

# DISPOSITIONAL THEORIES OF VALUE\*

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The following propositions seem both plausible in their own right and apparently inconsistent:

(1) Moral judgements like 'It is right that I  $\Phi$ ' ('valuations' for short) express *beliefs*; in this case, a belief about the rightness of my  $\Phi$ -ing.

(2) There is some sort of a *necessary connection* between being in the state the judgement 'It is right that I  $\Phi$ ' expresses and having a motivating reason, not necessarily overriding, to  $\Phi$ .

(3) Motivating reasons are constituted, *inter alia*, by *desires*. The apparent inconsistency can be brought out as follows. From (1), the state expressed by a valuation is a belief, which, from (2), is necessarily connected in some way with having a motivating reason; that is, from (3), with having a desire. So (1), (2) and (3) together entail that there is some sort of necessary connection between distinct existences: a certain kind of belief and a certain kind of desire. But there is no such connection. Believing some state of the world obtains is one thing, what I desire to do in the light of that belief is quite another. Therefore we have to reject at least one of (1), (2) or (3). Call this the 'moral problem', and call those who respond 'revisionists' and 'reconciliationists'.<sup>1</sup>

Revisionists accept the inconsistency, and so seek to explain away the apparent plausibility of at least one of (1), (2) and (3). Thus, for example, emotivists, prescriptivists and projectivists

\*The three papers that comprise this symposium come out of very extensive discussion between the three symposiasts—so extensive that sometimes we can no longer tell which ideas began with whom. But as will be plain, we have not ended in full agreement. Besides our indebtedness to one another, we are indebted also to Simon Blackburn, Paul Boghossian, Geoffrey Brennan, John P. Burgess, John Campbell, Josh Cohen, James Dreier, Jim Klagge, Robert Parfetter, Philip Pettit, Charles Pigden, Joe Pitt, Peter Railton, Denis Robinson, Gideon Rosen, Thomas Scanlon Jr., Nick Smith, Bas van Fraassen, Jay Wallace and Crispin Wright.

<sup>1</sup>The *locus classicus* for this form of argument is David Hume *Treatise of Human Nature* edited by Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1888) pp. 413–7. See also John McDowell 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 1978 p. 18; David McNaughton *Moral Vision* (Blackwell, 1988) p. 23.

accept (2) and (3) and reject (1).<sup>2</sup> Since we believe (1) only because sentences with moral contents display the syntactic and normative features of judgements that are truth-assessable—they figure in negation, conditional, propositional attitude contexts and the like, and particular uses of such sentences can be more or less justified—such theorists try to show how, via a logic of imperatives and universalizability, as in R. M. Hare's case, or 'quasi-realism', as in Simon Blackburn's, judgements that are not expressions of beliefs may still display these features. Alternatively, naturalists like Philippa Foot—at least when she wrote 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives'—and Peter Railton, and contractualists like Thomas Scanlon accept (1) and (3) and therefore reject (2).<sup>3</sup> They argue that such evidence as there is for (2) is equally well explained by the fact that wide-spread moral education produces in many people not just moral beliefs, but also, entirely contingently, a desire to do what they believe they should. Finally, anti-Humean moral realists like Mark Platts and John McDowell accept (1) and (2), and therefore reject (3) (or perhaps they only accept (2), and reject both (1) and (3)).<sup>4</sup> They argue that the Humean philosophy of mind implicit in (3) (and perhaps also (1)) is indefensible; that, properly understood, motivating reasons may be constituted by cognitive states alone.

By contrast reconciliationists deny the inconsistency. Prominent amongst reconciliationists are those who accept a dispositional theory of value, a theory that purports to analyse value in terms of a disposition to take a favourable psychological attitude towards certain actions or outcomes under suitable

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Ayer *Language, Truth and Logic* (Blackwell, 1937) Chapter 6; R. M. Hare *The Language of Morals* (Oxford University Press, 1952); Simon Blackburn *Spreading the Word* (Oxford University Press, 1984) Chapter 6.

<sup>3</sup> Philippa Foot 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' in her *Virtues and Vices* (University of California Press, 1978); Peter Railton 'Moral Realism' *Philosophical Review* 1986; Thomas Scanlon 'Contractualism and Utilitarianism' in *Utilitarianism and Beyond* edited by Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge University Press, 1982). It should not be surprising to find Scanlon's contractualism in the company of Railton's consequentialist naturalism, for Scanlon explicitly formulates contractualism in opposition to such theories, versions of what he calls 'philosophical utilitarianism' as opposed to 'normative utilitarianism' ('Contractualism and Utilitarianism' pp. 108–10).

<sup>4</sup> John McDowell 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?'; Mark Platts *Ways of Meaning* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) Chapter 10.

conditions.<sup>5</sup> Such theorists attempt to explain why (1) is true by giving us an account of what rightness as an object of belief is, and why (2) is true, and consistent with (1) and (3), by treating 'taking a favourable psychological attitude' to be a species of desiring, thus displaying an internal, indeed *analytic*, connection between believing that  $\Phi$ -ing is right and desiring to  $\Phi$ . Importantly, a dispositional theorist may or may not claim that some valuations are true: that is, he may offer us an error theory in the spirit of John Mackie, a reconciliation at the level of concepts rather than ontology.<sup>6</sup> We will return to this point later.

