

From Ethical Reflexivity to Value-Sufficiency

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vi. The Rise and Fall of Kantian Ethics

In adherence to an objectivist notion of value and a rejection of moral reflexivity, Iris Murdoch presents a Kantian perspective that deals with many such ethical issues. Dissatisfied with the prospect of subjective moral values simply created by choices, Murdoch supports the view that values are objectively fixed in relation to external reality through such experiences as beauty, honesty, humility and death. In her popular book 'The Sovereignty of Good,' she endorses Plato's belief that beauty could be the starting point of the good or moral life, and compares morality to other human universals such as honesty in art and other disciplines which reveal the detail of the world and are rewarded with a knowledge of reality. In her opinion, the necessity of the good is an aspect of the necessity involved in the technique of exhibiting fact. Yet there is a problem here that stretches from Plato and Descartes into the modern world. Murdoch's argument is predicated on the view that the authority of morals is founded on the authority of 'truth'.

An apparently unbroken connection between 'truth' and morality is as seductive and intuitively appealing as Murdoch's further connections between beauty, humility, death,

'truth' and their supposed satisfactions. On the subject of death she writes that:

"a genuine sense of mortality enables us to see virtue as the only thing of worth ... [and] the acceptance of our own nothingness ... is an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves".

Extending this disparagement of self-reference to an appraisal of 'truth' and 'reality', she claims that "the humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see things as they are". Charitably speaking, her account of morality draws attention to the issue of 'truth' and its attractions, and contains essential ingredients of a solution to the problems of ethics. Yet they fail to be mixed in the right way.

With respect to death, the prospect of oblivion can help to focus our attention upon and elicit those qualities of life that are peculiarly valuable, as well as facilitate capacities able to resist the threat of an absent future. But Murdoch's ideas also contain obscurities and misconceptions from the past. An appreciation of our own 'nothingness' and a concern with what is not ourselves can afford powerful insights. But so can the acceptance and affirmation of our own existence. Murdoch's emphasis is too negative and leads us to suspect her of an over dependence on outdated religious

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mores and a reification of a cost theory of virtue. To continue with her other virtues of beauty, humility, honesty; beauty may provide certain directives, but it is also an outstanding example of arbitrary value, subject to cultural relativity. Humility may be preferable to arrogance, and could impede a descent into ignorance, but it is invariably a veneration of personal abasement that should be replaced by more neutral conditions such as value-refrain and unaffected response.

With respect to her view of honesty, like ‘truth’, it might well serve as a ‘regulative principle’, a vector of good intent, and can be usefully compared to ‘truthfulness’. Yet as in that discussion, ‘truth’ deserves special treatment as a harbinger of value masquerading as an epitome of objectivity and neutrality, as well as a stalking horse for phenomenal states. As a part of the historical critique of ‘truth’, Kant went as far as denying access to objective ‘truth’ and replaced it with an unreachable underlying noumenal reality. This is already a severe criticism of Murdoch’s account of ‘truth’, as well as in its provision of a reward. But we don’t even have to go as far as this to see that, in an ethical perspective, the informed and more accurate perception of the expert should not be more rewarding than that of the layman, the child or the fool. If the claim is downgraded to the rewards of honesty as sincere belief, then we have already seen how belief can produce psychological rewards that can compete with and exceed supposed perceptions of ‘truth’. From the perspective of the moral agent, the value of belief is indistinguishable from the value of ‘truth’, even when concentrated by the prospect of humility or death. Moreover, it is another assumption to think that access to ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ is a reward rather than some horrific burden, underlined by Nietzsche with the idea that “The truth is ugly”.

Honesty, ‘truth’, death, humility and beauty

do have functions in morality, but then they need not, indeed they cannot be exactly those conceived in Murdoch’s or even the Kantian perspective. For Kant, the ‘truth’ about the world is hidden in a noumenal realm and is eclipsed by the ‘truth’ of reason and moral consciousness. His account is altogether more sophisticated in attempting to reconcile the ostensibly contrary principles of subjective ethical intent, the ‘good will’ and the value of others, with objective outcomes through applications of reason and universality. Ethical objectivity, universality or normativity, and the subjective intention of moral choice are manifestly essential elements of ethics. They are compelling intuitions that few of us could relinquish. Something about ‘the ethical good’ must be universal, yet it must also be compatible with the subjective states that we experience as the good-will and the faculty of free-choice.

For Kant, however, as for many of us, intention in ethics is paramount. He insisted that “Nothing can be conceived in the world... which can be called good... except a good will”.

