bound up with an individual's character; if I learn something through being moved and my trust in such stirrings proves well founded, then (in understanding something I previously did not) I employ my critical faculties in a way that appeals to concepts through which I try to establish that I have not been taken in. In this way, the acquisition of my understanding is necessarily personal and, as such, when I speak about something in which such understanding is inherently a part, my individuality is necessarily bound up in that speech.

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<sup>40</sup> Incidentally, when the general grammar of (for instance) a moral statement is violated and it becomes unintelligible, it shares something with a proposition in which the terms have not been strictly defined.

<sup>41</sup> I reject slavery because I have an understanding of an 'other's' humanity – i.e. I appreciate that a slave is no different from me in terms of his ability to grieve, love, wonder at the richness of life, have his life fall apart, and so on. In this respect, I understand that he should not be treated as a 'lesser' human being.

## CHAPTER IV

### 4.0. *Rush Rhees's Language of Love and the Language of Academic Moral Philosophy*

In Rush Rhees's book *Without Answers*, he speaks about the "language of love" – he is not, I think, describing a specific language, but rather highlighting a particular and vital aspect of language *viz.* its ability to allow individuality to be bound up within speech; and this relates directly to what I said in the previous chapter about being present in what one says. In this sense, I want to use Rhees to show how there exists, as well as necessary religious language or a language of love, a necessary moral language and how such a language cannot be reduced. This kind of language not only allows the individual to be bound up in his utterances, but also has the capacity to move others – thus providing us with an idea of what it is to communicate morally.

If we speak of the *language* of love, this is not because it has a special vocabulary. (It is not as if we had been referring to a *technical* language.) It is because the language is used in a particular way. The sense of his 'I love you' is bound up with so much else in his life now. It is only on that account that it does mean anything...It is not saying that anything has happened, and it is not describing anything. Nor is it the expression of a sensation or feeling. It is the expression of love. (Rhees, R. 'R&L'. p123).

Rhees's point is that the language of love expresses something that cannot be fully replicated in any other way i.e. it cannot be put into any other form and not (in some sense) be corrupted; to do so would be to violate its grammar i.e. that which supplies it with a particular sense. It can express something from deep within an individual. In this way, the language of love is more than simply 'words on paper' (Rhees, R. 'R&L'. p125) – its grammar is bound up with its speaker and 'is all it means to him in using it and to her in listening.' (ibid.). Of course, one can, as Rhees puts it, 'learn the language of love' (Rhees, R. 'R&L'. p124) and this holds in it the possibility of deception in which the receiver has to be sensitive to the thought that he may be conned by a skilled orator. In genuine cases however, an individual has a unique relationship with the words that he utters i.e. he is a part of that particular language game and is a part of the grammar that gives language – *his* words – sense; no one else can know his thoughts as he knows his own – such as the significance and profundity of his love for his wife.

Now, it might appear that this conflicts with Wittgenstein's private language argument, insofar as I have asserted that an individual has an intimate relationship with the words he utters inasmuch as they are tied to his thoughts. I do not believe that there is any conflict here. A private language (according to Wittgenstein) is one that only the individual whose language it is can understand; accordingly, it would be a language made up of wholly private rules (invented by the individual) that determine how particular words are used. Now, any language is rule governed, inasmuch as rules define how particular concepts are to be used and, as such, it must be possible to break or disobey them. The need for rules (as Wittgenstein highlights) negates the possibility of a private language in the following ways: 1. It makes no sense to speak of a person violating rules that only he can know. – For what method is there to check whether he has made a mistake in rule application? 2. If there is a defined system of rules then it is possible to explain them to another – thus such a language is potentially public, insofar as the nature of rules and concepts is necessarily transparent. The confusion that might arise in the light of what I have said is, I think, born from my argument that impersonal models of moral philosophy are inadequate, and of my insistence that moral thinking is necessarily (if not simply) personal. It is also perhaps, a result of seeing the emphasis on the necessarily public nature of concepts in Wittgenstein's private language argument as a call to understand such publicness purely in terms of the impersonal i.e. to view others from an impersonal standpoint and conceive publicness (i.e. others) in this way. My point however, is that (as people) we meet and interact with each other in public space – and that the concept of such a space is conditioned (and recognised) by the possibility (and presupposition of the possibility) of meaningful encounters between individuals; indeed, it is what allows us to distinguish between an individual's inner life (his relationship with his thoughts etc.) and his public life. Nevertheless, it is individuals (people) who exist within such space and, on account of their individuality, each and every one represents a unique perspective within it. In this way, individuality (namely recognition of what makes an individual) is dependent upon a conceived public space i.e. a space in which shared understanding is possible insofar as it allows us to recognize other human beings as realms of sense, value, significance and so on. As such, there is nothing I have said that conflicts with Wittgenstein's private language argument.

Within the language of love there exists the capacity to recognise the humanity of another human in more than the third person – when someone genuinely utters the words, “I love you!” they are not, as Rhee points out, ‘describing anything [or expressing] a sensation or feeling’ (Rhee, R. ‘R&L’. p123), they are reaching into their own humanity and appealing directly to that of another for understanding, in a way that is necessarily personal: they are expressing something *essentially* human. In this way one cannot extract the cognitive content from words of love, because the manifestation of love and its declaration are not aspects of life that can be anything but personal (yet we still understand them). It is this essentially human (and necessarily personal) aspect of life that has its own language; to attempt to describe love in a way that abandons the language associated with it, in an effort to make one person’s love universally intelligible, is an attempt to reduce the scope of our language to that of the impersonal, while still getting it to do the same job. In other words, such a reduction is an attempt to convey the personal nature of one man’s love to a third party without any alteration in its meaning, significance or profundity. Obviously this project is unsound insofar as we are all individuals.

In short, I think what Rhee is trying to say is that language incorporates humanity – or rather it is a necessary aspect of humanity, but one which cannot go beyond that; and neither is humanity greater than its limits. Its limits are humanity itself. From this, I think the mistake that is made – and this returns me to a point I made earlier about individuality providing a crucial part of the grammar of a language game – is that we try to completely separate the phenomenon of language from each individual and suggest that it is *only* something that we all share i.e. we treat language as made up purely of words, phrases, sentences and so on. Of course we *do* all share it, but it is also something that cannot be separated from the individual (insofar as it is also *his* language) – consider separating an individual from the manner of his expression of love. Gaita remarks,

It is important that [a] child grows in its mother’s body, that her body changes with its growth, and that these changes can appear to us as beautiful, for this provides a focus for love’s tenderness without which there could be no love .....Its being ‘of her own flesh and blood is an expression that plays an important role in our understanding of her love, *but it is an expression in the language of love* rather than one that pre-scientifically gestures towards something underpinning that language.’ (Gaita, R. G&E. p119. Italics orig.).

He continues by suggesting that in a 'scientifically sophisticated community' (ibid.) – such as that described by Aldous Huxley in *A Brave New World*, in which all humans are conceived in test tubes, as it were, asexually – the expression of a child being of its mother's 'own flesh and blood' (ibid.) would evaporate without needing to be replaced. The point being that such an expression describes the love between mother and child in a sense that allows the possibility of third parties to become aware of, and understand, the mother's love in a way that makes them sensitive to the genuineness (or otherwise) of her expressions of love towards (and about) her child. The expression is over and above a purely biological one, and the possibility of such expressions is given by the awareness of the existence of love. Naturally, it is possible to emulate expressions of love to the point where others might be taken in, but the point remains that without the manifestation of the genuine article, such expressions – i.e. such a language – would be flat or not exist at all. – And one should not try to employ kinds of language that do not hold the possibility of sincerely expressing the love of one person for another, if that is what is required.

Similar things can be said about moral expressions. In his article 'Kant and the Language of Reason' Mario von der Ruhr attacks Gaita for his criticism of Kant's moral philosophical language.

Rather than helpfully elucidating important features of moral phenomenology, Gaita claims, a Kantian account seriously distorts these features, itself betraying a lack of moral understanding. In this connexion, Kant's philosophical terminology is said to be both expressive of, and at the same time instrumental in propagating this distortion of moral thinking. Gaita is primarily thinking of expressions like 'categorical imperative', 'rationality in others', 'principles' moral maxim', etc., all of which combine, in his view, to yield what would strike many as a caricature of moral discourse. How, Gaita asks, are we to describe the character of a murderer's remorse for his deed, for instance? (Von der Ruhr, M. 'Kant and The Language of Reason' in *Commonality and Particularity in Ethics*. Ed., Alanen, L., Heinamaa, S. and Wallgren, T. MacMillan. London. 1997. P386-7)

The main disagreement with Gaita lies, I think, in the idea that Kant's style and the kind of arguments he employs, is an impediment to achieving a deepened moral understanding. Rhees argued that there couldn't be love without the language of love, and Gaita's claim is that the same holds for moral understanding and moral communication i.e. there cannot be moral understanding without moral communication and language to match (and *vice versa*). Now, der Ruhr is not

disputing this, but he does claim that Gaita's further argument – that Kant fails to fully appreciate the connection between moral understanding and natural language – is gratuitous. I am not in agreement with Gaita here, inasmuch as I think his assertion is presumptuous, but neither am I assenting to der Ruhr's point. Kant certainly accepts the autonomy of the individual, indeed individual autonomy is at the heart of his moral philosophy, as is the sanctity of human life, but I think his talk of principles, moral law and rational beings is unhelpful for two reasons.