If, as I believe, we really should accept the Humean philosophy of mind implicit in (3) (and (1)), then we must choose between reconciling, revising by rejecting (1), and revising by rejecting (2).<sup>7</sup> But how should we choose? Here we note a curious asymmetry. For while those who recommend revising by rejecting (1) seem to agree that reconciliation would be preferable—agree that (1) is, as it were, the *default* explanation

<sup>5</sup>David Lewis defends such a view in his contribution to this symposium. However, whereas I am concerned to give a dispositional theory of rightness, Lewis is concerned to analyse what it is for something to be a value quite generally. These theories are not in competition. A dispositional theory of rightness is best thought of as derived from, *inter alia*, a dispositional theory of value. If we derived such a theory of rightness from Lewis's theory of value, would the theory be reconciliationist in my sense? I am not sure. My reservations have to do with the kind of 'internalism' Lewis's theory secures. Views related to the dispositional theory of value are defended by C. D. Broad 'Some Reflections on Moral Sense Theories in Ethics' in *Broad's Critical Essays in Moral Philosophy* edited by David Cheney (Allen and Unwin, 1971); Roderick Firth 'Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer' in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1952; John McDowell 'Values and Secondary Qualities' in *Morality and Objectivity* edited by Ted Honderich (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985); David Wiggins 'A Sensible Subjectivism' in his *Needs, Values, Truth* (Blackwell, 1987). For critical discussion see Jonathan Dancy and Christopher Hookway 'Two Conceptions of Moral Realism' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 1986; Crispin Wright 'Moral Values, Projection and Secondary Qualities' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 1988. Lewis is right, I think, not to make the case for the dispositional theory hang on the plausibility of a tight analogy between values and secondary qualities. I argue this point in my 'Objectivity and Moral Realism' in *Realism and Reason* edited by Crispin Wright and John Haldane (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup>Mackie *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin, 1977) Chapter One. See also my 'Objectivity and Moral Realism'.

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of (3) see John McDowell 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?'; my 'The Humean Theory of Motivation' *Mind* 1987; Philip Pettit 'Humeans, Anti-Humeans and Motivation' *Mind* 1987; my 'On Humeans, Anti-Humeans and Motivation: A Reply to Pettit' *Mind* 1988; David Lewis 'Desire as Belief' *Mind* 1988; John Collins 'Belief, Desire and Revision' *Mind* 1988.

of the syntactic and normative features of moral discourse<sup>8</sup>—many of those who recommend revising by rejecting (2) make no such concession. They deny even the *apparent* plausibility of (2).<sup>9</sup>

This seems to me to be a serious mistake and it is the task of this paper to say why. Such theorists say we should accept (1) but reject (2). But reflection on (1) itself reveals a reason for accepting (2): specifically, it reveals that we should accept (2) if we think that our reasons for our moral beliefs are themselves reasons for being morally motivated. I will argue that we should so conceive of our reasons for our moral beliefs and that, therefore, reconciliation is the preferred solution to the moral problem. Though I will not argue the point at length, it will emerge that those who opt for a dispositional theory of value are uniquely placed to explain these relations between our reasons for our moral beliefs and our reasons for our moral motivations. I close with some general remarks about the prospects for revision.

Let's begin by seeing whether there are any *independent* reasons for accepting (2); reasons that will remain intact even if we ultimately opt to revise by rejecting (1). Someone who thinks there are is doubtless impressed by the fact that the alleged connection between moral judgement and motivation is not an isolated feature of *moral* thought. For just think of what is involved, quite generally, in making evaluative judgements that are practical in their subject matter (from now on I will take this qualification as read).<sup>10</sup> Evaluative judgements are judgements that play a constitutive role in deliberation. For when we deliberate we make judgements about the *prima facie* desirability of our options and, on their basis, reach the conclusion a particular option is desirable all things considered.<sup>11</sup> Moreover,

<sup>8</sup> Consider, for example, Ayer's argumentative strategy described in my 'Should We Believe In Emotivism?' in *Fact, Science and Morality: Essays on A. J. Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic* edited by Graham Macdonald and Crispin Wright (Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> The exception is Scanlon 'Contractualism and Utilitarianism' pp. 117–8.

<sup>10</sup> This seems to be Tom Nagel's strategy in defence of the requirement in his *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 9. Note that in what follows I will sometimes refer to the state that is expressed by an evaluative judgement as an 'evaluative thought'. Here too I will take as read the qualification 'that is practice! in its subject matter'.

<sup>11</sup> Are these judgements of 'prima facie' or 'pro tanto' desirability? See Donald Davidson 'How is Weakness of Will Possible?' in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford University Press, p. 198); Susan Hurley 'Conflict, Akrasia and Cognitivism' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1985–6.

we reach this conclusion about a particular option in order to do it. But how would this be possible if there were no connection between judgements of prima facie desirability and desiring? What *further* consideration could possibly get us motivated to do what we judge prima facie desirable if we could coherently think 'Yes, this option is prima facie desirable, but so what? I don't *care* whether my actions are prima facie desirable or not'?

It might be suggested that what's needed is a *desire* to do what's prima facie desirable. But this suggestion has to be made to cohere with the fact that it is *by deliberating* that we come to act in the way that we do, so the question is 'How is that desire connected with deliberating?' and no plausible answer consistent with the present line of objection seems to be forthcoming. For that desire would have to be connected with some *further* evaluative judgement, say, that it is prima facie desirable to do what's prima facie desirable. And then we would have to ask why *that* judgement is supposed to guarantee motivation if the original judgement that a certain option is prima facie desirable doesn't. A desire to do what's prima facie desirable is needed alright, but that is just to concede the point. For all that shows is that for deliberation to be possible at all there must be some sort of necessary connection between being in the state the evaluative judgement ' $\Phi$ -ing is prima facie desirable' expresses and desiring to  $\Phi$ . And, of course, that is just to say that (2) may be reconstrued as a quite general constraint on evaluative judgements (call this ' $2^c$ ').

Given that this is so it might be said that the task of defending (2) is made much easier. For it is up to someone who challenges (2) to say why moral thought *doesn't* have this feature. How surprising that would be given that moral thought is simply a *species* of evaluative thought!

Moreover, it might be said, we can now see that the moral problem doesn't trade on particular features of *moral* thought. Rather it is an instance of a quite general problem concerning evaluative thought. For, recall that the idea was that we deliberate on the basis of judgements concerning the prima facie desirability of our options. The general problem can be put like this: 'How can *any* evaluative judgement be what it seems to be, the expression of a belief about the desirability of an option, given that it has to satisfy ( $2^c$ )? After all, belief and desire are

distinct existences and. . .'. We may call this the 'deliberative problem', and, as before, we can divide those who respond into reconciliationists and revisionists.<sup>12</sup> The deliberative problem has attracted much attention. Significantly, however, no one who recommends revision in response to the deliberative problem seriously suggests that we should reject (2<sup>c</sup>). No surprise given that that would make deliberation practical only in its subject matter, not in its issue. If we are right to see the moral problem as a mere instance of the deliberative problem then, by parity of reasoning, no-one should seriously suggest rejection of (2) in response to the moral problem either.

