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On the Nature of Moral Judgements

Bartlett, Justin

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On the Nature of Moral Judgements

By

Justin J. Bartlett

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Thesis

In this dissertation I shall defend the following thesis: It is not the case that moral judgements express either non-cognitive or cognitive mental processes, but that they necessarily express both.

Dedicated to my father with love.

Thank you to all who have helped and encouraged me in my endeavours.

Contents

Introduction

As the title of this work suggest, the moral utterance or judgement is the target at which I aim. In this work I will defend the thesis that:

It is not the case that moral judgements express either non-cognitive or cognitive mental processes, but that they necessarily express both.

As an introduction I will provide a brief outline of the work as a whole. In doing this it is my intention to plot out the course which my argument will follow so that we can get an instant, if broad, understanding of the theory which I will subsequently be developing through the following pages.

Outline and Overview of the Argument

In order to defend my foundational claim: it is not the case that moral judgements express either non-cognitive or cognitive mental states, but that they necessarily express both, I will mount the following argument, here outlined in summary.

1. I will start by stating that "moral reasoning" is not a natural, immediate, instinctive or reactionary cognitive process, triggered in response to what we might broadly call *moral stimuli*.

- It seems reasonable and intuitive to assert that, when making moral judgements, humans follow or use some form of moral reasoning process that assess situations and judges the moral standing of those situations based on this logical cognitive process. I believe that the vast majority of people, if confronted with the claim that their actions were, to the contrary, unplanned, spontaneous, emotional in character and inconsistent, would strongly disagree. However, I will put forward and elucidate the hypothesis that this cognitive reasoning process is not an innate, reactionary one and therefore plays no part in the *typical*, *everyday* formation of *moral judgements*.

- I will speculate that humans might believe they are making reasoned judgements due to a post-judgement justification process that is *ex post facto*. I will support this theory by comparing and exploring similar hypotheses, (*a priori* and empirical*)* from the realms of philosophy and moral psychology.

- I will then argue that it is therefore, also *not* the case that human beings use established ethical rules or moral codes as matrices or frameworks when making moral judgements. I think it probable that most self-respecting people would disagree and furthermore be able to explain, *post hoc propter hoc*, the reasons for their judgements, citing these supposed moral codes as the blueprints upon which they make their judgements and guide their actions.

- In order to show this, I will firstly present a sociological study showing strongly conflicting moral codes occurring within a single culture. The case study will examine social and religious culture within modern-day Thailand. I will defend my view that the Buddhist culture upon which Thai social customs are originally founded is heavily contradicted by Thai social culture. Specifically the tension between the concepts of *face/loosing face* (หน้า/เสียหน้า) and the Buddhist principle of non-self (อนัตตา). This contradiction however seems not to be comprehended by most Thai citizens. I will show and expound the contradictions, using the study as evidence in support of this two-fold theory; that: secondary cognitive processes are not used instinctively when forming moral judgements in reaction to moral stimuli and, therefore that moral reasoning based on ethical codes, also does not occur as a first response to a given situation.

- Lastly, I will conjecture as to whether it is the functioning of the human psyche, in the above mentioned manner, that enables contradictory ethical codes to exist, and furthermore ponder whether these rules might be the basis for what we may loosely term *ideology*.

2. If, following from our previous argument, moral reasoning is *not* a conscious process founded on sets of prescriptive moral rules or codes, then could all forms of moral judgement (and the whole sphere of morality therefore) be merely the product of subjective human thought? Furthermore, if conscious moral reasoning does not take place, is there instead a possibility of any objective moral facts, or external qualities existing in the world, that are accessible by means of a cognitive process, and upon which we can base and make moral judgements?

- I claim not. I will explore metaethical cognitivism and its assertions in general (both ontological and metaphysical) and endeavour to show why I do not believe cognitivism, in any of its forms, can be plausibly expounded or adequately explained in a way that accounts for the natural moral "range" we see existing in human society, or the contradictions that we see between distinct moral codes and ethical systems. I will look at a selection of cognitivist hypotheses, and argue against moral realism introducing a thought experiment, which tries to show the distinctly *human* (as opposed to objective) nature of moral thought.

3. After having looked at cognitivism and subsequently found it inadequate and inept at explaining the nature of morality, I will pose the following question: How plausible is it, that moral judgements are completely non-cognitive and emotional in nature? Furthermore, I will look at the assertion that: moral utterances express non-propositional statements and therefore have no *truth-value*.

- I will explore here the assertion of metaethical non-cognitivism in general and put forward the argument that total non-cognitivism in the shape of quasi-realism and various other forms of projectivism are also not plausible as explanations when trying to describe the whole of human ethical discourse. We will then see that non-cognitive analysis fails to provide a full and uniform semantics to moral statements. I will ask whether this might be due to the fact that moral utterances, as I have posited, are simultaneously both non-cognitive *and* cognitive in nature.

4. I will then put forward a possible theory that describes moral judgements not as wholly cognitive or totally non-cognitive but how moral utterances might in fact be *aggregates* (combinations/condensation) comprised of and expressing *both* cognitive *and* non-cognitive sentiments simultaneously.

- I assert that humans occasionally do endeavour to describe (and feel that they are accessing) objective moral features of the world that in reality do not exist (as per Mackie's Moral Error Theory) but that it must also necessarily be the case that non-cognitive expressions are present alongside them. Therefore I propose that moral statements are *aggregates* and therefore might be both cognitive and non-cognitive simultaneously through a process of *condensation*. I will subsequently explain and expound this process and the other mechanisms at work when humans are expressing moral judgements. I will put forward the thesis that a cognitive process (condensation) means that there may be many elements, both cognitive and non-cognitive, making-up any one particular moral assertion or judgement.

- I will then explicate that these judgements (or *aggregates*) must be analysed in the appropriate way by first *expanding* their form and, secondly, by separating the non-cognitive from the cognitive statements. We will then be in a position to analyse the individual elements in the appropriate way and will find that following from my founding assertion (moral statements express both cognitive and non-cognitive elements) each judgement, when analysed appropriately, will have a *mode* in which it is expressed. The mode will be indicative of the dominant semantic role of each expression.

- The upshot of this theory is that, on some occasions, moral statements have a particular tone or *mode* in which they are expressed, and this mode functions with a binary polarity. So *ex hypothesi*, it will be necessary to examine the determining factors in the assigning of modality.

- Here I will elucidate how the mode of the aggregate is determined and show that the polarity of the moral expression/judgement can be found to be

either predominantly non-cognitive or predominantly cognitive and will be determined by the elements within the aggregate and by the context of the utterance. This implies that the mode of the judgement is an important part of its being and needs to be analysed accordingly.

- I will show how we can describe a mode or tone of a moral judgement. The mode of an expression cannot be analysed in the standard way where the utterance becomes stripped of context. I will endeavour to lay forth, how a given moral judgement needs to be embedded within a situation in order for us to be able to identify the mode of the statement. I will draw parallels between this and the Wittgensteinian concept of the *language game* and the notion of a *speech-act* as explicated by Austin and John Searle.

5. What does this mean for moral judgements used in unasserted contexts? Can we use our interpretation of moral judgements to construct correct moral *modus ponens* arguments?

- I will try to show how the theory stands in relation to the Frege-Geach problem. We will see how my reading of moral language alleviates or bypasses the problem of embedded language.

6. The thesis will be summarized and the dissertation concluded. I will reiterate my argument retracing the assertions I have made throughout the work and how they have led to my conclusions. The logical form of my thesis will be clearly drawn and reiterated. I will also briefly examine my theory as a theory in itself trying to locate its place on the landscape of metaethical thought.

1

THE ILLUSION OF MORAL REASONING

"For he who lives as passion directs will not hear argument that dissuades him, nor understand it if he does; and how can we persuade one in such a state to change his ways? And in general passion seems to yield not to argument but to force."[1]

Aristotle – Nicomachean Ethics, Book X, Chapter IX.

The question of morality is an ancient one and virtue has been defined and sought-after for millennia in its many varieties and myriad forms. What is it, though, that makes virtue possible? What defines the very space in which virtue and vice, good and evil, right and wrong can appear? This is not a simple question to ask – let alone answer. It is one that has divided philosophers, theologians and scientists alike for centuries. One thing that can be said of morality is that it is a very human problem. By this I mean that morality is something that concerns us, binds us and separates us as people; it is a subject that we all encounter, on various levels, every day, philosophers and laymen alike, and furthermore, its possibility, existence and machinations are things that very few people ever seriously question or ponder.

In this work I will explore the ideas of many thinkers from varied fields enlisting their help as guides through the moral landscape, so that I might humbly try to define my own theory of what gives rise to this most enigmatic of notions: morality.

[1] Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, Chapter IX, Edited by Richard Mckeon (The Modern Library Classics) 2001.

It certainly appears intuitively true that when conducting ourselves from day-to-day we carefully consider our actions, always assessing, judging and contemplating our moves. It seems that humans, for the most part, are logical and rational beings. This rationality is also characteristic of, and intrinsic to, our moral judgements and actions. We are sure that we use a sort of moral reasoning process, when making ethical or moral judgements. Our reasoning process seems to us to function along the lines of: *I should/ought to do X because of Y, If X, then Y,* or to put it symbolically, $(X \supset Y)$. We are convinced that we think clearly and logically. We feel acutely aware of the consequences of our actions, and we need to be, so that we may be 'good' people and so we may survive in society. We also, for the most part, believe that our innate reasoning processes are well informed and guided by externally existing ethical codes[2] (or sometimes objective universal moral *truths*) and that these codes or truths supply us with the blueprint upon which we can guide our moral actions. These are the rules, with which we are acquainted; they are codes that guide us axiomatically. These codes, whether stated explicitly or understood implicitly and intuitively by way of cultural conditioning, are always comprehended on some level. I think it is safe to say that, for the most part, humans feel we *know* what is right, both intuitively and logically, and we endeavour to act in accordance with our knowledge of right and wrong, clear-headedly and consciously, for the sake of righteousness itself.

For decades it has been noted and shown that when people consider hypothetical moral dilemmas, by way of experimentation, and are then subsequently asked to give a judgment or moral assessment of the situation, that we seem to be able to make moral judgements quickly and intuitively[3], and when asked 'why?' we are able to reply with ease, giving the line of reasoning that we have just used to make the judgement in a seemingly logical way i.e. "I judge that X is immoral because of Y". The subject then states this reason (Y) as if it came logically, necessarily and chronologically before the judgement was made. This

[2] I will be using the phrase "ethical code" throughout this work and by it I refer to an externally existing set of rules that explains, governs or defines 'good' (permitted) actions from 'bad' (Not permitted) actions in any given society. These codes may come in an explicit verbal or written form i.e. religious doctrines, or any governmental/political law, but may also include unwritten but generally adhered to cultural codes. This term does *not* refer to any perceived *internal* moral 'intuition'. The ways in which people act will be an amalgamation of rules from all of the aforementioned sources.

[3] Francis Myrna Kamm, *Harming Some to Save Others*, 57 Philosophical Studies 227-60 (1989).

gives the impression that our reasoning faculty functions using some sort of a moral algorithm, which first processes moral stimuli and then spits out moral responses. However, what reasons do we have to believe that this is actually the case? What evidence shows that our initial cognitive reaction to a moral situation is one that *is* logically reasoned in the above manner? It feels *intuitively* correct but how can we be *sure* of our intuitions; that our mental faculties are indeed functioning in this way? These are pertinent questions. The initial, underpinning claim in this work, and the logical foundation upon which I will build my argument, is that, in truth, this apparently calculated process is *not* the way in which the human cognitive faculties function at all when under such conditions. My first postulation then, is an empirical one.

I will posit that:

> *Any perceived cognitive moral/ethical reasoning process thought to take place under ordinary circumstances, is a mere psychological illusion, and therefore any reasons given for our actions reporting to explain a logical reasoning process that leads to the formation of the judgement are mistaken. A reasoning process does not come chronologically before the issuance of the judgement but, conversely, after it – functioning simply as an ex post facto justification procedure.*

I propose that although the Subject may be aware of some ethical code, they do *not*, in the first instance, use either secondary, cognitive processes or knowledge of ethical codes as frameworks or matrices for any 'ethical' behaviour viz. issuing moral imperatives, judging actions morally or guiding their moral behaviour. Humans are in this sense morally inert.

1.1 Examining Moral Reasoning

We will shortly examine the act of 'moral reasoning', however we must first define some of our phraseology. Until now, we have been using the term 'moral judgement' in a perfunctory manner and so far this has not lead us into any confusion. However, we must now define the term accurately so that our following

argument can be clearly grasped. In this work a 'moral judgement' is an utterance of the following sort:

> *An illocutionary speech act[4] expressed in an imperative form containing moral content.*

I will split these judgements into three categories or kinds of utterances: first, second and third order. The distinctions are as follows:

a. First order – Hard/Fixed

A moral judgement of this level would be for the Subject to utter, as an imperative, the following kinds of statement in the context of being asked their opinion on moral matters. The judgement is issued as an immediate, initial response to witnessing, either first-hand or hearing a report of, any of the following kinds of actions occurring (murder, rape, torture, slavery etc.). For example:

> *"Murder is wrong/immoral."*
> *"Rape is wrong/immoral."*
> *"Torture is wrong/immoral."*
> *"Slavery is wrong/immoral."*

We cannot realistically imagine anyone disagreeing with these kinds of judgements hence they are in the 'Fixed' category. There are many other examples of judgements that would fit into this group. They are defined by their being almost or totally universally accepted as morally base and impermissible.

b. Second Order – Malleable

[4] Here I am using the term 'illocutionary speech act' in the way explicated by Searle. Any moral judgement could fall into the categories of *verdictives*, *exercitives*, *behabitives* and *expositives*. See Searle, Searle, John R, *A Classification of Illocutionary Acts* (Language in Society, Vol. 5 No. 1, Cambridge University Press) Apr. 1976.

Moral judgement of this level would be for the Subject to utter, as an imperative, the following kinds of statement in the context of being asked their opinion on moral matters. The judgement is issued as an immediate, initial response to witnessing, either first-hand or hearing a report of, any of the following kinds of actions occurring (Stealing, lying, Cheating etc.).

"Stealing is wrong/immoral."
"Lying is wrong/immoral."
"Cheating or Deception is wrong/immoral."

With the judgements in the second order, we *can* imagine mitigating circumstances for committing them. For example, lying to protect someone might be deemed agreeable (or even virtuous) in some situations. However, we can accept that the majority of people would agree with and hold these judgements to be true.

c. Third Order – Fluid

Moral judgement of this level would be for the Subject to utter, as an imperative, the following kinds of statement in the context of being asked their opinion on moral matters. The judgement is issued as an immediate, initial response to witnessing, either first-hand or hearing a report of, any of the following kinds of actions occurring (eating meat, military interventionism, drug use etc.).

"The eating of animal products is wrong/immoral."
"Military interventionism is wrong/immoral."
"Migrant workers' having equal rights is wrong/immoral."
"Recreational drug use is wrong/immoral."

These judgements are still moral in nature but it is expected that the preceding views would divide most crowds. It should be noted that these views are mostly ones concerned with what we might instantly perceive as political opinion or ideology. Disagreement with them seems a matter of opinion and can be overlooked in most cases. For example, I can still have a friendly relationship with

a person who holds that: *"The eating of animal products is wrong/immoral"* even if I do not hold that opinion myself. The difference here is one of opinion, and in these matters, difference of opinion can be tolerated. The same cannot be said of the first order judgements and usually not the second order judgements mentioned above.

All of the above examples are to be treated as 'moral judgements' in this work; regardless of whether they are *Fixed*, *Malleable* or *Fluid*. Having now given a satisfactory (for the moment) elucidation of what we are dealing with when we say 'moral judgement', we will now define *moral reasoning*.

For lucidity, it is pertinent that we also understand the term 'moral reasoning' as it is intended here. I will define the term as *I* use it in this work:

> *Moral reasoning can be defined as the conscious, cognitive process, assumed to take place in the subject, which is responsible for, the formulation of moral judgements in reaction to moral stimuli.*

With this definition, we may proceed with our argument as follows:

It is the existence of this moral reasoning process, as an *immediate* and *reactionary* one, that I will contest. It is important to state from the start, for clarity's sake, that I do *not* doubt or deny the existence of cognitive reasoning processes *in toto.* I only wish to state that cognitive processes of this form fail to function, and are not at work, in the everyday *real-life* formation of moral judgements. These so called *real-life* situations would be ones whereby we do not consciously or actively engage in logical or philosophical work. These situations are those common, everyday circumstances whereby most of us make the majority of our judgements and decisions as instant and reactionary ones. I wish to examine and refer to the cognitive processes at work when assimilating those initial reactions to the situations and moral dilemmas, which we encounter on a daily basis. Hence the work is questioning the use and presence of this moral reasoning process as a natural or innate way in which humans react to and process moral situations in the first instance. It is of course quite obviously *possible* to think in a formulated and logical way about any given situation, and to articulate a conclusion that is the product of a reasoning process (this is what philosophers and scientists do). It does

not however, necessarily follow from the fact that humans have such a faculty or have the cognitive capability to reason, that it is *this* process, which is at work when reacting to situations perceived, as they normally are, in everyday life i.e. in a natural environment and in a non-analytical and quotidian way.

I posit that, when humans utter moral judgements, the formation of the judgement is not brought on or catalysed by a prescriptive rule or secondary cognitive process but, divergently, a primary[5] or subconscious one. A subconscious or reactionary process comes first, which causes the expression of a moral judgement.[6] However, the subject, post-judgement, then *retroactively* believes (mistakenly) that a secondary cognitive process must necessarily have spurred the judgement. It is believed that the judgement was therefore a logical and reasoned assessment, formed and based on already held moral values, or indeed by way of accessing the 'moral facts' of the situation. To offer a more ostensive description of this process we can outline it in the following manner:

i. *A moral stimulus occurs.*

ii. *The primary cognitive faculty functions.*

iii. *A judgement is made.*

When the subject is asked post-judgement the process is as follows:

i. *A moral stimulus occurs.*

ii. *The primary cognitive faculty functions.*

iii. *A judgement is made.*

[5] Derek D Rucker, Pablo Briñol, Richard Petty, *Metacognition: Methods to Assess Primary versus Secondary Cognition*, (Cognitive Methods in Social Psychology, edited by Karl Christoph Klauer, Andreas Voss, Christoph Stahl, New York, Guilford Press) 2011.

[6] Here the term '*expression*' is synonymous with the performing of a '*speech act'* or '*locutionary act'*; the performance of an utterance that in intended to have meaning. See J. L. Austin, *William James lectures, 1955* (Harvard University Press) 1962. Also J R Searle, Speech acts: *An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, (Cambridge University Press) 1969.

iv. *The secondary cognitive faculty functions.*

v. *A justification is made.*

The subject believes that the secondary cognitive process must have caused the judgement. We have no recollection of the initial primary process, as it is a subconscious one, hence the mistaken feeling of causality. The secondary process is retroactively assumed to have come before the initial judgement. To reiterate, the primary cognition comes first and causes/determines the outcome of the judgement but it is believed post-judgement that it was, in actuality, a secondary process that had caused the judgement. The subject does not note the presence of the primary cognitive response as it is subconscious and may not be accessible by way of meta-cognition. I claim that this supposed logical functioning takes place *after* the event in an effort to find a plausible justification, or causality, for the action or judgement. Hence moral judgements are, in reality, based *not* on a moral reasoning process or ethical code but, it seems, might simply be the articulation of a subjective conviction, emotional state or intuition (as per some forms of non-cognitivism such as emotivism). If then, on reflection, the judgement comes out as fitting with the particular moral rules that the subject subscribes to, then the subject is convinced of the reasoned formulation of the judgement and there will indeed be a strong appearance of causality, *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. However, if the judgement does not fit within the framework of the ethical code, it is easy for the subject to reformulate the rules and find another clause or justification that makes it acceptable, *if* any *post-hoc* reflection takes place at all, of course. It needs to be noted that just because the judgement expressed does fit with the moral rules that the subject adheres to, this fact is not *at all* evidence for, or proof of, causality.

In a sense this hypothesis is Humean in nature. We can find a similar assessment of moral reasoning in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature.* Hume classically argues, in opposition to many of his contemporaries and predecessors, when he says that, *"reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will"*[7] Hume's view that the "*will*"

[7] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* (Oxford, Clarendon Press) 1896. Source: http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/hume-a-treatise-of-human-nature

is subject to the "*passions*" essentially presupposes, although not explicitly, the existence and workings of two distinct mental faculties or processes, operating within our minds. Analogously, the "will" corresponds to an analytical, second-order cognitive process; the conscious cognition, which is the supposed machine of moral reasoning. The "*passions*" correspond to the first-order, reactionary cognitive process; sub-conscious cognition, and this is how we will read Hume from here on. Hume believes that no amount of conscious (moral) reasoning can move someone to act, and furthermore that it is the presence (or working) of the passions (subconscious cognitive processes) that will ultimately be found to be the true origin of motivation, underlying all of our actions, whether moral or otherwise. Linked closely to this theory of motivation is Hume's *Ethical Anti-rationalism.* He applies his theory of motivation to the domain of ethics and uses it to deny also that *moral* judgement or action is rational or deduced by reason. Hume bases this claim on a previous argument put forward earlier in the *Treatise of Human Nature* that supplies the logical foundation on which Hume mounts his moral claim:

> Reason is the discovery of truth or falshood. Truth or falshood consists in an agreement or dis- agreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. Now 'tis evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason[8].

Hume is then in a position to take the next step. He goes on to marry this logic up with morality:

> Since morals, therefore, have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be deriv'd from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already prov'd, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The

[8] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1896).

> rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason. [9]

Therefore, Hume claims:

> Moral distinctions, therefore, are not the offspring of reason. Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals.[10]

Hume's argument against moral reasoning comes in two subtly logical components. The consequent being that reason does not produce an emotional response in the subject, and therefore cannot motivate them into action, and the antecedent being that since moral matters *do* stir emotional reactions in subjects, and cause them to act, it cannot follow that moral judgment be derived from reason.

> Hume claims that moral distinctions are not derived from reason but rather from sentiment. His rejection of ethical rationalism is at least two-fold. Moral rationalists tend to say, first, that moral properties are discovered by reason, and also that what is morally good is in accord with reason (even that goodness consists in reasonableness) and what is morally evil is unreasonable.[11]

Where Hume's thesis differs from ours is in its assertions about motivation. Hume asserts that moral judgements are unreasoned expressions of emotion as it is emotion that motivates us to act/make the moral judgement in the first instance. So, is Hume saying that the sphere of morality is motivating in itself; that the reason we keep to ethical codes of conduct is due its being emotional, and therefore motivating us to act in that way? If our reading is not mistaken, this is a different argument to the one that we are trying to elucidate.

The motivational character or force of morality (doing something for the sake of the good) is indeed a heavily debated area in ethics, however the central concern

[9] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* Book 3 Ch. 1 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1896).
[10] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* Book 3 Ch. 1 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1896).
[11] Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (online), Hume's Moral Philosophy, first published Fri. Oct. 29, 2004; substantive revision (Fri. Aug. 27, 2010) Source cited (Dec. 2016) (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-moral/).

of this work, in being metaethical, is not to make postulations about the motivation to act but rather to explain the judgments themselves. We are primarily concerned with asking the following: what kinds of entities are moral judgements, how are they formulated and what is their make-up? We see eye-to-eye with Hume when he asserts that "*reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them*". We assent to his claim about the superiority of primary cognitive processes over secondary ones. And, it is *this* point, which serves as the lynchpin around which our argument turns.

We have found some support for our thesis from Hume; that moral judgements are not reasoned. When Hume was writing *The Treatise,* the discipline of psychology, as it is currently understood; as a scientific discipline, was non-existent, however it is, in essence, the workings, and machinations of the human mind, that Hume is trying to dissect and analyse. Hume was not able, of course, to appeal to, or find, epistemological evidence to support his work, however we are now be in a position to do just that. I feel it would be advantageous to look for support from the sciences and in particular, the field of moral psychology. In order to bolster our thesis, we will briefly enlist some further support in the form of hard, or empirical, evidence of the separate cognitive processes, which we believe to be at work. It seems that we may, in fact, be able to find epistemological evidence in support of this theory from the discipline of moral psychology. Although it is not strictly the concern of philosophy to present empirical evidence, I believe it will be beneficial to briefly venture into this science in order to strengthen our claims, as this does seem to provide evidence in favour of our hypothesis.

1.2 Dual Process Theory *&* Moral Psychology

It will be helpful to our argument if we very briefly outlined and presented some empirical evidence in support of our postulation. I feel that this may add some theoretical weight to the work, as it does indeed seem that the non-functioning of reason in the formation of moral judgements has been noted and researched before. It will therefore be appropriate to offer a brief explication of the main theories and proponents of this view.

One psychological theory of interest to this work is Dual Process Theory. Initially suggested by Jean Piaget, the psychological Dual Process Theory has more recently been expanded on and carried further in the work of Joshua Greene. Greene (and many others) assents to the theory that there are two distinct cognitive systems at work in the human psyche and that they are together responsible for the processing of, among other things, moral judgements. The first of these being *emotionally-based;* concerning the intuitive and instinctual aspects of moral judging. The second cognitive system being *rationally-based;* dealing with conscious and controlled moral decision making.[12] The two processes proposed and outlined by Dual Process Theory are an *implicit* (automatic) cognitive process and an *explicit* (controlled) cognitive process. This binary explanation corresponds closely, I feel, to the afore-postulated systems and I shall therefore, from this point on, assume that the two sets of systems postulated are one and the same *id est 'implicit'* is synonymous with unconscious, primary cognition and '*explicit'* would be at one with conscious secondary cognition and controls reasoned decision making.