Firstly, as Gaita indicates in *A Common Humanity*, to utter phrases such as, 'I have transgressed most terribly! I have violated my principles!...I have broken the Social Covenant!' (Gaita, R. ACH. p.32) in remorse, is at best a parody of it and, at worst, meaningless inasmuch as they show the speaker to have an incomplete understanding of the humanity and, as such, the particularity of his victim. Whatever case, such expressions are not in the grammar of moral language – indeed, they violate it and show the agent who uttered them to have a feeble grasp of what he has done (or his remorse to be counterfeit), provided we accept the argument that moral understanding and the existence of a moral language are cohesive. In the same way, one might violate the language of love by talking to one's spouse in purely scientifically biological terms relating (perhaps) to the mutual attraction that they feel for each other. One of the reasons that this violates grammar is because it expresses a sentiment that allows for its meaning to be only accidentally or contingently attached to the agent; it attempts to reduce one's love to something that can be understood in precisely the same way by anyone – and of course, one person's love for another is necessarily an individual (personal) phenomenon<sup>42</sup>. I am not suggesting that there is an inevitable link (although I think there might be) between the love of two people and morality, but I am claiming that the language associated with each is necessarily irreducible. Thus, I think it is difficult to learn anything valuable concerning the nature of remorse, love, religion etc., from a "translation" of their natural language into a more formal academic language.

Secondly, the essence of a formal language is that its grammar is fundamentally propositional in form i.e., is made up of true and false propositions punctuated with forms of valid and invalid inference. To break down a moral treatise

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<sup>42</sup> This assertion does not contradict the possibility of concepts such as love existing in the public domain. Part of what is publicly intelligible about such a concept is that those who love, are experiencing something personal and private. Similar things can be said about remorse, guilt etc..

into such a language, I believe, is to try and rationalise morality in a way that is incompatible with what it is to be morally rational or rational in love, insofar as I do not consider that the demands of rationality can be formulaically determined. Sometimes, for instance, it is rational to trust and at other times not - if we get it wrong, then the results can vary from mild consequences such as cynicism or naïveté to severe consequences such as insanity.

Nevertheless, this still does not adequately address the question of why one cannot take works written in such a way just as a 'conceptual recollection, rather than as a catechism of what is right and what is wrong' (von der Ruhr, M. 'Kant and the Language of Reason.' p.394). Now, the reason that I believed Gaita to be presumptuous in terms of his assertion that Kant fails to fully appreciate the connection between moral understanding and natural language, is that Kant specifically addresses such concerns – he is greatly concerned with individual happiness and, as der Ruhr indicates, 'it is difficult to see how a responsible moral agent could fulfil this duty adequately without being sensitive to what *would* promote their happiness, and thus to *who* they are as individuals – to their natures, likes and dislikes, preferences and aversions etc.' (von der Ruhr, M. 'Kant and the Language of Reason.' p.397 (italics orig.)). Thus, implicit in what Kant says, is the assertion that one has to be responsive in every way to the individuality of others, and this of course often involves dialogue in a language sensitive to such individuality. – So Kant was, at the very least, aware of it. It is not my intention to criticise Kant's actual moral philosophy, but I do want to highlight why I believe the style in which it is written, while not displaying a lack of understanding of the relationship between morality and its natural language, is unhelpful in terms of illustrating the requirement of deepened moral understanding (or wisdom) in terms of, for instance, moral obligation. My criticism is aimed at a style of writing common in academic moral philosophy. Such a style (as I have already mentioned) is in the language of the impersonal and whilst it is possible to describe the importance of a moral language or language of love in connection with moral understanding and love, it makes it very difficult to wield concepts that exist within them, such as good, evil love or hatred, insofar as such concepts have their home (i.e. hold their proper meaning) in their natural languages. To remove them and place them elsewhere constitutes a form of reductionism that cannot wholeheartedly illustrate the deepening of moral understanding or wisdom. – To embody what it is for one's moral understanding to deepen, one needs to speak in

a language that is appropriate to deepened moral understanding i.e. one in which the grammar is in accordance with everyday moral expression. So, one cannot ‘point and say ‘that is the being in love, and this is the difference that it made’...’ (Rhees, R. ‘R&L’. p123). To do so is to try and extract cognitive content from thoughts of love, and to write about morality or love in such a way encourages us to do this. Indeed, I think this one of the ways in which Wittgenstein meant ‘Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language’ (PI: 109) – in other words (in the case of religion, love or morality) the way that something is linguistically presented to us can affect the way we think about it. If one does attempt to extract cognitive content from thoughts of love or moral thoughts, then one is faced with questions such as, “What reasons do you have for marrying your girlfriend?” – And while one can list qualities that one finds attractive in one’s spouse, such reasons only run to a point. In the final analysis all one can say (unless one is corrupt) is that the wish to marry is a consequence of love. – And if one’s love relied purely on a series of reasons (such as having brown hair and being interested in music) then it would only ever be contingent. Certainly such an impersonal way of speaking (i.e. in terms of reasons) is misleading as it draws us towards a conception of reason,

‘...which deems the grammar of its constitutive categories to transcend our humanity, and, indeed, any particular form of life. This conception of reason provides its own edification, and indeed its own ‘winged words’ (Gaita. TPE. p146).

This is where I think language of the kind Kant and many others employ in their moral philosophy is misleading. It is a kind of language that draws us towards considering morality in a propositional (impersonal) sense, that at the same time can often make us feel philosophically uncomfortable in a way we cannot quite pinpoint. It is also a kind of language in which the grammar is in accordance with an impersonal (humanity transcending) form of thinking, in the same way as love and religion have their own natural language that is in accordance with a particular way of thinking. This, I believe, supplies the reason for the discomfort. Now, in terms of Gaita’s objection that Kant does not adequately appreciate the connection between moral understanding and natural language, – I think that it is not quite right, insofar as Kant’s moral philosophy focuses heavily on individual autonomy and specifically points out that detailed characteristics of situations are of vital importance. For

instance, Kant believes that it is every individual's duty to promote happiness in themselves and to encourage it in others.

To secure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly); for discontent with one's condition under many pressing cares and amid unsatisfied wants might easily become a great temptation to transgress one's duties. But here also do men of themselves already have, irrespective of duty, the strongest and deepest inclination toward happiness, because just in this idea are all inclinations combined into a sum total. (Kant, I. *Groundwork*. 399).

In promoting the happiness of others, Kant would surely have been aware – given the importance he imparts on individuality – that the way one person expresses himself to another is something that cannot be ignored. Thus it is, if not evident, implicit that Kant does, at least to a certain extent, appreciate the concordance between language and certain ways of thinking and living<sup>43</sup>. Nevertheless, der Ruhr's point that the language of the *Groundwork* is of little significance, if we take it purely as 'an exercise in conceptual recollection, rather than a catechism of what is right and wrong' (von der Ruhr, M. 'Kant and the Language of Reason.' p.394), fails to recognise the possibility of how language can affect how we think about things. In other words, in terms of moral philosophy, a tract written in an impersonal manner about, say, moral obligation, duties etc., and how we can determine what they are – no matter how acutely observed and argued – can encourage us (bewitch our intelligence), through its language, into thinking that it is appropriate to treat – i.e. think about – individual moral problems (and how we approach finding the answers to them) in the same way, even if it is implicit within the work that this should not be done. Earlier on, I mentioned that some moral philosophers do not consider words such as 'understanding', 'correctness' and so on as carrying the same significance in a moral context as they do in, say, a mathematical one. The problem - they think - is that the meanings of such words are identical both in mathematical and moral realms which results – through not being able to wield their mathematical meanings effectively in moral philosophy – in a belief that moral understanding is not really a proper form of understanding. And I think that moral philosophy written in an impersonal style draws us into this kind of confusion insofar as its grammar is of a

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<sup>43</sup> However I disagree with Kant's assertion that rationality is purely an a priori concept. I do not have space to articulate my objections in this thesis, but I think the essence of my disagreement can be grasped by returning to the section in which I talked about rationality necessarily demanding trust and not necessarily being formal.

propositional kind and incompatible with that of the moral; consequently we are persuaded to consider vocabulary such as “understanding” and “correctness” propositionally. In other words, our treatment of such vocabulary bewitches us into thinking that moral understanding is not a proper form of understanding like (or in comparison with), say, mathematical understanding. Accordingly, although Kant’s moral philosophy in the third person emphasises the importance of the individual (and implicitly the importance of individual expression), the fact that it is in such a form draws us into considering the meanings of words such as “understanding” and “correctness” in a sense that sees their meanings as identical in both the moral and mathematical realms. It is – as Wittgenstein emphasizes – the task of philosophy to guard against this kind of bewitchment.