Finally, we can now state more clearly what (2) says. For the argument just given establishes that there is, at least, a *defeasible* connection between evaluative judgements and the will; that in the normal case no further judgement, and thus no further desire, is required to get someone who judges that his  $\Phi$ -ing is *prima facie* desirable to desire to  $\Phi$ . But what does this idea of the 'normal case' amount to? This question is explored in some detail by Michael Stocker who observes:

Through spiritual or physical tiredness, through accidie, through weakness of body, through illness, through general apathy, through despair, through inability to concentrate, through a feeling of uselessness or futility, and so on, one may feel less and less motivated to seek what is good. One's lessened desire need not signal, much less be the product of, the fact that, or one's belief that, there is less good to be obtained or produced, as in the case of a universal Weltschmerz. Indeed, a frequent added defect of being in such 'depressions' is that one sees all the good to be won or saved and one lacks the will, interest, desire or strength.<sup>13</sup>

What Stocker's discussion suggests is that a subject is motivated to do what he judges *prima facie* desirable *only if nature conspires*;

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Kenny *Action, Emotion and Will* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) and Hector Neri Castañeda *Thinking and Doing* (Reidel, 1975) presumably count as revisionists. Donald Davidson in 'How is Weakness of the Will Possible?' seems to be a reconciliationist, but see p. 86 of 'Intending' in his *Essay on Actions and Events*.

<sup>13</sup> Stocker 'Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology' *Journal of Philosophy* 1979 p. 744.

only if one of these ‘depressions’ does not interfere with that connection. If to be depressed in the relevant way is to be subject to a condition of psychological ill-health then the more general idea at work here is plausibly that if A judges his  $\Phi$ -ing to be prima facie desirable then either he has a motivating reason to  $\Phi$  or he is *irrational*. If this is right, (2) should be understood accordingly.<sup>14</sup>

We have, then, a clearer idea of what (2) says, and, given the assumption that moral thought is a species of evaluative thought, we have established a presumption in its favour. For (2) is an instance of (2<sup>c</sup>), a quite general constraint on evaluative judgements. How might someone challenge (2), given this defence? As we shall see, a considerable challenge emerges as a corollary to Philippa Foot’s attack on rationalism in her ‘Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives’.

According to Kant, moral requirements are categorical, not hypothetical, imperatives. Moreover, Kant thinks it follows from this that moral requirements are requirements of reason. However, Foot argues, Kant faces a dilemma. On the first horn, though we can agree that moral requirements are expressed by judgements employing a categorical use of ‘should’, this does not entail that moral requirements are requirements of reason. On the other horn, Foot asks why, in that case, Kant thinks moral requirements *are* requirements of reason, insisting that his claim needs a special kind of support, a kind of support that doesn’t seem to be forthcoming once we fully appreciate the arguments on the first horn. Let me briefly explain her argument on each side of this dilemma.

<sup>14</sup> It should be said that Stocker considers and rejects the claim that the gap between evaluation and motivation is evidence of irrationality. However his reason for rejecting it seems to me based on a confusion. For he rejects it simply because not *all* manifestations of despair, accidie, apathy and the like are themselves evidence of irrationality. But though we might agree that *some* such manifestations are not evidence of irrationality, the question is whether we have such evidence when they manifest themselves by realising their potential to interfere with the connection between evaluation and motivation. Myself I think that we do. In such cases subjects are quite uncontroversially irrational in at least this sense: *the psychological processes of the perfectly rational agent are subject to no such interference*. This claim seems to me independently plausible. But, if it seems in need of support, note that the psychological failures Stocker mentions are quite generally apt for interfering with rational connections between psychological states. We characteristically appeal to such failures when we seek to explain why people fail to perform rational inferences, for example.

Foot begins by explaining why everyone should accept that moral judgements are expressed by judgements employing a categorical 'should'. Suppose a man wants to go home and we tell him that he should catch the noon train, but that just before noon he stops wanting to go home. We then have to withdraw the claim that he should catch the noon train. Here, then, we have a hypothetical 'should', for the truth of the 'should' claim is conditional on what the man wants. Contrast the case where a man behaves in a way contrary to some moral requirement—suppose he is cruel. It remains true to say that he behaved as he shouldn't even if he tells us (truly) that not being cruel in these circumstances would in no way serve any interest or desire of *his*. Here, by contrast, we have a categorical use of 'should'. The difference marked by the categorical, as opposed to the hypothetical, 'should' thus has to do with the kinds of consideration required to support the 'should' claim, the difference between those 'should' claims that can only be supported by showing how the action in question serves a desire or interest of the agent (the hypothetical) and those where this is not so, where what is required is mention of some relevant feature of the agent's circumstances (the categorical).

However, as Foot reminds us, in this sense moral requirements, though categorical, are like many other more mundane requirements: for example, requirements of etiquette. Suppose someone acts contrary to a requirement of etiquette—he replies in the first person to a letter written to him in the third. It remains true that he acted as he shouldn't even if he tells us (truly) that acting as etiquette requires in no way serves any interest or desire of his. For, as with requirements of morality, what *makes* it true that some action is required by etiquette *isn't* that acting in the relevant way serves an interest or desire of the agent.

The fact that requirements of etiquette and morality seem in this respect to be on all fours provides Foot with the materials to complete her argument on the first horn of the dilemma and make her argument on the other horn. For no-one holds that requirements of etiquette are requirements of reason; that someone who replies in the first person to a letter written to him in the third is shown thereby to be *irrational!* But in that case we have an example of a requirement appropriately expressed by a

categorical use of 'should' that is not itself a requirement of reason. And then Foot argues, on the other horn of the dilemma, that someone who insists that moral requirements *are* requirements of reason had better tell us why we shouldn't think that moral requirements are on all fours with requirements of etiquette in this respect as well. He must tell us in some non-question-begging way what the relevant *difference* is supposed to be between norms of morality and norms of etiquette.