Kant arrived at this view by considering that all other faculties can be used in malign ways, except ‘a good will’. The subjectivity of the will or the ‘good will’ raises difficulties of integrating this principle into the objective requirements of ethics, and even into his own ethical theory. Yet Kant extends common sense intuitions about the ‘good will’ with qualifications that both exacerbate and ameliorate this problem. That is, the ‘good will’ must also be free, informed and guided by rationality if it is to find expression in universally ethical behaviour. When the ‘good will’ is properly qualified by rationality, universality and a knowledge of other people as “ends in themselves”, it becomes a Kantian “categorical imperative” that we ‘must’ act in a certain way, that is, ethically.

Kant's emphasis on the good will is contiguous with the importance of subjective intent found in Christian ethics, modern intuition and common sense. Religious, secular and modern perspectives agree that moral acts must involve subjective intent. Purely natural, mechanical or non-conscious events (or even coerced actions) cannot possess intrinsic value or be attributed with moral intent. On this view, destructive acts of nature or an animal killing its prey cannot be described as ethical acts or moral events, as they lack the required conscious and subjective elements of knowledge and intent. Kant formalised this view with extensive qualifications of intention and reason in an ethical theory that was supposed to stand without recourse to faith or intuition. Consequently, on enlightened Christian, common sense and Kantian grounds, a human being is only subject to moral judgement and reprobation to the extent that he is freely acting on informed choices and that he is not under coercion from effects of such as physical force or psychological pathology.

This prerequisite of subjective intent as an essential element of moral action is central to the problem of producing coherent and objective principles of ethical behaviour because it calls for the apparently impossible requirement of an ethical principle which comprises a subjective and 'free' choice that must have objective outcomes. The greatness of Kantian ethics lies in its attempt to reconcile the subjective elements about intention, the good will, that the 'good' is really good and that other people have intrinsic value, with the objective requirements of reason and universality. He took fundamental and seemingly unnegotiable ethical insights of the good-will, of being an autonomous and free agent, of the universalisation of behaviour, and of the value of other people as ends in themselves, and formed them into the moral precept of the "categorical imperative" that

moral reason requires that we must act in certain ways, on pain of immorality, or as some would add, on pain of irrationality that Kant seems to discount.

But serious impediments challenge the success of this view, on the morality of its actual consequences, on the ability of reason and universality to bridge the gap between moral values and factual outcomes, on suppositions about the nature of rationality, on an unexplained connection between the good-will and the value of other people, and on basic presuppositions about the character of ethics. Korsgaard attempts to ameliorate the fundamental problem of discordance between objectivity and subjectivity with a contextual account of objectivity.

Phillipa Foot has posed the further problem that Kant's "categorical imperative" is subject to assent in that one might choose not to be ethical, and should thereby be described instead as a "hypothetical imperative",⁷⁵ that is, of being under an obligation to act only on the acceptance of some prior premise. John McDowell and IG McFetridge agree on the inconclusiveness of rationality in the Kantian categorical imperative, but question the wider implication that all moral requirements are only hypothetical imperatives, which moves the issue of an assumed assent to other venues.

Another kind of assumption can often be found in the acceptance of other people as ends in themselves. This may be an unnegotiable premise of ethical theory and practice, but it must be explained explicitly, and Kant does not convincingly explain why ethical value should be attributed to other people, even if they are acknowledged as intrinsically valuable. Ascribing people with rationality is no longer an adequate reason. Moreover, acknowledging people as intrinsically valuable begs the question of, why should we value the intrinsic-

value that other people have in themselves if it isn't already part of our own value systems? Even given that people are "ends in themselves", we can and must ask, why we should adopt these values as our values? The difficulty of answering this question evokes a wider question of how the internal structures of value can have inescapable relations with the external world as well as with other sentient or self-valuing beings.

Kant offers an answer to this question an appeals to a wider perspective when he adds 'duty' to reason and universalisation as another motivational element. But 'duty' is a contingent factor added to bolster a supposedly necessary principle. In the modern world, both 'duty' and 'rationality' have lost their irresistibly compelling character that they once had. Today, 'duty' and the dictates of reason are just two value preferences out of many. Nietzsche goes further to draw equivalence between duty and guilt,⁷⁷ and cites the malevolence of reason in Socrates' perverse equation of reason with virtue rationalism".