Thus, the position I am adopting concerning the respective positions of Gaita and der Ruhr, is that Gaita is hasty in accusing Kant of failing to appreciate the relationship between moral understanding and natural language – while der Ruhr (and Kant) fails to recognise the possibility that the language in which an academic tract is written can have a profound effect on the way in which we think about the subsequent problems contained therein – and this is where I believe problems do exist in academic philosophical writing. In terms of Kant (although one can make the point more generally), despite his emphasis on individual autonomy and so forth, the textual rationalization of morality does, I believe, stand in the way of the possibility of its allowing the attainment of deepened moral understanding in those who read it, as its grammar is not in tune with that of actual moral thinking.

There is one final point I wish to make clear before moving on, involving what happens to the meanings of words describing non-externally justifiable concepts such as love, cynicism, evil, right and wrong (in their moral capacity) and so on, when they are moved into the abstract. Such concepts make sense in ordinary language, insofar as one can comprehend what is meant when we speak of someone as cynical or sentimental or evil or loving; in other words, the sense of a sentence describing cynicism, love, sentimentality etc., acquires its meaning from the possibility of its opposite. I can describe an individual’s reaction to Diana’s death as sentimental because I can imagine his reaction as not sentimental, and this can be linked to the idea that such concepts can only be shown up by example. If we drag such concepts into the abstract – or at least try to form meaningful sentences about them in the abstract (which pretty much amounts to the same thing), what happens?

Fundamentally, one needs a series of necessary and sufficient conditions associated with the concepts (love, sentimentality, cynicism etc.) that one is talking about, in order to provide a standard by which all possible instances of them can be measured; in other words, such concepts need to be truth-valued against others in a way that allows them to be externally justified (i.e. impersonally, like mathematical and scientific propositions). This however, is not possible - if it were, then every individual could (for instance), in principle, understand one man's love for a woman in an identical way. In other words, they would understand in such a way that would mean they love the woman as he does - for there could be no way to understand such love in an identical way that did not involve this. This makes no sense, and is a mockery of the concept of love - i.e. what it means to love. Two (exhaustive) alternatives now become clear in terms of what occurs when we attempt to form sentences involving such concepts in the abstract: either (1) - for meaning to be possible - there needs to be a series of necessary and sufficient conditions from which we can determine an absolute standard and thus have the possibility of external justifiability (which, as I have demonstrated, is not plausible), or (2) (if there are no such conditions) such sentences are nonsensical and meaningless, insofar as there is nothing in the structure of abstract grammar that allows for sense. Nevertheless, we can still talk sensibly about rationality and irrationality in terms of love and other moral concepts, and this reveals that rationality does not always demand external justification and that sometimes it can only be shown up by example and used in language in the same way as, say, sentimentality or love. This is what makes rationality a distinctly human phenomenon.

The following section provides illustrations that what is reasonable and rational is not always impersonal.

#### 4.1. *Moral Significance, Moral Obligation and The Individual.*

In this section, I take the arguments I have made so far and employ them to consider the importance of an individual voice, and associate this with moral significance and obligation for the individual.

Firstly, I want to consider the importance of an individual voice on the model of thought that always separates cognitive from non-cognitive content. Certainly, (in philosophy) much is made of the importance of the individual voice, but how compatible is this with the cognitive / non-cognitive conception of thought? If we take

cognitive thought as that which can be separated from the individual without any harm to the meaning (i.e. as that which transcends the individual), then there are some conspicuous problems with viewing the concept of the individual voice as supremely important. If cognitive content is only accidentally the individual's, then surely this negates the importance of an individual voice. For although one can make an argument to respect the feelings of another, it can also be seen that, on this conception, non-cognitive phenomena (such as feelings) have, in themselves, very little evaluative force insofar as they are supremely subjective. If this is only what separates one individual from another, then it is rather at odds with the notion that each individual voice should be treated with utmost respect<sup>44</sup>. On this theory, an objective argument cannot be made that supports the thought that an individual voice can be *profoundly* individual. To do so, it would have to speak of concepts such as depth and maturity in a way that allowed for them to be employed (and deployed) as cognitive concepts; as such, it would have to incorporate aspects of an individual that mark him out as distinct from all other human beings. In terms of moral significance, this is important, and the forthcoming discussion of significance and obligation should make transparent what I have said here.

When I make a moral decision, I do not make a decision that can be evaluated as right or wrong, in the way I can about a decision over which violin I should buy. The decision about which violin to buy is independently correct of the individual, while a moral decision is not. In the case of the violin, I make a decision based on a particular method that will ensure an outcome that I desire. In terms of significance, a decision of this kind ultimately rests on whether I am well enough acquainted with the facts – so, for example, if I were to buy a new violin, I would examine the quality of sound it produced, the merits (and reputations) of the various violin-makers and so on. I would also be well advised to take someone else with me who was knowledgeable about violins. Were I later to find that the violin I purchased was unsatisfactory, then I could chastise myself for not having been thorough enough in my research. I might, for instance, have allowed my emotions to influence my judgement – perhaps I let the look of it (rather than its underlying quality) sway my decision. – And here one can see an association with my earlier discussion concerning cognitive and non-cognitive content. The correctness or incorrectness of decisions such as this one, lies in the

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<sup>44</sup> Of course, I am not suggesting that individual voices should be treated with respect unconditionally – one considers, in each case, how deserving of respect an individual's words are.

thoroughness of the research conducted and, consequently, a correct or incorrect decision remains the same over time; they are no more significant for one person than they are for another. In other words, correctness or incorrectness of this kind is only accidentally an individual's – anyone could have made the *same* mistake i.e. not carry out the necessary research to ensure correctness. There is a definite (externally justifiable) logic here: the violin that I purchased is either of good, reasonable, or poor quality and my decision can be measured in that way. Thus we have a decision that can be measured as correct or incorrect against the procedure that was involved in making it and, in this respect, the decision will always remain either correct or incorrect. There is however, another dimension to the decision to purchase a particular violin *viz.* that of external contingency. It might be the case that I have recently been offered (and taken) a position in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and that, on such grounds, have decided to acquire a new violin. I now have a commitment to a world-class orchestra and desire a fine violin to match my position and I make the necessary procedural arrangements to ensure I purchase the best violin I can afford. – But suppose, later on, the orchestra's arts subsidy is cut, and they are forced to let me go; in this case, the correctness or incorrectness of my decision to buy a violin rests on an external contingency. If I remain in the orchestral wilderness forever after, then it can be said that although, in terms of my research, I acquired the best violin available for my money, things did not turn out as I expected and that, in this respect, the decision was not as correct as I might have wished (although I am in no way blameworthy). What can be seen here is that the correctness or incorrectness of some decisions relies on external contingencies beyond my control.

A moral decision, by contrast, is non-accidentally an individual's and I wish to relate the following discussion to a claim that I made early on in this thesis *viz.*, that a moral problem or judgement has, embedded in it, all the concepts bound up with my character that I have acquired during my lifetime, and that this is what I mean when I speak of a moral problem as *non-accidentally* or *profoundly* mine rather than *accidentally* mine. The decision to buy a new violin will not *fundamentally* change me as a person – I may be upset that things did not turn out the way I had hoped or I might be very happy that my orchestral ambitions have worked out and vindicated my decision to spend thousands of pounds on a new violin, but these are not deep identity-conferring changes. Consider the following scenario: I meet someone and develop romantic feelings for them, they do the same for me – however, neither of us

feels at ease with anything more than a tacit acknowledgement of the state of affairs that exists between us. Eventually it becomes apparent that the situation as it stands is fast becoming unworkable and so I elect to ask her out. We both decide to give it a go and, to begin with, everything runs fairly smoothly – after a while however, things between us become strained and finally, after about four years, we break up. Was my decision correct, and what was the significance of it? Unlike the violin example, it depends when I am asked – for instance, the day she accepted my invitation to dinner I would have said that it was one of the best decisions I had ever made; but if it was the day after we had parted company, I would probably answer bitterly and rue the day I made the decision to ask her. A year or two after the event, my perspective might be different again and perhaps I would see it as just one of those things that happens to people. Thus, it is apparent that no standard of correctness exists in the same way as the decision about buying a violin. In terms of the significance of my decision - it is not firm, but that is not to say that there are not boundaries to it; for instance, it must tally with certain cold facts about our relationship such as what we did and when. In this way (unlike the violin example) one cannot make an assessment of correctness based on an impersonal or ‘cognitive’ evaluation of the facts. And it cannot be an evaluation in which I try to separate cognitive from non-cognitive content – i.e. it cannot transcend my individuality. That is not to suggest however, that I do not understand the significance of my decision at any given time and that I am not capable of recognising the possibility of changes in significance later on<sup>45</sup>. So, does this mean that we should just see such (personal) significance as fairly irrelevant insofar as it appears to be capricious – liable to change at any moment in a way that is contingent upon future unknown events and my reaction to them? Given that I don’t know how the significance will manifest itself in the future, should I really consider my decision in terms of significance at all? Only if I accept that true significance lies purely in an impersonal model upon which decisions can be weighed as correct or incorrect by anyone, i.e. in a sense in which correctness or incorrectness is independent of (or only contingently linked to) the agent. Obviously this only allows for the kind of significance that was manifest in the earlier violin example and, as such, there is a definite parallel between this and my previous discussion concerning cognitive and non-cognitive content with regards to moral judgements and problems.