We are now in a position to see why a challenge to (2) emerges as a corollary. For an agent's being disposed to make judgements about what *etiquette* requires of him tells us nothing about what he is disposed to *do*. That is, (2) is *certainly* unacceptable if 'right' is read as 'required by etiquette'.<sup>15</sup> Foot may thus quite legitimately challenge the defender of (2) to say why he thinks (2) is acceptable if 'right' is read as 'required by morality'. What is the relevant *difference* supposed to be between norms of etiquette and norms of morality?

Foot's challenge is considerable. For it forces us to make a distinction between an agent's *recognition* of a norm and his *embracing* that norm.<sup>16</sup> When I say 'A letter written in the third person should be answered in the third person' my judgement reflects my *recognition* of the relevant norm of etiquette. But in order to be moved by that consideration when I am writing a letter I have to do more than recognize the norm, I have to *embrace* it: that is, very roughly, I have to want to answer letters in the way I know I should. And this in turn shows what was inadequate about the defence of (2) given earlier. For what we saw then was that, in these terms, there is at least *one* category of thought with normative contents where the distinction between recognising and embracing a norm is *collapsed*: namely, evaluative thought. However, though in the case of evaluative thought that distinction is quite rightly collapsed—otherwise evaluative judgements would not be able to play the role they play in deliberation—Foot challenges us to say why we simply *assume* that moral judgement is, of its nature, a mode of expressing evaluative thought. Why not think instead that moral thought is

<sup>15</sup> In the words of the children's song, 'You may very well be well-bred/Lots of etiquette in your head/But there's always some special case/Time or place, to forget etiquette . . . for instance/Never smile at a crocodile. . .'

<sup>16</sup> See Railton 'Moral Realism' p. 168.

simply, like thoughts about the requirements of etiquette, *recognitional*, with *embracing* the requirement in question being an optional extra?

It might be thought that the defender of (2) shouldn't be too worried by this challenge; that he can insist that, since Foot says nothing to show that we have to *deny* (2), so her challenge shows at most that if we do accept it, we accept it as *basic*. However it seems to me that this would be bad enough. For those who reject (2) might equally reply that, if we deny (2), we take its *denial* to be basic. There would then be a real question what interest *debates* between those who respond to the moral problem by accepting (2) and those who respond by rejecting it should hold for us. For neither would be able to say anything in favour of especially *his* attitude towards (2). It is time to examine the plausibility of the assumption that our reasons for accepting (1) and (2) are entirely independent of each other.

We have already seen that reconciliationists and revisionists can agree that we have some reason to believe (1). For they can agree that belief is the appropriate attitude to contents expressed in sentences that are truth-assessable, and they can agree that sentences with moral contents display the syntactic and normative features of such sentences. I want now to argue that they can agree about more. For a moment's reflection reveals something about the *kind of justification* a moral belief seems to require, and thus something about the *kind of content* a moral judgement seems to have. In the end I want to argue that the kind of belief we have reason to believe a moral belief is, suggests a reason for accepting (2).

The point I have in mind about moral belief emerges as soon as we think about moral arguments. Suppose A says 'Φ-ing is worthwhile' and B says 'Φ-ing is not worthwhile'. If the value in question is moral value, then we seem immediately to conclude that at least one of A or B is *mistaken*. *Argument* ensues: 'What are your reasons for believing that Φ-ing is worthwhile? Display them to me so that I too can see the value of Φ-ing'. If such reasons aren't forthcoming then A may rightly assume that B doesn't have adequate reasons to believe that Φ-ing is worthwhile.

Indeed, this seems to me to be partially constitutive of moral value, as against values of other kinds. Suppose A and B disagree over some aesthetic matter: the relative merits of, say, Turner

and Pollock. In this case we seem much happier to rest content with bafflement at why someone likes what we can't stand; much happier to admit that, since 'there's no accounting for taste', so, at bottom, we have a *mere* difference in taste. Given that there is no reason to *criticize* A for judging Pollock to be a better painter than Turner, and vice versa, we might explain away the apparent conflict in these judgements by providing a relativistic analysis of them: A's judgement is about Turner's and Pollock's respective standings relative to *his* aesthetic sensibility whereas B's is about their standings relative to *his*. We are, however, profoundly resistant to resting content with such bafflement in the case of moral value. Moral difference about the relative importance of justice and self-interest in a particular case, say, seems not to be explicable in terms of a mere difference in *taste*. And thus we are profoundly resistant to analysing away moral disagreements by finding a hidden relativity in our moral judgements.<sup>17</sup>

Nor should it be thought that this is a mere artefact of *moral argument*; that since in moral argument our task is to resolve conflicts, so we keep looking for common ground, but that this is consistent with our accepting that, at bottom, there may be no common ground to be found.<sup>18</sup> For these points have nothing especially to do with moral arguments. Rather, so long as we can imagine some *hypothetical* rational creature to whom we cannot justify our moral beliefs, the search for reasons in support of them is in place. (Just think of the method of moral theorising.) Thus, we may say: moral beliefs seem to be beliefs about some non-relative fact of the matter and the search for reasons in support of our moral beliefs seems to be the search for reasons that would convince rational creatures *as such* to take on such beliefs for themselves.

We are now in a position to see why reflection on the kind of belief a moral belief seems to be suggests a reason for accepting (2). For since, according to (2), someone who has a moral belief but is not motivated accordingly is, to that extent, *irrational*, so, if (2) is true, our moral motivations can be seen to *inherit* the

<sup>17</sup> See Bernard Williams *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1985) pp. 158–9.

<sup>18</sup> This line was suggested to me by conversations with Simon Blackburn.

rational status of our moral beliefs. Now what we have just seen is that we seem to conceive of our moral beliefs as beliefs that require a *privileged rational defence*. If (2) is true, then we should presumably conceive of our moral motivations as motivations that *themselves* require a privileged rational defence. But do we? I want to argue that we do. Moreover, I want to argue that the best account of what it is to conceive of our moral motivations as requiring a privileged rational defence suggests that our reasons for being morally motivated are *themselves* our reasons for our moral beliefs. Accordingly, it seems to me, we should accept both (1) and (2).