The existence of these two systems was hypothesised based on data obtained from experiments using FMRI scanners on humans when making moral judgements in different scenarios[13]. The theory therefore was subsequently elucidated *a posteriori* in an effort to account for and explain the evidence. My account of the two processes was postulated *a priori* however, assuming that they are referring to the same phenomenon, the data obtained in experimentation could be used as epistemological evidence in favour of my postulation.

Of further interest from the field of moral psychology is the work of Jonathan Haidt. We find that his *Social Intuitionist Model*[14] also appears to offer some epistemological support, as it seems to fit with our theory. Haidt's work asserts that the majority of human moral judgement making is based on automatic processes or "moral intuitions" as opposed to a conscious reasoning process. Haidt even goes

[12] Joshua D Greene, *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Moral Judgment,* (This work was due to appear in The Cognitive Neurosciences IV, http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~mcl/mcl/pubs/Greene-CogNeurosciences-Chapter-Consolidated.pdf).
[13] Joshua D Greene, R B Sommerville, L E Nystrom, J M Darley, & J D Cohen, *An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment* (Science New York, N.Y.) 2001.
[14] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind,* (Pantheon Books, New York) 2012.

as far as to posit, as I have done, that humans possibly use reasoning *post hoc* in order to find evidence for, or to justify, their initial reactions or judgements.[15]

The inclusion of empirical data is done here in an effort to find support for my postulation from the disciplines of science and also to acknowledge the previous work in the field. It might also serve us well to follow the old Logical Positivist axiom that a meaningful proposition is either logically necessary or empirically verifiable, our assertion that moral reasoning is fallacious needs to be empirically verifiable as it is synthetic and not analytic in form. It is, of course, not within our scope as philosophers to actually verify the statement but I do believe it gives the postulation somewhat more gravitas if we do include, at least a brief, reference to any data that is available.

1. 3 The Assimilation of Ethical Codes & Ideology

It seems that these two previously elucidated mental faculties have had a decisive role to play in the development of civilisation, as we might expect them to have done. Above, I briefly explained and used the term *moral codes.* We will now examine these phenomena more closely in order to mount the next part of our argument.

If we start with the premise that moral reasoning is false, it follows that we might expect to find sociological and historical evidence in favour of this assertion. I indeed believe that we should see evidence for this in human culture and society and, I claim, that it comes in the form of conflicting moral codes. I have already used the term *moral code* and have explained its usage above.[16] I will now set about examining these codes in order to show how contradictions within socio-cultural systems could arise due to the fact that humans, naturally and intuitively, fail to conduct themselves in a way that is reasoned and logical. If we are correct, this will most likely be true of human conduct in all spheres. However, we will focus here, of course, on ethical conduct and moral judgement making. Let us look at a quote from Bertrand Russel's *History of Western Philosophy* where I believe we can get a

[15] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, (Pantheon Books, New York) 2012.
[16] Vide, Section 1: *The Illusion of Moral Reasoning*.

cursory overview of how these moral codes and cultural rules might have developed, making reference also to the human cognitive capacity for reason, along with its natural tendency towards unreasoned impulsive, action.

> The civilized man is distinguished from the savage mainly by prudence, or to use a slightly wider term, *forethought*. He is willing to endure present pains for the sake of future pleasures, even if the future pleasures are rather distant. This habit began to be important with the rise of agriculture; no animal and no savage would work in the spring in order to have food next winter, except for a few purely instinctive forms of action, such as bees making honey or squirrels burying nuts. In these cases, there is no forethought; there is a direct impulse to an act which, to the human spectator, is obviously going to prove useful later on. True forethought only arises when a man does something towards which no impulse urges him, because his reason tells him that he will profit by it at some future date. Hunting requires no forethought, because it is pleasurable; but tilling the soil is labour, and cannot be done from spontaneous impulse.
>
> Civilisation checks impulse not only through forethought, which is a self-administered check, but also through law, custom and religion. This check it inherits from barbarism, but it makes it less instinctive and more systematic. Certain acts are labelled criminal, and are punished, certain others, though not punished by law, are labelled wicked, and expose those who are guilty of them to social disapproval. [17]

Russell suggests that 'forethought' is a habit that humans have learned to do over the ages as a kind of evolutionary adaptation, and that this change in thinking might well have risen from, or have been catalysed by, the advent of agricultural practices. Farming, although taken for granted among modern humans, is of course a practice that takes a great deal of forethought and planning. It is certainly a strategy that needs planning and a degree of reasoning and rationality. It seems that in developing the techniques of agriculture, humans would need to be using conscious, secondary cognitive processes in order to refine, evaluate and perfect farming techniques. Russell goes on to mention that this forethought is in opposition to "impulse" and notes that it is civilisation that tries to discourage

[17] Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, Part 1, P21 – 22, (Routledge) 2009.

impulse and promote more considered actions, it is at this point in the development of early human society that human thought starts to become "less instinctive and more systematic". This also seems elementary; that the rise of a civilisation as an organised and ordered collective of citizens, would necessarily need less of this impulsive thinking and more conceptual, abstract thought to be able to occur at all. The next logical progression is to instate rules and laws that help this purpose and it is with the advent of these rules that we start to see the makings of morality.

> Certain acts are labelled criminal, and are punished, certain others, though not punished by law, are labelled wicked, and expose those who are guilty of them to social disapproval.[18]

This, to my mind, suggests two things.

> 1. That morality is plausibly something invented by humans as a way of controlling the masses and might not, therefore, be objective in the way that many forms of strong cognitivism claim it is.
>
> 2. That humans are naturally prone to act impulsively, and not in a reasoned, logical manner by way of second order cognitive processes. (Humans are able to engage in this form of reasoned, conceptual thinking but it would seem that it is not the default mode.)

We can begin to see how laws and cultural rules might define our morality. They can therefore cause people to form moral judgements about things, which are not intuitively moral[19] in character for example drug use. It seems to be that things are more likely to be judged morally right, if the 'law of the land' endorses them.

Humans have the cognitive capability to think in a logical and reasoned way. This capability accounts for the fact that people live in highly organised and

[18] Ibid footnote #18

[19] This 'moral intuition' is of course fallacious; if we are asserting that external laws imposed upon us define morality. What I allude to by using this phrase in this passage are problems that appear more *obviously* moral in character such as murder or rape as opposed to less obvious things like drug use.

structured societies. It cannot be denied that this mental potential is real. However, it seems that humans have a natural tendency *not* to use this form of cognition as the predominant mode. This, we might conjecture, is why society needs to create laws and social rules that guide us. Laws and moral codes develop in order to remind people of how to conduct themselves and to maintain the stability of the social order. From this point onwards, the laws and codes within a given culture begin to impact on the psyche of the populace and they then start to become ingrained in the collective subconscious. Once the rules have become embedded, people henceforth are following the rules blindly without using the reasoned, secondary cognition that had allowed the rules to exist in the first instance; they do not think, they simply act. For example, abstaining from X because rule Y says it should be abstained from becomes simply an automatic action. This is behaviour determined by rules, but it seems that the rules are not consciously considered, and we may therefore ask the question: if the rules are followed in this automatic and non-conscious way, to what extent is this actually *following the rules*? I will now draw an analogy with language. Professor John Searle points out that using a language is acting in accordance with certain rules.

> The hypothesis then of this work is that speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behaviour. To put it more briskly, talking is performing acts according to rules.[20]

When we use language, it is possible to analyse the grammar and syntax of that language, and subsequently conclude that indeed our language is rule-governed; it follows grammatical and semantic conventions, although not consciously or explicitly. It is here that Searle's term '*rule-governed'* is more appropriate than *'rule-following'* as we have briefly used above. 'Rule-governed' carries with it the feeling that the use of language conforms to the rules but that it does so in a non-deliberate or conscious way. This seems to capture the point: that our actions (linguistic or otherwise) are often performed in a non-cognitive[21] sub-conscious manner. It is in this way that our general and everyday actions should be understood; our actions

[20] J R Searle, *Speech Acts*, (Alden & Mowbray, Oxford) 1969.
[21] Here I use the term 'non-cognitive' in a descriptive manner and not in a strictly metaethical manner.

are *rule-governed* but not consciously *rule-following*. Furthermore, I will claim that engaging in ethical or moral discourse, or any discussion of moral value, is engaging in a rule-governed form of behaviour. Moreover, not only is morality analogous to language in this way, but I also believe language must be the very possibility of morality.[22]

There exists in society a web or mesh of overlapping rules and it appears to be the case that humans tend not to follow one particular set of rules precisely, we can usually see people using some rules from one set and others from a differing set in a selective way. For example there may be two distinct sets of rules in a society. Let's say that one set is a religious set and that another is political. It might be true that it is not possible to always abide by both sets consistently due to the fact that certain clauses are contradictory.[23] In this instance, people can only follow one of the rules and must therefore 'select' one. The acting in accordance to a particular rule from one set does not automatically mean that individuals, by way of necessity, will totally assent to all of the rules from its particular set and at once disregard the other set. What we see happening in fact is that there is a mix or combination of rules that are adhered to and they form a non-explicit set of rules by themselves.[24] This shows that we are not indeed reasoning or deliberating over 'the rules' when we act. If we were, I imagine that we would notice contradictions within our cultures that we do not ordinarily pick up on.

A case-in-point would be drug use. Many people would make the judgement that, for example, smoking marijuana is wrong or immoral. But what supposed logical or *empirical* grounds might the person have for making this judgement? In other words, why would they say it is "wrong"? What is their reason? They might assert that it is dangerous to ones health to use the drug. However, if we look at the available research we find that there is very little certainty about the good or bad

[22] I mean that language makes it possible not only to engage in discussions of value practically (this is quite elementary and obvious) but that language creates or enables the whole *sphere* of morality.
[23] This represents what is known as a *truth-value glut* in formal logic. It is also noteworthy to mention that truth-gluts can occur within a single system whereby the system contradicts itself. For an interesting example I refer you to: Graham Priest, *An Introduction to Non-Classical Logic,* Ch 7.6.3 P.128, (Cambridge University Press) 2008.
[24] This also brings to mind what Richard Dawkins calls 'The Moral Zeitgeist'. His explication of 'social memes' is also an interesting explanation of how the 'selection' of particular rules might function. This line of thought is beyond the scope of the present work. See: Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Ch. 5, P.191 & Ch. 7, P.235 – 272, (Bantam Books) 2006.

effects that marijuana poses to people's health when used periodically, but it is still not hard to imagine someone making the judgement that I "have broken morals" if I am contemplating trying it. Let us now, for contrast, look at alcohol use. It seems that very few people (apart from the devoutly religious) would judge my wanting to try alcohol as immoral. However, if we are sincerely judging using a reasoned cognitive process then we might see a different reaction, as the adverse health effects posed by alcohol are severe, common and well known, yet these are often disregarded. Is it the case that the difference in judgement between these two examples is defined by the fact that one is *legal* and the other *illegal*? This may be so but the contents of the law, I assert, are not enough to motivate the subject to act on their own. It must be something that has touched the emotional character of a Subject.

So it seems, from this example, it might be possible for the contents of the law to enter into people's psyches and influence their moral judgements at a subconscious level. The subsequent assimilation into social culture of these rules over time might then give them more motivational force than perhaps an abstract, externally enforced, law or rule would. Might this be the birth of ideology? Is ideology the subliminal assimilation of a particular set of rules or standards that helps to play a prescriptive role in unreasoned moral judgement making? The rules in the first instance might have been created in a very logical and reasoned fashion but the acting-in-accordance-with them appears to bypass any cognitive reasoning process within individuals.[25] [26] This is why, I believe, contradictions within cultures can occur. Let us take another example:

In countries where the state possesses the power to perform executions, the populace will often hold contradictory beliefs on the subject of murder Viz.:

Murder is wrong. (Impermissible)

State-sanctioned (retributive) murder is right. (Permissible)

[25] Jesse Prinz, *Beyond Human Nature: How Culture and Experience Shape the Human Mind (W W Norton & Company) 2018.*
[26] Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason and the Gap Between Us and Them*, (Atlantic Books) 2014.

So people will tend to assent to the following 'logic':

Murderers are morally objectionable because they have committed the act of murder. Murder is wrong and is a punishable offence therefore the offender should be executed (murdered).

Following this line of thought, it seems that there is something about retribution that makes it morally right to execute a human, providing they have transgressed the rules in a certain way i.e. *iff* it is also included within the same rule structure, which has been transgressed that retributive state-sanctioned killing is permitted. However, in countries where the state does not possess this power, I conjecture that we might encounter fewer people who hold that it is correct for the state to carry out executions. Crucially, neither party feels that they are guilty of holding contradictory beliefs. Are the aforementioned rules really contradictory? Let us imagine some possible worlds in order to analyse these different situations and expose the logical flaws further:

> *World #1* is a world with a set of laws that contains a prohibition on murder and a prohibition of state-sanctioned executions. People who live there hold that: killing any human is wrong, and is not permitted under any circumstances. The people of World #1 believe that their moral judgements on these matters are logically consistent and would argue so if pushed on the subject.

Now let *M* be the act of *killing any human*. We will next assign *impermissible* and *permissible I* and *P* respectively. We find that the rules of the world are logically consistent as *M* always comes out as I. We also add the truth-values 1 (true) and 0 (false). There are no inconsistencies, exceptions, clauses or mitigating circumstances whereby M→P. In World #1, M→P. is banned.

(1) Murder is prohibited.

(M→I) =1

(2) State-sanctioned execution is prohibited.

$(M \rightarrow \mathrm{I}) = 1$

or:

(3) Murder is permitted.

$(M \rightarrow \mathrm{P}) = 0$

(4) State execution is permitted.

$(M \rightarrow \mathrm{P}) = 0$

Next:

> *World #2* is a world identical to world #1 apart from the fact that the state does posses the power to execute a citizen *iff* the individual has committed murder. People in this world hold that killing humans is wrong, *except* in circumstances where one human has killed another. In this case, retributive, state-sanctioned killing is right. The people of World #2 believe that their moral judgements on these matters are logically consistent and would argue so if pushed on the subject.

So:

(5) Murder is prohibited.

$(M \rightarrow \mathrm{I}) = 1$

(6) State-sanctioned execution is prohibited.

$(M \rightarrow \mathrm{I}) = 0$

Or:

(7) Murder is permitted.

$$(M \rightarrow \mathrm{P}) = 0$$

(8) State-sanctioned execution is permitted.

$$(M \rightarrow \mathrm{P}) = 1$$

In World #2, the laws do not seem to be logically consistent. If these laws formed the basis of morality within this world, then morality would also be logically invalid or inconsistent. If we look at this from another point of view, we could say that, in this world, all human life is valued, *except* for the lives of those who take other lives. So the second rule is simply a mitigation of, or exception to, the first rule; it is a circumstance in light of which, the rule can be waived.

In World #1 it is *necessarily* the case that murder is impermissible:

$$\Box \forall x(Mx \rightarrow Ix) = 1$$

It is necessarily the case that all acts of murder are impermissible, is true.

In World #2 it is *necessarily* the case that murder is permissible:

$$\Box \forall x(Mx \rightarrow Ix) = 0$$

It is necessarily the case that all acts of murder are impermissible, is false.

Now let's consider their negations:

In World #1:

$$\neg \Box \forall x(Mx \rightarrow Ix) = 0$$

It is not necessarily the case that all acts of murder are impermissible, is false.

$$\neg \Box \forall x(Mx \rightarrow Ix) = 1$$

It is not necessarily the case that all acts of murder are impermissible, is true.

We can therefore describe the laws of the two worlds as follows:

World #1:

$$\Box\forall x(Mx \rightarrow Ix) = 1$$

It is necessarily the case that all acts of murder are impermissible, is true.

And World #2:

$$\Diamond\forall x(Mx \rightarrow Ix). = 1$$

It is possibly the case that all acts of murder are impermissible, is true.[27]

I.e. *It is a logical necessity that M → I =1 in world one and conversely, this is not a logical necessity in World #2*

For these laws to be able to enter the mind and form a moral compass within, I posit that the information must necessarily bypass any conscious or critical cognitive reasoning process. If the role of such a cognitive function were to play a part in assimilating the rules, I posit that certain rules would not 'get past' this process on account of the rules being contradictory. However, I claim that the truth of the matter is that the rules are not consciously apprehended or analysed, and this is why certain ethical-codes can be inconsistent. Retributive state-sanctioned killing seems just and consistent in the eyes of most who never question it. Even if one agrees that retributive killing is the 'right' thing to do, you cannot disagree with the fact that the logic is inconsistent. Things start to get very complicated when trying to construct a 'logically' consistent chain of rules and reasons as to why World #2 makes sense.

It is of paramount importance, having now made this point, that we understand the following: although World #1 has a consistent and valid logic and, conversely, World#2 does not, in *neither* world is the law, in being followed by its populace, being filtered through a cognitive reasoning filter/process; the workings of the

[27] Here I am using the modal operators ◇ and □ simply to represent the modal verbs *possibly* and *necessarily* respectively.

human mind are identical, the fact that the logic is consistent in W#1 is a mere contingent fact and simply serves the purpose of showing that logically inconsistencies, gluts and gaps can exist in human society.

The above analysis goes some way to showing that reasoning processes might not aid the making of moral judgements. This might be the foundation of ideology. Perhaps the phenomenon, which we have just analysed, gives rise to political ideology. We are encroaching on the ground of normative ethics or politics here and it is not within the scope of this work, however it might give us an insight into the field. It is fruitful to use philosophical and logical methodology in order to exposes the contradictions behind certain political views, and ideologies. It could be the case that laws and rules forming the foundations of our morality are taken-on unchecked by any secondary cognitive processes.

We can find further evidence for our assertion when we analyse contradictions that appear within real, existent moral codes as opposed to ideal or hypothetical legal ones i.e. where moral codes can be seen to contradict themselves in modern societies. I will shortly give an example by way of a sociological study that will hope to provide more evidence in support of this theory.

I will examine the case of conflicting moral and ethical codes in Southeast Asia. It appears that in a number of countries throughout Asia, whose moral and social practices are founded upon Buddhist philosophy and ethics, we can observe social practices that conflict with the traditional Buddhist ethical philosophy assumed to lay at the foundation of Asian social culture. The general population however believes that they are indeed acting in accordance with these moral rules and seemingly fail to see the contradictions in their modern-day social culture. It can be shown that Buddhist moral practices in many Asian countries are systematically disregarded, giving rise to the paradoxical phenomenon called "*face*" within said cultures.

1. 4 Contradictions in Ethical Systems

It appears, paradoxically, that it is in South-East Asian Buddhist societies where the phenomenon of *face-culture* is particularly pronounced. My main assertion here is that the sociological concept of *face* conflicts with the foundational principles that are paramount to the philosophy of Buddhism, the predominant form of faith/religion in Thailand. I will focus specifically on Thailand as it is a country with which I am well and intimately acquainted. However, this does not mean at all that Thailand is the only country in which the phenomenon I am explaining exists.

I will shortly explain what this phenomenon of face is and in doing so, will hopefully make clear its conflict with Buddhist ethical practice simply by explaining its nature. We will see clearly that the social practice of face-culture directly contradicts two core principles of Buddhist moral philosophy, those being *anātman, (*อนัตตา, *अनात्मन् (non-self)) and upādāna,(*อุปาทาน, *उपादान (non-clinging)).*[28] Before explaining in more detail the content and ramifications of so-called face culture it will be necessary firstly to give an overview of the fundamental and intrinsic philosophical and ethical concepts in Buddhism.

The first and most fundamental principle to be understood in Buddhism is that of *dukkha* (*ทุกข์, दुःख,* suffering) and what the concept means for Buddhists. Broadly translated, *dukkha* means suffering or pain, but is a notoriously difficult concept to translate into English.

> Dukkha is a Pali word [originating from Sanskrit] with no simple or convenient English equivalent, but it is often translated as suffering, sometimes as unsatisfactoriness, imperfection, impermanence, mental conflict, anguish, mental pain, unsubstantiability, anxiety, frustration or disappointment. Because of the difficulties of translation, the word is usually used in its Pali form. [29]

[28] Here I have represented the Buddhist concepts in three forms Latinised-Pali, Thai, Sanskrit and English respectively, and I will follow this same convention through this work when using specific Buddhist terminology.
[29] Pra Peter Pannapadipo, *One Step at a Time,* (Bamboo Sinfonia) 1997.

The existence of *dukkha* in the world is seen, in Buddhist philosophy, as an intrinsic, essential or "noble" truth of existence. The fact that *dukkha* exists and is experienced by all sentient beings is a cornerstone of Buddhism and its existence is the primary focus and lynchpin around which Buddhist philosophy hinges, hence its understanding is crucial. For the Buddhist, *dukkha* must be correctly comprehended and accepted as a fact of existence that permeates and saturates reality.

> The Buddha taught that birth is dukkha, sickness is dukkha, aging is dukkha, death is dukkha. All the sorrow, lamentation, grief and despair that everyone feels at some time to varying degrees are dukkha. The Buddha also taught that… Desire for that which one cannot have, or cannot attain to, brings dukkha. To lose or be separated from the things, situations or people that one likes or loves brings dukkha… Attachment to the idea of a permanent entity – the idea of 'self' or ego – brings dukkha… All attachment, all clinging to conditions, situations, people and things will eventually bring dukkha of one degree or another.[30]

The primary and foundational objective of Buddhism then, is to eliminate this suffering or *dukkha*. Buddhist doctrine teaches that the elimination of *dukkha* in oneself is a task that *can* be achieved, and that indeed its destruction should be strived for. This is outlined in what are known as *The Four Noble Truths.* They are seen as facts of existence, and are as follows:

1. There is Suffering (*dukkha*).
2. Suffering (*dukkha*) arises because of craving or clinging.
3. Suffering (*dukkha*) ceases with the elimination of clinging.
4. Following the *eight-fold path* leads to the elimination of clinging and therefore to the elimination of suffering (*dukkha*).

Once the Buddhist has fully understood, and come to terms with, the existence of suffering in the world, they must then follow the rules outlined in the *Eight-fold Path* in order to alleviate, and eventually totally irradiate, the experience of *dukkha* from

[30] Pra Peter Pannapadipo, *One Step at a Time*, (Bamboo Sinfonia) 1997.

their life. This arduous task, it is taught, can be achieved by conducting oneself according to the correct precepts, these being:

1. Right understanding
2. Right thought
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

These eight precepts are notoriously vague in their meanings and it is apparent that we need to read more of the scriptures in order to help us understand what "right…" means in Buddhist philosophy. It is because of this vagueness found in the Pali scriptures[31] that the divergent sects of Buddhism differ in their interpretations of the precepts. To explore the different interpretations of these prescriptive rules in depth is not necessary for the point that I am making here. It will suffice for us to understand simply that The Four Noble Truths and The Eight-fold Path together form the core of Buddhist moral philosophy, they first identify the problem (suffering) and then prescribe the abandonment of clinging (to ones self-image, concrete objects and even conceptual thought) as the antidote. These truths are the *point* of, or the reason for, Buddhism. The fact that *dukkha* exists and is experienced in the subject, as a direct result of their clinging, is the concept that defines and typifies Buddhism as a philosophy and therefore "acquisition is the root of suffering"[32] can be understood as a mantra that underpins the totality of Buddhist practice.

I am here mainly referring to the predominant form of Buddhism in Thailand today, namely *Theravada Buddhism* or The Middle Way, as this is the sphere of my immediate experience and the society in which I have personally learned about

[31] Anne M Blackburn, Jeffrey Samuels, *Approaching the Dhamma: Buddhist Texts and Practices in South and Southeast Asia,* Part 1, P.47 (Bps Pariyatti Editions, USA) 2003. Online source: *http://krishnamurti.abundanthope.org/index_htm_files/Approaching-the-Dhamma.pdf*

[32] *Majjhima Nikāya Scripture, Sunakkhatta Sutta*, as Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

Buddhism and face-culture. Having said this however, the core concepts outlined in the above precepts, form the foundations of all other Buddhist sects. There are many differing and varied schools of Buddhism throughout Asia and the world but although certain technicalities such as methods and practices of relieving ones self from suffering, and other superficial or cultural customs, such as meditation techniques for example, or colours of robes worn by ordained members of the monkshood differ, the core moral and philosophical principles remain consistent through all schools of Buddhism and even in forms of Hinduism such as Vaishnavism who's adherents also worship Gautama Buddha[33] believing that he was the ninth avatar of Vishnu. Vaishnavism still emphasises the non-existence of the self as taught by Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. The defining conceptual core of Buddhist philosophy is summed-up in the Four Noble Truths, listed above. These are absolutely paramount to any form or sect of Buddhism.

To offer a brief example of another sect of Buddhism (in addition to Therevada Buddhism), let us look at Zen Buddhism. It is interesting to note that Zen Buddhism, in fact, holds the principles of *non-self* and *non-clinging* to be so very important that its philosophy goes far further than other branches in emphasising the importance of the annihilation of attachment or clinging, so far, indeed, that it is almost in danger of rejecting its own doctrine on account of relinquishing absolutely everything to which one clings. Even conceptual thought must be abandoned, as this, it is taught, will keep the attached within the infinite cycle of death and rebirth and they will therefore be destined to experience *dukkha* eternally.