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<sup>45</sup> Once again, the burden is on those who believe that something that is truly cognitive must be fundamentally impersonal.

Indeed (in terms of my decision to ask the girl to dinner), with hindsight, I might think that I could (or even maybe should) have made another choice, but – and this is important – at the time I made the decision it was the *only* decision I could make<sup>46</sup>. And this is why wisdom takes time to achieve and moral decisions are necessarily, but not simply personal. I shall try to make this clear in the light of what I have just said. Insofar as wisdom takes time to achieve, it is bound up with the significance of the decisions that we make, inasmuch as they develop our understanding of who we are; often these decisions are of a personal kind (such as the example above), the significance of which cannot be impersonal. Consider for instance the idea of a pre-nuptial agreement<sup>47</sup>. An agreement such as this provides a clear and interesting example of the difference between impersonal and personal significance and also demonstrates the importance of personal significance in terms of what we feel obliged to do. Essentially a pre-nuptial agreement is a form of insurance policy like – for instance - property insurance; I have ensured the contents of my college room against theft because I understand that there is a certain risk. Now, in terms of marriage, from an impersonal perspective it makes sense to say the same kind of thing – there is a risk that my marriage will fail and, as such, it seems right to insure it. – But to insure my marriage (as it were) is to admit the possibility that it might end in divorce, and that contradicts my decision which is bound up with my certainty (assuming that I'm serious) that I want to spend the rest of my life with one person. To take the decision to get married carries with it massive significance, but its significance - as I have tried to show – is different to that of something impersonal such as the move to insure the contents of my college room, insofar as the grounds for certainty are entirely different. The certainty of one can be externally justified, but the other cannot be. I am *certain* that it is possible that some of my possessions might be stolen during my time in college and, on these grounds, I take the prudent measure of buying insurance. I am also *certain* that I want to commit and devote the rest of my life to one person and, on those grounds do not need to take out insurance, but in this case, I cannot appeal to possibilities – or anything else, apart from my love – as a means of justification.

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<sup>46</sup> And in any case, I have no way of knowing the possible significance had a different decision been made.

<sup>47</sup> The pre-nuptial agreement has no legal force in British law.

The point is that the person in love is different; life is different for him, or the whole world is different for him. But in this there is not anything to which you can point and say 'that is being in love, and this is the difference it has made'; the difference is being in love. (Rhees, R. 'R&L'. p124)

Consequently, the significance of my decision to marry can never be impersonal and neither can the obligation associated with it i.e. "for as long as I live". Nevertheless, that is not to say I don't understand my certainty or the obligations bound up with my love and commitment to marry. And this is why, with a moral problem, we cannot defer to a third party for an attempt at its solution, as each individual has a unique relationship with it. I wish to return for a moment, to the case of Billy Budd and Winch's declaration that he would have found it impossible to act as Vere had done and have Budd executed. In such a situation, it would make no sense to say to Winch that perhaps he should have a bash at acting in the same way, just as it makes no sense for a lover (unless he is corrupt) to marry whilst at the same time admitting that there is a good chance that his marriage will fail. Conceivably, later on, his understanding of the significance of his decision might change and he may later feel, as a result, that it is possible to act (or that he should have acted) in a way that he could not have done previously. The same, of course, could be said of Winch. However, the judgement that Winch made at the time of writing his essay was the *only* one he could make. Whatever the case, the significance of decisions must (on pain of insanity), in some sense, be tied to cold facts despite the possibility of changing significance. Nevertheless, significance is crucial in terms of how it influences our understanding i.e. how it affects us conceptually, how we learn and how it shapes our individual outlooks that make us the persons that we are. Such influence often determines the kinds of subsequent decisions that we make and this is why wisdom takes time to achieve.

A final point I wish to raise in this section is that the above shows that people *do* change, and that the person entering into deliberation is not the same person that emerges. The marriage and girlfriend examples provide very good illustrations of the sort of thing I mean. The significance of such decisions changes a person insofar as they represent far more than simply the satisfaction of a desire; one cannot be a husband, wife, girlfriend or boyfriend just for an instant – these are necessarily aspects of one's life that one must live with (at least for a while). Thus the agent is not

changed immediately or completely – such changes take place over time, and this is also tied in with the claim that wisdom takes time to achieve. In the case of my violin example, any change that takes place will be transient, inasmuch as I acquire the violin and move on – perhaps I fuss over its maintenance, but this is not identity conferring. A decision to marry, or a moral decision continues to change me insofar as the understanding associated with it (i.e. understanding of what I have done, and what I have become) influences my understanding of subsequent moral problems and decisions, and such decisions may also influence the significance of earlier decisions. In the Vere / Winch example, the significance of Winch's judgement (that he found it impossible to have Billy Budd executed) may change over time and, as I pointed out earlier, there may have been a time later on when he thought differently - this could have been due to many things. The necessarily (but not simply) personal nature of such judgements means that change in significance and change in person are interconnected and inseparable; the significance of, for example, my decision to ask a girl to dinner is uniquely tied to me. As I change, the significance of my decision will change also, but the change in significance also influences me as a person. Suppose we grow apart and things collapse into a bitter and spiteful break up; in this case it is clear to see the significance of my decision changing over time. To begin with I was happy that she agreed, later on when I was in love with her, it was the best decision I ever made, at the time of our split it was the worst decision and so on. The fact that she was my girlfriend meant that we adapted to each other's company and I saw her – after a period of time - under the light of my love as I saw no one else. Thus the significance of our decision to be together and our falling in and (later) out of love with each other changed us as people, and such change altered the significance that these decisions had for us. From here, it is apparent that an obligation at a particular time in one's life need not hold for all time – as significance and personhood changes, one's obligations do also.

#### 4.2. *Relativism*

However, ultimately, are not all such judgements and decisions merely relative? Surely the decision that I want to marry Matilda is relative insofar as that is simply how I feel? – Certainly such a judgement admits of no external justification. Similar things can be said about the respective differences of Winch and Vere concerning the execution of Billy Budd; their judgements, it can be argued, are relative insofar as

they are individual responses that are, at best, contingent upon cultural and historical factors. Thus, it is easy to claim that one cannot critically assess moral judgements because there are no solid and conclusive criteria by which this can be done. Worse, it could be argued that since this is so, it is inappropriate to pass judgement on those from vastly different backgrounds.

The first point to be made however, is that we do not *experience* moral claims relativistically. Indeed, what I am arguing for can be interpreted as a kind of relativism, but one that is not harmful, providing one understands that the decisions and judgement of the agent are no less significant or important (or indeed cognitive) as a result. Granted, there is certainly cultural and historical influence involved insofar as an individual is necessarily going to inherit aspects of the cultural setting in which he was brought up – it is something that is an ingredient of his biography and doubtless affects his outlook, but it is not something that wholly determines his individuality (although it is certainly enough to mark him out from individuals of other cultures); that, as has already been discussed, is shaped by (among other things) the decisions that he makes and their significance. Nevertheless none of this precludes the possibility of meaningful disagreement, as the nature of concepts is necessarily transparent and, thus, public. The point is that moral decisions *matter* to the agents who makes them and, as such, it is improper to try to look at them from an impersonal personal perspective; to do so brings us round (again) to my previous discussion of cognitive and non-cognitive content and violation of grammar. In relation to this, we can also appeal to the discussion of the significance of marriage. I shall attempt to cash out what I have just said more clearly. To examine moral judgements from an impersonal standpoint i.e. one in which one makes a cognitive / non-cognitive distinction, is to attempt to examine a phenomenon that does not fit into such a model; as such, an examination of this kind violates grammar insofar as it denies important aspects of the individuality of an agent's moral thought that give particular decisions and judgements sense. It attempts to apply moral thought onto a pre-conceived conceptual model of the nature of thought which, as I have already discussed, is inappropriate for an accurate account of moral thinking. An attempt to do so will finish up – for instance – with part of a thought being treated as a whole one if we try and hoist it onto the conception of 'cognitive' as it exists in the cognitive/non-cognitive model I have described. Thus we cannot talk of relativism in terms of moral judgements in a really meaningful sense, since it involves taking an impersonal

standpoint and, even though what I am arguing for is a type of relativism, the individuality contained within such thought (i.e. its grammar) means that to judge it as 'merely relative' neglects the relevance of the grammar provided by the individual, and also denies that individual's claim on seriousness and authority. Thus, to explicitly present this as a charge against my argument misses the point. This can be further demonstrated by referring back to the marriage example in the previous section. While the decision to get married is essentially relative, this takes nothing away from its significance for the individual, nor does it provide anything useful in terms of evaluating correctness or incorrectness of the decision; as such, we (as individuals) do not experience such decisions relativistically. To dismiss a decision to get married as "merely relative" might, strictly speaking, be true, but it is also absurd. His conception of love is slightly different to hers, but it's just a relative standard, just as her conception of good is just a relative standard and so on. The point is, that like marriage, moral decisions *matter* to the individual.