Foot would doubtless be unimpressed. For the idea that our moral motivations require a privileged rational defence *just is* the idea that moral requirements are requirements of reason. Yet she began by asking the rationalist what reason we have for supposing that to be true. Let's therefore focus on Foot's challenge to the rationalist.

Foot wants the rationalist to tell us, in a non-question-begging way, why we should think that moral requirements are requirements of reason. But this is ambiguous. Is he to justify the claim that we *conceive* of moral requirements as requirements of reason—something that allows that we may be wrong in supposing that *there are* any moral requirements—or the claim that, in addition, *there are* some such moral requirements? Clearly, the argument for (2) requires only that he be able to do the first, not the second. For (2) simply tells us, *inter alia*, that we must think of our moral beliefs and motivations as alike in rational status. Thus all that's required is that, as we saw with regard to our moral beliefs, our moral motivations *seem* to require a privileged rational defence; that we *conceive* of them as requirements of reason.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical

<sup>19</sup> Foot does not keep these different claims separate. Thus at one point she urges her challenge against the rationalist by insisting 'Irrational actions are those in which a man in some way defeats his own purposes, doing what is calculated to be disadvantageous or to frustrate his ends. Immorality does not *necessarily* involve any such thing' ('Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' p. 162). But whether or not we think this a good argument, it is irrelevant if our interest is in whether we *conceive* of moral requirements as requirements of reason. Is it a good argument? That depends on whether there are principles of reason like the principle of limited altruism (see later).

Imperatives' Foot seems to acknowledge an explicit argument for this claim. She remarks:

We are apt to panic at the thought that we ourselves, or other people, might stop caring about the things we care about, and we feel that the categorical imperative gives us some control over the situation.<sup>20</sup>

If anywhere, she seems to be saying, the fact that we conceive of moral requirements as requirements of reason manifests itself in circumstances like this; manifests itself in the apparent *legitimacy* of this kind of panic. In the end, however, she concludes that our conception of moral requirements does not allow us to make sense of this sort of panic. For, she argues, when we think more carefully about moral concern we see that it is unnecessary to have the kind of control we might think the categorical imperative gives us. Moreover, she argues, this is just as well, for the idea that the categorical imperative gives us such control is an 'illusion'; it is 'as if we are 'trying to give the moral "ought" a magic force'.<sup>21</sup> Let me consider these claims in turn.

Foot argues that it is unnecessary to have the control we might think the categorical imperative gives us because, in other areas of life, we get by without it. Thus, she observes,

. . . it is interesting that the people of Leningrad were not struck by the thought that only the *contingent* fact that other citizens shared their loyalty and devotion to the city stood between them and the Germans during the terrible years of the siege.<sup>22</sup>

*They* did not panic at the thought that loving Leningrad is not rationally required. By analogy, then, Foot asks: 'What is wrong with thinking of the moral person as someone who simply loves the ends that morality aims at: liberty, justice, truth and the like? What is wrong with thinking of a community of moral agents as being like "volunteers banded together to fight for liberty and

<sup>20</sup> Foot 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' p. 167.

<sup>21</sup> Foot 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> Foot 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' p. 167. Note that Foot once again focusses on the non-moral and asks what the relevant difference is with the moral. (Like Foot, I will ignore the fact that the people of Leningrad were no doubt actually *morally* motivated.)

truth, and against inhumanity and oppression”?’<sup>23</sup> Foot can see nothing wrong with this. And so she rejects the idea that the panic she describes is even apparently legitimate.

Foot’s question is a significant one, but I suspect that an answer to it pushes us in the opposite direction. If the citizens of Leningrad were asked why they bothered fighting for their city then they would presumably have begun by listing all of the things about their city that they loved. But if they were asked why *those* things mattered to them, and not other things—things about Berlin for example—then they would presumably have simply rested content with the fact that they could give no distinctively rational justification of their caring about these things; rested content with the fact that, since they grew up in Leningrad not Berlin, so *these* are the things that they love, not *those*.

But now suppose we asked someone why he bothered fighting for liberty and justice. Is the corresponding story plausible? I do not think so. In order to see this, note, to begin, that as we have seen, moral agents do not take the objects of their moral concern to be fixed in the way the objects of our love and devotion are fixed. Thus we think that we might be *wrong* to assign the moral value we do assign to liberty and justice. Is this the same as thinking we might be wrong *that* we love liberty and justice? No. The thought is rather that liberty and justice may not be deserving of the love and devotion we do *in fact* give them. It therefore seems that, in defending fighting for liberty and justice, we would *not* simply cite the features of liberty and justice we love—as the citizens of Leningrad might rightly have cited the features of Leningrad they loved—but would rather try to give our reasons for thinking that these features of liberty and justice *merit* our love and devotion. The question whether we conceive of moral requirements as requirements of reason then turns on how we should interpret this idea of *meriting* love and devotion. Do liberty and justice merit our love and devotion only if the considerations we cite in their support have appeal, not just to *ourselves*, but to any creature capable of asking the question ‘Should I care about liberty and justice?’, at least insofar as they are rational? If so then, *a fortiori*, we will not rest

<sup>23</sup> Foot ‘Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives’ p. 167.

content with saying that these are things that we *in fact* care for. But how are we to determine whether that is how we should interpret the idea of meriting love and devotion?