> 'The Buddha enunciated all Dharmas in order to eliminate every vestige of conceptual thinking. If I refrained entirely from conceptual thought, what would be the use of all the Dharmas?' Attach yourselves to nothing beyond the pure Buddha-Nature which is the original source of all things.[34]

Huang Po says of the *Dharma*, or Buddhist ethical teachings, that it can be the source of suffering itself if it is clung to. The Dharma therefore must eventually be rejected in order to attain the highest virtue of enlightenment. It is easy to see throughout the teachings of Huang Po that the central concern or pillar of Zen

[33] Gautama Buddha; the historical Buddha (Siddhārtha Gautama) and the founder of Buddhism.
[34] Huang Po, *The Chun Chou Record*, Paragraph 15, page 42 (Buddhist Society) 1968.

Buddhist ethical practice is the elimination of *taṇhā,(ตัณหา, तण्हा,)* or clinging/craving.[35]

> If you are attached to forms, practices and meritorious performances, your way of thinking is false and quite incompatible with the Way.[36]

> The building up of good and evil [karma] both involve attachment to form. Those who, being attached to form, do evil have to undergo various incarnations unnecessarily; while those who, being attached to form, do good, subject themselves to toil and privation equally to no purpose.[37]

In the above passage we also see an overt objection to *making-merit,* or the conscious building-up of karma – the rituals and practices thought to lead to the accumulation of good fortune, or karma, that would benefit the individual in their next life or future reincarnation. In this specific aspect, Huang Po's teaching stands in direct opposition to modern-day, Thai Therevada Buddhism which, as it is practiced now in Thailand places very heavy emphasis on the building-up of merit. In some cases, this has even lead to the emergence of quasi-Buddhist cults forming as microcosmic sub-cultures. An excellent example of this would be that of the Dhammakaya Temple (วัดพระธรรมกาย)[38] in Bangkok, Thailand, which is part of the larger Dhammakaya Movement. Here is a temple that places such a strong emphasis on meritorious acting and accumulation that it preaches a meritorious or karmic structure whereby the devout are that told that they can have complete faith in the fact that they will accumulate great amounts of good karma which will be correlated to, or dependant on, the amount of work they do to help the temple or by the money they transfer to the temple each month as a virtuous act of merit-making. Most Thais see this sect as a business and find it laughable, and we should indeed be very hesitant when using the moniker "Buddhist" as it is almost of a sub-sect or cult in its own right. However, it is in many ways a very Thai phenomenon,

[35] Huang Po, *The Chun Chou Record,* (Buddhist Society) 1968.
[36] Huang Po, *The Chun Chou Record,* Part 1,Paragraph 2, Page 30 (Buddhist Society) 1968.
[37] Huang Po, *The Chun Chou Record,* Part 1, Paragraph 7, page 34 (Buddhist Society) 1968.
[38] Wat Dhammakaya official website: http://www.dhammakaya.net/ .
See also: Rachelle M. Scott, *Nirvana for Sale? Buddhism, Wealth, and the Dhammakāya Temple in Contemporary Thailand*, (Sunny Press) 2009.

born from an amalgamation of the over emphasis of merit making[39] within Thai Buddhism coupled with social face-culture.[40]

Let us consider again Huang Po. He opposes all forms of dualism, even the dualism between 'good and 'bad'. For the Zen master, dualism not only suggests the clinging-to of a concept, ideal or doctrine, but also supposes a clouded vision or understanding of what 'being' or existence really is. So, in essence, what Huang Po wants to say is: There is no 'good' or 'bad', there only 'is'. Therefore, one must forget, let go, and rid oneself of these futile and mistaken concepts or they will forever obscure our view.

The philosophy of Zen (in this respect) is of a higher conceptual level perhaps that that of modern Thai Theravada Buddhism, but the foundational and general understanding is that the two main sources of suffering from clinging are the clinging-to of ones self-image or ego (*anātman)* and the clinging-to of material possessions (*upādāna).* To reiterate, the total elimination of suffering must first be achieved by the destruction of the self or the ego. It is understood, quite pragmatically by Buddhists, that the image or picture that one has of oneself is the source of much suffering. Clinging to this image, along with the material possession that help to prop op the image, must be stopped in order to relieve oneself of *dukkha*. It is not expected that these things can easily or realistically be achieved by everyone, but that they should, at least, be strived for.

Face Culture

Let us now look at the previously alluded to case of *face-culture*. It is necessary first to give an explanation of the phenomenon of face-culture before we see how it conflicts with Buddhist teaching. Face-culture is a phenomenon that, although is existent in many societies seems to be very prominent in Eastern and South-East Asian cultures and it is the algorithm which calculates social status or the

[39] This emphasis on merit making in Thai culture is possibly a cultural phenomenon still hanging on from Brahmanism. (See Oxford bibliographies: Nathan McGovern, *Buddhism, Intersections between Buddhism and Hinduism in Thailand*, (Oxford University Press) 2013.

[40] Ms. Apinya, Fuengfusakul, *ศาสนา ทัศน์ของชุมชนเมืองสมัยใหม่: ศึกษากรณีวัดพระธรรมกาย (Religious Propensity of Urban Communities: A Case Study of Phra Dhammakaya Temple*, (Buddhist Studies Center, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand) 1998.

foundation upon which the social hierarchy is structured.[41] *Face* describes the forming of distinct social hierarchies founded on the basis of personal social status, image and honour. It is comprised of a series of rules or codes of conduct that govern how people should act towards themselves and others within a society in order to "save face" for either themselves or others, acknowledging the importance of peers. Face is also a prominent cultural phenomenon in Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures, among many others, with each of the cultures having nuanced interpretations and conceptions of what it means to gain and lose face.[42] However, here I will focus on its meaning and use specifically within Thai culture for this work. In the Thai language the words หน้า (Nah) and เสียหน้า (Sia Nah), refer to *face* and *spoiled* or *lost face* respectively. In Thai social culture, face can be gained by the showing-off of ones desirable assets, as judged desirable in Thai society. These articles could typically include such things as positions of status or success within ones profession, ones monetary wealth and physical or material assets and possessions such as houses, cars and qualifications and also age, but rarely is it metaphysical or 'spiritual' attributes such as intelligence, or moral righteousness. The better ones face appears, the higher the social standing of that person. This social standing will typically lead to people being treated differently by being afforded more courtesy, respect and help if they are perceived as having a higher social standing. Or accordingly, if a person deems themselves to be of a lower standing, a sense of duty and reverence or respect[43] is induced.

On the other hand *losing* face is predominantly a matter of being publicly shamed, dishonoured or embarrassed and often does include transgression of rules or immoral practice. In Thai culture, the emphasis is on the being scolded or shown publicly to have committed an act that is seen as wrong, immoral or inappropriate. The loosing of face is experienced as a very personal feeling of embarrassment and

[41] Brown and Levinson argue that the human propensity towards politeness in general is a born out of trying to "save-face". Hence politeness and face are universals in human culture, to varying degrees. See: Penelope Brown, Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage,* (Cambridge University Press) 1987.
[42] Michael Haugh and Carl Hinze, *A Metalinguistic Approach to Deconstructing the Concepts of 'Face' and 'Politeness' in Chinese, English and Japanese*, 10/11: 1581-1611 (Journal of Pragmatics 35).
[43] The concept of 'respect' is different in Thai culture and means that people of higher status are entitled to respect or reverence simply due to the fact that they occupy a high social position. This can be contrasted again the more European idea that "respect has to be earned" and is rarely given for free or automatically.

can induce in the subject who loses face, extremely strong emotional reactions over seemingly small incidents. A strong hypothetical example of losing face would be the public exhibition, by a third party, of your failure to have upheld a particular desirable, to have committed a sinful or criminal act or to be shown not to have something, perhaps material wealth, which you have given your word about or which you have previously flaunted or boasted about. This potential loss-of-face leads to interesting mannerisms in Thai culture and these idiosyncrasies serve as relevant examples of face losing situations. For example, suppose I were to ask someone to help me do something or give me some information and they did not know the answer. The fear of face-loss could induce one of two polarised actions. Either the person whom I had asked to help me would state clearly that they do not know, or that they cannot do it. Or alternatively, they would go out of their way to make sure that the right answer or help was given. In this hypothetical scenario, the average Thai is very unlikely to lie about the fact that they do not know or cannot help you i.e. saying that they *do* know, or can possibly help, when they do *not,* or probably cannot help, and giving the wrong answer. Neither are they likely to say that they will try to find out or help and then subsequently not commit wholeheartedly to fulfilling their promise. So it is better socially for Thais to say that they do not know, or cannot do something, even if it is perhaps something that they really ought to know, than it is for them to pretend that they know when in fact they do not, as this is a lie that could come back to shame them later. It is to be noted that face is not likely to be lost if, in this situation, the Thai speaker says that they cannot help. Whereas in comparison to British culture, I believe we would sooner give the illusion that we could possibly help, just to give encouragement, and then commit to or follow through with doing it later, than face the embarrassment of having to explain that we cannot do something or that we do not know how to help. The idea of having or displaying ones face is a very superficial artifice but is held as greatly important in Thai culture. This leads not only to an excess of showing-off but also to a lacking in substance, as great time and effort goes into the surface presentation of something meaning that much time and effort is diverted from the substructure or heart of a matter. A good example of this kind of face-showing would be to mention schools and other similar establishments in Thailand. When visiting schools in Thailand one is immediately

struck by the fancy and elaborate signage displayed outside, at the face of the premises. These signs are often huge polished marble structures displaying the name of the school or building and often incorporating small gardens featuring flowers and topiarian shrubbery. These signs are often the first things to be built when starting a building project and are always kept looking immaculate. On the other hand, when venturing inside the school itself, it can appear starkly different. The quality of the teaching, the classroom conditions and learning resources may all be extremely lacking or are neglected. School libraries, even in very wealthy schools, are often sparse or empty of books and so are never used or taken care of. This can be noted of almost all Thai schools, of course, there will be some exceptions but these exceptions are usually international schools where the culture is not predominantly Thai. It appears that this is how things are judged in Thai culture – by their external appearance; if it looks good on the surface, it must be good on the inside too.

The phenomenon of face, as it functions in Thailand, needs to be conceived of not as a metaphysical substance or transcendental currency that can be added to or taken away from, but we need to, in fact, conceive of there being two different phenomena or substances: that of *face* and that of *face-loss*. It is not that face-loss is deducted from the amount of face, or that virtuous deeds can offset our face-loss debt. The two are distinct forms. For this investigation, the more interesting of the two concepts is that of face in its positive form, as it is *this* that I believe possesses the more direct threat, challenge or contradiction to Buddhist ethical philosophy. As above, examples of things or qualities that can add to an individual's face or status are almost all, or at least predominantly, concerned with material wealth, monetary wealth, or egotism and narcissism. Being rich adds to ones face, having an expensive car gives one face and positions of power and authority also improve ones face. I think from this, by no means exhaustive or fully comprehensive, account of face culture it is already clear to see the contradictions between the fundamental principles of Buddhism and the common social practice of, and adherence to, the idea of face in Thai society. These rules form a very delicately structured social code and it is because of this detailed and delicate structure that the potential for face-culture appears.

To offer another clear and concrete example highlighting this social order and of acting differently towards someone who has more/less face or higher/lower social standing can be seen everyday in the use of language. I wish to make a further related assertion, that the Thai social sphere is highly structured and intricately ordered, and that this structuring of people is an intrinsic and inseparable part of Thai culture that could not be abandoned very easily. Language therefore will be my evidence for this assertion, as its analysis will give a strong insight into the psyche and therefore the culture of Thai citizens.

Thai language has built into it a *morphosyntactic T-V distinction*. This, in linguistics, means that the style of language and the vocabulary (especially pronouns) used with a person must change depending on their social status, as compared with the interlocutor. In the Thai language there are several linguistic devices that can be employed to show ones own, or to acknowledge another's, status and this forms an honorific system in the Thai language. In Central Thai, the most widely spoken Thai dialect, pronouns can be used to show this quite easily. Pronouns and titles in Thai have a very important role as linguistic and social tools, and it can be very difficult or even impossible to use them without correct and detailed knowledge of the social culture. For example, unless speaking to someone who is a very close friend, it is almost never correct to call someone by their name[44] without first attaching the appropriate title or pronoun as this can be seen as impolite and could potentially lead to face-loss. Let us look at a personal example first. Being a teacher gives an individual a considerable amount of face and social standing within Thai society. Therefore, that person will then be referred to using the word for teacher (Kru/ครู). This will be used as a pronoun or title either standing alone or placed before the name. So, as a teacher myself, I am almost never called "*Justin*" (my first name) but always called "*Kru Justin* (ครูจัสทิน)" or simply "*Kru* (คร)". This word can also be used as a pronoun and will be replaced within a sentence with the word *you* i.e "*Are **you** well today?"* should be said *as "Is **Teacher** well today?* (วันนี้ครูสบายดีไหม

[44] Strangely enough it is very common for people to refer to themselves by their name instead of using the pronoun for I or me. To the English speaker, this gives the impression that the speaker is talking about themselves in the third person but it should not be perceived that way, the name stands in as a substitute for a pronoun and a little like how when an English speak speaks to their children when very they, they might say "Daddy is hungry." But it doesn't carry the same sense as "Justin is hungry." if, let's say, I am Justin and I am talking to a friend.

ครับ)". Looking at these pronouns and their use will give us a good insight into how the hierarchy of Thai social status is organised. Below I have given a non-exhaustive list of pronouns/titles as used in Thai language and listed them in order according to their politeness/status level, with the first being low and the last being high.

Pronouns/Titles Used to Denote Social Standing and Status in Thai

Noo (หนู) is used by or with children and so can mean '*you'* if an adult is addressing a child or *'I'* if a child is addressing an adult. In addition, the word *noo* can be used by adults (male or female) to refer to themselves when speaking to close family members. It can also be used outside of the family (usually by females but sometimes by males) if talking to someone of a higher social status than himself or herself. In this latter usage, the word is only used as the word *I* or *me* and is employed to show subordinacy; in order to make the speaker appear lower than the interlocutor hence affirming the social hierarchy and showing respect for the interlocutor.

Nong (น้อง), literally meaning younger brother or sister, is a non-gender specific word meaning *you*. It is to be used as a second person pronoun or title with someone younger than the speaker.

Chan (ฉัน) is a pronoun meaning *I* or *me* that is predominantly used by females. This pronoun must only be used when speaking to someone of the same social level and/or age, or if they are of lesser age. It would be perceived as impolite if used with someone higher or older than the speaker.

Pom (ผม) is used by males to mean *I, me* or *myself*. This pronoun is seen as formal and can be used by males to refer to themselves when speaking to anyone, in any social situation without seeming impolite.

Pee (พี่): Literally meaning older brother or sister, *pee* is most commonly used as a pronoun. This word is used as '*I'* when speaking to someone younger than you and as '*you'* when addressing someone older. When using the word to mean '*you'*, it must be used carefully so as not to cause offence. It should *not* be used with people who are considerably older than yourself but only with people who are older than yourself but younger than your mother or father. It is also used occasionally to address someone younger that the speaker if they perceive themselves as being lower in social standing or if they want to show you greater respect, this latter one is a rare usage but it can be found.

Baa (ป้า), literally means *aunty* and is used as '*I', 'me'* or '*you'* with or by females. As a first person pronoun, it is used by females considerably older that the other interlocutor and as a second person pronoun, it is used to address females who's age is approximately their mother's age or older.

Loong (ลุง), literally means *uncle* and is used as '*I', 'me'* or '*you'* with or by males. As a first person pronoun, it is used by males considerably older that the other interlocutor and as a second person pronoun, it is used to address males who's age is approximately their father's age or older.

Khun (คุณ) is a non-gender specific word meaning '*you'*. It is seen as formal and polite, and can therefore be used with anyone.

Pra (พระ) – is used as a title to refer to a monk whom the speaker does not know personally or who is of a lesser age that himself. Pra should not be used as a second person pronoun but can be used in the third or first person voices.

Luang (หลวง) is a title used to refer to a monk whom the interlocutor knows personally, and is of a more advanced age. It is only used as a pronoun in the first or third person but never in the second person voice. When addressing all monks, the formal second person pronoun Khun (คุณ) should be used.

Preservation of Identity

There is always a strong sense of personal identity and position within society preserved within the Thai language, as all of the above examples suggest. Another interesting identity preserving word in Thai is the polite particle. Ka or Khrap (ค่ะ, ครับ). In Thai this kind of word is know as *คำลงท้ายที่ใช้แสดงความสุภาพ* which is translated as an *honorific* or *politeness particle* in English. These words are used to finalise every sentence in Thai to show politeness. They are also gender specific and in being so, show the speakers identity as a male or female. This is a linguistic tool used by gay or transgender people in Thailand to show clearly their sexual preference or status. For example, in a lesbian or gay couple, often one of the partners will use the female word and the other partner will use the male word in order to show the gender that they most want to be identified with.

Furthermore, Thai language also has four distinct levels of language that must be used with people of different social standing. For example if I were speaking to a close friend of a similar social standing to myself, I would use words from the standard set of vocabulary but If I were talking to someone of higher social standing like a boss or a very powerful individual, I would have to use vocabulary from the next level in order to show them that I acknowledge their higher social status. For example the word "*eat*" should be translated as follows, depending on the situation:

Gin (กิน) – Standard level, used with friends, family and strangers in informal situations.

Rapratаan (รับประทาน) – Second level, used with people whom you know are of a higher social standing than yourself and in formal situations.

Chan (ฉัน) – Only used with monks and nuns.

Sawuuy (เสวย) – Only used with the king and members of the royal family.

I want to classify all of the above examples as identity preservers or denotors. It is not simply that they are polite but it is an intrinsic part of their use and meaning that they display and fix the identities of the interlocutors. Now that we have a slight insight into the importance of position and personal identity within the Thai social hierarchy, we can start to see how face culture manifests and how it is seemingly at odds with the core Buddhist ethical/philosophical principles.

In considering face for the purpose of my argument, I want to view it more as a social code of conduct than an ethical system but as with ethical systems, it governs the way in which one *ought* to act. It provides a blueprint according to which Thais behave. So, if we also view Buddhist morality in this same manner, as outlining the way in which one ought to act, we can now see that there exist two separate and distinct systems that govern or prescribe for people's actions viz. *The Doctrine of Buddhism* and *The Doctrine of Face.* It is easy to see, given just a brief explanation of face culture, how it is in direct conflict with the two foundational Buddhist moral principles of *anātman (non-self) and upādāna (Non-clinging).* Concisely, the two main conflicts are as follows:

1. The acknowledgement of a social hierarchy stands in opposition to the concept of *anātman (non-self).*

And

2. The coveting of material wealth for the purpose of improving ones face is at odds with *anātman (non-self) and upādāna (Non-clinging).*

The problem is this one: for the most part, Thais believe that they are following both systems and do not see how they contradict each other. How then, can people believe that they are both polite and are following Thai etiquette correctly and, simultaneously, understand Buddhist philosophy believing that they are following *that* set of prescriptive rules also? It would be easy to answer this question by asserting that this happens simply because of a misunderstanding of Buddhist ethics; that the majority of Thai Buddhists simply do not understand the philosophy

of their own religion. This will be true in some cases, but it cannot be true for everyone when Thais are given a very comprehensive Buddhist education starting from kindergarten and continuing through to university. To state that Thais do not care about or are apathetic towards their religion or spirituality in general would also be false as the majority of Thai men still ordain as monks for a period of time at least once in their lives. Also, most Thai citizens continue to wake up at five a.m. every morning and give alms to monks and houses, shops, schools and office blocks proudly display countless Buddha images to which offerings are made every day before work. It would be wrong, in light of this information, to claim that Thai people had an attitude of nonchalance towards their faith.

So the question now stands before us: when there are two incompatible codes existing within one society or culture, what is it that determines which rules are followed? Are we free to choose which set we assent to? Why, in general, is the Doctrine of Face followed rather than the Doctrine of Buddhism? Again, it might seem, on the surface, that people are using reasoning processes when considering conducting themselves i.e. they consciously choose to act in the way that they do. I want to argue however that there is not any conscious reasoning process taking place that determines people's actions; that it is simply automatic and instinctual acting as explicated above. Here it seems as if people are just *choosing* one doctrine over another, however I do not believe that this is the case. Before I give a hint towards a possible answer to this question, it must be noted that my mere pointing-out that there can exist two distinct and contradictory ethical codes of conduct within one society where the citizens see no contradiction, and simultaneously believe that they are following both correctly, is sufficient enough for my argument and needs no further explanation as to *why* it can happen at this point. However, it is an interesting question. We might consider the following. Due to the way in which the language is structured, it is almost impossible *not* to follow honorific face-culture as a Thai citizen. When simply using the language, one is engaging in and acknowledging the social hierarchy. It looks like people are forced to follow the Doctrine of Face as it is written into the language and so it is the default code; the rules are being followed subconsciously in the same way in which linguistic rules are followed – without explicit knowledge and understanding of them. So to give an extreme example, even a very devout Buddhist monk who considers his

actions very carefully according to the Buddhist philosophy of non-self is still contradicting or breaking those rules when engaging in conversation in the Thai language as it is intrinsic to using the language that you display your position within society, which, incidentally, is a position that is considered to be very high if one is ordained.

It might also be an easy non-cognitive conclusion to draw from my line of argument so far that the Doctrine of Face is followed and generally adhered to over the doctrine of Buddhism as it is the face doctrine that is the one conducive to and derived from emotional, egotistical, non-cognitive content, the same non-reasoned actions which I have already conjectured to be the predominant and default mode of human cognition. Face-culture is the culture of the ego, the passions, and the emotions. It is one of reactions and in being so is more in-line with human nature is the product of the sub-conscious. Strict following of Buddhist ethical principles requires the opposite kind of thinking; that of secondary, reasoned cognitive processes and is not a natural or an easy way in which to think (this is The Buddha's point). Perhaps this is why they are not often followed; they do not stir emotions in people. And now we come back again to a Humean conclusion: the emotions need to be stirred to produce action; reason alone cannot do this. Is this why face culture exists and is followed above Buddhist ethics? The following of face-culture in Thailand is like any moral action in the sense that it is an unquestioned, unreasoned mannerism and accordingly, when questioned, Thais will try to look for the non-existent reasoning process that lead them to their action and of course are usually able to find a *post hoc* justification or reinterpretation in order to explain their actions and judgements. Furthermore, it seems to me that these two opposing prescriptive codes should not coincide in the first instance if the adherence to either of the ethical codes were a constant and reasoned cognitive process; the one would be rejected in favour of the other. As it stands, this is not what we see here. We see the two differing codes existing together and interestingly the contradiction or clash between them is not perceived by most. Is the fact that people do not see the presence of incompatible sets of rules further evidence for the non-reasoned nature of day-to-day human acting? I feel that I must answer this question affirmatively. I conclude therefore, that the following of cultural and ethical rules is an automatic

and non-considered action and hence these rules are not intrinsically action-guiding.

If, following from our previous argument, moral reasoning is *not* a natural cognitive process founded upon sets of prescriptive rules, then we should ask: is the whole sphere of morality merely the product of subjective and instinctual human thought? Furthermore, if conscious moral reasoning does not take place, could there possibly be any objective moral facts, or external mind-independent qualities existing in the world, that are accessible by means of a special (un-reasoned) cognitive process or faculty that explains morality?

2

The Subjectivity of Moral Discourse

We have now disposed of the moral reasoning theory. Before I move on to explain further the thesis that *it is not the case that moral judgements express either non-cognitive or cognitive mental processes, but that they necessarily express both,* let us remember our first assertions in order to point the way to the next part of the thesis clearly. Firstly, I posited that moral judgements were not products of a conscious "moral reasoning" process. I then asserted that moral/cultural codes were not intrinsically prescriptive or action-guiding i.e. people do not seem to act morally by firstly considering the rules and then subsequently acting in accordance with them in a conscious, pragmatic and reasoned manner. I then used the case of moral disagreement and conflicting moral/cultural codes in Asia as evidence in support of my assertion, showing that there can exist incompatible prescriptive codes in a single society without their contradictions being comprehended. Hence ethical codes, in and of themselves, I claimed, could not guide moral behaviour or be the source of morality. I am subsequently led, due to the dismissal of moral reasoning, to consider the plausibility and possibility of the existence of objective and mind-independent moral facts or properties as per strong cognitivism. I will attempt to explain how this route also seems an uneven and arduous one and this will lead me to consider the subjectivity of moral discourse in preparation for the third stage of the thesis.

As is the way with philosophy, the above view will undergo appraisal and indeed should not be accepted without first considering the alternate theories. However, suppose for the moment, that we *do* accept the above argument and assent to the nonexistence of moral reasoning, what would the upshot of this be? What is the next logical step? We may wonder that if indeed there is no cognitive reasoning process taking place when making moral judgements, is morality itself,

as a whole, necessarily subjective and emotional in its essence? Is ethics merely at the whim of the senses or is there another route to take? Some questions, which we might pose at this juncture, are: What follows from the fact that moral reasoning does not exist? Does this render all moral values worthless or can the truth or foundation of morality be found somewhere else, saving us from this moral nihilism? Is the sphere of morality wholly subjective and mind-dependent? We can rephrase this last question in another inverted form: *Can there plausibly be natural moral qualities, which exist as features of objective reality, mind-independently, that could be cognitively accessed or picked-up-on by humans, these qualities being the constitution of morality, as opposed to moral judgements being a result of a considered reasoned process?* When I use the term 'natural qualities' I am here using the definition of natural offered by Alexander Miller in *his Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*:

> I will simply take natural properties to be those which are either causal or detectable by the senses. Natural properties, thus characterised, will be dealt with either by typical 'natural' sciences or by psychology. So if a property is natural on our characterisation, it will also be natural on Moore's.[45]

The above characterisation of a natural property fits well as we need to stress the scientific nature of the proposed existing qualities to ensure that they are natural and not super-natural. By this definition, if the properties are not detectable in the way stipulated above, they are un-scientific in the sense that they are non-material and are therefore metaphysical.