#### 4.3. A further look at 'Being Moved'

I now wish to address a worry that was omitted earlier for the sake of lucidity *viz.*, that the idea 'being moved' is not as authoritative as I give it credit for; the very notion of, for instance, sentimentality involves being genuinely moved by the wrong things. Therefore, why not bypass talk of being moved and go straight to talking about the nature of the things that it is appropriate to be moved by? Firstly, I want to make some comments about the character that such an enquiry would have. An investigation into the nature of appropriate things that we should be moved by would immediately demand a series of necessary and sufficient conditions showing why we should let certain things, as it were, slip through the net and others not. This, I believe, is the wrong way to approach the problem, since it does not allow appropriateness to be determined by a language game – i.e. one has to have a watertight impersonal preconception (with strict propositional grammar) of what is, and is not, appropriate in all possible situations and contexts. The enquiry must take into account – for instance – the characters of individuals involved in a particular situation and so on. Moreover, such an enquiry would demand that we are all moved by the same things in similar ways, and I think one of the problems is that we should not think in terms of being moved by *things*.

Rather, we should accept that our being moved is the product of a particular language game (one that includes ourselves) i.e. one in which the possibility of our being moved is made manifest in, and is itself a part of the language game. Now, in terms of sentimentality, an individual is genuinely moved to look upon something in a sentimental manner; and that he is moved is a product of a belief (or beliefs) that whatever he is moved by is appropriately telling of his relationship with it. Consider the death of Princess Diana. Many people were moved by Diana's funeral, some in ways that could be regarded as sentimental – for instance, those who truly believed they knew her just from watching her appearances on television (and were “devastated” by her death). One can say that their reactions were sentimental because seeing a person on television is quite different from actually being acquainted with them personally – yet they trust that their being moved is appropriately telling of their relationship with her and justify this with statements such as, “I felt like I knew her!” Now, there is an important sense (as discussed in previous sections) in which beliefs such as these are not beliefs that can be truth-valued; sentimentality needs to be shown up by example and as such one cannot see reactions such as those to Diana's funeral as wrong or false – only sentimental. One can only see sentimentality for what it is, and not necessarily as a cause of a thought's failure.

What is interesting is that many people have come to see their own reaction as sentimental. How did this change come about? The question returns me to a point I made earlier *viz.*, that wisdom takes time to achieve since it is bound up with the significance of aspects of our lives that often revolve around decisions that we make, or are the results of events of which we are victims. Such significance develops our understanding of who we are. Perhaps one way in which someone who was sentimental over Diana's funeral comes to see their sentimentality for what it is, is when they later lose a very close relative – someone whom they loved very much and were genuinely close to. It takes this event – and the significance of it for them personally – to draw the contrast between relationships mediated through journalists and a television set, and an understanding of what it really means to lose someone. Possibly such an event afforded them the understanding of what a truly personal relationship actually means which, until that time, had not been made clear to them – i.e. they had been naïve. And this is a good example of one way in which wisdom is acquired.

#### 4.4. *Wisdom*

A while back I talked about age and maturity, and how its necessity, in terms of understanding certain things, compels us to differentiate between children and adults – certainly we can credit a child with a mature attitude, and that is to make him an exception by highlighting his behaviour as beyond that expected of his years. Similarly, we can accuse an adult of having a very immature attitude and so on. Thus, age is not a *sufficient* condition for achieving understanding (or wisdom) – for instance, it is possible that an individual who reacts to Diana’s funeral in, for example, the way made explicit in the previous section, may not see his reaction as sentimental even in the light of the death of a close relative. Certainly there are plenty of old fools about – so are we supposed to think in terms of understanding and wisdom coming from the right kind of experience or appropriate kind of reflection on experience? Firstly, I am not sure that the word “right” is, in this context, suitable, as it draws us towards thinking of kinds of experience in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions with an aim to establishing criteria for rightness. I would be inclined to favour the latter option *viz.*, appropriate reflection on experience. With the concept of appropriateness (in terms of reflection on experience), we can see whether a person has, for instance, displayed a mature attitude, or whether they have been naïve or sentimental; once again, consider the ‘Diana’ example – a sentimental reaction can be seen to be inappropriate, as can a thoroughly cold one. In the previous few sections, I have attempted to illustrate how I believe wisdom can occur and have implied what is incorporated in it as a concept. Nonetheless, wisdom and understanding still seem dangerously subjective concepts: I think my Auntie Dorothy is very wise, but her husband does not. Here, I think, we encounter relativism in a similar way to that present in moral judgements and decisions such as those to get married; it might be the case that I am naïve or uneducated and, as such, easily impressed, or it might be that my Uncle is a dreadful cynic and sees his wife as just being full of clichés. And in the end, like concepts such as cynicism, maturity and sentimentality, wisdom can only be shown up by examples of what is not wise. Thus, to see someone as wise, in itself requires wisdom i.e. a sober reflection on their words and deeds; such reflection demands a degree of trust in the person being judged, and in oneself as being worthily trusting. Serious reflection of this sort is of the same kind that is required in moral deliberation which, as previously discussed, need not be entirely subjective insofar as one attempts (in such deliberation) to understand and fully appreciate the humanity of

another person in a way that matters and runs very deep – consider the earlier example of a thief coming to an understanding of what he has done and in the process realising that he has got more than he bargained for – this is, of course, being wise after the event and one cannot say of the thief that he possesses wisdom. Now, in terms of recognising wisdom in another, one has to examine the various actions, decisions and judgements that an individual has made during his lifetime, look at the significance that they have had for him, and whether he has learnt from such significance and responded to it in appropriate ways. So, for instance, in the case of Diana’s funeral, if an individual reacts in a very sentimental way and subsequently does not see his reaction as such in the light of the death of a close relative whom he loved very much, we can say that he has not seen (or perhaps learnt from) the significance of the death of his relative. Accordingly, we can see that the concept of wisdom is of a form that cannot be arrived at through purely cognitive or non-cognitive means (assuming the “traditional” cognitive non-cognitive model of the nature of thought), since cognitive thought demands an impersonal propositional grammar, and non-cognitive thought is purely subjective. Some might suggest that a mix of the two is what is required, but once again, this begs the question of why we should only consider as cognitive (and objective) those things that are impersonal. – And we would certainly not identify an individual as wise if we believed he just relied on his feelings to make judgements or, conversely, if he never relied on them. Such a cognitive/non-cognitive division encourages us to think in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions concerning the right proportional combinations of head and heart, with what it takes to achieve understanding and wisdom. And what proportions (or combinations) of each determine whether we are thinking properly critically?