Blackburn has spoken more recently of "the tyranny of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason was a groundbreaking work with moral as well as epistemological objectives. Yet it is no less liable to criticism and even deposition by subsequent developments. The idea of a synthetic a priori—necessary knowledge with material content—for example, is highly controversial. AJ Ayer insisted that necessity is an 'analytic' feature that cannot be properly applied outside logic and mathematics, or within ethics, as Kant wants in order to establish moral order on a secure foundation. There is over-reach here. Like 'truth', rationality or reason may be an essential element of ethical activity, but in itself, it can have no intrinsic ethical value or mandate. Except on rationalist assumptions, rationality does not obligate ethical behaviour. It may compel us to act on a "hypothetical

imperative" if we desire certain ends, but it is neither a sufficient or necessary reason for action. This has consequences in the production of ethical values that we will encounter again in the problem of their derivation from some secondary source.

Despite Kant's work, the problems of establishing moral order, of enforcing some kind of 'necessity', and of justifying respect for other people as "ends in themselves" remain. It's significant that Kant attempted to establish these mandates on the foundation of consciousness. But his conditions of consciousness include the unlikely features of an "I think" that "must be able to accompany all my representations",⁸¹ an awareness of a faculty of unification, the representation of an objective world distinct from oneself, and a unified conception of space-time. These are conditions that must obtain logically on the basis of presuppositions prevalent in the Kantian ethos that over-emphasised the significance of logic and rationality. Both rationality and consciousness are viewed differently in the modern era. Descartes as well as Kant regarded consciousness as having to possess certain representations such as an 'I think', but today even Sartre makes a distinction between reflective awareness and pre-reflective awareness when we are observing an object, or are engaged in a task, without an explicit conception of ourselves doing these things.

The logically uncompromising character of Kant's ethics is reflected in the many contradictions and abhorrent ethical injunctions to which it leads. His suppositions about the status and function of rationality and universalisation, for instance, led him to conclusions about the unacceptability of either lying or suicide under any circumstances. His adherence to absolute impartiality also involves the problem of moral distancing, where on Kantian ethics—contrary to both ethical intuition

and virtue theory—no favour should be shown for friends and family over distant or unknown persons. Similarly, his particular concerns over moral intent led to his prioritisation of ‘duty’ and the moral will over ‘inclination’, with the result of also disparaging the moral content of many positive human dispositions. As in all deontological ethics involving doing the ‘right thing’, requirements of absolute impartiality also lead to the classic problem of irresolvable conflicts between different rights, duties or conceptions of right and wrong.

WD Ross and other Neo-Kantians have made rigorous attempts to rescue and develop Kantian ethics as an objective system of right or wrong, rather than accept ethical relativity or an ethics based on consequences or situations. Faced with both ineradicable conflicts of value and unacceptable consequences of absolute enforcement of strict principles, Ross remodelled Kant’s immutable duties into conditional obligations or *prima-facie* duties enforceable only under the right circumstances which obtain in the absence of overwhelming detriment. This manoeuvre was intended to preserve the theoretical viability of objective right and wrong as well as the possibility of implementation in the real world. But it was bought at the cost of multiple ‘*prima facie* duties’ competing against each other, and still without adequate justification except for further claims that they were self-evident.

To resolve this new conflict, Ross advised that we should obey the stronger duty and always perform the act that has the greatest *prima-facie* rightness over *prima-facie* wrongness. To determine the stronger duty, he provided a scale of *prima-facie* duties including such as fidelity, gratitude, justice and self-improvement. But in the real world of ambiguity and conflict—that *prima-facie* duties are supposed to accommodate—it isn’t always possible to determine even which duties are *prima-facie*,

much less which duties take precedence. So Ross returned dogmatically to the idea that selection and precedence of *prima-facie* duties are self-evident and obvious. But difficulties show that they are not always self-evident or obvious, unless sustained by the prejudice and convention that Kantianism was supposed to avoid. In order for the notion of *prima-facie* duties or obligations to have some credibility, they must be both very few in number and be exceedingly compelling, such as the good-will and respect of others, which returns us to the original problem of their explication.

Except that, completing the circle brings us back to a different position. Engagement with the realms of Kantian rationality and consciousness have given us access to cognitivist and phenomenological perspectives in which a unification of different ethical and human values might be found. There is also emphasis within the Kantian perspectives of the two compelling notions above that firstly, the ‘good will’ is intentional and is indeed ‘good’, not as a psychological inclination or as a social convention but as an executive ethical state, and secondly, that people are to be valued as ‘ends in themselves’, not simply as objects or even agencies in prudential acts.