Foot is right that, if it is, then this will manifest itself in the apparent legitimacy of a certain sort of panic. But it is panic not at the thought of the *contingency* of our caring about the things we care about, but rather at the thought that if we stopped caring, or if we had never started, we would rightly come to see, or perhaps always have seen, our caring about these things as *rationally optional*; as *arbitrary*; as to be *explained* rather than *justified*; as to be explained, in much the same way that loving Leningrad is to be explained, simply in terms of *when, where and how we were brought up*.<sup>24</sup> That seems to me to be a kind of panic that we rightly feel when we reflect upon the possibility that we can give no privileged rational defence of moral concern and that the citizens of Leningrad rightly did not feel when they reflected on the fact that they could give no privileged rational defence of loving Leningrad.<sup>25</sup>

In order to see this, suppose I care for justice as well as for myself and you only care for yourself. Suppose you make your case for caring only for yourself and I make my case for caring for justice as well. Suppose we fail to convince each other and begin wondering whether this is a difference between us to be explained rather than justified. We rightly panic if we take this idea seriously because, I suggest, we can then no longer take seriously, as we must, the idea of *disapproving* of someone for caring other than the way we think he should.<sup>26</sup>

Imagine a citizen of Leningrad who claimed to *disapprove* of a Berliner for loving features of Berlin rather than Leningrad. Can we make sense of this attitude? No. The attitude seems altogether inappropriate because we know that if you grow up in Berlin you will love Berlin, and if you grow up in Leningrad you will love Leningrad. Having grown up in Leningrad you

<sup>24</sup> Thus, though it may be a *contingent* matter whether I care about justice, it may not be *arbitrary*. Caring about justice may be rationally required, and so not arbitrary, despite the fact that, since it is a contingent fact that I am rational, so I only contingently care about justice.

<sup>25</sup> The thought that requirements of etiquette are arbitrary, in the relevant respect, inspires no panic either.

<sup>26</sup> Here I find myself in agreement with much of Foot's 'Approval and Disapproval' in her *Virtues and Vices*, though it seems that I take her argument to have implications that she would herself reject.

have every reason not to want to live in Berlin, and vice versa. But the idea that there is *something wrong* with someone from Berlin who doesn't want to live in Leningrad, that he makes some kind of *mistake*, is simply absurd. *Disapproval* is out of place.

Of course, citizens of Leningrad may well *dislike* Berliners. But that is because, like loving Leningrad itself, what we like and dislike about people is, in a certain respect, *arbitrary*. Thus it is significant that we are not rationally constrained to dislike people who like what we don't. For disliking, unlike disapproving, of someone does not imply you think there is something wrong with him, that he makes some kind of mistake. Disliking someone is, as it were, as much a fact about you as a fact about him. Consequently, the fact you dislike certain features of someone I don't is a fact about you I don't have to take all that seriously. It need provide me with no reason to suppose I should dislike him.<sup>27</sup> And hence, from a certain perspective, the fact that I don't like certain features of someone is not a fact about myself I have to take all that seriously either. Thus it is significant that we can quite seriously entertain the idea of *undoing* our likes and dislikes. Consider a frivolous example. I dislike it when people constantly grin; I find it annoying. However I couldn't really care less whether I *continue* to find this feature of people annoying. Getting rid of my distaste for constant grinning is something I would readily consider if someone could give me a method and a motive for doing so, and, correspondingly, is something I will not consider if someone does not give me a method and a motive for doing so.

And now the explanation of why we panic at the thought that moral concern can be given no privileged rational defence can be put like this. Once I come to see the fact that I care for both justice and myself and you care only for yourself as a difference between us to be explained rather than justified, the idea of my *disapproving* of you for caring only for yourself begins to look as absurd as a citizen of Leningrad *disapproving* of a Berliner for loving Berlin; as absurd as my *disapproving* of someone who constantly grins. After all, there is nothing *wrong* with you for not

<sup>27</sup> Of course, it may provide me with a motive for not liking him. If I don't like him then perhaps that will jeopardize our friendship and I very much want our friendship to continue.

caring for justice; you make no *mistake*. At best I *dislike* the fact that you don't care for justice, just as you, perhaps, dislike the fact that I don't care just for myself. But what we like and dislike about people is *arbitrary*. I therefore needn't take seriously your disliking what you dislike about me, and you needn't take seriously my disliking what I dislike about you. Indeed, from a certain perspective, neither of us should take our own dislikes all that seriously either. Perhaps we should seriously consider *undoing* our dislikes. I wonder whether we have a motive for doing so. . . ? Panic seems quite rightly to have set in.

Note how unsatisfying it would be to be told at this point that in actually disliking those who don't care for justice, I also dislike myself in possible worlds in which I don't care for justice; that this is why I can't seriously consider undoing this particular dislike of mine; that this is the relevant difference with say, my distaste for constant grinning.<sup>28</sup> For even if this makes for a difference, it does nothing to remove the *arbitrariness* of that dislike, and it is the arbitrariness of the dislike that is the source of the unease. After all, in another world I dislike myself in this world for not caring only for myself. How *peculiar* each of these attitudes seems, in the context of the other! Far more plausible is the idea that my actual attitude towards myself in worlds in which I don't care for justice is itself dependent upon my belief that I am, in the actual world, possessed of a *justification* for caring for justice. For, it seems, only this could account for my apparent ability to question whether I should have the attitude I actually have towards myself in such worlds. Panic sets in when I entertain the thought that this is an ability I don't actually have.<sup>29</sup>

Foot thus seems to me wrong to suppose that it is unnecessary to have the 'control' the categorical imperative gives us. For the idea that moral concern is required by reason seems to be the only thing that would allow us to make sense of the idea of moral disapproval in this context, the idea that there is *something wrong* with someone who is *motivated* to do other than what he should;

<sup>28</sup> For suggestions along these lines see Martin Davies and Lloyd Humberstone 'Two Notions of Necessity' *Philosophical Studies* 1980 pp. 22-5; my 'Should We Believe in Emotivism?' pp. 303-4; David Wiggins 'A Sensible Subjectivism?' pp. 205-6.