Returning to the theme that age is not a sufficient condition of understanding, I want to look at the possibility of one’s understanding (or wisdom) falling away, before moving on to the next section in which I discuss moral corruption. I have already made a case for the notion that deepened understanding takes time to achieve, but I want to stress that such progress in understanding in no way precludes the possibility of its subsequent decay. How can this be, considering that I have argued that understanding and wisdom necessarily take time to achieve – thus requiring age? My answer is that one can achieve a clear kind of understanding before having it corrupted by certain experiences – for instance, going into politics (which may involve becoming selfish) or being sent to Iraq as a soldier (which may require the

ability to kill without guilt or remorse). Thus, a certain effort is necessary in order to hold and retain one's understanding and keep it fresh, or to advance it further. If one fails here, jadedness will set in and one can repeat what one has learnt through one's previous understanding time after time and never be truly standing behind what one says – often in such cases, one feels obliged to look for reasons, and once this has happened such understanding has virtually lost its hold. For an example, I wish to consider the kind of person who started off attending church as a result of genuine religious conviction, but who, over the years, has become jaded i.e. the importance of such conviction has waned and perhaps the social factor has become more important. Nowadays, he attends church each week and repeats over and over the words in the service, but with little understanding of what he is saying – the words which once had a profound meaning and significance for him are now idle. The point here, is that his understanding of his faithfulness to God and its relationship to his church-going and the service, has either just diminished through a general kind of malaise and languor, or perhaps been corrupted through the enjoyment of social factors which he found his church provided. The issue I am raising, and one that I shall expand upon in the following section, is that one's deep, long term, identity-conferring choices (career, marriage, religious conviction etc.) can never be fully justified with *reasons*. If, for instance, I lose my religious conviction (for whatever reason), I cannot regain it through incessant repetition of arguments that, at one time meant something to me. This returns me to a comparison that Gaita makes – one that I highlighted earlier – between a jaded scientist and someone who is morally exhausted; a jaded scientist is not necessarily compromised (in terms of his authority) to speak about a scientific subject, as cognitive content can be easily separated from the individual. In this way scientific understanding *can* be regained through repetition of cognitive processes that lead to the formulation of theories (that one has forgotten), since they are of a form that admits of external justification and, as such, are only accidentally the individual's. This is not so with a morally jaded individual; authority wanes with jadedness and, in this respect, the agent is the '[limit] within which justification...take[s] place.' (Monk. R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. p.571). Wittgenstein remarks,

“But *this* is how it is - ” I say to myself over and over again. I feel as though, if only I could fix my gaze absolutely sharply on this fact, get it in focus, I must grasp the essence of the matter. (PI: 113)

Reasons for understanding in – for instance – a moral or religious sense are somehow not enough; the authenticity of an individual’s religious or moral convictions (and his proper understanding of them) demands more from him than proclaiming a series of reasons. The sincerity of his religious and moral convictions and their associated expressions cannot be verified by going over and over those proclaimed reasons – genuine expression (as has been discussed) can only be shown by counterfeit examples.<sup>48</sup> Thus in terms of moral or religious understanding falling away and the effort that is required if this is to be avoided, there is a dynamic in one’s conception of such things that cannot be reclaimed simply by listing the relevant facts or beliefs on a piece of paper in case they are later forgotten.

Of course, one can attempt to recover understanding of the religious or moral kind and sometimes succeed, but this cannot be done exclusively through appeal to reasons – the individual featured in my church-going example would, for instance, have to re-examine his relationship with God and Christian teachings, and realize what kind of a religious life such a relationship demands. Moreover, failures in one’s understanding – laziness, sentimentality, optimism, cynicism, and so on – are all concepts that are factored into our understanding of what it means to be wise. Certainly, wisdom is not acquired independently of these things i.e. we cannot become wise if we have never, in one form or other, encountered them, and we must have wrestled with such thoughts and won<sup>49</sup>. One could not, for example, say of someone who had no acquaintance with such concepts that they were wise, no matter how appropriately they acted, because they would not have had to overcome them to act in the way they did. Their actions would have to be purely accidental. Thus, when I am anxious about what I ought *morally* to do, this does not mean (as I made clear earlier in a different way) that, at bottom, there is an answer that I can discern cognitively and that my main problem is to find it. Both the problem and solution are, in a way, conditioned by past encounters I have had with concepts such as laziness

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<sup>48</sup> And although I might be able to recognise such counterfeit examples, that does not mean that I could successfully articulate the difference, and not because language does not possess the necessary vocabulary. Such understanding is determined by the particular grammar of the particular language game that one is involved in.

<sup>49</sup> And this again shows why wisdom takes time to achieve.

and sentimentality, how I have dealt with them, and what I have learned from them<sup>50</sup>. –And, assuming I'm not morally jaded and that my wisdom has not fallen away or been corrupted, every fresh problem of this kind presents me with the possibility of deepening wisdom<sup>51</sup>. This is why, although all moral problems have something in common, it does not follow that there is a shared or universal point around which we can all discuss them on the same level. Nevertheless, that is not to say that I cannot meaningfully criticise another's actions or views – I can try to understand his thinking and perhaps condemn it as sentimental or cynical, and attempt to get him to see this by showing why.

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<sup>50</sup> This also changes me as a person.

<sup>51</sup> Thus to say, "I understand that to act in this way is wise" is to articulate more than "I felt like acting in this way" – the latter expression could just be a personal preference; this clearly illustrates the difference between subjective and objective action, even though both decisions to act are necessarily personal. The former is not simply personal.

## CHAPTER V

### 5.0. *Moral Corruption.*

But what is it for a moral thought to be corrupt? Suppose for instance, I fall in love with a woman, I propose to her, she accepts and we set the date for our wedding - a couple of years hence. However, in the intervening period my love for her begins to wane, but not for any particular reason (such as my finding another woman). The right thing to do for both of our sakes is, at the very least, for me to discuss this turn of events with her; however, I choose not to as I believe that it will hurt her terribly and, on such grounds, I arrive at the conclusion that the best thing to do is to stay silent, hope that my love returns, and continue with the engagement as planned. In such a case my moral decision has been corrupted by cowardice. I will, later on, doubtless regret not having raised the issue having married unhappily and, no doubt, will hurt my wife even more by finally coming clean with her and filing for a divorce. At the time however, I believed in my decision and considered it the wisest thing to do, even in the light of the realisation that I no longer loved my girlfriend as I once did (although I had qualms about my “wisdom”). Other instances of corruptness might involve my falling out of love with her, but still deciding to marry her because she is rich or perhaps well-known. Gaita considers that ‘conjectures about what we may be capable of are based upon an assessment of what is within our power to achieve’ (Gaita, R. G&E. p203). In this respect, I ought to be ashamed of myself for having allowed cowardice to dictate my decision, i.e. allowed it to seduce me into thinking that the best course of action was to continue with the engagement and hope against hope that my love for my girlfriend returned. Nevertheless, the cowardice had its roots in thoughts of nobility, no matter how corrupt, inasmuch as I was desperate to spare her dreadful heartache. In the final analysis my qualms were doubtless the consequence of knowing, in my heart of hearts, that I had done the wrong thing, but my cowardice had prevented this from surfacing. This could not be said if I had elected to continue with my engagement because my girlfriend happened to be very rich or famous – in this case I could still be acutely aware of the hurt I would cause if I declared that I no longer loved her, but my cowardice (perhaps born in nobility) would itself be quickly fouled by the realisation of what I would lose in material terms (money or reflected glory). Here, moral thought has been polluted to such an extent that it has all but collapsed – I hesitate to say completely, as it is still possible to trace

honourable origins. There are two further points that need to be made in connection with the above examples.

Firstly, that the corruption of my thought implies an incomplete understanding of what I become if I allow cowardice, greed etc., to prevent me from acting properly and, just as importantly, displays a lack of understanding of the humanity of my fellow human beings (in a sense, these two kinds of understanding are closely connected).

Secondly, to think and act morally demands varying degrees of courage in the same way as thinking rationally requires varying degrees of trust (there is no benchmark). Courage, as Gaita emphasises 'is an ethical requirement, and its absence is a proper cause for shame...' (ibid.). Nevertheless that is not to say that to forsake courage in the face of adversity is necessarily, or always shame-worthy – it is not shame-worthy, for instance, to occasionally have allowed cowardice to influence one's thought, but it *must* be in the knowledge (and understanding) that the demands of courage were well and truly beyond what one was capable of. Of course, corruption is possible here too, insofar as cowardice may influence one's perception of what one is really capable of and, in this respect, it is important that one possesses no qualms. I do not think – for example – that anyone would consider a victim of the London Underground bombings a coward just because he had qualms (that overwhelmed him) about re-entering the tunnels after his own escape, to assist his fellow passengers. If he displayed shame at his cowardice, it would not be reasonable for anyone to impress his shame upon him. That said, one might hope that he would not instantly abandon feelings of shame – for in that case, it might lead to suspicion that his confession of a lack of courage was phoney and that he was *just* (only) glad to be out of there. An analogy can be made with Bernard Williams's famous lorry driver example (Williams, B. 'Moral Luck' in: *Moral Luck*, CUP. 1981.) - Williams employs it to demonstrate the difference, in terms of evil, between intentional and accidental killing. The example revolves around the unintentional killing of a young child by a lorry driver who was driving within the speed limit and in a vehicle which was deemed wholly roadworthy. The child ran out in front of the lorry and there was nothing that the driver could do; nevertheless, he is wracked with guilt, even though he is in no way morally culpable and realises this. That said, Williams points out that one would be worried (and it would indeed be strange) if his guilt just evaporated in the face of people telling him that he was not morally blameworthy. Why? Consider



the earlier example concerning the pre-nuptial agreement. In this example it was shown that the agent getting married could not consider such an agreement in the same light as a third party, i.e. although the possibility of divorce exists, to insure his marriage would fly in the face of what marriage meant to him – and that is not to say he would just feel he was contradicting himself, it would be something he could not even seriously contemplate (unless he was corrupt). The point here is that he is a unique (and individual) perspective in the same way as the man who escaped from the underground, or the lorry driver who accidentally ran over the child. Thus, if an agent were to be persuaded to make a pre-nuptial agreement just because a third party said, “It’s a possibility that you might divorce in the future!” one might (indeed should) doubt his certainty and integrity as an individual – and, on similar grounds, this is why it would be slightly unsettling and strange if the underground escapee immediately abandoned his shame when told he had no *reason* to be ashamed for his lack of courage. Gaita highlights that ‘some regrets are directed not only to what we did or to its effects, but also at the fact that *we* did it.’ (Gaita, R. G&E. p53 (emphasis orig.)). The person whose courage failed him in a situation in which the demands of courage were beyond him still has his shame conditioned by his perspective; it is *his* lack of courage irrespective of whether anyone else *would* have had the courage.