More specifically, Putnam tells us that:

“For Kant, it is the ‘dignity’ of obeying ‘the moral law’ that is the motive (which means, ultimately, the ‘dignity of giving myself a law that all other rational beings can give themselves, the dignity of ‘autonomy’”).⁸³

There is an emphasis here pointing beyond irreducible and problematic principles of motivation driven by duty, rationality and universality to a state of ‘dignity’ closely associated with those of self-respect and self-value taken up and extended by others. John Milton spoke of “an esteem, whereby men bear an inward reverence towards their own

persons". As part of an explicitly interpretive project, Dworkin names "two principles ... of human dignity ... [as] ... self-respect and authenticity", that are in need of further analysis, and these have particular significance in our own. In this way, Kantian concerns have initiated a widening movement into more subjective explanations and reflexive accounts of value. An emphasis on autonomy, freedom and choice has manifestly developed into other possibilities of choice for unconventional and pragmatic criteria of justification as well as dispositions of self-value that can now be considered.

Yet in the Kantian perspective there is an emphasis on unaffected intent and the moral-will to the near exclusion of other moral sentiments ranging from visceral affect to values as felt experiences and ethical inclinations. Stepping in to rectify these omissions, virtue theory has become an attractive ethical complement and alternative viewpoint that we can examine below.

vii. Aristotle's Resurgent Virtue Theory of Ethics

Elizabeth Anscombe made a now classic criticism of Kantian and modern ethics, and presented virtue theory as a viable alternative. She argued that Kantian and recent ethics are systems of rights, duties and obligations, which rest on notions of right action, law and God as a lawgiver that have been weakened or rejected.

Virtue theory offers a different approach wherein ethical behaviour is not just the response of right action to duty but is an expression of good character and disposition to act in a virtuous way. This is more consistent with our modern moral intuitions about the limitations of dutiful action (even done with good will) and the importance of compassionate dispositions which can

resolve the problems of exceptions to absolute impartiality and the indifference implied by the emotionally bare dictates of reason and logic. The 'virtue perspective' brings the needed change of emphasis from external command and constraint to the internal requirements of not only character and disposition but also, in this inquiry, to value-states. Such a change of emphasis is crucial to finding a way of dealing with intractable notions of rights, impartiality, rationality, necessity and obligation.

In the Kantian perspective, the formal content of the good-will is provided by the will to do ones duty, and the material content is furnished by the universalization of duty through reason which is informed by the recognition of people as ends in themselves. According to virtue theory, however, ethical behaviour is an expression of good character or right disposition, and good-will or intention is regarded as an attempt to be ethical rather than its achievement. On this view, virtue is informed by both society and nature, and is realised in the internalisation of virtue as a deep habit, becoming second nature, and culminating in what Aristotle described as magnanimity or "greatness of soul" as "the crowning virtue". Other virtues such as courage and loyalty correspond with common intuitions and appeal to a contemporary appreciation of features such as subjectivity, inclination, human partiality and a distinction between being good and doing good. These features accord more with conceptions of mind, thought and virtue that are sceptical of pure will and logic as ethical dictates. They are also consistent with a view of the will and motivational reasons as expressions of unconscious and infinitely permeating levels of thought and experience which have social and biological roots.

But virtue theory has not been able to reconcile itself with all modern discoveries of

thought. Its numerous problems include the designation, cultural relativity and justification of the virtues, as well as greater difficulties with coherence and 'truth' than those afflicting Kantian ethics. Traditional Aristotelian virtues such as courage, loyalty and honesty are socially dependent, as would be any list of virtues. But the question also arises today of why should a virtuous person be courageous, loyal or honest? In the Ancient Greek ethos the question would be rhetorical. Aristotle nevertheless answers with the reward of happiness or eudaimonia, which despite its ethical connotations, still implies the now naïve equation between happiness and virtue. Although Aristotle broadens this view with other virtues like magnanimity and integrity, another limitation is indicated in his neglect of so called executive virtues such as justice and prudential self-interest which don't imply particular actions. This exacerbates the problem that virtue ethics does not have clear principles for guiding action other than social conventions and the judgement of a virtuous person. The primacy of dispositions in virtue theory does not explain the connection between the agent and his actions, or easily translate into prescriptive principles of behaviour. In addition to the problems of the characterization of virtuous dispositions, their cultural relativity, their uncertain connections with virtuous actions, and their lack of a unifying principle, virtue theory fails to answer outstanding questions of justification, of why must I be ethical, and why must I respect other people and not harm them?