If indeed morality *does* exist objectively *out-there* and independently of our minds, then this might also account for the fact that a moral reasoning process does not happen, as it would not need to happen if there were external moral qualities or universal absolutes. All we would need is the appropriate sensory apparatus by which we could pick up on those proposed qualities. Morality then becomes wholly objective and physicalised in some sense. The above questions start to plot-out the dissecting line that divides the two main branches of what we know today as the philosophy of metaethics, namely *cognitivism* and *non-cognitivism*. In the discipline of metaethics the above assertion (that morality is objective and cognitively

[45] Alexander Miller, *Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, Ch.2, P11 (Polity Press) 2003.

accessed) is one that has been made and defended by cognitivists, and more specifically by the advocates *Moral Realism* and of *Moral Naturalism.* Metaethical Moral Naturalism appears in a myriad of different forms including the more contemporary *Cornell Realism* and *Jackson's Moral Functionalism*. The differing forms of Naturalism posit quite varied and technical views but they all hold the following to be true (as do all realists):

> "… there really are moral facts and moral properties, and that the existence of these facts and instantiation of these moral properties is constitutively independent of human opinion." [46]

This is a path that remains open to us after rejecting moral reasoning due to the fact that this kind of theory also denies the role of human opinion in the formation of moral judgements. Theories that assert the above, can be classified as *strong cognitivist* theories. Strong cognitivist theories in general make the following assertions:

1. That moral judgements, like statements of scientific fact, are truth-apt; they are capable of being true or false.

2. That moral judgements are the result of cognitively accessing the moral facts that make them true or false.

Following from our argument that moral judgement making is fallacious, we have done away with the possibility that our moral judgements are based on our individual assessment of a situation, or that they are founded upon personally or culturally held moral codes by way of a considered cognitive process. The elimination of this cultural or subjective view of morality leaves the door open to the possibility of cognitivism as it could be the case that we do not make moral judgements in an analytical and logical manner due to the fact that morality, or the source of morality, is actually an external and objective fact or property. If morality

[46] Alexander Miller, *Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, Ch.1, P4 (Polity Press) 2003.

is capable, as the cognitivist asserts, of being either true or false, then this suggests that moral judgements do not need to be formed by a subjective reasoning process. In that sense, moral judgements therefore are statements made by observing and reporting the truth of a situation. I could for example use the following analogy. When I utter the phrase "*The chair is there*", I have been able to make this statement by accessing the world via my sense of sight, and by observing that the object in front of me matches with the object that is most commonly called "a chair" in English. I did not, in this case, have to do any subjective judgement forming. I do not simply *believe* that the chair is there, it *is* there, it is a matter of fact that can be proved or disproved by accessing the natural facts. It is of course a matter of *fact* and not one of *value* as, of course, was noted by Hume. The fact that the chair is in a specific location is, quite obviously, a fact and any other speaker of English, upon viewing the chair, assuming that they were not subject to any sensual impairment, would make the same judgement when assessing and reporting on the same situation. This is the manner in which strong cognitivists view the formation of moral judgements. The cognitivist explanation of what is happening when I utter "Murder is wrong" is that, in an parallel manner, I am also able to access the wrongness of the act of murder and am describing it in much the same way as I do in the example of the chair. Just as when I cognitively access the existence and position of the chair with my sense of sight, I also access, via some cognitive/sensual faculty, the objective wrongness of the act of murder and upon sensing this property, am able to pronounce the judgement "*Murder is wrong*". This utterance is a truth-apt one and this again means that there is no subjective judgement of value going on. By this view, there is no fact-value distinction, there is only fact. The statement is either true or false as it is made based on externally existing facts or furthermore, it is truth-apt.

I will now proceed to argue against any kind of theory that asserts the objectivity of morality, the fact that moral judgements are formed by cognitively accessing moral qualities or facts, that moral qualities can be reduced to natural qualities, or indeed that they are independently existing, universal and natural qualities in their own right, as indeed many others have asserted in the past.

The above view claiming the mind-independent existence of moral qualities or that there are moral facts, feels to me intuitively false as questions of value and

questions of fact seem manifestly to be very different from each other. In the realm of ethics, the question of value might not seem so clear-cut, but if we briefly consider questions of *aesthetic* value, it is hard to imagine that any aesthetic judgement could possibly be objectively true or false, but by this cognitivist theory, are aesthetic judgements not also rendered as such? With the strong cognitive model, when I, for instance, assert that the work of Mark Rothko is beautiful, engaging or visually arresting, I am stating a proposition that is either true or false. Indeed, strong cognitivism makes no explicit statements about aesthetic value, however it appears that it must implicitly posit the same about aesthetic value as it does about moral value. The reason for my claim here is two-fold. Firstly, if the strong cognitivist model is the correct model of interpretation mustn't it be applicable to all areas of life? Mustn't it be the way in which we know about everything? This sits well with scientific fact but can it be applied to all human experience? Secondly, if we let one kind of value exist, namely aesthetic value, we are weakening our other assertions about moral value. If you allow *any* kind of value to be a genuine, personal and subjective phenomenon, then is there not always the possibility that it could be a genuine explanation for morality too, that morality is *also* subjective? However, strong cognitivism, as it is presented in ethics, when applied to the field aesthetics does seem extremely hard to swallow, as it would assert that when I make a judgement of aesthetic value, that the statement I make is either true or false.[47] I would like to draw a parallel here with Kant when he speaks of 'taste' in his *Critique of Judgement* he says:

> …when he [man] puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for all men, and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Thus he says that the thing is beautiful; and it is not as if he counts on others agreeing with him in his judgment of liking owing to his having found them in such agreement on a number of occasions, but he demands this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently, and denies them taste, which he still requires of them as something they ought to have; and to this extent it is not open to men to say: Every one has his own taste. This would be equivalent to saying that there is no such thing as taste,

[47] John Gibson, *Cognitivism in the Arts*, (Philosophy Compass 3, Blackwell Publishing Ltd) 2008.

> i.e. no aesthetic judgment capable of making a rightful claim upon the assent of all men.[48]

Something interesting about this quote is that we could swap the concepts of *beauty* and *taste*, replacing them with *goodness* and *morality* and the passage would still make sense to us. We would still understand it and relate to it as a genuine experience. This description quoted above is almost a cognitive reading of aesthetics. Kant says that when we judge something as beautiful we feel as if its beauty is an intrinsic mindindependent (to put it in metaethical terms) quality with which the object of desire is endowed. When we subsequently find that others are in disagreement, we cannot understand their judgement; it is almost as if we view them as having some impairment. We do not want to be able to admit of a non-cognitive or relative reading of beauty, however, as it feels as if in doing that we are admitting the non-existence of beauty *in toto*. Can the same not be said of evaluative ethical judgements?

> *…when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it [good], he demands the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for all men, and then speaks of [goodness] as if it were a property of things. Thus he says that the thing is[good]; and it is not as if he counts on others agreeing with him in his judgment of liking owing to his having found them in such agreement on a number of occasions, but he demands this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently, and denies them [moral conscience], which he still requires of them as something they ought to have; and to this extent it is not open to men to say: Every one has his own [morality]. This would be equivalent to saying that there is no such thing as [morality], i.e. no [moral judgment] capable of making a rightful claim upon the assent of all men.*

So when I utter my judgement that Rothko's work is beautiful, and someone disagrees, I am stuck; caught between two differing and incompatible interpretations. I am simultaneously unwilling to accept the cognitivist view that my statement is truth-apt and therefore capable of being false, and also in denial of the possibility that its beauty be wholly subjective. The subjectivity of aesthetics, as

[48] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, (Cambridge University Press) 2001.

with morality, leaves a bitter taste in the mouth, as it is the admission of its non-existence. It is as if I want to have my moral/aesthetic cake *and* eat it; I want my judgement to be truth-apt if, and only if, it comes out as true.

However intuitive things may seem though, we must examine the assertions made by cognitivism in a more analytical and philosophical praxis, which I will now endeavour to do.

In order to mount a further rebuttal of strong cognitivism, I will firstly mention an early and important argument against naturalistic cognitivism, which claims that moral qualities, like goodness, are reducible to natural qualities such as pleasure. This idea most probably has its root in Hobbes' work[49] when he defines 'good' as that which people seek-out or strive for. 'Goodness' then is reducible to pleasure. This reductionism of goodness to other properties was stated in a more explicit and definite form by moral naturalists and was subsequently rejected by British philosopher G.E. Moore. Moore, who was himself a weak cognitivist, argued against naturalism and for a form of non-naturalism. His main argument against this view is negative and comes in two parts. Firstly, Moore asserts that when we try to explain goodness in terms of natural qualities thereby reducing it to another natural property such as pleasure, for example, we commit what he termed the '*naturalistic fallacy'*. He then explicates this proposed fallacy by using what is known as '*the open question argument'* which, simply put, says that for every natural quality or property that can be said to exist in the world, it always makes sense to ask if that quality is '*really good'*. If, for example, we assert that pleasure and goodness are one and the same property, we are forced also to accept that they are therefore synonymous with, and analytically equivalent to, each other. Furthermore, being analytically equivalent, the two qualities should be easily transposable and mutually replaceable (linguistically and conceptually) within a sentence and it therefore should make no sense whatever to ask whether one quality *is* the other. For example, It makes no sense to ask the question "is pleasure pleasurable?" because the speaker is clearly displaying a lack of understanding of the concept. So, due to the fact that the words *pleasure* and *goodness* are synonymous, we would expect to be able to substitute or interchange the terms for each other and find the same nonsensical quality about the question "is pleasure

[49] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford University Press) 1996.

good?" however we do not, it seems to be a legitimate question. Hence Moore says that it is always an 'open question' whether any other property is 'good' or not and so concludes that 'goodness' cannot be reduced down to, or analytically equivalent to, any other property. This argument was formulated to be used against a specific kind of cognitivist naturalism and I mention it only briefly here as a notable objection to naturalist cognitivism. It, of course, has had its fair share of criticism as an argument and is not especially useful for our thesis as it stands, other than in a negative way against naturalistic reductionism, so let us now look at some more objections to strong cognitivism in general.

Among some of the arguments in opposition to strong cognitivist theories in general, are claims of epistemological debt and metaphysical complications[50]. This means that a theory of this kind is in danger of opening-up and presupposing a lot more than it explains and this does indeed seem unsatisfactory. As the Australian ethicist J.L. Mackie famously pointed out, one problem with this kind of theory is one concerning metaphysics. The realm of metaphysics is one that many philosophers have tried to do away with altogether since the advent of the 20th century, however it may have been a spark lit by Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason. Kant's critique of metaphysics tries to show that "it is impossible" Kant argues, "to extend knowledge to the suprasensible realm of speculative metaphysics."[51]

This is something that has worried many ethicists before, of which J. L. Mackie is one. I have briefly mentioned Mackie above so let us now look at his own attack on metaphysics which comes in the form of an argument against strong cognitivism. His argument, is directed specifically towards forms of cognitivism that use metaphysics to support their assertions of mind-independent morality, as is my own work. Mackie provides us with a forceful and compelling anti-metaphysical thesis against the existence of mind-independent moral qualities.[52] Mackie has put forward his contention with the cognitivist theory in a line of reasoning, which he calls *The Argument from Queerness.* Despite its dated name, it is a useful and enticing argument. Mackie says that: if moral qualities existed mind-

[50] Alexander Miller, *Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, Ch.2, P11 (Polity Press) 2003.
[51] Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Kant Metaephysics, www.iep.utm.edu/kantmeta
[52] J L Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin Books) 1977.

independently as physicalised entities, then they would "have to be entities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" [53] and so far unknown to, and undetected by, science. Mackie also notes of these qualities their necessary motivational force:

> …the metaphysical peculiarity of the supposed objective values, is that they would have to be intrinsically action-guiding and motivating.[54]

Mackie's work stands out in the field of metaethics as although he argues against and rejects strong cognitivisms that make the above objective claim about moral properties, his own error theory technically sits in the cognitive camp itself due to the fact that he asserts that moral judgements are truth-apt. Mackie's Moral Error Theory is therefore a form of weak cognitivism, judged solely on the strength of its logical *truth-aptness* claim. It is Mackie's weakly cognitive stance and his rejection of the metaphysical aspects of strong cognitivism that allows him to posit his own Error Theory that: *moral statements are truth-apt but following from the fact that there are no externally existing moral qualities in the world, they are always false*. Hence, the speaker is trying to explain a moral quality that is assumed to exist, however as moral qualities do not in fact exist, moral judgements are always wrong and so we are always in error when making moral assertions. This position is one that will be important in my thesis, as it is a claim that I also need to make, with some other stipulations and conditions, in order to defend my thesis.

The logical stipulation of the truth-aptness of moral statements is indeed a very important one as it is this logical difference, in addition to the obvious cognitive aspects, of metaethical theories that determine whether they will sit in either the cognitive or non-cognitive side of the metaethical field. The logical assertions of the truth-aptness of moral utterances is of paramount importance in metaethics and so when working with the problems of metaethics, of course, we must always consider both the logical form as well as the conceptual or metaphysical form of the argument.

[53] J L Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin Books) 1977.
[54] J L Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin Books) 1977.

Moral Error Theory agrees with all cognitivist theories in this truth-apt sense only. To come back to Mackie's rejection of metaphysics, he challenges strong cognitivist theories further by also setting forth an epistemological claim that follows on from the metaphysical one. Mackie says that proceeding from the aforementioned metaphysical assertions made by cognitive realism, there arises an epistemological difficulty: how, or with what sensory organs/cognitive faculties, are we able to access and understand these supposed moral qualities?

> If we were aware [of objective moral values or properties], it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ways of knowing everything else. [55]

The epistemic problem with the idea of objective properties is one that is still hotly debated in ethics and is defended by many varied intuitionist claims.[56] The above are all strong arguments and it has meant that the myriad forms of strong cognitivism have had to evolve in order to overcome the difficulties that arise when faced with these questions. There are however modern forms of intuitionism that have revised and explicated their propositions but still, at their heart, they propose the existence of objective moral properties or facts. The existence of these external and mindindependent properties is something that I find hard to allow. I will shortly try to show how the second assertion of strong cognitivism – that moral judgements are the result of cognitively accessing the moral facts that make them true or false is wrong. I will do so by trying to show that moral judgement making is after all an internal human process, all be it an *automatic* and *unreasoned* one.[57] I will shortly outline a thought experiment that endeavours to show the human (non-objective) nature of moral discourse. This is meant as more of a positive argument for the purpose of building the foundations of my own theory but it does, of course, bring to mind questions that challenge the idea of objective moral qualities. Before I explain this experiment I will quickly reiterate my line of argument so far.

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[55] J L Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong,* P 38 (Penguin Books) 1977.

[56] Philip Stratton-Lake, *Intuitionism in Ethics*, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/intuitionism-ethics/>.

[57] Vide, Section 1: *The Illusion of Moral Reasoning.*

> Firstly, I posited that moral judgements are not products of a conscious "moral reasoning" processes. I asserted that moral/cultural codes were not intrinsically prescriptive or action-guiding i.e. people do not act morally by firstly considering the rules and then subsequently acting in accordance with them in a conscious, pragmatic and reasoned manner. This then helps to explain moral disagreement and why conflicting moral/cultural codes can exist in a single society without their contradictions being comprehended. Hence ethical codes, in and of themselves, cannot guide moral behaviour or simply be the source of morality.
>
> We are subsequently lead, due to the dismissal of moral reasoning, to consider the plausibility and possibility of the existence of objective and mindindependent moral facts or properties as per strong cognitivism. We however reject strong cognitivism based on the implausibility of its metaphysical assertions and inadequate epistemological claims.

I will now claim that morality is subjective in the specific sense that it is a thoroughly human trait *id est* it is subjective in the sense of being opposed to objective, and not in the sense of being a product of *personal* moral judging, feeling, or opinion. Let us examine this idea. To conduct this experiment we will firstly imagine three different states of existence or "*Worlds*".

World #1

We must first imagine an early, pre-human universe just after the Big Bang. All that exists is an array of simple chemical elements. Hot dust clouds are slowly starting to condense into and form more complex elements and larger bodies of solid matter. Now, imagine that you are a god-like (*non*-omnipotent), transcendent observer, existing in a removed sphere or dimension. From this position, we need to ask ourselves the following: Do we feel that we can make a moral judgement about this world? Can we plausibly describe any event that happens in this early universe as moral or immoral, right or wrong?

Answer: *Negative.*

We cannot answer this question affirmatively. It certainly seems difficult or implausible to describe the nuclear fusion of hydrogen atoms, the effervescent fizz of sub-atomic particles, the movement of photons as they start to fly across the cosmos or the collision and explosion of stars, as either moral or immoral; right or wrong. Is this because life, in particular *homo sapiens,* is not present in this world?

Before coming to a conclusion, let us now imagine another scenario:

World #2

The universe has aged several billion years and we now find ourselves observing an early primordial Earth with the presence of simple, single-celled life forms. We, again are the same god-like (non-omnipotent) observer, we are to ask ourselves the same questions again: Do we feel that we can make a moral judgement about this world?
Can one describe any event that happens in this world as moral or immoral?

Answer: *Negative.*

Again the answer seems intuitively to be negative. Now let us move on to the present day and imagine another, more familiar, state of existence.

World #3

We are now to imagine the present-day Earth in its current state, the same Earth which we inhabit, and once more imagine that we are a god-like (non-omnipotent) observer, existing on a different plane or dimension, and are now to ask ourselves the question for a final time: Do we feel that we can make a moral judgement about this world? Can one describe any event that happens on present-day Earth as moral or immoral?

Answer: *Affirmative.*

The answer to the third question must, of course, be: "Yes!" or we are denying the existence of morality *in toto*. Yes, we can imagine situations, both moral and immoral very easily. In World #3 we can quickly imagine a multitude of events including interactions between humans and humans, and the interaction of humans with nature (animals, plants or the environment) as moral or immoral. But now let's take one more step that will take us back to the beginning. In this same world, can we plausibly describe any event that happens in nature (unconnected to human action) either on the planet or elsewhere in the universe (assuming that there is no other form of intelligent life in distant galaxies) as moral or immoral? Again that the answer must be: No. If the answer were affirmative, then one would need to state a very concise criterion as to why they would answer affirmatively and that criterion must, for sake of logical necessity, not include or postulate any possible causal link including humans, either conceptually or physically. This I believe to be impossible. It is difficult to see how interactions and happenings in nature when considered outside of, and as separate from, the human sphere of concern, could be described as having any moral value whatsoever.

The preceding thought experiment is meant to highlight the, I argue, *necessary presence of human though or action in the formation of moral judgements and indeed morality as a whole*. It seems that the problem of morality only appears when humans do. If that which strong cognitivism posits is correct, that there are natural extra-mental moral qualities which humans can cognitively access, should we not be able to answer the question affirmatively in relation to all of the above worlds? This should be possible and conceptually necessary, as although we are able to imagine ourselves as nonhuman or god-like when making the judgement, we are in fact human, so when imagining these situations we would be able to cognitively access or pick-up-on the supposed moral qualities that each scenario possessed, thus being able to make a moral judgement based on the perception of these natural qualities in the same way that if we are asked to imagine a fire we would be able to describe the imaginary fire as hot. We would therefore, if objective moral qualities existed, be able to make statements of the sort: "The explosion of stars in the early universe was morally righteous." without sounding like a lunatic. As it stands, we cannot say this. The closest we can get to this kind of statement would be something along the lines of:

"The explosion of stars in the early universe is a morally righteous event because it will eventually lead to the formation of more complex elements within the universe, for example carbon which in-turn will lead to the possibility of conscious life (homo sapiens), who would be able to write papers on the philosophy of metaethics and postulate thought experiments that show how moral reductionism is false." One could then argue that this is a good thing."

Of course this statement does not work as it postulates a causal chain at the end of which we find humans, and so it ultimately falls down. And in addition, and it still does not dodge the metaphysical and epistemological hurdles which we have already outlined. It could be argued by the moral realist that the moral properties must be cognitively accessed and that in Worlds #1 and #2 there aren't any humans to be able to make the judgements, hence the negative answers. However this again will not work. The key to the experiment is that *you*, the thinker, *are* human. You should then be able to, even though you were not connected directly to or physically present in the situation, imagine the natural qualities of the scenario e.g. the glow of the light the heat of the dust clouds, the sound and light emitted by explosions and describe them from your imagination. This too, if the assertions of moral realism were indeed correct, would be possible for moral qualities. Hence, we would not expect to see an affirmative answer in either World #1 or #2 unless the moral qualities and facts *are*, as realists claim, objective and mind-independent. The problem here is one of supervenience. The moral realist needs to be able to explain why the proposed mindindependent moral properties in the first two worlds do not supervene on the moral judgments made. If the moral properties were natural and objective in the realist sense, they would necessitate on all moral judgements so that we would have to see an affirmative answer given in all three worlds. Whether the moral judgements capable of being made were true or false is irrelevant. It is just that if their assertions are correct, a moral appraisal in terms of right and wrong must be possible. However, this is clearly not so.

However supervenience might pose a threat to my assertion too. It could of course be argued that in these imagined worlds the moral does actually supervene on the natural and this would pose a serious threat to the previous thought

experiment as it would turn the argument into one confirming the existence of objective moral qualities by showing that as physical descriptions change, so does the possibility of moral judgements. i.e. When the physical properties are differing, so too are the moral ones and therefore two physically identical worlds must have the same moral status. It could be argued then that there must be some physical quality which morality reduces down to that means we could not have two physically identical worlds that had differing moral qualities. This supervenience might need to be explained but it still does not change the fact that it is the presence of humans in the worlds that makes a moral judgement possible and it is *this* point that I am trying to make; where there are humans, there is morality and it therefore appears that the objective existence of moral qualities seems unlikely. The fact is that a moral judgement must be possible in all situations if we are to take the claims at the heart of naturalism seriously. Let us remember again what strong cognitivism states:

> "… there really are moral facts and moral properties, and that the existence of these facts and instantiation of these moral properties is constitutively independent of human opinion." [58]

However, it seems that this is not the case, hence it seems we need to conclude, I feel, that either there are no objective moral properties, or facts, existing outside of human subjectivity, *or* that there are moral facts but, for some unknown reason, these moral qualities do not necessarily supervene on moral judgements (as in World #1 and #2). The latter explanation needs to be explained but it seems unavailable to the realist however as to concede this would mean that even though there are objective moral properties, the fact that they do not supervene on *all* moral judgements and in *all* situations leaves moral judgement looking rather subjective (in the sense of being a human phenomenon), and so conceding this might undermine the whole strong cognitivist hypothesis and send us back in the direction of a weak cognitivist theory or even away from cognitivism altogether and onwards towards a form of non-cognitivist explanation.

[58] Alexander Miller, *Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics,* Ch.2, P11 (Polity Press) 2003.

The above thought experiment shows that human presence determines the ability to make moral judgements. If we were to postulate a further fourth world that contained humans, we would get an affirmative answer (moral judgements can be made) and again a further fifth world with no human life, we would expect to see a negative answer (moral judgements being impossible). The ability to make a moral judgement (whatever the content of the judgement) depends upon the presence of humans and the interaction of humans with nature. Whenever humans are present, in any particular world, it is possible to make moral judgements. Where they are not, it is not possible to do so. The factor that determines the ability to make a moral judgment appears therefore to be the absence, or presence, of human life.

To conclude, our rejection of moral reasoning has lead us to consider the plausibility of the assertions made by strong cognitivist theories. We however rejected them on account of their implausible metaphysical and epistemological claims. We subsequently set forth an argument in the form of a thought experiment that showed how the possibility of moral judgement making is wholly dependant on the presence of humans. The question we are subsequently faced with is: are, moral qualities reducible, then, to human physical or mental/emotional qualities? This is the question that I will explore from here on and its resolution will be the purpose and subject of the proceeding chapter.

3.