<sup>29</sup> This may be seen as correcting what I say in 'Should We Believe in Emotivism?' pp. 303-4.

that he makes some kind of *mistake*. For, we may then say, what is wrong with him is the same as what is wrong with someone who *believes* other than what he should. *Each is insufficiently sensitive to the available reasons.*

This conclusion is certain to meet with resistance. For just as there are people who take the idea that moral requirements are requirements of reason to be axiomatic, there are others who treat the idea with evident disdain.<sup>30</sup> The following remarks of Simon Blackburn's are representative:

This is the permanent chimaera, the holy grail of moral philosophy, the knock-down argument that people who are nasty and unpleasant and motivated by the wrong things are above all *unreasonable*: that they can be proved to be wrong by the pure sword of reason. They aren't just selfish or thoughtless or malignant or imprudent, but are reasoning badly, or out of touch with the facts. It must be an occupational hazard of professional thinkers to want to reduce all the vices to this one. In reality the motivational grip of moral considerations is bound to depend on desires which must simply be taken for granted, although they can also be encouraged and fostered.<sup>31</sup>

However, the problem with this is that it doesn't speak to the issue.

If moral requirements are requirements of reason then we have no need to deny that someone who is motivated by the wrong things *is* just malignant; for being malignant *is* just a manifestation of an insensitivity to good reasons. The rationalist's idea is not that we need to *prop up* our terms of moral assessment with terms of rational assessment because the moral terms aren't enough by themselves. The idea is rather that, in order to understand *why* our terms of moral assessment are enough by themselves, we have to think of moral requirements as requirements of reason. To think otherwise is to suppose that the charge 'He is malignant!' is much like the charge 'He is from Berlin!', or 'He constantly grins!' or 'He answers letters written

<sup>30</sup> Tom Nagel takes the idea to be 'self-evident' in *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 159–60.

<sup>31</sup> Simon Blackburn *Spreading the Word* p. 222.

to him in the third person in the first!' And that is plainly wrong.<sup>32</sup>

Nor need the rationalist deny that that the motivational grip of moral considerations 'is bound to depend on desires which must simply be taken for granted'.<sup>33</sup> For it is now a familiar point that, at a certain level, at 'bedrock', our disposition to say, for example, '12' when asked 'What is  $7 + 5$ ?' depends on a disposition 'which must simply be taken for granted'.<sup>34</sup> But if no one needs to take a transcendental view of reason in order to see the rules of arithmetic and logic as justified, then why insist that the rationalist needs to take a transcendental view of reason in order to see the rules of morality as justified? *Bedrock* should not be thought *arbitrary*.<sup>35</sup>

Another reason why the foregoing argument might meet resistance is that, if what I have said is right, it follows that it is in fact *inappropriate* to say that someone committed to acting on requirements of etiquette *disapproves* of those who couldn't care less. But is this plausible? After all, it might be said, they would surely *say* they disapprove. But whether they would say this or not, it seems plausible to me to suppose that they do not really disapprove in the sense of supposing that there is *something wrong* with someone who couldn't care less about the requirements of etiquette; that he is making some sort of *mistake*. Indeed, though to my ear it sounds more appropriate to say that someone committed to acting on requirements of etiquette *dislikes* those who couldn't care less, even this seems to me a non-compulsory description of their attitude. For note that the dismissive remark 'He isn't one of us' has a legitimate role to play in practices of etiquette. Accordingly it seems to me that those who couldn't care less aren't so much thought to be mistaken or disliked by

<sup>32</sup> Thus I cannot agree with David Lewis when he writes in his contribution to this symposium 'And it won't help to juggle terms; as it might be, by calling it 'rational necessity' and then classifying the disposition to value genuine values as a department of 'rationality' (p. 133).

<sup>33</sup> Can a rationalist agree that motivating reasons are constituted *inter alia* by desires? Yes he can. See my 'Reason and Desire' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1987-8, section III and IV.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Saul Kripke *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Harvard University Press, 1982); Crispin Wright *Realism: Meaning and Truth* (Blackwell, 1986). See also Simon Blackburn *Spreading the Word* pp. 197-8.

<sup>35</sup> See Mark Johnston's contribution to this symposium.

those who could, as simply avoided and ignored. (Myself I find this rather alarming in certain contexts.)

Consider now Foot's second argument. The idea that the categorical imperative gives us the kind of control over our concerns that we want is, she suggests, an 'illusion'. It is 'as if' we are 'trying to give the moral "ought" a magic force'. What does Foot mean by this? As I understand it, she is questioning the *coherence* of the categorical imperative; asking how moral concern *could* be required by reason; asking for the *form* of an answer. But the answer is easily given.<sup>36</sup>

Consider something uncontroversially required by reason: that we desire the means to our ends (here we see the relevance of the earlier discussion of (Z<sup>c</sup>)). To say desiring the means to our ends is required by reason is to say, first, that since some version of the means-ends principle

(x)(If x's  $\Phi$ -ing is prima facie desirable and x can  $\Phi$  by  $\Psi$ -ing then x's  $\Psi$ -ing is prima facie desirable)

is valid<sup>37</sup>—i.e. a principle allowing us to derive evaluative truths from evaluative truths and truths about means—so this principle can be used to explain the *rationality* of deliberation.<sup>38</sup> For we can then see why a subject who believes both that his  $\Phi$ -ing is prima facie desirable and that he can  $\Phi$  by  $\Psi$ -ing but who doesn't believe that his  $\Psi$ -ing is prima facie desirable *violates* a norm of reason.<sup>39</sup> However it is also to say, second, that since a subject who believes his  $\Phi$ -ing is prima facie desirable is irrational if he does not desire to  $\Phi$ —something we learnt from

<sup>36</sup> Here I have been influenced by Christine Korsgaard 'Skepticism about Practical Reason' *Journal of Philosophy* 1986. For my disagreements with Korsgaard see sections III and IV of my 'Reason and Desire'. In what follows I assume that reconciliation is the *preferred* solution to the deliberative problem (legitimately—see the earlier discussion of (Z<sup>c</sup>) and footnote 38 below). I hope to defend such a solution elsewhere.

<sup>37</sup> The validity of this principle requires that the derived judgement be understood as a judgement of prima facie *instrumental* desirability. For other complications see my 'Reason and Desire' footnote 11. These complications may safely be ignored here however, for the argument I am constructing doesn't turn on the precise form of the principle, merely on its acceptability in some form or other.