Perhaps most telling is that Aristotle was simply unaware of the 'fact- value' and 'is-ought' problems, which reveals a minimal appreciation of value, adding to an undeveloped view of the value or significance of other people. These omissions can, nevertheless, be rectified in a remodelled virtue theory. The neglect of other people, for example, has been addressed

by feminist thinkers who have moved the emphasis on agency in virtue ethics to that of 'care' in nurturing and guardianship. Difficulties with dispositions in virtue theory can also be effectively complemented or even replaced with value-states which are structurally similar yet more amenable to the requirements of ethical theory than Aristotle's principle of happiness or eudaimonia. Aristotle's stated virtues such as courage, truthfulness and modesty are already tacit examples of value-states, although they haven't been explicitly described as such or unified within a principle of value. In this enterprise, there is something to be made of a comparison between Aristotle's principles of 'finality', sufficiency and magnanimity, and the idea of value-sufficiency in this inquiry, as already broached in a comparison with happiness.

Comparisons of similarities between virtue ethics and existentialist ethics also unexpectedly point us in useful directions, but their similarities lead to similar difficulties. Both have distinctively non-cognitivist traits which create problems in relations to 'truth' in establishing systematically objective foundations and in finding coherent principles of action. Action in virtue ethics is ideally produced spontaneously from virtuous character or disposition, and in the existentialist outlook it depends upon the 'dispositions' or 'virtues' of authenticity, freedom and responsibility. The non-derivative character of value in both can be seen in that in virtue theory the ethical-will or good-intention is regarded as only an attempt to do good, whereas 'genuine' good is an internalised and naturally manifesting product of character. Existentialism similarly eschews forms of justification derived from looking either back or forward to past or future states or judgements. These non-derivative forms of justification can be described as non-cognitive, but are different from the Humean

version that locates goals and objectives in (future) psychological states which are pursued and implemented through the powers of reason. But both these denotations fail to define their most salient feature—as well as their greatest difficulty—of how to obtain justification from within that immediate experience.

With respect to virtue theory, we have noted Aristotle's endorsements of sufficiency, and happiness as *eudaimonia*, and have outlined how happiness can have its own kind of sufficiency and even its own kind of justification. Virtues that are value-states such as courage, truthfulness, modesty and loyalty are evoked by and directed towards particular values that can be integrated into a more general ethical theory, and can be complemented by other value-states such as love and compassion. This begins to explain how a justification of virtue theory can be developed along more straightforward lines of inquiry as well as by a phenomenology of value adopted here.

One of the key problems that needs to be resolved in any theory of ethics and justification is that of the value and respect of other people. But both virtue theory and existentialist ethics have particular difficulties here. The obligations of virtue theory are usefully grounded in social relations, but it has no systematic means of enforcing them, such as in Kantian theory. Similarly, it has been doubted whether an existentialist ethics is even possible in such an individualistic and antinomian philosophy. Existentialism is, however, also deeply interested in relations with other people, but largely with reference to the individual agent rather than out of concern for other people. Yet as a reflexive concern, this need not be entirely without advantage to this inquiry.

Another kind of unification is that considered here of different forms of human activity and different moral perspectives having different

functions within a diverse spectrum of human experience, encapsulated within a graduated phenomenon of consciousness. These include religious and ethical reflexivity, appraisals of different aspects of the self, and the importance of authenticity, freedom and happiness as well as the consequences of action. In this view, different theories of ethics attend to the different requirements of different aspects of the human being as an amalgam of multiple domains, evoking the notion of divisibility.

viii. Self-reference and Reference to Others

In addition to the possibility of representing different human domains, different theories of ethics advocate different ways of relating to other people. Virtue theory assesses relations with others through the agent's virtues such as friendship, loyalty and generosity. In Kantian ethics, people are valued as ends in themselves as a requirement of rationality and duty. Peter Singer holds that a happy, meaningful life requires ethical concern for others because we need a wider purpose in life than ourselves. Robert Nozick similarly maintains that unethical action impoverishes the agent, whereas ethical behaviour establishes a more valuable life. He also gives a more definitive principle in that we should "treat everything as having the value it has", which, however, involves a problematic objectivism. In the valid exception of other people having intrinsic value, he adds that they should be treated as valuable because each person has the characteristic of being a unique and value seeking "I". But this is little advance over Kant, and does not explain why we should value other people as either ends in themselves or as value seeking I's.

One answer considered in this inquiry is suggested in the idea of value- maximisation, that individuals will seek to increase their

value through such means as attribution and the recognition of value in others which will be reflected back upon themselves. We haven't yet established the principle of a will-to-value that would be foundational to this view.