The Plausibility of Non-Cognitivism

The apparent implausibility of an objective morality, as elucidated in the previous chapter, points us toward the possible subjectivity of our moral judgements, and leads us necessarily to consider some form of non-cognitivism as a possible explanation. Having dismissed the plausibility of cognitivism, consideration of its antithesis is the next logical step. Firstly, we will look at A. J. Ayer's form of moral non-cognitivism, namely: Emotivism, which I briefly alluded to in Chapter 2. In *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ayer elucidates a moral theory of his own which seems to be the advent of emotive non-cognitivist analysis. He puts forward his ethical theory of morality very hastily, dealing with the subject in only a few pages. This theory seems, at first, to be a persuasive one but due to the way in which it is written and the novel reading which Ayer applies to moral judgements, the theory has had its fair share of criticism over the decades since it was published. Emotivism along

with the other forms of non-cognitivism has also stumbled upon some very tricky logical problems since its conception, one of the most difficult being the so called Frege-Geach Problem.[59] Professor Ayer himself, although first expounding the theory when he was only twenty-four years old and endeavouring to revise it in order to avoid certain criticisms, always held that it was the correct interpretation of moral judgements. Let us first remember Ayer's explication of the Principle of Verifiability (mentioned in the previous chapter) with which he uses to dismiss metaphysics, as discussed in Chapter Two. We will recall that in *Language Truth and Logic*, Ayer, firstly, states:

> The criterion which we use to test the genuineness of apparent statements of fact is the criterion of verifiability. We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express – that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false…[60]

Being an honorary or visiting member of the Vienna Circle and therefore ascribing to a logical positivist understanding of philosophy, Ayer found it necessary to elucidate a theory of morality that did not include any metaphysical aspects or assertions:

> It is our business to give an account of "judgements of value" which is both satisfactory in itself and consistent with our general empiricist principles.[61]

As we have already seen, Ayer quickly dismisses any form of metaphysics as nonsensical at the start of *Language, Truth and Logic*. This does the job of clearing the conceptual ground ahead and eliminating vast swathes of traditional philosophy therefore securing the logical foundation on which he mounts and builds his positivist theory of ethics: emotivism. It is important now that we

[59] It is rightly pointed out (Originally by Peter Geach in 1965) that if an ethical judgement is construed as being non-cognitive then ethical markers must in fact carry different meanings in un-asserted or embedded contexts. This of course means that a valid logical inference made by a *modus ponens* argument appears not to work.
[60] A J Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (Victor Gollancz Ltd.) 1936.
[61] A J Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (Victor Gollancz Ltd.) 1936.

understand some of the foundational axioms of the logical positivist doctrine, as set forth, expounded by and assented to by Ayer and the Vienna Circle, in order to see why Ayer could not allow for any kind of cognitivist interpretation or analysis in ethical discourse. Logical Positivism had as its foundational thesis that all 'meaningful propositions' must adequately meet at least one of the two following criteria, or, failing that, should be dismissed and judged as nonsensical and having no meaning. These two criteria were:

> 1. A statement must be either analytic or *a priori* in nature, therefore being true by logical necessity and in virtue of the meaning of its words. These propositions are usually expressed in tautologies i.e. "All bachelors are unmarried."

Or

> 2. The proposition must, at least in theory, be empirically testable.

It is fairly easy to see how these two axioms lead to the emotivist theory as posited by Ayer. He held that 'the existence of ethics and aesthetics as branches of speculative knowledge…' presented an '…unsuperable objection to our radical empiricist theory.' And that it was therefore necessary to '…give an account of 'judgements of value which is both satisfactory in itself and consistent with our general empiricist principles.'[62] The emotivist theory posits that as far as statements of value can have any significance or meaning at all, they are ones of scientific interest i.e. they are empirically testable. Otherwise, moral statements are just expressions of emotion or personal taste and therefore are not truth-apt. So unlike the aforementioned cognitivisms, Ayer's emotivism does indeed allow for the existence of value; statements of value are in fact just *that* (they are not attempts at describing moral qualities) but the content of those statements, Ayer asserts, is of no genuine philosophical interest. A phenomenon that seems to give some support to this theory is that often in debate about morality, on a normative level, when all of the hard "facts" of a moral situation under discussion are brought up and are

[62] A J Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (Victor Gollancz Ltd.) 1936.

mutually accepted as true, it is still possible that both parties agree on those empirical facts but nevertheless still disagree with one another on the level of value; their opinions, feelings or intuitions still differ morally and seem not to boil down any further. So what constitutes this moral difference? When all the apparent facts are agreed upon, what is left that can be analysed what is remaining that determines the difference in moral value between individuals? It seems in this situation that it might only be opinion/preference/conditioning or emotion that creates the difference. Where the conditioning comes from and how it comes to manifest in strong moral attitudes is a question that may be posed by philosophers but can probably be left up to the fields of sociology and psychology to endeavour to provide us with some answers.

So what is Ayer's way of approaching and dealing with the problem of moral statements?

> We begin by admitting that the fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable, inasmuch as there is no criterion by which one can test the validity of the judgements in which they occur… We say that the reason why they are unanalysable is that they are mere pseudo-concepts. The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content.[63]

The path which emotivism takes to solving this problem is the denying of the possibility that ethical statements can have any factual content at all, and this solution is founded in the assenting-to of the positivist logic of verification that renders this conclusion inevitable. Ayer denies the fact that moral judgements express genuine propositions. So we now arrive at the conclusion that moral judgements are neither capable of being analytic or a priori true by necessity. Furthermore, nor are they capable of being empirically testable.

Let us see how this works for our example "murder is wrong". It looks on the face of it (grammatically and intuitively) that the judgement is expressing a truth-apt proposition. And, furthermore, I believe most people, under natural quotidian circumstances, would assent to the truth, and therefore the truth-aptness, of this

[63] A J Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (Victor Gollancz Ltd.) 1936.

statement instantly without wanting to subject it to any further form of analysis, but this would just be everyday common-sense intuition and of course does not mean at all that this is in fact an analytic proposition. For it to be true by logical necessity it would need to express a tautology whereby the meaning of 'murder' is synonymous with 'wrong' by virtue of their definitions. This is however obviously not the case. So then, if the statement 'murder is wrong' is not analytic and therefore not capable of being true by logical necessity, it falls short of fulfilling the first criterion imposed by emotivism: that tautologies or analytic statements express genuine propositions that are describable in terms of truth or falsity. So next we ask: is this statement empirically verifiable? Ayer provides us with a technique, as discussed above, for considering whether or not a statement is empirically verifiable. To reiterate, he says that one must ask oneself: What evidence would I accept as being proof that *murder is wrong*? We must be able to conceive, at least in principle, even if we are currently lacking the technological apparatus or know-how to obtain such evidence, which kind of evidence we would need to see in order to judge, objectively and empirically, that *murder is wrong* be a true statement. But again with this example, we cannot simply do that. It is impossible to point to an example which would show conclusively that this moral judgement is a true statement. It does then seem, from this example at least, to follow that the assertion 'murder is wrong' is not in fact a proposition but rather an utterance that makes no sense by the logical positivist criteria i.e it is unanalysable and contains no factual content.

Ayer's work is forceful and has been extremely influential in the field of metaethics, however it seems to me that there must be another avenue of possibility. As logically rigorous and concise this analysis seems at first, it in some way feels almost too simple - as if it is missing something. It does feel true that on certain occasions a moral utterance (in the form '*X* is *Y*') is *attempting* to describe a physical or externally existing phenomenon as opposed to being simply a cathartic release of emotion. Non-cognitivism in general asserts that moral judgements are *not* truth-apt and that they are *not* the result of cognitive access to the 'moral facts' or qualities existing outside and mind-independently of humans, but are, on the contrary, expressions or regurgitations of emotion that have no logical form or significance. This does seem to fit with the conclusion drawn from my thought

experiment from the previous chapter – that morality is a human problem and arises only with humans. Morality can therefore been seen as a human social construct that possibly arose as a result of trying to make sense of natural emotions and inclinations, much like religion might have been the product of humans trying to understand the world around them. It is also my feeling however that on occasions we *do* utter moral judgements of the form X is Y with purpose of explaining the imagined truth of a situation; that X *really is* Y, that wrongness and righteousness are, in fact, universal qualities. Given the fact that I have already analysed ethical cognitivism and found its postulations convoluted and difficult to accept, where am I to turn? Let me return to this question shortly.

Let me for the moment pose another question: How can we be so mistaken or clueless as to what we are saying when making moral judgements? I mean how can we not know what we are trying to do when expressing moral utterances? Should we not know what we are trying to communicate ourselves when we are motivated to do so? I am not going to attempt a full and comprehensive answer to this question but I will briefly offer my line of thought, via a slight digression into the field of language and linguistics.

In Thailand there exist several local dialects of the main branch of Thai language. Thai language is of a tonal nature and in being so, it is intrinsic to the meaning of all Thai words that they are pronounced with the correct tone and intonation (there are five distinct tones in Thai: High, Middle, Low, Rising and Falling). When native speakers of languages that do not have this tonal element start to learn Thai, it can be extremely difficult to fully understand the intrinsic value and paramount importance that the tone has for the meaning of the word. Hence novice learners often say totally different words from the ones they intend to say by pronouncing the phonetic composition of the word correctly but with incorrect tone. For example, the word *"glai"* when said with a flat middle-pitched tone means *"far"* whereas *"glai"* spoken with a falling tone means *"near"*. Keeping this in mind, I have observed that an interesting phenomenon appears when we take into consideration the differing dialects of Thai language where often words will change in such a way that the phonetic structure of the words are left intact but the intonation not. A non-native speaker unfamiliar with tonal languages may hear these dialectical variants and actually understand them correctly as they are not

paying attention to the tone but only the phonetic make-up of the word. Now, in the case where a sentence is spoken in a dialect that utters a certain word with the opposite intonation to the standard usage, but is *intended* to have the same meaning, the non-native speaker hears it and subsequently understands the meaning correctly, due to the fact that they were not considering the tonality of the word. In this case, are we to say that our non-native-speaking subject really understood the meaning of the word? This is an interesting situation as the meaning was indeed communicated and comprehended correctly but it was only conveyed by way, in fact, of a *misunderstanding* of the word spoken, as relative to standard Thai language. The non-native speaker had understood directly due to their misunderstanding or failing to consider the tonality of the word. Conversely, a Thai native speaker might, upon hearing the same word uttered, not understand the meaning due to their perfect understanding of the language. In the case of the native Thai speaker, it is the superficial or surface form of the word that has lead to the misunderstanding of the deeper semantic meaning. In the former case of the non-native speaker, they have understood the semantics and inferred the correct meaning of the word as a direct result of a *misunderstanding* of the surface form. The point I am trying to make is that the speaker, whether understood by others or not, knows *themselves* what they are trying to communicate and they are then capable of being externally interpreted correctly or incorrectly. Behind wrong or misleading words are motivations to act or express something, and these motivations I argue cannot be wrong or mislead. If I am communicating something I must have at very least a subconscious knowledge of what I wish to communicate, even if it is not communicated effectively. When applying this to the analysis of moral utterances, I mean to say that if it is the case that when I utter "murder is wrong" I am trying to describe the quality of murder as having the quality of wrongness, I must myself be aware on some level that that is what I am doing. Likewise, if it is the case that moral utterances are simply expressions of emotion, disapproval or an attempt to simply reprimand, *I* must also be aware that *this* is what I am doing here.

There is a parallel here with Frege's work in *On Sense and Reference*[64]. Frege points out the words have both a sense and a reference attached to them which together account for their meaning. The reference of a word is its truth value or to what it

[64] Gottlob Frege, *On Sense and Reference* (1892).

denotes or refers to in the real world e.g. "my mug" refers to a particular mug that is sitting on my desk and so that particular mug is the reference of the phrase 'my mug' when uttered by me. The phrase also has a sense and this is something which the word itself possesses, the feeling or picture that the word conjures. So if I say 'my mug' and you say 'my mug' the identical phrases have the same sense that is inherent to the phrase itself but in fact have two distinct references, the mug sitting on my desk and the mug sitting on your desk. So to put my example of the Thai speakers in Fregean terms, the non-native speaker has understood the reference of the word by accident as they have completely missed its sense. The Thai speaker, on the other hand, has misunderstood the sense of the word and is therefore clueless as to what its reference is. This observation brings to mind and seems in some way similar to the Twin Earth thought experiment devised by Hilary Putnam.[65] In this experiment the Twin Earth dweller and the Real Earth dweller believe that they mutually understand the word *"water"*. They are in fact mistaken by the surface form of both the word and the substance (the analogous substances on the planets are clear non-viscous liquids and are both called H2O, however the molecular make-up is different). This misleads them, as the substance they are talking about is not, in actuality, the same. Is this not like the Thai speakers in our preceding example? They have mistakenly interpreted the surface form of the word and are therefore misunderstanding each other. Unlike the twin earth situation the interlocutors, in an inverted manner, have actually, because of being misled by the surface form, hit on the correct meaning (in the non-native case). The meaning has been transferred and understood correctly but has the listener really understood? Is this to be described as understanding? Externally this situation seems very much like there has been a clear and concise communication. However on an analytical level this communication of meaning is grounded in the non-native speaker's incompetence. Conversely with the Thai speaker who has not grasped the meaning of the word. Are we able to say that she has misunderstood? Again, on the surface, this seems like a miscommunication. On the analytical level however, the misunderstanding is due directly to the competency of the Thai speaker. How are we to say that she has misunderstood her own language? The novice Thai speaker has hit on the meaning but accidentally. The speaker may feel that because of the

[65] Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and Reference*, (Journal of Philosophy) 1973.

correct transference of meaning the listener has understood the word itself. However, they have not, they have simply hit upon the correct meaning contingently, but by way of a wrong interpretation. This may then lead to the speakers assuming retroactively a false sense of causation between the hearing of the word and the understanding of its meaning. I feel that we cannot accuse the Thai speaker of misunderstanding the language but we can rightly accuse her of a miscomprehension of meaning. The interlocutor has failed to grasp the semantics of the word however they have understood the surface form quite perfectly and it is *this* that has lead directly to the miscomprehension. So we can see here that there is not always a necessary causal link between understanding the surface form of a statement and comprehending the semantic meaning of it. Semantic externalist would argue that the meaning of the word is in fact determined by outside external factors and I do not wish to challenge the externalist theory however my point is that there has to be an internal drive/motivation to express and that that which I am trying to express is capable of being misinterpreted by others. However, I, myself, can be sure to know, on some level, of what I wish to express. Is the act of expression itself not proof of this internal knowledge?

Could this be said for the inverse situation? Where the speaker of the statement misunderstands themselves? Could it be the case that when making moral judgements we are misled as to the deep meaning of the words we are speaking? It seems to me not. We must know what we mean or want to express by a statement in order to be able to say it. The forming of the concept and therefore the comprehension must come first before it is expressed in a syntactic structure; the motivation is prior to the action. The syntactical structure itself is of great importance and is a tool which we use to express and communicate. The analysis of the surface form can give us some insight into the cognition of the subject but it is not the whole story. To use another example of language, if I am speaking a foreign language and have gotten the grammar wrong in such a way as to give the surface form of the sentence a different, opposed or utterly incomprehensible meaning, the listener may indeed be confused but *I* am still under the impression that the noises I am pronouncing are correct. Furthermore, correct or incorrect, they are still the product of a sincere motivation to express which cannot be confused or mislead. I know what it is that I want to say but I am simply expressing

it with incoherent language - I am not at all confused about what I mean to convey. It is hard to imagine a scenario whereby I do not comprehend what I want to say.

Let us follow this line of thought and apply this to ethics. The basic foundational point that one needs to grasp when understanding metaethics is the distinction and split between *cognitive* and *non-cognitive*. As we have seen, the non-cognitive reading of moral statements, like Ayer's emotivism sees them as utterances that do not have the form of genuine propositions. For example, when I state "*Murder is wrong*!" the non-cognitivist says that I am not attempting to describe a concrete/physical thing or state of affairs (murder) as having a certain property (wrongness) but am in-fact only expressing a feeling of perhaps disapproval towards the action. From a linguist's point of view, the non-cognitivist says, it is the surface form of the sentence (A is B) that leads us astray into a cognitivist interpretation whereby we read "Murder is wrong!" as equivalent to "Grass is Green." Where in fact the semantics of the two sentences are radically different. Non-cognitivist theories therefore hold that all moral statements of this form can be neither true nor false as they are not true propositions and hence cannot be analysed logically. When the speaker says "Murder is wrong!" by the non-cognitivist interpretation they are really expressing a non-cognitive sentiment, something similar to "Boo to murder!" which does not have a truth value. It is obvious when translating "Murder is wrong!" into "Boo to murder!" that this expression is inappropriate for a logical analysis based on its truth-value. This may be the case, and intuitively it resonates at some level. However, I would argue that whatever the case, (whether moral statements be cognitive or non-cognitive) the speaker must be aware *themselves* of what they mean by it, what they are trying to express. When I say "Murder is wrong!" *I* must comprehend what *I* mean to express on at least at some level, conscious or unconscious. Even if I were speaking absolute gibberish that made no sense to anyone else, I must know what I am expressing. When a baby cries, its whimpers are not often understood instantly. The cries are incoherent before the child has the grasp of language, we therefore must make guesses as to what it is the child is trying to communicate to us. Whether the child is hungry, tired, in pain or discomfort cannot be understood clearly or directly from the content of its cries but we must be sure that the baby *itself* knows what he is expressing with his vocalisations, otherwise why would he cry? If we

were to give a semantic analysis to the cries of a baby we would have to take a non-cognitive stance towards their meaning i.e. it would be impossible to say that the child was expressing a truth-apt proposition as it has not a grasp of language yet. However, it would also be implausible to state that the child's screams had no meaning. We know the cries have a meaning (the child is trying to communicate something) and we also know that their cries are not logical propositions. We therefore must take a non-cognitive stance. Some questions we might ponder in light of this are: Is this seemingly innate ability or want to communicate without the use of a language system, one that stays with us throughout life? Is there always a base-level of communication, a background, of pure non-cognitive expression underlying all of our speech patterns?

Many of the assertions made by non-cognitivism seem intuitively right, they feel that they could be the case and the logic appears to check out, but so too do many of the claims of the cognitivist. It could be that either cognitivism or non-cognitivism are the case and one of them will be found beyond a shadow of a doubt to correctly describe morality, but what I wish to claim is that we must be aware ourselves of what we mean when using language on some level, whether it be a conscious or an unconscious one – or indeed both. There must be the urge or motivation that leads to the expression and this motivation is necessarily comprehended and felt, to a point where we become compelled to express it vocally. It could indeed be that we are trying to describe, in a cognitivist sense, a property of wrongness that something has, or conversely in a non-cognitivist way, simply our disapproval or disgust at the action for personal, reactionary or ideological reasons. This line of though however brings about some further questions. Are we capable of analysing our own mental processes when making these judgements through a meta-cognitive effort on our own part, so that we are able to become consciously and acutely aware of what we are expressing? If so, how are we to show this, what would be the best method of analysis? … is there one? How are we to know there is not a subconscious urge that we are unable to consciously pick-up on when introspectively analysing our own thoughts? And finally, how are we to know for certain the meaning of these expressions or that there is only one single meaning behind our stating of moral judgements?

To return to our question above: Given the fact that we have already analysed ethical cognitivism and found its postulations difficult to accept, where are we to turn? I propose the following method:

- We reject, on account of their implausibility, any forms of hard cognitivism that postulate the existence of objective and mind-independent moral facts, qualities or entities.

- Instead, we assert that moral judgements express *both* non-cognitive or emotional content and simultaneously also attempt to describe (as per weak cognitivism) some imagined objective moral reality.

- As this objective moral reality is deemed non-existent by falling short of empirical status, our attempts to describe it always fail and our moral judgements are subsequently in error, or false.

- Therefore, we assert that: moral utterances are necessarily *both* weakly cognitive *and* non-cognitive in nature as they not *only* express emotional and personal subjective states but also simultaneously express and, attempt to describe the world in terms of objective moral facts or properties. However, due to the fact that these objective properties are fallacious, the descriptions always lead to error and are therefore neither truth-apt nor empirically testable.

This seems a promising option to me. I will then for the remainder of this work pursue a route towards an error theory that incorporates the emotive expression maintained by emotivism, and that allows moral judgements to be speech acts with a multiplicity of meaning; an error theory of a hybrid form. I will now endeavour to build and develop a theory that allows this and shows how we can reconcile this form of emotive non-cognitivism with an error theory. I will posit that:

Moral imperative judgements of the form X=Y are condensations of differing cognitive states that express both non-cognitive, non-truth-apt sentiments and cognitive truth-apt propositions simultaneously.

4

Condensation & the Multiplicity of Meaning

If we have failed, so far, to find a plausible, agreeable and uniform semantics for ethical language, can we be so bold as to postulate a new one, a hybrid? Following on from my line of thought in the previous chapter, I now pose the following questions: Might it be possible that when engaged in moral discourse we are expressing both cognitive and non-cognitive sentiments simultaneously? Might it be that our moral judgements are not simply truth-apt propositions or just discharges of emotional sentiment but *both* simultaneously? Might they contain a multiplicity of meaning? Is it the case, then, that when we express moral judgements and imperatives, we are condensing a multitude of different sentiments down together into one compounded form before projecting it out into the world? Here I will use the word *condensation* for my own purpose, which I will shortly elucidate, but the term should also be understood in the psychoanalytical sense with its Freudian weight attached, as it is a subconscious cognitive process that I am positing. And it is somewhat analogous to Freudian condensation that happens as part of the dream-work in Freudian psychoanalysis:

> The first thing that becomes clear to anyone who compares the dream-content with the dream-thoughts is that a work of condensation on a large

> scale has been carried out. Dreams are brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts. [66]

There are parallels to be drawn between Freud's theory of condensation and my own. It will therefore serve us well to first understand Freud's theory. Freud explains that condensation is the psychological process whereby the material used in the formation of a dream is condensed down and projected out into a dream, forming new shorter and more concentrated symbolic content. Symbols in dreams, Freud says, are overdetermined due to this condensation process. That is to say, the vision of a single object within a dream is actually determined by a multitude of ideas and symbols from the subconscious thoughts of the dreamer that have become compounded during the dream-work, the process of dream formation. This of course means that each symbol or object appearing within the dream represents a multiplicity of meaning. The composition of these symbols can be quite convoluted and they need to be picked apart in order to identify the many sources leading to the symbol's manifestation. It is my suggestion that a similar, or analogous, process may be at work when expressing moral judgments. This would mean that moral judgements come out not as truth-apt propositions or indeed as non-truth-apt emotional expressions but rather as a condensation of both, when applying this theory to the field of metaethics.

In the proceeding chapter, I will endeavour to put forward and explicate this theory in a concise and logical manner. However, before doing so, let us first look at some more analogous or supportive theories in order to enlist a little foundational support. This is not, in any case, an altogether novel idea. It has been noted before by many philosophers of language and linguists that utterances do not simply express what is shown in the surface form of a statement. This means therefore that a rigorous analysis of an utterance's deep form can possibly reveal a multitude of further or 'meta' meaning. There is very detailed analysis of the difference between the surface (syntactical) structure of an utterance and its deep (semantic) structure in the work of John Searle and it will help us to briefly look at this distinction:

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[66] Sigmond Freud, *The Interpretation of dreams,* Ch VI (A), The Work of Condensation P.312, (Avon Books, New York, Third Edition reprint) 1998.

> I am distinguishing between the illocutionary act and the propositional content of the illocutionary act. Of course, not all illocutionary acts have a propositional content, for example, an utterance of "Hurrah" does not, nor does "ouch"… From this semantical point of view we can distinguish two (not necessarily separate) elements in the syntactical structure of the sentence, which we might call the propositional indicator and the illocutionary force indicator… If this semantic distinction is of any real importance, it seems likely that it should have some syntactic analogue, even though the syntactical representation of the semantic facts will not always lie on the surface of the sentence. For example, in the sentence "I promise to come", the surface structure does not seem to allow for us to make a distinction between the indicator of illocutionary force and the indicator of propositional content. In this respect it differs from "I promise that I will come", where the difference between the indicator of illocutionary force ("I promise") and the indicator of propositional content ("that I will come") lies right on the surface. But if we study the deep structure of the first sentence, we find that its underlying phrase marker, like the underlying phrase marker of the second, contains, "I promise + I will come". In the deep structure we can often identify those elements that correspond to the indicator of illocutionary force quite separately from those that correspond to the indicator of propositional content, even in cases where, e.g., deletion transformations of repeated elements conceal the distinction in the surface structure. [67]

The above fairly technical description from Searle's *Speech Acts* highlights and explains one of the points which I am trying to make. As Searle explains, it should be possible to analyse both the surface structure of an utterance, and the underlying deep structure, in order to reveal the 'condensed' semantics that lay hidden beneath the surface. This should also be appropriate with moral judgements, as most moral utterances would be classified as *speech acts,* falling under the heading 'illocutionary act' as allowed by Searle and first explicated by Austin. [68]

> Some of the English verbs denoting illocutionary acts are: "state", "describe", "assert", "warn", "remark", "comment", "command", "order", "request",

[67] J Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge University Press) 1969.
[68] J L Austin, *How to do Things With Words* (Harvard University Press) 1962.