Returning to the first point *viz.*, that my understanding is incomplete. I want to relate this to my earlier discussion of wisdom in which I claimed that the acquisition of wisdom requires one to encounter and wrestle with concepts such as cowardice, greed, cynicism, sentimentality and so on. Wisdom, I maintained, could not be acquired independently of these things and consequently takes time to achieve. Moral corruption is perhaps best seen as one’s understanding or wisdom falling away in the face of forms of temptation or, perhaps, because of temptation. Nevertheless, one can still be tempted without being corrupted, indeed temptation is a necessary requirement if we are to be seen (i.e. shown) as possessing moral integrity or wisdom – for if there were nothing to test one’s certainty and integrity one could never truly be considered as such. In this sense, it is important to admit that one is tempted by something insofar as to deny it is a form of self-deception (in itself a form of corruption) that would, sooner or later, lead to a disintegration of what makes an individual good as a result. So what happens when we are led, or fall, into temptation? When this occurs, there is the temptation to suggest that it is because our desires overshadow and prevail against our better thoughts, and although this is certainly part of the reason, I believe it

neglects an important lesson raised by Socrates and highlighted by Gaita *viz.*, that a good man cannot be harmed, and that if he knows what evil is he will not be able to commit it. This is what I was alluding to in my first point when I suggested that to be corrupted implied an incomplete understanding of what one becomes, and also a lack of understanding of the humanity of one's fellow human beings. The Socratic claim that a good man cannot be harmed means, I think, that he cannot be corrupted and thus cannot commit morally reprehensible acts. What does this mean? Fundamentally it describes someone who has a complete understanding of what they would be doing to themselves and others and suggests that, on such grounds, they would (and could) not fall into temptation. So, for instance, if I were tempted to steal money in order to finance what I considered to be a well earned and deserved holiday, but understood that I would become a thief and that my subsequent vacation would be tainted with that realization, then, the Socratic claim runs, I would not be able to steal. Gaita provides an excellent example of how succumbing to temptation is often the result of self-deception. The example centres around one man's love for another man's wife and that this man is tempted to murder the husband in order to be rid of him permanently. 'He wants what he would have if her husband left her or if he died in an accident and *the desire which tempts him pretends that that is the achievable purpose of his deed.* (Gaita, R. G&E. p233 (italics orig.)). What is self-deceiving about his desire and temptation is that it leaves out what he will actually get if he submits to it *viz.*, 'a love and a life polluted by murder' (ibid.)

Not to steal in the face of great temptation, no matter what the conditions surrounding it, is to fully understand the evil of the possible submission to it; it also shows that, provided one's understanding remains sound i.e. does not fall away and allow self-deception to creep in, a good man (one who understands and is sensitive to all aspect of humanity) cannot be harmed by it. Now, one might comment that there are plenty of intelligent individuals in the world who are willing to steal and / or commit murder and who would readily claim that they are not bothered by (or about) morality, as long as they get what they want. Given that intelligent people are generally held to have a good understanding of things and, by and large, understand what they're saying as a result, does this not cause considerable problems for the Socratic claim? - Only if one dismisses their villainous nature as extraneous to their achieving moral understanding. In other words, the objection only has force if one

considers what makes them villains as existing outside what it is to think and develop morally; their villainous nature has no bearing on how they understand morality. .

Now, while I have maintained throughout (and still do) that morality should not be considered purely as a guide to conduct, its very nature means that it acts as a limit to one's behaviour, and that is what inextricably links the two - i.e. the particular individual's morality to his behaviour. Accordingly, provided we accept that there is a necessary link between morality and one's conduct, it is possible to reveal that even a highly intelligent murderer or thief who claims to understand moral requirements, but just chooses to flout them, does not understand them as fully as he believes. This is so inasmuch as one's behaviour reflects a moral capacity (i.e. ability to morally understand etc.). Someone whose behaviour reflects the abandonment of consideration for himself and others (i.e. one who has enacted his supposed flouting of morality) knows not fully what he does. – For instance, if a thief has abandoned such consideration to the point that he does not recognize what he has become by stealing (and by this act also implicitly violating the humanity of another), then he does not grasp anywhere near completely what he is doing, either to himself or to others<sup>52</sup>. It is therefore only possible for him to understand morality in a sense that places his being a thief outside, and as an irrelevancy to, morality – i.e. he sees morality as a set of rules that need only accidentally be his, should he choose to adopt them. This leads me into my final point concerning a purely cognitive approach to moral understanding.

If we accept that villains who claim to reject morality and that those who succumb to temptation are only human, and that almost all human beings live lives punctuated by at least one of these characteristics, then are we to say that none of these people understand what they mean by morality? No, but that is not to say that they understand fully what they are doing when they kill or steal. This, I think, is where the confusion occurs and what encourages belief that genuine moral understanding can be separated from the person. There are two points to be raised in connection with this confusion. Firstly, there is confusion (as I discussed earlier) over the nature of moral understanding and whether it is as genuine as, say, mathematics – the doubt over its reliability arising as a consequence of the belief that it is

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<sup>52</sup> In such a case as this, an illness would doubtless be diagnosed – it is unnatural for an individual to abandon his consideration for others so completely (even if they profess to). The fact that such an attitude is considered unnatural attests to the role that morality plays in making us normal human beings. Morality is an aspect of humanity, and without it we are considered ill in some way.

grammatically identical to mathematical understanding rather than possessing a genuine grammar all of its own. Secondly, and in relation to this, if we accept that the grammar of moral understanding is identical to that of mathematics (i.e. impersonal) then we can say that moral understanding and thus integrity is independent of an individual's character. That is to imply a cognitive approach to morality and one thereby in which the significance of one person's love for another can, in theory, be understood in exactly the same way by anyone – I have already revealed why this cannot be done and why the same thing applies to moral judgements. To understand that one is tempted, one must recognise what that temptation means i.e. a certain kind of guiltiness if one succumbs to it; to realise this is a part of its significance that, if we are sensitive to it, helps us to acquire wisdom (i.e. understanding of our thoughts and actions). If an individual fails in his resistance to temptation, then (provided he is not a villain) as Gaita highlights, his subsequent understanding will result in remorse and a 'shocked awakening to the reality of the evil [he] did' (Gaita, R. G&E. p232). Once again, the significance of his understanding of what *he* has done will bear on him in terms of his individuality i.e. who he is. In this sense, his individuality is inseparable from his character. His biography (i.e. what makes him an individual) and moral understanding (fashioned, in part, by the significance of events such as marriage and succumbing to temptation), whether it has increased or fallen away, changes him as a person and this in itself is incompatible with a cognitive impersonal model of moral understanding, insofar as such a model only allows such understanding to be contingently attached to the agent.

Morality is a phenomenon the very essence of which demands recognition and understanding of humanity and individuality (with all that that entails) in both oneself and others; it also demands recognition and understanding of the relationship between the two. That is what it is (and means) to think and act morally.

## CONCLUSION

### 6.0. Conclusion.

Throughout this thesis I have sought to demonstrate (and defend the view) that moral judgements are necessarily, but not simply personal and that this is necessarily so. I have argued that a truly moral judgement relies on the recognition of an 'other's' humanity (and all that that entails – for instance, the protection of one's own life, and thus the recognition and understanding that others want to protect their lives for similar reasons e.g. the love of their family) and that, as such, moral judgements require more than strictly formal argument and should be considered as more than purely a guide to conduct. Within this, I make the distinction between public and personal morality and suggest that confusion often arises when we take political (i.e. public) decisions as moral ones. In such cases, what is often neglected is that the requirement for evil (such as the decision to go to war) is present before the political decision is made and, as such, the real moral element exists prior to it; all that can be done in political decisions of this kind is to try to limit the loss of human life, but they are decisions, as I have tried to show, that are not in themselves, strictly moral. However, I qualified this argument by maintaining that political and moral decisions are not unrelated.