A provisional explanation of this view of ethics as self-value is supported by the reflexive character of ethical action whereby an agent attributes value to himself by virtue of his perceived relation to his own actions. On a maximisation of value, favourable judgements and outcomes accrue self-value, whereas unfavourable ones negate self-value. The process is reinforced in several ways. To begin with, the inescapable significance of the agent's world ensures that he must attribute value to his own actions as he does to other events and objects. Also, for psychological reasons intimated earlier in the discussion on 'free-will', people cannot easily disassociate themselves from their own actions which then have particular claims upon them. The need to find meaning and purpose in ones own behaviour makes it difficult to regard it as of no consequence. Thirdly, due to a belief in 'free-will', people feel responsible for and identify with their actions which are regarded as good or bad. People thereby judge themselves as good and valuable or not, by association with their actions, in which other people prominently figure as the objects of their behaviour. And lastly, other people do have a special and privileged status in the world, however difficult to establish philosophically.

But even on the acceptance of value-maximisation and the recognition of other self-valuing beings, why should we should we accept other people as having ethical significance for ourselves, even as a means of attaining our own value? It is logically coherent to recognise others as having value like ourselves, but there is no obvious mandate or value imperative to accept the value of

others into our own value systems. We could acknowledge the fact of other conscious self-valuing beings, for example, and then use it to enhance our sadistic satisfactions to greater effect. One way of avoiding such an intention to harm others is to go beyond the recognition of the value of others to our common identity with others, in that other people are also self-valuing conscious beings like ourselves, and recognition of this creates an even greater ethical claim on us. On this account, problems of ethical concern for other kinds of creatures, such as hypothetical relations with different human species or with animals, are resolved in their identity as self-conscious, self-valuing beings who also contain within themselves intrinsic value, to the degree of their explicit, or tacit, self-value.

More to the point, it isn't possible to have viable conceptions or understanding of other people without reference to ourselves, and a deep understanding of other people unavoidably includes a reference to ourselves that must involve an experience of value and self-value. A comprehensive understanding of ourselves requires the inclusion of an experience of value and self-value, which must arguably be present in a satisfactory recognition of, or empathy with, another person. Such a comprehensive understanding of another person requires not just the recognition of their values but the experience of those values, and that experience must include the self-value of that person. Comprehensive understanding of another person thereby includes an appreciation of the value of another, not by the force of reason, but by the requirements of perceptual development.

But even if this analysis is correct, and it can create a bridge across the 'fact-value', or rather a value-fact-value distinction, it still faces serious difficulties. Firstly, an authentic apprehension of another's conscious existence

presupposes a will-to-truth as a function of a will-to-value, that I discuss in my final chapter. Secondly, the closing of a hiatus between 'knowledge' or moral knowledge and moral action rests upon the status and function of cognition to be examined in the following chapter. Thirdly, as noted earlier, closing the 'fact-value' divide does not yet span the 'is-ought' distinction sufficiently to mandate moral action. Paradoxically, having certain values, even ethical values, may not be decisive because one may choose not to act on them, or one may act on other values such as 'truth' or excellence instead of kindness or compassion. There remains a 'choice', possibly a moral choice, that cannot be mandated by the logical necessity of any single factor, but turns upon the combined force and quality of value, the will-to-value and their expression through the contingencies and circumstances of life.

The faculty of 'choice' turns the direction of this discussion away from qualities of the object-person, like sentience, consciousness and self-value, and towards similar but differently functioning qualities of the subject-agent such as reflective consciousness, self-value and the will-to-value. This is because on an objectivist conception of value, qualities of the world or of the object-person are typically held to evoke action from the agent. But a subjectivist critique holds that this reverses the actual direction of the process, like trying to reverse the arrow of time, or cause and effect, or more aptly as in Mackie's reversal of desire, making goodness depend on desire instead of desire depending on goodness.

The most fundamental condition of a moral agent is the reflective consciousness that makes moral intent possible, and on a graduated conception of mind, this gives rise to numerous and variable states. Different degrees of consciousness or moral consciousness can produce both limited moral judgements and

increased moral acuity, as well as radically different kinds of moral judgement, with different levels of 'reality' with different ethical domains. Nozick also speaks of degrees of reality, but in an objectivist context and without explaining how this would affect ethical values. On a gradualist view, consciousness is found at many levels such as animal, human and reflective, and can have different capacities like abstraction, empathy and ethical will.