> "criticize", "apologize", "censure", "approve", "welcome", "promise", "object", "demand" and "argue". Austin claimed there were over a thousand such expressions in English.[69]

The way in which we engage in moral discourse is analogous to the way in which Searle supposes we use language viz. language is a form of *rule-governed behaviour* in which the rules are followed subconsciously. However, this is not all. In fact, engaging in moral discourse is not simply *analogous* to the Searlean notion of the speech act, but they are one and the same necessarily. Hence, moral discourse is defined and created by the language in which it is expressed. Language creates the boundaries, delineates the boarders and opens up the space from which moral discourse can emerge. Without language how could morality be expressed? Could it be expressed at all in the absence of language? If not, it seems that the rules of language must be the underlying foundation to moral discourse; the rules would correlate. So now I draw your attention to the fact that, for my purposes, all moral judgements must be understood as being speech acts, but not all utterances which are speech acts are moral judgements, of course. In the correct Searlean terminology, moral utterances in the form of imperatives are illocutionary acts. So, I will now update our definition of a moral judgement again before we refine it further in the coming paragraphs. We can now define a moral imperative of the form $X=Y$ as:

> *An illocutionary speech act expressed in an imperative form that contains/prescribes moral content/actions/symbols. Moral judgements, being speech acts, and being comprised of condensed cognitive sentiments, express both cognitive and non-cognitive sentiments necessarily.*

With this definition in-hand let us move on with the explication of our theory of condensation. It *would* in theory be possible to conduct an analysis of the moral judgement or imperative if it were subject to condensation, although it would be an analysis that rests on possibilities. We must first, then, subject the moral judgement to a process of *expansion.* So how do we expand the form of the

[69] J Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language,* Chapter 2, P23 (Cambridge University Press) 1969.

imperative? Let us first start by giving a simplified dualistic example of this. We firstly take the example:

"*Murder is wrong*"

By my interpretation, when I utter "*Murder is wrong*", I might be expressing both cognitive *and* non-cognitive attitudes. It is, at present, not possible to distinguish this, as this utterance is in a *condensed* form and, being in such a form it cannot be allocated either propositional or non-propositional status, this speech *act*, just as with any act, has motivations, meanings and intentions. It is not yet analysable in terms of its propositional and syntactical content. We remember that, following from Freud, being condensed, also means that the utterance is overdetermined and therefore has several sources of content. So if, for the purpose of this example, we assume there is one non-cognitive expression and one cognitive expression condensed into the utterance, when expanding the utterance, the correct semantic interpretation of the judgement "Murder is wrong" might give us an answer similar to the following:

> Expressed Condensed Form: *"Murder is wrong"*
>
> Expanded Form: "*The act of murder has the property of wrongness,* ***and I disapprove of it***."

So we have translated or *expanded* the phrase. The expanded form reveals what I could possibly mean to express when I make the judgement "*Murder is wrong*". It is of paramount importance to note that the expanded form reveals both cognitive and non-cognitive expressions (the non-cognitive one here represented in emboldened text) underlying the judgement. The process of expanding the judgement to reveal the expanded (deep) form involves listing possibilities of meaning. We ask: what *could* this judgement *possibly* mean? Above I have given a simplified example that contains one cognitive possibility and combines it with one non-cognitive possibility. In fact, there might be many more possibilities that could be meant by this utterance, both propositional and emotional. It will not, however,

be necessary to ensure that we exhaust all possibilities when expanding the form here, but just that we understand the realistic and probable meanings that could be condensed into an utterance. For example, in the above case it is possible that I mean "I disapprove of murder" but it is not probable that I mean "I am hungry". To reiterate, the reading or translation of the moral imperative into expanded form tries to show the possible meanings that could have been condensed down into the formation of the original judgement. This judgement, seen so comprised, can be termed an *aggregate*. We will assign the moniker 'aggregate' and give it the Greek uppercase letter *"Σ"(sigma)* (we take the Greek letter Σ from the word *'Σύνολο'* meaning aggregate). We will use Σ to refer to an aggregate in our later analyses and will use the word *aggregate* to refer to moral judgements from here onwards as the aggregate (judgement) is understood as neither propositional nor emotional. Once expanded, it will be found that the aggregate is composed of both cognitive propositional content and non-cognitive emotional content.

To put the above analysis back into Searlean terms, the *locutionary* act in this example was the act of asserting that "Murder is wrong" and the *illocutionary* act was to assert that "I disapprove of it (murder)." The *perlocutionary* act would be dependent on the context of the sentence. What we *really mean* when asserting this kind of imperative is quite unclear so we have to unpick the possibilities and propose what we could *possibly* mean by it. This sort of imperative would be classified as an *assertive* in Austin's terminology. I think it might also be of importance to note that all of these acts can change for the same sentence depending on the context in which it is uttered. For example, it is possible that the illocutionary act was to assert the wrongness of murder (which lies on the surface) or to assert my disapproval of the act. It is difficult to fix these kinds of speech act in an aggregate of this sort. This is the reason we must first expand its form.

Is it plausible that this reading of moral utterances could be used? Let us go further with the explanation by looking next at a more detailed, but non-moral, example of *condensation*. We can see this process working in everyday, non-moral statements too e.g. when I say, to take a trivial example, that:

"*Sushi is horrible*."

I might mean many different things simultaneously, and all of these elements combined form a strong motivation for me feeling compelled to actually utter the sentence. So now I will proceed to expand this aggregate so that we can see some possible deep content. When I say "*Sushi is horrible",* a plausible expanded form could be:

> *["Sushi has the property of horribleness, I don't find sushi delicious and I therefore don't wish to eat any, furthermore, I cannot understand why others would want to eat it either, therefore Uuch! to sushi!"]*[70]

This expansion could even be expressed in a further expanded form. By "horrible(ness)" I could mean that it has a displeasing taste, smell, texture, aesthetic appearance or that the concept of eating raw fish is distasteful one. I might even be expressing an underlying xenophobia towards Japanese culture or a repressed experience with sushi in my past. Viewed like this, the original sentence "*Sushi is disgusting*." Is to be understood as being cognitively over-determined. It is often inappropriate to utter all of these reasons together but it may nevertheless be that the combination of them all together forms the motivational cause of the verbal expression, and so the sentence appears in a condensed form as an aggregate.

Are we not also supplied here with a motivation to utter or to act? If moral expressions were simply cognitive descriptions of moral qualities, we are left wondering what the motivation is behind the utterance. Following the Humean line of reasoning that it is 'the passions' alone that can stir us into action, we can discover the emotional content that is being condensed into the moral utterance. The same content that supplies us with the motivational force and which compels us to act.

All of the underlying determinations, or elements of the aggregate, may also fall into one of two cognitive categories: Conscious or unconscious. An example of a conscious determination in the above statement might be the taste (I am acutely and consciously aware that the taste of sushi disgusts me and induces in me a gag reflex). An example of an unconscious determination might be the xenophobia I

[70] As a convention, the expanded form of a moral aggregate will appear in [squared brackets] and the separation of its elements will be marked by a comma.

have toward Japanese culture. We must note that in the case of a moral aggregate, we are not looking right away for conscious and unconscious elements are but are looking to separate the elements as being cognitive and non-cognitive. So let us take the moral example and reproduce it in expanded form following the same procedure. We take:

1. The aggregate (*Σ)*:

"*Murder is wrong*."

2. The expansion:

[*The act of killing another human being is an act that has the moral property of wrongness, I therefore disagree with the act of murder, the act of murder is, and should be, forbidden, I don't want you to murder, I don't like murder, if you murder I disapprove of your actions, I do not condone or sanction murder, do not murder!, boo to murder!]*

The immediate problem with the theory of semantic condensation is that now a moral judgement *X* could be seen as both non-cognitive *and* cognitive in the sense that it expresses both truth-apt and non-truth-apt statements. Many will want to argue, "Murder is wrong" be either a truth-apt proposition *or* a non-cognitive expression that is not truth-apt. It will be argued that it is not possible to be both, and it represents a logical contradiction and therefore might be construed as meaningless or simply wrong. However we must now view any ***moral statement X*** as a ***moral aggregate Σ*** and it is therefore not the case that ***Σ*** is both truth-apt and not truth-apt simultaneously, but that it is neither truth-apt nor non-truth-apt. In logical terms it represents a truth-*gap* and not a truth-*glut*. The aggregate ***Σ*** is not analytic and it cannot itself be assed in terms of truth or falsity and it must be first expanded in order to reveal the deep form of the expression. The elements of the expression can then subsequently be assessed in terms of truth or falsity in the standard manner *id est*, the non-cognitive statements do not have a truth value and the cognitive elements can be determined as either true or false.

Is it not plausible that a moral judgement of this sort could be expressing both kinds of statement and therefore be impossible to analyse in the standard way? Let us try to see how we might take this interpretation further and also reiterate our analysis. We now define moral statements as aggregates of both non-cognitive and cognitive elements that have been condensed. We therefore need to apply the method of expansion previously shown in order to separate the truth-apt propositions from the non-truth-apt expressions. We would then be left with two lists that form two opposing sets of determinations, (the two lists containing cognitive and non-cognitive elements respectively). Together these elements constitute the whole base or background behind the surface form and are also the motivational force, or drive, that gives rise to the expression of the judgement. Moral categorical imperatives of the form X=Y are therefore to be seen as aggregates or condensations of differing cognitive states that express both non-cognitive, non-truth-apt statements *and* cognitive truth-apt propositions simultaneously. When we have expanded the form and separated the two kinds of statements, we are then at the point where we can start to apply an appropriate analytic method to each set of determinations (i.e. cog. Or non-cog.). In light of this view it is seen as impossible to analyse a moral judgement or aggregate *before* expanding it to reveal the possible underlying moral expressions that are the elements of the aggregate.

Before we move on, a note about terminology. We need to define *moral judgements* and *moral expressions* as distinct notions. For the purpose of this argument, 'moral judgments' are *aggregates* (Σ) *e.g.* "*Murder is Wrong*." And will be referred to as such from here on. 'Moral expressions' are the individual sentiments or *elements* that make up and indeed form the moral aggregate, giving the judgement meaning and illocutionary force *i.e.* [*The act of killing another human being is an act that has the moral property of wrongness, I therefore disagree with the act of murder, the act of murder is forbidden, I don't want you to murder, I don't like murder, if you murder, I disapprove of your actions, I do not condone or sanction murder, do not murder!, boo to murder!]* are all *elements* and will be referred to as such from here on. An element can be cognitive or non-cognitive; an aggregate cannot. It is important for clarity that these two different notions of *aggregates* and *elements* be clearly understood as distinct but connect to each other.

4.1 Defining Moral Statements in Terms of Sets

In order to define moral aggregates clearly I will employ some basic set theoretic notation. This way it can more easily be understood how the aggregate is composed. When defining the moral aggregate in terms of sets we use Σ. Let any moral aggregate for example: "*Murder is wrong*." be the set {Σ}. {Σ} is the set that contains all possible moral aggregates. Now we will define the aggregate {Σ} using the following notation, in terms of its', and its members' recursive rules and predicate notations.

We start simply by defining the set {Σ} as relative to itself:

1. List Notation of {Σ}

$$\{\Sigma\} = \{\{N\},\{C\}\}$$

2. Predicate Notation of {Σ}

$$\{\Sigma\}=\{x \mid x\text{: } a\ moral\ aggregate\ (M)\}$$
$$\{\Sigma\}=\{x \mid M(x)\}$$

**All members of* $\boldsymbol{\Sigma}$ *have the property* $\boldsymbol{x}$ *such that* $\boldsymbol{x}$ *is a moral aggregate.*

3. Recursive Rules of {Σ}

$$\{\Sigma\} = \{N \cup C\}$$
$$\{\Sigma\} \notin \{N\}$$
$$\{\Sigma\} \notin \{C\}$$
$$\{N\} \in \{\Sigma\}$$
$$\{C\} \in \{\Sigma\}$$

Now we define the members of {Σ} ({N} and {C}) and therefore {Σ} as relative to these members. Let {N} be the set of all possible non-cognitive moral elements. We define {N} as follows.

1. List Notation of {N}

$$\{N\} = \{0_y, 1_y, 2_y \ldots \infty_y\}$$

2. Predicate Notation of {N}

$$\{N\} = \{y \mid y\text{: } \textit{Non-cognitive element.}\}$$
$$\{N\} = \{y \mid N(y)\}$$

* *All members of* ***N*** *have the property* ***y*** *such that* ***y*** *is a non-cognitive element.*

3. Recursive Rules of {N}

$$\{N\} \in \{\Sigma\}$$
$$\{N\} \subseteq \{\Sigma\}$$
$$\{N\} \subset \{\Sigma\}$$
$$\{N\} \notin \{C\}$$

$$\{\Sigma - N\} = \{1_Z, 2_Z, 3_Z \ldots \infty_z\}$$

(*The compliment of N relative to Σ where* 1_Z *is defined as below.)*

And finally, let {C} be the set of all possible cognitive elements. We define {C} as follows:

1. Listing Notation of {C}:

$$\{C\} = \{1_Z, 2_Z, 3_Z \ldots \infty_z\}$$

2. Predicate Notation of {C}:

$$\{C\} = \{z \mid z\text{: } \textit{cognitive moral element}\}$$
$$\{C\} = \{z \mid C(z)\}$$

All members of **C have the property **z** such that **z** is a cognitive element.*

3. Recursive Rules of {C}:

$$\{C\} \in \{\Sigma\}$$
$$\{C\} \subseteq \{\Sigma\}$$
$$\{C\} \subset \{\Sigma\}$$
$$\{C\} \notin \{N\}$$

$$\{\Sigma - C\} = \{1_y, 2_y, 3_y \ldots \infty_y\}$$

(*The compliment of C relative to Σ where 1_Y is defined as above i.e. a moral element that is non-cognitive.)*

The use of the set-theoretic notation is employed to show clearly and unambiguously, the make-up of moral aggregates and the relationships between the elements in an aggregate.

We can now see that it would be inappropriate to analyse Σ by either a cognitive or non-cognitive praxis. This is because if we apply any sort of analysis to the aggregate, we go wrong as it is the sum of its parts and therefore an entity that cannot yet be given a specific reading. We can also see now that we could not hope to apply any sort of analysis and have it work uniformly across all members of the set Σ. We must expose its elements through expansion to obtain and separate all possible meanings. We are then left with the two sets {N} and {C}. Let us start with {C}. We can now analyse the individual elements of {C} ($\{\varnothing, 1_Z, 2_Z, 3_Z \ldots \infty_z\}$) in terms of their truth-values, as is standard practice for the cognitivist. So we can now look at 1_z and find its truth-value e.g. $_v(1_z) = 1$ (is true) or $_v(1_z) = 0$ (is false). We are then, given our findings, at the point where we can possibly apply a further

theory. For example, if the truth-values of all the elements contained within {C} come out as false, we can then head towards an error theory. If the inverse is true then we may head in the direction of some kind of Moral Naturalism or Realism. However, we need to consider the set {N} first. The coincidence of {N} with {C} in my view is not a contradiction and therefore the presence of one set does not rule out the other. The set {N} cannot be subject to further logical analysis, as the elements of the set do not express propositions. The fact that they do not express propositions means that their presence does not logically interfere with the propositions (cognitive elements) expressed in {C}. We can therefore just accept them as emotional expressions for the time being. The presence of {N} *is* important, however, for supplying us with motivational force.

4.2 The Modes of Aggregates

In having laid down the foundations of the theory and explicated the composition of moral aggregates, we now understand that there is always a multiplicity of meaning. This means that there are always elements from {N} being expressed as well as elements from {C}. Having posited this, I wonder if it must be, therefore, that at certain times each set {N} or {C} is expressed with a different degree of power or emphasis. Here the aggregate could be capable of functioning in different modes. The problem remains then to describe and quantify these modes, how they operate and why they change. It seems to me that modes ought to change in different situations. Given my above interpretation, we must now try to understand what a mode is and how it is manifested. That is, we need to understand how, depending on the situation, different sentiments might be expressed more strongly, or be more heavily weighted than others. It is possible that in some situations I might utter "*Murder is wrong*" expressing more strongly a non-cognitive or emotional sentiment. At other times the very same sentence might be used with a descriptive, factual or cognitive weighting. The meaning of the aggregate therefore needs to be determined from the context, and from the way in which it is used. It is this use that determines the mode of the aggregate. Of course, sentences are symbols and as such always carry at least some universal symbolic and definitive

meaning that exists more objectively, and utterances will take on an additional meaning externally as per the semantic externalist philosophy of meaning [71] [72]. However, in given situations these meanings can be employed in differing modes with a heavier emphasis on an {N} type element or a {C} type element. Might this be the reason why the Frege-Geach problem emerges as a hurdle for the non-cognitivist? They cannot explain away the logical inconsistency because their reading of the moral judgement (aggregate) is too rigid. Semantic theories must leave open room for the huge breadth of human expression. Humans are capable of expressing many complex varieties of things through myriad different modes and ways of expression. It seems implausible to state that there be only a binary possibility. It seems that context also needs to be examined. We must take into consideration the situation under which the sentence is said and the way in which it is used. It is however very difficult to do this in a rigorous and concise way. But to offer an example of how this must be necessarily the case, let us think about the use of sarcasm in language. In speech we often use sarcasm as a tool to imply a different or opposed meaning to the apparent meaning showing on the surface of the utterance. It is our hope that the interlocutor understands this sarcasm and so is not offended by our ironic statements. How do we imply and understand this sarcasm. It can be very hard to understand this sarcasm through written language as we are sometimes stripped of the situation and the context in which the sarcasm will be shown and are therefore in danger of taking the words literally. Is there a way to take this kind of implied meaning into account and develop a way of allowing for it, or at least describing it, in our interpretations? When taking a sentence and analysing it for its deep semantics in a standard way, how am I to understand if the sentence is sarcastic or not? This seems to me to be an impossible task. So, therefore how am I to give a correct account of its base meaning without knowing this fact?

To illustrate this point let us take an everyday example of sarcasm.

[71] "Externalism with regard to mental content says that in order to have certain types of intentional mental states (E.G. Beliefs), it is necessary to be related to the environment in the right way." Plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-externalism/

[72] Both Wittgensteinien and Externalist thought need to be considered here. Wittgenstein's later work needs to be considered as complimentary to this concept. See Philosophical Investigations, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

#1. He is an old man.
#2. He is an old man.

If I tell you that one of the two sentences above is sarcastic/ironic and that the other is sincere, how are you to tell the difference between to two when only looking at the surface form represented as it is above stripped of its context? The surface form of each sentence is the same but the meanings are polarised. One sentence describes something that is the case and the other describes something that is opposite to the actual case and is meant to be understood as such. The truth is, this is an impossible conundrum unless we have some situational context to draw upon in order to decipher the meanings.

If I add some context it becomes clearer:

1. Situation: A family are sitting together when the son stands up and announces that he feels stiffness in his spine. The father utters "*He is an old man*".

2. Two friends are talking about a third person whom the one knows but the other does not. The friend who knows the third person who is the topic of conversation says "*He is an old man*".

Now here I have tried not to give away too much obvious context however we can already see that with minimal background we are now in a better position in which to analyse the meaning of sentences #1 and #2. I think now that most people would infer that sentence #1 was sarcastic and sentence #2 was sincere. So if we were to describe these sentences in terms of Modes using our set theoretic notation as above we could write it as follows:

Let the set {S} be the set containing the statement "*He is an old man":*

$$\{S\} = \{\text{He is an old man [true], He is an old man [false]}\}$$

$$\{S\} = \{\{T\},\{F\}\}$$

2. Predicate Notation of {S}

$$\{S\}=\{x \mid x\text{: the statement “He is an old man”}\}$$

All members of **S have the property **x** such that **x** is the statement “He is an old man”.*

As above, {S} can be expressed with two distinct modes $\{S_t\}$, $\{S_f\}$. Here T,t and F,f standing for true (sincere) and False (sarcastic) respectively. Hence $\{S_f\}$ is the sentence “*He is very old”* when delivered with a sarcastic tone.

So here we have the two modes in which {S} can be expressed. It is important to note that we cannot analyse this statement {S} correctly if it is stripped of its context as in the first example given. It is also important to note that when {S} is expressed, both {T} and {F} are expressed simultaneously as they are both members of the set i.e on some level the sarcastic meaning and the sincere one are both understood and meant. However there will be one overriding polarity that will be explicitly understood and implied as the true meaning. Here I am trying to make not only the case that utterances can have distinct polarities but also the point about the removing of context from language as happens in logical analysis and furthermore I wish to show that this meaning assigns a polarity or mode to the statement analysed that, if not understood, may lead us astray in our analysis. I am reminded here of the difference between the *presence-at-hand* and the *ready-to-hand* of an object as expounded by Heidegger. Where language as a tool used in a natural way has presence-at-hand, it has a distinct existence of its own. When we subject the very same language to a methodological analysis it somehow loses this presence-at-hand and takes on a new existence as the ready-to-hand. Like when the hammer becomes ready-to-hand we see it as a construction of wood and steel,

when language becomes ready-to-hand, we see it as a syntactical composition comprised of grammatical forms.[73]

It is clear to see from this example that we cannot assign a truth-value to {S} before knowing the polarity. Once we know the polarity we can start to analyse the statement further.

Let us look now at a more relevant example and take once again our aggregate "Murder is wrong" ({Σ}).

As above, {Σ} can be expressed with two distinct modes $\{\Sigma_n\}$, $\{\Sigma_c\}$
Here *n* and *c* stand for non-cognitive and cognitive respectively. Hence $\{\Sigma_n\}$ is the aggregate "Murder is wrong*."* appearing in a non-cognitive mode.

Now let us do a similar experiment to the one above:

1. Murder is wrong.
2. Murder is wrong.

One of the above sentences has a cognitive mode and the other a non-cognitive one. How are we to tell which is which? We cannot do this as these two aggregates are appearing extra-contextually. We will then add some hypothetical situations:

1. A parent is patiently teaching their child some basic precepts about a non-descript religion (one of which is a prohibition on killing) and the child asks, "*Why should we not kill people?*" To which the parent answers calmly and confidently "*Murder is wrong."*

2. An altercation occurs between three acquaintances whereby one of the group becomes enraged about the actions of another member of the group. He seriously talks to the third member about his wish to kill the other friend at which the third party is shocked and instantly becomes worried about the

[73] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Harper Collins Publishers, New York) 2008.

future actions of their friend. The third person then quickly and indignantly issues the response "*Murder is wrong!"*

Now in light of the minimal context surrounding each example I think it would be easier to assign a mode or polarity to each one; statement #1 being cognitive $\{\Sigma_c\}$ and statement #2 being non-cognitive $\{\Sigma_n\}$. Again as stated above for the non-moral example, it is important to remember that both cognitive and non-cognitive elements are *always* being expressed simultaneously. It is the situation that determines the *mode* in which the aggregate is delivered. It seems that in situation #1 above, the parent is trying to describe to the child that there is a thing or property called wrongness and that the act of murder has this property, it is wrong when viewed from the religious point of view, it has wrongness in the eyes of God. It must therefore be given a cognitive reading. In situation #2, it seems like our interpretation must be a non-cognitive one as the third party is clearly trying to show their disapproval of their friends' intended actions it is clear here that the response is emotional. It may still be possible that they are describing the wrongness of the action but I fail to see how this reading could be considered first and foremost over the emotional one given the nature of the situation. Here it seems that *"Murder is wrong."* Is analogous to *"Boo to murder!"* or "*Don't Murder!".*

Following Wittgenstein, we should consider that the meaning of language is in its use, that is, the way in which it is employed. As with Wittgenstein's notion of a *language game,* this is the idea that a word gains its meaning through the way in which it is used in discourse as opposed to words having fixed or intrinsic meanings, they acquire differing meanings within different contexts. Building on the Wittgensteinian thesis that the meaning of language is determined by the way in which it is used or the *language game* in which the utterance is played. How are we to prove that meaning is determined by use? If we analyse simpler more idealised forms of language than English, such as the formal symbolic languages found in mathematics and science, we can understand this point more clearly. For example if I show you the sentence A - B and you are an arithmetician, you would most likely interpret the sentence as a basic algebraic equation (A minus B) and assert that A and B are placeholders for undisclosed numeric values. If, on the other

hand, a set theorist was to interpret the very same sentence, they would most likely conclude that it meant the compliment of B relative to A and that the symbols A and B were names of sets. But what is the *real* meaning? And how are we to find it? Assuming the sentence was expressed by a human, we might be correct to assert that there was a real meaning behind the sentence, in the sense that it was uttered with a specific purpose and the true meaning therefore being the intent of the speaker. But assuming now that this is just a series of marks spat out by a machine and unconnected with any human intent, wouldn't it be wrong to assert a true meaning? Here we could use this sentence as a tool to perform an operation in arithmetic or we could just as easily use it to perform an operation in set theory. Is it not clear here that the meaning of the sentence is imbued by the way in which the sentence is used? We could plausibly say that inherent to the sentence is the possibility of being interpreted in at least these two differing ways. Hence we now see more obviously the multiplicity of meaning condensed within the sentence. To say that it had only one true or definitive meaning would be to deny it the possibility of having any other interpretation or use, but this would be blatantly wrong. To posit, conversely, that it had no meaning would be to question the very concept of meaning itself almost to the point of undermining its own argument. We have to accept the possibility of meaning as read. Denying, doubting or questioning what linguistic meaning is would bring us dangerously close to denying ourselves the very tool which we would need to use to prove our argument: language. As I have mentioned above, I not only want to assert the multiplicity of meaning as inherent and necessary to utterances both internally and externally but I also want to draw attention to the fact that due to this multiplicity, our analytic methods must be revised. This is a concern that Wittgenstein had also expressed in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

> Reflections such as the preceding will show us the infinite variety of the functions of words in propositions, and it is curious to compare what we see in our examples with what we see in the ridged rules which logicians give for the construction of propositions.[74]

[74] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations, The Brown Book,* P187, (Harper Collins) 2009.