Much disagreement arises in areas of moral philosophy concerning subjectivity and objectivity, and I have argued that objectivity and rationality are possible without the need for external justification (although I'm not saying that this is always so) – i.e., I suggested that objectivity and external justification are not synonymous; in other words, objectivity need not be entirely impersonal. But how can one be objective and not impersonal? – This question led me to discuss what it means to be subjective and objective within ethics and I began with an outline of the position I was attacking, using arguments advanced by Thomas Nagel as paradigms.

Moral subjectivity, I argue, is a kind of selfishness indicative of a lack of understanding of another individual's humanity and, to support this, I employ Gaita's example that someone who commits a morally reprehensible act, as a result of (say) giving in to temptation, finally gets more than he bargained for; – for although an individual may acquire great riches through robbing a bank, his subsequent enjoyment of them will be tainted by the realisation of what he has become *viz.*, a thief. Moral objectivity (I tacitly equate this with moral understanding) involves the prior

recognition of the violation to the humanity of others, and also the realisation of what the perpetrator would become if tempted to commit a morally reprehensible act. But how does one learn morally? – How does one become morally objective?

The answer to these questions, I believe, is to be found in examining how we acquire the ability to understand. This, I argued, involves much more than simple acquisition of facts. As human beings, we have the ability to wonder, be moved by things in ways that are mysterious and in ways that we cannot discount; we love, hate, possess courage and can be cowardly; we can be cynical and sentimental, and so on. These are things that, as human beings, we have the potential to understand (whether we realize it is another matter). In my examination of how we acquire moral understanding and objectivity I look at what it means to morally communicate, and argue that this in itself is a part of morality, insofar as morality rests on a consideration and understanding of others, and that this is made possible by the possibility and phenomenon of language. Such communication (language) rests on far more than a “words standing for objects” basis and words in particular combinations representing possible states of affairs, and in my analysis of language I examine (and follow) Wittgenstein’s later conception of it. This language analysis provides the necessary conceptual apparatus to make coherent the possibility of an objective moral understanding that does not admit of external justification, insofar as it allows for meaningful discussion of concepts such as sentimentality, courage, cynicism and so on. I argue that while such concepts are necessarily personal, insofar as they do not admit of external justification and, as such, are the preserve of an individual and go to characterise his individuality in a way that is only derived historically, they are nonetheless transparent and public. In other words, concepts such as cynicism, sentimentality, and love allow the speaker to have an intimate relationship with the words he utters while not in any way compromising their public nature so that - for instance - we can appreciate the necessarily personal nature of one person’s love for another while not having intimate access to the nature of that love. In connection with this, I argue that, in a moral sense, the individual is a component of the grammar of a situation and, as such, has the potential to influence meaning. I distinguish between situations and problems that remain the same irrespective of the individual involved – for instance, mathematical problems or answers to the questions such as, “Which is the shortest way out of the wood from where I’m standing?” and those that are influenced by the presence of a particular individual.

In terms of those aspects of life in which an individual affects the grammar of a situation, I discuss what it means for an individual to stand behind the words that he utters, and argue that his individuality provides aspects of grammar to the particular language game in which he is involved, that consequently influence the meaning of his words (i.e. how they are taken). Within this discussion I suggested (and tried to show) that rationality does not always require formalism and that, in many cases, it requires us to reject it; in support of this I drew on Raimond Gaita's example of an individual who, at the very least, questions whether the person he has been introduced to has given the correct name. Thus, I argue that rationality often demands trust over formalism, and continue by asserting that this is often what is required when we are moved to believe what an individual is saying. I then tackle the possibility of being taken in by, say, a skilled orator.

This is an important part of the thesis inasmuch as I discuss how one can distinguish genuine forms of speech etc., from counterfeit ones. I suggest that it would make no sense to speak of counterfeit examples if there did not also exist genuine ones. – But how does one distinguish between the counterfeit and the genuine? – Ultimately, I argued, only by examples of what is not genuine. Of course, sometimes we will be conned and it is a fear of making such an error that entices us into trying to develop infallible (i.e. formal) methods upon which we can evaluate an individual's utterances. This attempt to develop a formal method can only consider proper understanding to possess the grammar of a propositional kind (i.e. true and false with valid and invalid inference) and has led to a belief, in some quarters, that words such as 'correctness' and 'understanding', which occur in both mathematical and moral realms, do not carry the same level of significance in the latter as they do in the former. The reason for this is that such vocabulary is believed to operate in the same way in both realms - consequently the inference is, since it is far more difficult to wield vocabulary (of an identical meaning) in the moral realm than in the mathematical one, that moral understanding is less of an important form or even a proper form of it. I argued that moral understanding and understanding of a mathematical kind are grammatically distinct insofar as the former allows for deepened understanding, while the latter does not and, as such both are genuine. One form can be separated from the individual, while the other cannot. - And it is possible (I claimed) to learn from being moved in a way that cannot be understood purely by exercising one's cognitive capacities (in a way one would if trying to solve a

mathematical problem). In other words, I argued that although a large part of our moral vocabulary might also be present in our mathematical vocabulary, meaning differs according to the realm in which such words operate, because the grammar of each is distinct. Thus (as philosophers), in terms of fear of error, the bewitchment we suffer through our desire to formulaically eliminate the possibility of error, also extends to only allowing words (such as ‘correctness’) to have strict meaning; consequently, when they are hoist upon a facet of our lives that admits of a different kind of grammar, a violation of grammar – and thus sense – occurs. But how can we be sure that moral understanding relies on a different kind of grammar?

In answering this question, I concentrated on what it means for an individual to become wise, and on how understanding of the moral kind necessarily takes time to acquire; I also examined how moral understanding could fall away and tried to highlight the difference between what it would take to regain scientific or mathematical understanding as opposed to moral understanding<sup>53</sup>. I argued that firstly, if the grammar of moral and scientific understanding was identical then, in theory, it would just be a question of learning a series of correct and incorrect propositions and acquiring a method by which they can be found – and, as such, moral understanding would not necessarily take time to achieve – rather, it could just be put there like information into a computer. Secondly, I attempted to demonstrate how moral understanding and wisdom does necessarily take time to achieve, by highlighting the requirement that, in order to become wise, one needs to wrestle with concepts with no absolute standards such as cynicism and sentimentality, and win. In this way I tried to illustrate the grammatical differences. Thirdly, I considered what it meant for one’s understanding to fall away and how it could be regained in both the scientific and moral realms – I argued that, provided one re-acquaints oneself with the relevant facts and methodologies, it is a simple enough matter for anyone to regain scientific understanding. However, in terms of moral understanding, one has to re-examine the significance of aspects of one’s life that once upon a time meant something and have now become idle – these aspects of life and their significance are necessarily personal, such as living a religious life or falling in love. As such, I have shown that there is

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<sup>53</sup> In this respect, I have tacitly shown that such influences on an individual’s life (among other things) form his perspective (i.e. his individuality); such perspective (individuality) being determined by various different points of view unique to him in terms of the platform from which he views things (lives). In other words, his understanding of love, religion etc., the decisions he makes based on such understanding, and the ways in which events influence his life, go to make up an historically achieved biography exclusive to him.

grammatical difference between scientific and moral understanding and thus, the onus is on those who believe that we should treat our vocabulary identically in both realms to justify their beliefs.

In this thesis I have sought to question the validity of much of the methodology of moral philosophy and show that to be objective does not require an impersonal approach on pain of subjectivity. I have tried to show that, as morality is a peculiarly human phenomenon (i.e. a human capacity) one cannot treat it, in terms of enquiry, in a way that seeks to impersonalise it. As such, one must see genuine moral judgements as necessarily, but not simply personal. I have attempted to demonstrate that we should treat moral understanding as just as genuine as other kinds of understanding, and have tried to outline what it means to be moral and what it is to learn morally, as opposed to what it means to learn in other ways. I have implicitly argued against the notions of consequentialism, insofar as such doctrines rely on a kind of propositional grammar and I have argued more directly against the idea of universalizability (these two are, in any case, related). Moreover I have tried to show that we should see morality as more than purely a guide to conduct, since such a conception again relies on a series of propositions that are agent independent – and this can be related directly (and generally) to my criticism of consequentialism and universality; within this I have attempted to illustrate that moral concepts are not externally justifiable – the framework that gives them sense being one's own humanity and the humanity of others. As we are no more than human, external justification in such cases is not possible.

Overall, I have tried to stress that a moral life is fundamentally a human one, and that one's ability to speak sensibly of rationality (or objectivity) and irrationality in the moral sphere is a recognition of humanity, with the only possible mode of justification (for moral rationality) being humanity itself.

\* Where '[...]' I have given acronyms.

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