This policy of avoiding 'the bad' rather than pursuing 'the good' also helps to resolve a problem in reflexive ethics, where other people figure prominently when an agent looks at the world and assesses how he can best enhance his value. On the view given, a failure to recognise other people as self-valuing beings indicates either an ignorance or a self-deceit that would diminish the agent's value in his own eyes. But the remaining problem is that the affirmation of another's existence does not yet compel any particular behaviour such as harm or help. As noted, it is possible to affirm or value oneself by demeaning or inflicting suffering on the other. However, seeking to harm or hurt other people, for no material gain other than the enhancement of one's own value, implies pathology, and the recognition of this would again demean the agent's self-value. It is a 'psychological fact', that to take pleasure in the suffering of others, even as mild *schadenfreude*, is a symptom of inadequacy and indicates regressive value, an awareness of which would hasten the decline in self-value. In contrast, 'good intent' and affirmation of another's value signals the agent's mental health, thereby reinforcing his self-value as well as a positive belief in himself and in his position in a community of self-valuing beings. But paradoxically in the case above, it is the avoidance of 'the bad' rather than the pursuit of 'the good', that provides a less ambiguous ethical motivation for the agent.

Yet there are other difficulties in a reflexive

account of ethics which give further reason to accept it only as a provisional or interim practice. To begin with, this account depends upon self-assessments which are themselves based upon judgements that are culturally relative, and are in need of argument or support for those judgements such as above. Sartre also reminds us that genuine ethical concern for others must be primarily for the other person and not just reflexive concern over our own concern for the other person. He explains that in an ethical act such as, my concern for Pierre, a 'genuinely' ethical act should be concerned for Pierre rather than the quality of my concern for Pierre.

This may be the case, indicating different qualities and even different degrees of reflexivity which may be more or less acceptable, but not eliminating the problematic character of reflexivity, nor the possibility of self-indulgence or "reflexive deformation" as Williams calls it, which introduces other kinds of reason for action.

Different kinds and degrees of reflexivity can be seen in value-states such as pride, honour, self-pity, self-worth, self-esteem, self-respect, self-love, self-interest and selfishness. These evoke different judgements of acceptability that seem to be based on the degree and quality of the particular reflexive concern that can be measured in terms of self-indulgence (explicable for us as excessive cognitive support and inadequate value-sufficiency

Both the adequacy and the coherence of ethics as a category of human understanding are challenged by its lack of theoretical consensus, its contradictions and even the incommensurability of its various positions. Its privileged status is put in question by alternative explanations of its theories, by their appeals to different principles of justification, and by the indefinite boundaries around the

concept of ethics itself. This comparative analysis not only places different theories of ethics on a spectrum in relation to each other on the scales of value, but also places ethics on a spectrum with other human activities such as romance, religious sentiments and pursuits of meaning. These outcomes are useful, as well as disruptive with respect to theoretical problems in foundational concepts concerning the nature of 'truth', reason, value, justification and 'free will'. Practical problems also emerge in the inability of ethics to provide satisfactory answers and solutions, seemingly mitigated only by common intuition and social custom. Three areas of consequence follow from this analysis. These are its effect on practical ethics, the broader perspective in which ethics and ethical theories must now be placed, and the character of any future 'ethics'.

With respect to practical ethics we can reiterate an earlier view that the failure of ethical theory will have little effect in practice because social and psychological processes will largely override theoretical ethical structures. Nietzsche rejects this outcome, but points to a pragmatic account of ethics taking shape in the hands of the English psychologists and in Herbert Spencer's notion of 'the good' as 'the useful'. Leaving aside the question of justification, accounts of practical ethics can be found in value-maximisation, psychology, sociobiology and even Dawkins' 'selfish gene', which admits 'altruism' to genetically related individuals, then to tribal groups, and to everybody else by extension.

A more coercive and versatile account, however, can be found in the process of externalisation, objectification and internalisation, employed by Berger and others, which brings refinement to the social establishment of moral values as it does to religious values. Common ethical prohibitions against murder, theft and adultery, for instance,

are externalised as generally undesirable events. Practically everyone doesn't want these things to happen to them, and because nearly everyone believes this, such become objectified as shared 'social facts', which are then internalised through education, socialisation and social mores.

Regardless of such practical solutions, I am concerned with ethical possibility and a phenomenology of value as means of resolving not only ethical problems but also other enigmas, dilemmas and contradictions of life. To this end, there is a way that the various difficulties and contradictions between ethical theories can be brought together, not just because all ethical principles are values, or that these can be somehow contorted into a unity, but because they each reflect different aspects of human life which are in conflict with each other and require different expressions of different values. Not that different theories provide perfect representations of different levels of consciousness or moral awareness, but that such diversity should be expected and accounted for.