<sup>38</sup> The assumption is that, as with moral judgements, we have reason to believe evaluative judgements express beliefs because of the syntactic and normative features of the sentences in which they are expressed. I hope to expand on this idea elsewhere.

<sup>39</sup> Compare someone who believes both that  $p$  and that  $p \rightarrow q$  but who does not believe that  $q$ . See my 'Reason and Desire' section II.

the earlier discussion of (2<sup>c</sup>)—so a subject who believes both that his  $\Phi$ -ing is prima facie desirable and that he can  $\Phi$  by  $\Psi$ -ing but who isn't motivated to  $\Psi$  also violates a norm of reason.

If this is right then to say moral concern is required by reason is to say something straightforwardly analogous. It is to say, first, that since a principle like the principle of limited altruism

(x) (If someone is in pain and  $x$  can relieve that person's pain by  $\Psi$ -ing then  $x$ 's  $\Psi$ -ing is prima facie desirable)

is valid—i.e. expresses a principle allowing us to derive evaluative truths from truths about our circumstances—so this principle can be used to explain the rationality of deliberation.<sup>40</sup> For we can then see why a subject who believes that someone is in pain and he can relieve that person's pain by  $\Psi$ -ing but who doesn't believe it is prima facie desirable that he  $\Psi$ 's violates a norm of reason. But it is also to say, second, that since a subject who believes his  $\Phi$ -ing is prima facie desirable is irrational if he does not desire to  $\Phi$ , so a subject who believes both that someone is in pain and that he can relieve that person's pain by  $\Psi$ -ing but who doesn't desire to  $\Psi$  also violates a norm of reason.

I thus see no problem with providing the *form* of an answer to the question 'How *could* it be that moral concern is required by reason?' Foot may well, of course, be right that it is an 'illusion' to suppose that moral concern is required by reason, for she may be right to be skeptical about the existence of principles like the principle of limited altruism allowing us to derive evaluative truths from truths about our circumstances. But if what I have said here is right, skepticism about the existence of such principles may well be tantamount to skepticism about the existence of moral requirements themselves.

Recall that, according to the argument for (2) sketched above, we should accept (2) if we think our moral motivations require a privileged rational defence and if the best account of what it is to so conceive of our moral motivations suggests that our reasons for being morally motivated are themselves our reasons for our moral beliefs. For then, by (2), our moral motivations may be seen to inherit the rational status of our

<sup>40</sup> See Tom Nagel *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 156–62. For a different way of putting the same point see my 'Reason and Desire' section IV.

moral beliefs. It should now be evident that the argument given establishes just this conclusion. For if principles like the principle of limited altruism are valid, then it is precisely these principles we will appeal to in justifying our moral beliefs. Moreover, as I said earlier, reconciliationists who opt for a dispositional theory of value are uniquely placed to explain why this is so.

According to the dispositional theorist we can analyse rightness in terms of a disposition to desire under suitable conditions. But what are these 'suitable conditions'? The preceding discussion provides an answer. The dispositional theorist should say that an agent's  $\Phi$ -ing is right just in case he would desire to  $\Phi$  if he were to deliberate in accordance with the principles of reason corresponding to moral principles, principles that permit us to derive evaluative truths from truths about our circumstances, principles like the principle of limited altruism. For the dispositional theorist is then in a position to say not just that our moral motivations can be given a privileged rational defence to the extent that they are based on such deliberations, but also that our moral beliefs can be given a privileged rational defence to just the extent that our moral motivations can. For the fact that we can give a privileged rational defence of our moral beliefs, if indeed we can, simply follows from the fact that the desire in terms of which we analyse rightness is one all rational creatures would have if they reasoned in accordance with principles like the principle of limited altruism.<sup>41</sup>

Reconciliation in the form of the dispositional theory of value is thus the preferred solution to the moral problem. For it alone explains why our reasons for our moral beliefs and our reasons for our moral motivations are one and the same. Our moral beliefs and motivations are each justified to the extent that they are based on reasoning in accordance with valid principles that permit us to derive evaluative truths from truths about our circumstances.

Of course, the dispositional theory merely offers us a reconciliation of (1), (2) and (3) at the level of *concepts*, not *ontology*. If no such principles are valid then moral judgements of the form ' $\Phi$ -ing is right' are all, strictly speaking, false. It might

<sup>41</sup> I discuss these matters in my 'Objectivity and Moral Realism'.

be thought that, if this turns out to be so, we would then be forced to adopt an error theory, in the spirit of John Mackie. But that is not our only option. We might instead conclude that rightness isn't everything we thought it was, so opting for *conceptual revision*.

Revisionists who urge rejection of (1) might insist that this is the conclusion they reached long ago. Revisionists who urge rejection of (2) might now insist that their view be thought of as a serious competitor in this quest for revision. I do not myself think that, even if we did opt to revise our beliefs about what rightness is, we would have to respond in either of these ways, however. For we might prefer instead to respond by giving an anti-rationalist relativistic dispositional theory of rightness.<sup>42</sup> But even if we did I want to emphasise how *different* such revisionist strategies look from the way they looked earlier. For it now seems quite inappropriate for those who opt to revise by rejecting (1) to say that they reject (1) rather than (2) because they accept (2) as *basic*, and likewise for those who say that they opt to revise by rejecting (2) because they take the *denial* of (2) to be basic. (1) and (2) are intertwined, the appeal of each lying in a conception of reasons that at one and the same time can be reasons for our moral beliefs and reasons for our moral motivations. Revisionists who wish to cash in on the failure of this form of the dispositional theory, if indeed it fails, thus have to admit that we *should*, but *can't*, accept *both* (1) and (2). Reconciliation must be given its due even if we ultimately opt for revision. Once this is agreed I am happy enough to let the revisionists fight it out amongst themselves for final honours as regards the moral problem.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See my 'Should We Believe in Emotivism?' pp. 302-5 and footnote 22.

<sup>43</sup> Thanks to Rory and Owen Pettit for footnote 15 and Eileen McNally for her help in transcription. This paper was largely written while I was a Visiting Fellow in the Department of Philosophy, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. I thank them for their support.