Summarising Condensation Theory

Condensation theory states that firstly, and most importantly, there are no extra-mental moral qualities but that humans sometimes feel as if there are and therefore, on occasion, try to explain things in terms of them. However, due to the fact that these imagined qualities do not exist, our statements are always in error. Furthermore, Condensation also posits that moral judgements are speech acts and being such have a multiplicity of meaning. It is for this reason that moral judgements are treated as aggregates which are the result of the human mental capacity to be able to express non-cognitive and cognitive sentiments through language simultaneously. This process is called condensation – it is the process of expressing a multitude of moral sentiments out into the world in the compressed syntactical form. From a technical and logical standpoint, this means that aggregates (moral judgements) are not fit for assessment in terms of truth and falsity until being expanded as they contain both truth-apt and non-truth-apt elements. Once the aggregate has been expanded to reveal the possible cognitive and possible non-cognitive elements, it would then, in theory, be possible to determine an overall mode of the aggregate by balancing the cognitive with the non-cognitive. The aggregate could then be found to have been expressed either with a predominantly cognitive or non-cognitive hue. This is called the mode of the aggregate. Is it plausible that fluctuating modes of aggregates might be able to describe the problem of perceived equivocation when moral utterances are expressed in un-asserted contexts?

What condensation means is that when we issue moral judgements (*aggregates*), we express emotions and non-cognitive ({N}) sentiments (*elements*), *and* are also, at the same time, endeavouring to explain the state of the world in terms of imagined moral properties, along with our beliefs regarding those properties using cognitive ({C}) elements. However, as this theory proposes that these moral properties do not exist, we always fail when trying to describe them and so when we find the cognitive element "Murder is wrong" inside a moral aggregate, it is false and also the element "Murder is right" also comes out as false, as with Mackie's error theory. Condensation Theory however, goes further by stating that the aggregate is

not at all assessable in terms of truth or falsity due to the fact that condensed into the aggregate are both factual/evaluative elements and emotional ones. We can call both the non-cognitive and cognitive elements expressed in a moral aggregate, *elements*. Expression here is not used in the emotional or subjective sense but should be seen as the *trying-to-convey* of information, emotions or feelings; when using language we are trying to communicate, transmit or express something whether it be descriptive or otherwise, we therefore label all possible meanings uncovered when expanding the aggregate, *elements of expression*. Expression, in the sense we must grasp here, is therefore what humans do when we use language, whether in moral discourse or otherwise. At base, this reading posits that, at times, we are trying to describe states of affairs using imagined moral predicates. However it does also allow for the necessary existence and presence of non-cognitive expressions within moral discourse, and furthermore, states that they may or may not be the main function of a moral utterance depending on the sense or mode in which the aggregate is expressed. The modes are indicated in our notation by the binary mode operators $\{\Sigma_n\}$ and $\{\Sigma_c\}$.

4.3 Possible Objections

My above reading of moral judgements as aggregates containing both cognitive and non-cognitive expressions will not sit easily with many current metaethical theories, except perhaps Mackie's form of error theory[75]. I therefore feel I should anticipate and briefly note some points of objection from existing metaethical schools of thought in the hope that it helps to clarify my above interpretation of moral judgements.

The Subjectivist Objection

Subjectivism says that when we issue moral judgements or statements we are not actually explaining or reporting something about the world but rather reporting and commenting on our own personal sentiments, for example "Murder is wrong!" is

[75] J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin Books) 1977.

always seen as in fact meaning something like "I disagree with the act of murder." So from the subjectivist point of view (as with most non-cognitivist readings of moral judgements) it is not possible at all to allow for any occurrence of descriptive or cognitive elements, as our theory allows. In this reading of ethical judgements, we are simply mislead by the surface form X=Y into thinking that it could be an attempt at describing the quality of a concrete thing or act.

The Projectivist Objection

Connected to the subjectivist interpretation, it seems that condensation is incompatible with expressivist and projectivist interpretations of moral judgements. Projectivists could object to this theory on account of the fact that it allows for moral descriptive language to be just *that*. Condensation interprets evaluative language as always being false but this is not enough for the projectivist, who denies even the possibility of descriptive expressions and cognitive propositions within moral discourse, due to them being simply emotions in disguise. It is not the case, in this view, that we are even trying to describe any kind of moral reality, whether it be true or false. Professor Simon Blackburn describes projection as follows:

> We project an attitude or habit or other commitment which is not descriptive onto the world, when we speak and think as though there were a property of things which our sayings describe, which we can reason about, know about, and be wrong about and so on. Projecting is what Hume refers to when he talks of 'gilding and staining all natural objects with the colours borrowed from internal sentiment', or of the mind 'spreading itself on the world'.[76]

To reiterate, the projectivist claims that all apparent attempts to describe moral properties are not even genuine attempts at all and therefore cannot be treated as such i.e we cannot subject them to logical analyses due to their non-propositional status. So, if the projectivist were to use our method of expansion above, I imagine

[76] Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word,* P170 (Oxford University Press) 1984.

they would therefore not allow the elements from the expanded form to be split into two sets ({N} and {C}) in the way that I have done above. They would instead place all of the elements into {N}, even if they had the surface form of a cognitive expression, and want to lose {C} altogether. This is an important difference, however it seems that projectivism would not conflict with the process or machinations of condensation itself as a cognitive process or fact of language. As mentioned above the multiplicity of meaning is not a novel idea and has been expounded by philosophers of language such as Austin and Searle in their work on speech acts, as well as ethicists. Blackburn, being a proponent of the projectivist reading, also accepts, acknowledges and makes reference to the multi-semantic function of utterances and accepts its presence when explaining projectivism. Blackburn makes his understanding of this linguistic feature explicit:

> "It is frequently pointed out that a term may occur in an utterance which is both a description of how things are *and* expresses an attitude…" [77]

In the remainder of this passage, Blackburn almost gives us the possibility of this sort of descriptive moral language which projectivism attempts to deny. Blackburn continues:

> …If I say that there is a bull in the next field I may be threatening you, or warning you, or expressing timidity, or challenging you to cross, or doing any of a range of other things and expressing any of a range of subtle attitudes and emotions. But none of these things has any bearing on the meaning or content of my remark which is true or false in a determinate range of circumstances, and is a paradigm of a saying with a truth-condition. But it would be wrong to infer that no description is given from the fact that an attitude is also expressed. However this fallacy need not be committed. First of all, an expressive theory should not infer that the attitude gives the role of the saying from the fact that it is expressed when the saying is made. So long as the attitude may give the role, the argument for saying that it

[77] Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word,* P169 (Oxford University Press) 1984.

> does is the superior explanation of the commitments which we then arrive at. There is no inference of the form "this attitude is expressed, so these remarks have no truth conditions' but only "this attitude is expressed." If we see the remark as having no truth conditions, the philosophy improves so let us see the remark as expressive rather than descriptive. There is no fallacy here. And there is a second point. We can see that it does not matter at all if an utterance is evaluative as well as descriptive, provided that its distinctive meaning is expressive. It is the extra import making the term evaluative as well as descriptive which must be given an expressive role. It is only if that involves an extra truth-condition that expressivism about values is impugned.[78]

This quote seems to describe how to avoid the charge of committing the descriptive fallacy. Blackburn is careful to use the non-moral example of a bull in a field but this seems not to fully cover the conceptual difference. It appears here that Blackburn allows for (at least non moral expressions) to be aggregates of both descriptive and emotional content as we do with our 'condesationist' reading. It is also apparent from the above passage, although the use of a non-moral example is employed, that Blackburn must be making reference to moral judgements and utterances *as well as* the non-moral ones. This must of course be the case as if he were not also referring to moral statements, what would be the purpose of this passage? It would not carry much argumentative weight unless it also purported to describe moral utterances. It is clear that expressivism does not deny the existence of such descriptive language within other (non-ethical) domains, but this extract seems to serve as a rebuttal against an attack on his theory or other expressivist and projectivist theories, that they commit a descriptive fallacy or speech-act fallacy. Hence we must understand, and it is paramount for his argument to have any force, that he must also be talking about moral judgements and the way that they are elucidated within the non-cognitive, or more specifically, the projectivist framework. In doing so is he not allowing (as I do) for the possibility of actually descriptive, not merely projected, language within moral discourse, even if its truth-value would always come out as false? Blackburn's reason for deciding that the

[78] Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, P169 (Oxford University Press) 1984.

main or active role of the remark is "expressive rather than descriptive"[79] is simply one of philosophical solvency. He explains that the expressive function should be assumed over the descriptive one because then we are relieved of the metaphysical and epistemological debts of cognitivism. At this point we might ask: What is the weight of the metaphysical and epistemological debt of projectivism? It does look as though projectivism earns the right to claim a higher degree of theoretical solvency over and above at least any form of strong cognitivism if not all forms of cognitivism (aside from Mackie's Error Theory which could feasibly claim the highest degree of philosophical economy[80]) but whether or not it is a solid contender amongst other non-cognitivist theories in this respect is unsure and open to argument. An in-depth analysis is needed here however this is beyond the scope of the current piece of work. I bring this point up as a point of interest and it is indeed worth considering. After this brief analysis it is unsure whether the projectivist, or at least the quasi-realist, would be able to legitimately reject our interpretation on the grounds that descriptive moral language is merely an illusion.

Objection from Cognitivism

It is of course very clear that any kind of strong cognitivism that makes claims about externally existing moral qualities or absolute morality is totally at odds with my proposed reading of moral judgements. My foundational dismissal of the existence of extra-mental moral qualities makes it impossible to reconcile any form of strong cognitivism about morality with my theory. However, if we consider weak cognitivisms which make only the logical claim that moral judgements are truth-apt then such theories may be reconcilable with ours as our logical claim is that certain moral elements, as opposed to judgements/aggregates, are truth-apt.

Let us now summarise the foundational claims made by our theory of condensation and lay forth a well-defined and concise outline of moral judgements. Let us do this by first outlining and tracking our argument from the beginning:

[79] Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word*, P169 (Oxford University Press) 1984.
[80] J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin Books) 1977.

- I started with and elucidated the hypothesis that conscious moral reasoning is not an innate, reactionary process and therefore plays little or no part in the *typical*, *everyday* formation of *moral judgements.* I speculated that as humans we feel intuitively that our making of moral judgements is reasoned due to a post-judgement justification process that is *ex post facto*.

- I then argued that it is therefore, also *not* the case that human beings use established ethical rules or moral codes as matrices or frameworks when making moral judgements. I thought it probable that most self-respecting people would disagree and furthermore be able to explain, *post hoc propter hoc*, the reasons for their judgements, citing these supposed moral codes as the blueprints upon which they make their judgements and guide their actions.

- I then rejected cognitivism on account of its implausibility and its unpayable metaphysical debt thus ruling out any forms of hard cognitivism that postulate the existence of objective and mind-independent moral facts, qualities or entities.

- I asserted that moral judgements must express *both* non-cognitive, emotional content and simultaneously also be attempting to describe some imagined objective moral reality.

- As this objective moral reality was deemed non-existent by falling short of empirical status, our attempts to describe it always fail and our moral judgements are subsequently in error, or false.

- Therefore, we asserted that: moral utterances are necessarily *both* weakly cognitive *and* non-cognitive in nature as they not *only* express emotional and personal subjective states but also simultaneously express and, attempt to describe the world in terms of objective moral facts or properties. However, due to the fact that these objective properties are fallacious, the descriptions

always lead to error and are therefore neither truth-apt nor empirically testable.

- Subsequently, we have developed a more refined definition of what a moral judgement is and how it is constructed which states that:

  1.) A moral judgement is an illocutionary speech act expressed in an imperative form X=Y that contains or prescribes moral content, actions or symbols.

  2.) Moral judgements, being speech acts, are comprised of condensed cognitive sentiments and express both cognitive and non-cognitive elements necessarily.

  3.) We therefore call moral judgements 'moral aggregates'. Moral aggregates are not analysable in terms of truth and falsity; they have no truth conditions.

  4.) Moral aggregates must be expanded and analysed in terms of their possible meanings. These possible meanings will form two bodies of elements; one cognitive and the other expressive.

  5.) The overdetermined nature of the moral aggregate gives a Humean motivational force behind the issuing of the moral judgement by supplying both subjective desire and concrete (all be it mistaken) belief that the desire or emotional reaction is founded on an objective truth about the world, i.e. that there are universal moral truths. The total balance of these cognitive and non-cognitive elements gives the possible mode of the aggregate.

It remains to be seen if such a reading of moral judgements as I have outlined above would indeed have any real explanatory use or efficacy. So far I also have still not offered an explanation as to how it is possible for humans to believe in the first instance that there are moral qualities, when, in fact, there aren't any. So, as we

move on to the next chapter, a few questions come to mind: Could construing moral language in this manner give us a tool with which to prise open or tackle any of the deeper questions in the field meta-ethics, or even general moral thought? Is it useful? And, more specifically, can a reading such as this shed any light on the use of ethical language in un-asserted contexts? In the following chapter I will examine how a reading like this might help to tackle the aforementioned issue of un-asserted contexts and the hurdle that expressivist theories face when trying to explain valid *modus ponens* inference with moral language.

5.

Explaining Unasserted Contexts

In the previous chapters I have endeavoured to lay forth and explicate a metaethical theory of a hybrid form[81] which asserts that moral judgements are speech acts expressing both cognitive/descriptive and emotional or expressive elements necessarily. This reading of moral judgements appears to be a plausible thesis which, above all, avoids the charge of committing the so called *speech act fallacy* and manages to, more effectively, account for the full possibility of human expression as it is manifested through our language and in our speech acts. These linguistic expressions or propositions which we have been analysing and endeavouring to expound are, as Professor Simon Blackburn puts it, just:

> "counters in our transactions with our values, just as a piece of money is a counter in financial transactions. To understand the value of a piece of money it is no good staring at it. It is necessary to understand the process of human economic behaviour. You need to approach the token not with a microscope or a scalpel, but with an eye for large patterns of human interactions. Similarly, to understand the ethical proposition, it is no good looking for a 'concept' or 'truth condition'. We need the same eye for whole processes of human action and interaction. We need synthesis, not analysis."[82]

In line with this thought from Blackburn, I will briefly touch on one more analytical concern which needs to be addressed and in doing so I will also be plotting my

[81] There are examples of other hybrid theories of which I was initially unaware. My theory thus has a resemblance to these but differs technically and I must therefore make clear that any resemblance is contingent and accidental and hybrid theories have not had any explicit influence on my work up until this point. A broad definition of metaethical hybrid theories can be found here: https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/metaethical-theories-hybrid/v-1/sections/hybrid-expressivism.

[82] Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford University Press) 1998.

route back and preparing for a climb up from the deep and formal world of the metaethical to the more immediate and accessible world of the normative. In fact, I do agree to some extent with Blackburn's afore-quoted analogy – but not wholly. I believe, as Wittgenstein also did, that the meaning of language is to be found in the way in which it is used. But I also think that words and sentences, like counters, perhaps on a chessboard, come in a variety of shapes and forms which are indeed indicative of their functions and that these functions are in-turn indicative of the cognitive rules which give rise to, and allow for, the *language game* to be played in the way in which it is. We therefore cannot rule-out or deny the need for logical analysis of words and sentence forms themselves. The game in which the pieces are used, of course, could not be played if the pieces did not take the form they do. It is also possible that the form of the pieces reflects back or is redoubled into the way in which the game is played.

Earlier in this work, I briefly alluded to the infamous Frege-Geach Problem. This notoriously difficult situation arises inevitably with any metaethical theory which asserts the non-cognitive nature of moral discourse. It is therefore an obstacle which I am also destined to confront. So, before I move on, let us sum up and outline the problem with a quote from Mark Schroeder:

> The problem is *very big*, because for every complex-sentence-forming construction in natural languages, sentences formed using that construction using moral terms like 'good' have the same sort of semantic properties as sentences formed using that construction using ordinary descriptive terms like 'green'. This is true not only for questions, negations and conditionals but also for quantifiers, modals, tense, attitude-verbs, generics, adverbs of quantification, intensifying adverbs like 'very', and so on. Noncognitivists believe that moral terms have a different kind of semantics than ordinary descriptive terms, but somehow every complex-sentence-forming construction manages to do exactly the same sort of things with them that it does with ordinary descriptive terms.
>
> This is the new shape of the Frege-Geach Problem, and it is the one that noncognitivists have been trying to address since Hare. The problem is to construct a compositional semantics for natural languages which makes complex moral sentences and complex descriptive sentences turn out to have the same kind of

> semantic properties – and the right kind of semantic properties – even though moral and descriptive terms really have two quite different kinds of meaning.[83]

This, put simply, is the problem of not being able to account for logical inferences in the form of *modus ponens* argument when using a non-cognitive reading of moral judgements. It is rightly pointed out (Originally by Peter Geach 1965[84]) that if an ethical judgement is construed as being non-cognitive then ethical markers must in fact carry different meanings in un-asserted or embedded contexts. This of course means that a valid logical inference made by a *modus ponens* argument appears not to work. This is due to the ethical terms not carrying a uniform semantics with their use and therefore lacking compositionality. It is important to note of course that moral *modus ponens* inferences *are* valid when moral language is given a standard cognitive reading, as the ethical symbols appearing with both asserted and embedded contexts carry the same uniform semantic function.

The root of the problem is therefore the semantic interpretation of ethical language. When we interpret moral judgements as non-cognitive we come up against the fact that we are no longer able to make valid inferences in this manner. This invalidates the use of moral *modus ponens* arguments through a fallacy of equivocation due to the fact that the moral phrase has a different meaning when appearing in an unasserted context. However, the cognitivist does not run into this logical problem as moral terms are interpreted as having a fixed semantics that is indeed compositional in the way that other language is. So, now we should consider how our new hybrid reading stands in relation to this problem. One answer could be that when a proposition is used in this form of logical argument, it needs to be read as expressing only the one set of elements, namely {C}. This would mean that there is no fallacy of equivocation due the fact that the meaning stays the same in asserted as well as unasserted contexts. This however seems a little cheap and certainly not one hundred percent satisfactory. So, let us now examine this in a little more depth.

[83] Mark Schroeder, *What is the Frege-Geach Problem?*, Philosophy Compass 3/4 (Blackwell Publishing) 2008.
[84] Peter Geach, *Assertion,* (Philosophical Review) 1965.

5.1 A Condensationist Reading of Moral Modus Ponens Inferences

It seems to me that having a multilevel semantics for moral language, far from posing an obstacle, gives us a rather promising insight into the imbedded contexts problem. It seems that we might even be able to overcome or bypass the problem encountered by non-cognitivism when inferring from *modus ponens* arguments. However, there is no doubt that this is a formidable obstacle and I will briefly reiterate it for clarity before I endeavour to construct the condensationist argument. This will help to pinpoint our target in preparation for my explanation. Our task is summed up quite succinctly in the following passage by Mark Von Roojen:

> "This kind of [cognitivist] story makes it no mystery how speakers can understand novel constructions and use them to think thoughts they might not previously have entertained. The story employs the compositionality of our language – the fact that the meaning of complex sentences are a function of the meanings of the parts – to explain an ability we obviously have. It would be handy if noncognitivists could offer a parallel story. For they too owe us an account of the meanings of more complex sentences and one that explains how we can be competent with such sentences given our knowledge of their components. Compositional theories typically require the meaning of embedded expressions to retain a constant meaning even while embedded so that this meaning can contribute to the meaning of the whole. That is why ordinary speakers are able to compute the meanings of complex sentences once they know the meanings of the parts. The meanings of the complex sentences are a function of the meanings of their parts. Typical noncognitive proposals for simple indicative sentences complicate the task of producing a compositional semantics for a language containing moral terms. One problem is just that moral predicates don't retain the features used by many noncognitivists to indicate their meanings when they are embedded in more complex constructions. "[85]

I posit that if, when we utter moral judgements, we are always necessarily expressing both cognitive and non-cognitive attitudes simultaneously, then all of

[85] Mark Van Roojen, *Metaethics: A Contemporary Introduction*, Page 148 (Routledge Press) 2015.

these layers are necessarily "meant" simultaneously on some level, this is indeed paramount to my above reading. This fact means that although they are in error, there *are* indeed cognitive descriptions which are also expressed. Hence the argument from *modus ponens,* as mentioned above retains its compositionality and works just as it does with a cognitivist reading of ethical statements. But, of course, there comes some additional meaning in the form of expressive material that features alongside the descriptive. We can therefore always run with a cognitive reading of *modus ponens* arguments as there is always a descriptive and compositional reading available to us. The additional expressive or emotional material is understood to be always appearing alongside, of course. This might be why non-cognitive readings of such arguments may appear, intuitively, as if the moral *modus ponens* works. This is because it *does* indeed work, but at a certain level. Is it possible that we simultaneously understand the multi-semantic nature of moral utterances, that we are able to be almost malleable with our interpretation. This might be seen as a case of having ones philosophical cake *and* eating it but it does seem to work. To reiterate, with this multilevel semantic theory, the semantics are uniform throughout language (they are always multi-levelled) whether being used in an asserted or unasserted/embedded context – there is always a condensed and multi-layered bulk of material expressed. Therefore, as other hybrid theories have noted, the *modus ponens* reading is, in reality, of the following form:

P1: *Murder is wrong* and **boo to murder!**

P2: If murder is wrong then getting your brother to *murder is wrong* and **boo to murder!**

C: Therefore getting your brother to *murder is wrong* and **boo to murder!**

Remember from our reading that "Murder is wrong" contains both descriptive and emotive sentiments and so could be very simply expanded into the form [*Murder is wrong* and **Boo to murder**] where the italicised phrases represent the descriptive content and the emboldened ones represent non-cognitive or emotional ones.

In fact, we could even reproduce this in a further expanded form, using the method which I have introduced and developed in the previous chapter, to reveal all plausible cognitive and non-cognitive elements in each moral aggregate. Conditionals of the form "if X, then Y." are still to be viewed as moral aggregates following our conventions and definitions from the previous chapter. This very simple hybrid model follows naturally on from our assertions about the multi-semantic make up of moral aggregates and has indeed been proposed as a plausible reading by others. In his contemporary introduction to metaethics, Mark Van Roojen Constructs a model almost identical to this which was developed from hybrid expressivist frameworks of Boisvert (2008) Hay (2013) and Barker (2000). As Van Roojen concedes:

> This looks pretty good as an explanation of the validity of the argument. The representational/descriptive part of the conclusion follows from the premises by modus ponens, and the expressive part follows from either of the two premises.[86]

However satisfactory the above model seems there is still something about this problem of inference by *modus ponens* that in intrigues me and I feel intuitively as if we might not be getting to the root of the problem yet. I therefore want to briefly explore some other interpretations before drawing a line under this chapter. Let us step back a little and take a look at how Simon Blackburn perceives things from a quasi-realist perspective.

Blackburn's quasi-realist approach to this problem is to assert that the meanings and functions of connectives such as '*and*' and conditionals such as *'if*' are ambiguous and that we should therefore refine our understanding of the structures in which they appear. Blackburn constructs an idealised form of English which he calls "Eex" that he hopes will unveil the underlying semantics which lay hidden beneath the surface form of the everyday Standard English grammar.[87]

Following on from Blackburn, I feel that the construction of a meta-language might be a necessary task to complete in order to understand what is really happening in ethical language such as this. Firstly, I propose that our now very

[86] Mark Van Roojen, *Metaethics: A Contemporary Introduction*, Page 148 (Routledge Press) 2015.
[87] Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word,* P169 (Oxford University Press) 1984.

familiar linguistic construction of "Murder is wrong", when taken and analysed at face value, is far too simplistic to be able to account for all the possibilities of its use and its semantic functions within everyday natural ethical assertions. As I have explicated with my theory of condensation, the moral judgement is overdetermined and therefore has multiple functionality and meaning. Therefore, a judgement like this is expressing a lot more than it appears to be at first glance, and has as a part of its being a wide multiplicity of meaning. My question is, how can we know what we are analysing when working with a black and white, printed sentence such as this, removed, as it is, from a human subject and a real-world context.

In order to more clearly explain my concern, let us for a moment go back to the root of this problem. We should go back to Frege's interpretation of *Judgements* and *Truth-Values*. I think it is important that we understand Frege's definition of '*reference*' before we move on. In *On Sense and Reference*, Gottlob Frege says "A judgement, for me, is not the mere comprehension of a thought, but the admission of its truth".[88] Furthermore, In Frege's semantic theory, he says that the reference of a sentence is its truth-value. All true sentences (propositions) therefore have the same reference, and, following from this fact, all false sentences (non-propositional) share the same reference also. So if we were to use Frege's definition, we would have to admit that the sentence "*Murder is wrong."* Has a different reference to "*I believe that murder is wrong."* the former being, technically, truth-apt and the latter, certainly not. Indeed the former seems to be aiming at something concrete and the latter a comment on or expression of a personally held idea, belief or concept. This is a small but very important stipulation. Frege shows us that the subordinate clause "I believe that…" changes the reference of the sentence from a concrete thing which has a truth-value to a notion or idea which does not. Accordingly, the former then would be classed as a proposition, as its reference is a truth-value and the latter, not. Now with this definition in-hand I want to pose a question: When the sentence "Murder is wrong" is uttered, how can we know that the *intended* meaning is not "I believe that murder is wrong"? In other words, how can we be absolutely certain that the utterer is not simply cutting the sentence short but intending to express their opinion of belief? This also affects the cognitive reading of the utterance. Cognitivism does not state that humans cannot give

[88] Gottlob Frege, *On Sense and Reference,* 1892.

opinions about morality in this way but in the general cognitivist readings of the moral *modus ponens* argument, cognitivists assume the sentence "Murder is wrong" is equivalent semantically to "Grass is green" So therefore the cognitivist is making an assumption to start with. Just because it is possible to be describing a moral quality, does not necessarily mean that when I utter a judgement such as this I *am* describing that particular moral quality and not conversely implying that *I believe* it is so.