On the accounts that I have given, ethical egoism strongly emphasises the element of reflexive value and self-reference to the agent, and could be expected in levels of consciousness with greater awareness of the self than of the other. Utilitarianism focuses on the importance of consequences in our relations with the world, the role of happiness in our lives, and fortuitously presents the interim idea of 'maximisation' that can be employed in the context of value. Virtue theory provides an account in terms of character or disposition which can be readily replaced by value states. Kantian ethics represents the most abstract and universal perspective in that its focus on executive consciousness has lost touch with common human virtues and instead emphasises the value and dignity of obeying 'the moral law'

and the intrinsic value of other people as ends in themselves.

There are many features that different theorists might want to attribute to an ethical system, such as universality, necessity, the objectivity of value, virtuous dispositions, the intrinsic right or wrong of actions, and belief in a divinity. Sheer proliferation as well as opposing argument will eliminate many of these, but several core features have been identified as virtually indispensable, including that the 'good will' is really good, and that this 'good will' must incorporate positive intent towards other people, and not hurt or harm. Other standard features include a recognition and internalisation of the intrinsic value of others and a sufficiency able to withstand depletion and loss.

Further incongruous elements might also need to be included, in even orthodox accounts of ethics. Yet in order for an ethical principle to be satisfactory, it should also be true to the paradoxical observation that in order to function it must be obvious enough for everyone participating in ethical behaviour to be able to apply it, but obscure enough to resist millennia of philosophical analysis. Hence the traditional claim of the non-definability of 'the good', from Kant and Moore to Murdoch, and put in further question by a phenomenology of 'the good' in terms of value, as one value-state among others. The consideration of such features are progressing towards the solution suggested in this inquiry of a value-state that avoids the use of reflexive processes, eschews psychological or evaluative reward, and is relatively independent of cognitive support.

Finally, we must then look to a future 'ethics' that is both viable and connected to other aspects of human life like physical satisfactions, pleasures, happiness, romance, religion, and meaning and purpose, as well as a coherent,

cognitive and indeed a phenomenological perspective that a Kantian ethics leads naturally into. To this end, the idea of value-maximisation was suggested as a provisional account of ethics in both theory and practice, mirroring an issue in virtue theory of how to become virtuous if virtue is a matter of disposition rather than directed action. Aristotle's answer was — “practice the virtues” so that they might be internalised. Likewise here, a further condition (of value) is proposed that avoids the problem of self-indulgent reflexive concerns and self-conceptions, as well as others such as objectification, the logical derivation of values and necessary relations within ethical processes. This isn't envisaged as an absolute or a binary condition, but a graduated refinement of value and self-value, towards improvements in quality and sufficiency, and away from (self-indulgent) dependence on supporting cognitive frameworks.

With respect to ethical considerations, such a state or condition would have to incorporate paradoxical properties like alterity, altruism, ambivalence, an accommodation of loss, need and an absence of need. This is an absence of a need of supporting cognitive structures that allows an individual to comport himself without egoistic self-conceptions, or the excessive endorsement of social acclaim, or fame or glory, that I have described as value-refrain, neutrality or unaffectedness. There is no place here for pride, arrogance or emotional self-indulgence common to many psychological and ethical responses. In contrast, the sufficiency and magnanimity pursued here compare with Nietzsche's tentative justification in the innocence of a child, also without judgement, beyond good and evil, beyond moral value-judgement, beyond moralising, beyond blame and even beyond the attribution of rights, rewards and justice. These are concessions to

misdirected human inadequacy and need. An appropriate value-sufficiency does not impose or project its needs on the world, but comes to terms with them and allows the world to ‘disclose itself’ as whatever it may appear to be. There is no need for anger, jealousy, resentment, denial or neurotic distortion. With an adequate quality and sufficiency of value, we can be whatever we are, and let the world be whatever it is. The world is only what it is. Yet tensions remain, as do questions of ‘truth’ and coherent relations with the world concerning how value, and its satisfactions, can be compatible with fact, ‘truth’ or the lack of it.

The formal expression of the dialectic is between cognitive representations, its supportive function and phenomenal value, discussed in our final chapter. Many of the value processes that drive motivation as well as ethics and meaning are governed by cognitive elements that are required to be consistent and coherent both internally and in relations with the external world. Ethics and meaning are—like religion—paradigm vehicles of marginally different kinds of value, and have moderately different kinds of relation with the world, which thereby produce slightly different kinds of problems. We can then, now turn to an analysis of meaning and purpose, not only for the importance of these issues in themselves, but also for reasons of exploring different modes of value, the question of internal and external relations of value, their significance in relation to a wider perspective, and the pursuit of value as envisioned in this inquiry. In the following chapter we will look at cognitivist and non-cognitivist theories of meaning, their positions on the status of value, their relation to ethical motivation, and the question of the existential significance of truth and/or fiction in the realms of both ethics and meaning.