This appears to reveal a problem with the semantic analysis of sentences in this idealised way. With this question raised, how are we to be certain that the subject is expressing a judgement (by the Fregean definition) or not; how do we know what the intended reference of the sentence is? In the first phrase, the reference is an abstract noun and in the second, a belief. But in common parlance the speaker may be intending to reference their belief about murder while uttering the sentence without including the subordinate clause but nevertheless implying it. The analysis, in this case, would come out as flawed. I believe this to be a problem for cognitivist readings. It is not however for my above explicated interpretation of moral judgements as the reading includes a wider, multi-semantic function of moral terms and asserts this as a necessary fact of moral language. Hence, the answer to the above question is that: When we utter "Murder is wrong" we necessarily mean "I believe that murder is wrong" and "murder is wrong" simultaneously. However, in response to this difficulty, we could ask: are we justified in widening our definition of a judgement to include both above-mentioned examples as 'judgements'? If we keep to the narrower, Fregean, definition of a judgement we see that "murder is wrong" Comes out in our analysis as a truth-apt proposition and therefore we have given it, by default, a cognitive analysis, and, of course, "*I believe that* murder is wrong." Comes out as non-propositional or non-truth-apt. With our wider definition of the 'judgement', we can allow every judgement to be both cognitive and non-cognitive simultaneously or rather, by way of analogy, it can be seen to exist in a state similar to that of quantum superposition, whereby until the judgement has been measured, it is both truth-apt and non-truth-apt simultaneously. The correct interpretation is similar to the collapsing of the wave function and the polarity is therefore determined and fixed based on the measurement itself this is what I mean by *modes of ageregates*. In doing this we avoid

the problem presented by the above question. It is now irrelevant to ask if the speaker, in saying "murder is wrong" really means, "*I believe that* murder is wrong." as we are already assuming that the speaker means/is expressing both concurrently. Hence, we can call *any* assertion or assessment of the moral standing of an action, regardless of its grammatical form, not a judgement but an aggregate, and any given aggregate expresses both truth-apt *and* non-truth-apt statements necessarily. As I see it, there stands a challenge to cognitivism and it can be expressed in the following question: How can it be certain that when we utter a moral judgement such as "Murder is wrong" we do not implicitly mean "I believe that, murder is wrong"?

5.2 Constructing a Meta Language

Briefly, I want to offer an analysis of this form of moral argument based on my interpretation of ethical language. Here I am not asserting anything positive but rather expressing my doubts about how well we can analyse the semantics of moral utterances. The following is the attempt to find the implicit or meta-language that is expressed alongside moral judgements. In the following analysis the symbols [ ] and { } denote the meta-language and the action to which the judgement is referring respectively. So that, for example:

- *[I believe that…]* represents the meta-language that is implicitly meant but not vocalised.

And

- {*murder*} represents the action of murder (assuming that 'murder' is meant as a verb).

So now let us look at the argument again with the meta-language included.

P1: [I believe that]{[the action of] **Murder**[ing a person]} **is wrong**.

P2: If {[one believes that] [the action of] **murder**} **is wrong,** [one must also believe that] {[the action of] **making your brother commit** [the action of] **murder**} **is wrong**.

C: {[The action of] **Getting your brother to commit** [the action of] **murder**} **is wrong**.

Note that if P1 is referring to an action whereby murder is uttered as a verb, then there is no equivocation. The two separate actions viz. murdering someone and making a third party murder someone are different actions. This argument also appears to work as it seems acceptable that if someone believes the action of committing murder to be wrong then it follows that they would probably judge the action of making another person commit that same act as wrong too.

Let us take an example of a non-moral *modus ponens* argument as follows:

P1: Fruit is healthy.

P2: If eating fruit is healthy, then getting your brother to eat fruit is healthy.

C: Getting your brother to eat fruit is healthy.

So of course, due to the non-moral nature of the above argument, it must firstly be given a cognitive reading whereby it is asserted that in P1 the utterer is predicating of fruit the property of healthiness. This property is reducible to natural qualities that are subject to empirical investigation such as containing vitamins and minerals which the human body needs to function. But even though this reading should give us a correct inference, there is something strange about it. Let us tease it apart by reproducing it with some plausible meta-language and I will also add some relevant questions alongside each part of the argument.

P1: [Eating] **Fruit is healthy**.
(Fruit has the property of healthiness? or the eating of fruit is a health action?)

P2: **If** [eating] **fruit is healthy, then** [the action of **getting your brother to eat fruit] is** also a **healthy** action.

C: [The action of] **Getting your brother to eat fruit] is healthy**.
(Healthy for whom?)

It is easier now to see this example as vague or incorrect. The error occurs if we first read 'fruit' as a noun in P1 and then conversely in P2 we understand 'fruit' as 'eating fruit' as part of a verb phase. The *modus ponens* argument may be going amiss not because it simply equivocates on the meaning of a word but because it is inconsistent in its use of nouns and verbs. In P1 we instinctively and initially read it as a sentence describing the quality of a noun. P2 however does not mention the quality of a noun at all but, instead describes the action of encouraging someone eat fruit. The argument is then assuming a causal and necessary link between the quality or property of an object and the quality or property of an act, which is incorrect.

Take the conditional:

"If eating fruit is healthy, getting your brother to eat fruit is healthy."

If we accept the antecedent part of this conditional only, we are agreeing with the assertion that the action of eating fruit is good for one's health. If we accept the consequent only, we are agreeing that the action of getting your brother to eat fruit is a healthy one. If we accept the whole proposition we are agreeing with the assertion that: Eating fruit has certain health benefits and therefore as a necessary consequence of these health benefits, the action of making another person eat fruit also has health benefits, as if the healthiness of the fruit makes, the action of encouraging a third party to eat fruit a healthy one.

So to come back to my question: How can we be sure that same thing is not happening with the moral argument? Or indeed any argument made by *modus ponens*? This is not the end of the problem however. It might help us to see how, when uttering moral judgements of the preceding form; we might not be trying to describe the quality of something as wrong but our attitude towards the action. It seems that there may be a meta-language that is part of the meaning but not part of the structure; it just gets cut out from the surface form. This is important as when uttering "Murder is wrong", we have a large variety of possible interpretations including, at least, the following:

I. The action of murder is wrong. *(Propositional verb phrase)*

II. I believe that the action of murder is wrong. *(Non-propositional verb phrase)*

III. Murder has the property of wrongness. *(Propositional, murder as a noun – the concept of murder)*

IV. I believe that murder has the property of wrongness. *(Non-propositional, murder as a noun– the concept of murder)*

As mentioned above, this difference would change our interpretation, for if the statements **I** or **III** above were meant, it does indeed seem that we are trying to describe the moral quality of the abstract noun 'murder'. This reading leans towards a cognitive analysis. However, in **II** and **IV** the sentence structure is less likely to lead us into this kind of analysis as the grammar of the utterance seems to express a belief or personally held opinion regarding an action and therefore would lend itself more to an expressive reading.

A Note on Assent

J. H. Newman had some interesting notions about the nature of assent and how we hold different kinds of belief and how we actually assent to ideas. Newman proposed that there were different kinds of assent to propositions. In his work *An*

Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent, he attempts to describe and develop a full taxonomy of these varying degrees of assent to a proposition.

> "It is human nature to be more affected by the concrete than by the abstract; it may be the converse with other beings. The apprehension, then, may be as fairly said to possess the force which acts upon us, as the object apprehended."[89]

> " Next passing on to assent, I observe that it is this variation in the mind's apprehension of an object to which it assents and not any incompleteness in the assent itself, which leads us to speak of strong and weak assents, as if Assent itself admitted of degrees."

Following Newman's thoughts, if murder were a noun, how could the proposition 'Murder is wrong' possibly be authentically assented to? It, according to J. H. Newman, is, at best, a *notional assent,* as opposed to a *real assent,* as it is only an assent to a notion and not a really existing thing, which we may grasp beyond all doubt.

In the above example, it is therefore the *notion* that 'murder is wrong' is true, that is being assented to and not the wrongness of murder as this cannot be authentically assented to because it describes something that cannot be experienced by the senses. As Newman goes on to explain, this kind of assent (the notional kind) is dubious and we may wonder as to whether it is really assent at all, and may simply need to be classified as inference. If this is the case, how sure can we be of the wrongness of murder, even if wrongness and murder are objective and mind-independent notions? Even if it were an objectively existing quality, how would we go about measuring, experiencing or knowing wrongness? Let us use a question from Ayer. What evidence could we possible take to be proof that murder is wrong? What could one show us that would lead us to be sure, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that murder is wrong (in the descriptive sense that murder has the property of wrongness)? What I mean to say is that even if the proposition 'murder is wrong' is true, how could we know or track its truth? How could we obtain that knowledge and not be correct merely contingently or coincidentally? The correctness of the

[89] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 1870.

statement is irrelevant to the question here. The problem is how we could obtain that knowledge.

Above I point out a possible problem for cognitivism and non-cognitivism alike. The problem is this: how plausible is it that we can be *certain* there is no hidden meta-language, or meaning, that is not expressed through the surface grammar or form of the sentence uttered? And, furthermore, how can we even be certain that, in this case, 'murder' is a verb or a noun? This seemingly trivial uncertainty changes the logic and semantics of moral utterances in very fundamental ways.

I am not here asserting that there is *in fact* a meta or hidden meaning (although I think it true and necessary) but I simply wish to point out that the cognitivist needs to be certain that there *is not* a meta-language present. If the cognitivist claims he can assume the absence of such a meta-language then, of course, he needs to be ready to defend himself against the claim of the speech-act fallacy.

Hence, I would be tempted to say that we should not use the sentence "murder is wrong", or indeed any other sentences like it, due to their ambiguity, in a valid *modus ponens* inference, this is the first point.

5.3 Assenting to Conditionals

My concluding point for this section is about the acceptance, or assent to, of conditionals such as the statement we see in P2 above. This said, I now want pose a question that will not only undermine the general cognitivist reading of embedded contexts but also my own above explanation, along with other hybrid theories. So, let us offer a possibly controversial question: To what extent are we sure that the cognitivist interpretation of moral *modus ponens* inference itself actually works for moral utterances? This question is based on my claim that a moral conditional in the form of "If X, then Y" is not something that can realistically be accepted or assented to. *Modus ponens* inference relies on the acceptance of P2 which is a counterfactual or conditional. The acceptance of P2 is the acceptance of a causality or necessary connection that exists between the consequent and the antecedent. If we accept 'if p then q' we are assuming that p necessarily gives rise to q. But, on what grounds can we accept the moral conditional P2? How, for example, can it

follow logically that "*If murder is wrong, then getting someone else to murder a person is wrong.*"? We are equating two separate acts here and although they might both be "wrong" by most people's standards, are they the same kind of wrong? Just because in a cognitivist reading we do not have a case of equivocation of terms, this does not necessarily mean that the argument follows. The difficulty lies not in the words used *per se* but rather on the kind of wrongness to which the word 'wrong' refers? Must there not be varying degrees of wrongness? Lying might be wrong and so could murder. We do not however view both actions as having a "wrongness" of equal severity. It is my opinion that this conditional is misleading. The difference in severity might only be tiny in this case. The act of getting someone to commit murder is wrong and so is committing murder, however they are not the same act.

It is acceptable to ask "*Is murder a more or less morally base act than that of persuading someone to murder?*". Rather like Moore's open question argument, the fact that this question can be asked, understood and deliberated over, leads one to think that they are two different actions with two differing degrees of wrongness. If there *is* an extra mental property called wrongness then to accept a conditional like this is to give a single and absolute reading of wrongness. This might be found out to be the truth of the matter, but if we accept *this* as truth we have to face some very disturbing consequences like the coming to terms with the fact that genocide and self-defensive manslaughter are equally wrongful acts. I think that most people would not want to allow for a reading such as this.

6.

Conclusion

It is my hope that this work has been able to offer a complete and coherent explanation of moral judgements and their meaning from a new point of view, and if I have been unsuccessful in my endeavours, then I hope that at least I will have posed some relevant and novel questions. In this final and concluding chapter I will reiterate my argument in as succinct a fashion as possible whilst still trying to capture adequate detail and technicality as is necessary for the argument to be coherent and to have any argumentative force. First I want to very briefly examine my theory as a theory in itself and try to pinpoint this 'condensationist' reading on the landscape of metaethical thought. We should describe it broadly as a Humean hybrid theory. This mainly comes from the fact that the thesis holds to a Humean ideal about belief and desire and how they give motivational force. Let us remember that for Hume *"reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will"*[90]. As the Humean theory of motivation says that a belief alone is insufficient to cause the subject to act and requires therefore the presence of a desire-based cognitive state. My view holds that the issuing of a moral judgement is a speech act and therefore requires both a belief and a desire for it to manifest. Both desire-based and belief-based components are not only present in the cognitive states that cause the speech-act but are also identifiable, I have shown, in the contents of moral utterance itself i.e. there are both cognitive elements expressed which are the product of a mistaken belief in an objective morality and non-cognitive or emotive elements which are the residue of an emotional desire to assert ones beliefs, or to comment on, undermine, agree with or relate to the moral beliefs of others. This

[90] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* (Oxford, Clarendon Press) 1896. (Source: http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/hume-a-treatise-of-human-nature)

want to express moral emotion, I believe, is part of identifying and is a natural human desire and defines us as social beings.

Now, let us move on and plot the structure of the work. I will now reiterate and summarise the foundational claims which I have made with my theory of moral judgements, and give a well-defined and concise definition of moral judgements as described by my reading. Let us first outline and track the development of my argument from the beginning, as above:

- As a foundational claim, I started with and elucidated the hypothesis that conscious moral reasoning was not an innate, reactionary process and that it therefore reasoning plays little or no part in the typical, everyday formation of moral judgements. I speculated that as humans we felt intuitively that our forming of moral judgements was reasoned due to a post-judgement justification process that is *ex post facto*.

- I then argued that it is therefore, also not the case that human beings use established ethical rules or moral codes as matrices or frameworks when making moral judgements. I thought it probable that most self-respecting people would disagree and furthermore be able to explain, *post hoc propter hoc*, the reasons for their judgements, citing these supposed moral codes as the blueprints upon which they make their judgements and guide their actions.

- I then rejected cognitivism on account of its implausibility and its unpayable metaphysical debt, thus ruling out any forms of hard cognitivism that postulate the existence of objective and mind-independent moral facts, qualities or entities.

- I subsequently asserted that moral judgements must necessarily express both non-cognitive, emotional content and simultaneously also be attempting to describe some imagined objective moral reality (cognitive expression).

- As this objective moral reality was deemed non-existent by falling short of empirical status, our attempts to describe it always fail and our moral judgements are subsequently in error, or false.

- Therefore, I asserted that: moral utterances must necessarily be both weakly cognitive and non-cognitive in nature as not only do they express emotional and personally subjective states but also simultaneously, attempt to describe the world in terms of, objective moral facts or properties. However, due to the fact that these objective properties are fallacious, the descriptions always lead to error and therefore moral judgements (aggregates) must be viewed as neither truth-apt nor empirically testable propositions of logic.

- Subsequently, we have developed a more refined definition of what a moral judgement is and how it is constructed which describes moral judgements more correctly as: *aggregates of both cognitive and non-cognitive elements.*

So let us now look at the main form of my theory and its foundational premises. Firstly I make the following assertions:

1.) A moral judgement is an illocutionary speech act expressed in an imperative form X=Y that contains or prescribes moral content, actions or symbols.

2.) Moral judgements, being speech acts, are comprised of condensed cognitive sentiments and express both cognitive and non-cognitive elements necessarily.

3.) We therefore call moral judgements 'moral aggregates'. Moral aggregates are not analysable in terms of truth and falsity; they are not propositions of logic and have no truth conditions.

4.) Moral aggregates must be expanded and analysed in terms of their possible meanings. These possible meanings will form two bodies of elements; one cognitive and the other expressive.

5.) The overdetermined nature of the moral aggregate gives a Humean motivational force behind the issuing of moral judgements by supplying both subjective desire and concrete (all be it mistaken) belief that the desire or emotional reaction is founded on an objective truth about the world, i.e. that there are universal moral truths. The total balance of these cognitive and non-cognitive elements gives the possible mode of the aggregate.

The argument makes the following assumptions, claims and observations:

Firstly, the assumption is made that moral convictions are not the products of conscious reasoning processes and are neither based on personally held, nor externally existing, ethical rules.

a.) The inherent tension between currently existing metaethical schools of thought is reason to believe that neither cognitive nor emotivist theories correctly and comprehensively describe the cognitive machinations of ethical discourse.

b.) The fact that both cognitive and non-cognitive sides of the metaethical spectrum produce formidable arguments that have not dissipated after more than a century of theorizing suggests further that both theories might describe the workings of ethical thoughts correctly, at least to some extent.

c.) Trying to reconcile mutually-compatible assertions made by the opposing theories into one hybrid form therefore presents us with a promising route of inquiry.

d.) In trying to overcome two different but related problems about the semantics of ethical language Viz. the speech act fallacy and the Frege-

Geach problem, we can find a mutually harmonious interpretation that overcomes both obstacles and which furthermore, forms a uniform and plausible semantic interpretation of its own.

e.) These problems are overcome by reading moral judgements as aggregates of both descriptive and emotive expressions. This reading means that neither the speech act fallacy nor the Frege-Geach Problem arise as obstacles for this 'condensationist', or hybrid, model.

f.) The view also manages to retain a Humean shade by supplying an emotive motivational force and a drive which lies behind the issuing of moral judgements.

6.1 The Further Implications of Such a Theory

I am of the view that this form of hybrid model, even if not exactly in the above-stated form, provides the most promising future for metaethics. Perhaps it is a pragmatist or commonsensical view that everything asserted on one side of the cognitivist/non-cognitivist divide cannot be totally wrong or misguided, and this is where I stand. It therefore stands for us to identify the mutually-compatible and convergent assertions made from all areas of metaethical thought and bring them together in a coherent and logically sound way. We can then subsequently organise and flesh out this theory as a unifying theory of metaethics – This is the project which I have undertaken. Interestingly, it seems that my feelings are echoed by other writers in the area as Guy Fletcher and Michael Ridge explain in their introduction to their recent collection of papers on hybrid theories *Having it Both Ways* published in 2014.

> The new millennium has seen a blossoming of interest in hybrid theories in this sense. This is perhaps no surprise, since the existing debate between pure cognitivists and noncognitivists can easily appear intractable. Each side of this debate can be seen to go in for more and more epicycles to accommodate what the

> other side accommodates so easily or instead to try to debunk the pretheoretical intuitions so cherished by the other side of the debate. Moreover, the availability of hybrid theories reveals that this apparently calcified traditional way of framing the debate rests on a false doichotomy.[91]

I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter that prior to the conception of my condensationist reading of ethical judgements I had not, at the start of my research, been aware of other hybrid models. I think then, in closing, it would be fair-play not to leave them out from my work completely and so I would like to briefly mention a few notable names and contrast them to my own reading above. Before I mention specific theories, let us look at a definition of this kind of theory as elucidated by the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy:

> Hybrid theories in metaethics hold at least one of the following theses:
>
> 1. Moral claims express both belief-like and desire-like mental states.
>
> 2. Moral judgements are constituted by both belief- like and desire-like components.
>
> This definition is deliberately broad and inclusive, to cover all theories that share a theoretically important aspiration: to accommodate or at least explain away both the belief-like and desire-like features of moral thought and discourse without abandoning a broadly Humean philosophy of mind.
>
> A broadly Humean philosophy of mind subscribes to two claims. First, that belief-like and desire-like states can be sharply distinguished in in terms of their respective directions of fit (that is, beliefs aim to accurately represent the world), while desire-like states have a world-to-mind direction of fit (desires aim to have the world aligned with them). Second, that beliefs and desires are distinct existences: for any propositions p and q, believing the p and desiring that q can come apart.[92]

[91] Edited by Guy Fletcher and Michael Ridge, *Having it Both Ways: Hybrid Theories and Modern Metaethics,* (Oxford University Press, New York) 2014.
[92] Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Online Source, www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/metaethicaltheories-hybrid/v-1

Or to put it or formally:

> R at t constitutes a motivating reason of agent A to [O] iff there is some Y such that R at t constitutes a desire of A to [Y] and a belief that were he to [O] he would [Y] (Smith 1987 p36)[93]

It appears that my theory fits into this definition of a hybrid theory as it indeed holds, as previously mentioned, both claim 1 and 2, as explained above. It appears that hybrid interpretations are fairly new arrivals in the field but nonetheless have become increasingly popular and are doing the job of finding the common ground in metaethics. Some notable metaethical hybrid theories can be found in the work of many contemporary philosophers including Mark Shroeder and Guy Fletcher[94]. This I hope might become a more influential method of inquiry in the future. It is interesting to wonder from where this form of argument first arose. It might be the case that many recent hybrid theories in metaethics were first conceived out of an effort to find a route around the Frege-Geach conundrum which has maintained its grip on the field of metaethics since the 1960s.

> Recently Hybrid theories of moral sentences and the attitudes they express have gained some prominence. One motivation for going hybrid has been that such theories offer to help meet the Frege-Geach desiderata. The basic hybrid idea is that moral sentences have ordinary representational meaning, while also expressing (either semantically or pragmatically) additional non-cognitive content. The representational part of the semantics allows the hybrid theorist to take advantage of many of the resources of truth conditional semantics to generate a compositional account of the semantics insofar as it is representational. This account can then be supplemented with some additional principles to govern any expressive semantic content.[95]

This however was a secondary concern for my own work. The main motivation behind my own hybrid model was two-fold. Firstly, it was based on a belief that

[93] Michael Smith, *A Humean Theory of Motivation*, Mind, P.36. (Oxford University Press) 1987.
[94] See Mark Schroeder, *Hybrid Expressivism: Virtues and Vices*, Ethics, January 2009 and Guy Fletcher, *Hybrid Views in Meta-ethics*, Philosophy Compass, 2012.
[95] Mark Van Roojen, *Metaethics – A contemporary introduction,* P154 (Routledge, New York) 2015.

moral judgements and ethical thoughts were not the product of reasoning or due to the presence of prescriptive action-guiding rules (which is often asserted by the religious). Secondly, I wanted to posit the multi-semantic nature of natural language and to do away with the problem of the speech act fallacy, of which non-cognitivist theories are often accused. It was during the process of drafting my theory that I came across a possibly new way to avoid the Frege-Geach problem which I have outlined in the previous chapter.

It seems to me that either side of the cognitive and non-cognitive divide must acknowledge the existence of the other as a human mental capacity. Congnitivists must concede the existence of non-cognitive expression even if they deny that moral judgements themselves are expressions of non-cognitive sentiments. And the same must be true *vice versa*. The debate, it seems to me, is not about which form of cognition exists but is rather concerned with which one is at work when we are making moral judgements. The answer of course is *both*.

6.2 Limitations and Things Left Unanswered

So now I have posited my multi-semantic account of moral judgements and asserted their necessarily *condensed* nature, what is missing from this account of moral language? To my mind, the obvious question raised and left unanswered by this work is an important point about how humans can actually come to think in terms of ethics. There are some anthropological and evolutionary[96] models that can plausibly explain the occurrence of moral thinking but from a more philosophical point of view, and one more specific to my work, the question left unanswered can be put like this: If we assert, as a foundation to our theory, that there are no objective and mind-independent moral qualities or entities yet we also state that there are necessarily descriptive elements expressed through moral utterances, how is it possible that we can come to speak as if these moral qualities exist in the first instance, when in fact they do not? This is of course the problem that arises for any error theories about morality. This is a tricky question that does indeed need to be

[96] One such example can be found in Sharon Street's work. Sharon Street, *A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value*, Philosophical Studies, 2006.

answered in a satisfactory way for this reading to be complete. So, this is perhaps where my work may be lacking in its present form. My hope for the further development of this theory into the future is that a plausible and compatible reading can be found that explains this phenomenon, which I do not deny, of thinking in terms of moral qualities as if there is an external and objective ethical reality when there really is no such thing. The mistaken belief may be explained away by a kind or projective error whereby we project our emotional reactions to various stimuli out onto the world which colours our view and understanding of reality. This theory might be apt for empirical investigation by way of psychological experimentation.

5.3 Final Thoughts and Reflections

Finally, I want to express my hope that this kind of theory is not simply seen as a compromise or as simply as *"having it both ways"*. Myself, I prefer to see it as a cutting-away-of the unnecessary and a collating and calibrating of the necessary truths which have already been picked out and explained. The assimilation of these truths into one unified whole which describes the foundations, motivations and machinations lying behind ethical discourse should be the goal of the hybrid theorist. There is another parallel to be drawn with scientific endeavour here, especially in the realm of physics and the project of finding a 'grand unifying theory'. My process has been one of bringing together a host of theories from opposing sides of the metaethical landscape. In addition to this, I have drawn from research in the domains of science, logic, philosophy of language, linguistics, psychology and psychoanalysis and tried to identify the common ground or thread which runs through them all and ties them together. During the process of conducting this research, it has become increasingly apparent to me how important it is to keep an eye on the bigger picture, so to speak. By this I mean that when theorizing in a specialized and technical area of philosophy it can be a very immersive experience. And in trying to find solutions to technical problems, the conundrum itself quickly becomes ones sole focus and in being so, pulls ones attention from the fact that we are, at the heart of it, trying to discover, define and elucidate the broader picture of ethics as a whole and how the sphere of morality

functions. Our endeavours to describe the metaethical form an intricate and detailed jigsaw piece that will help us fill in the puzzle of Ethics and this in turn will be an important piece in our whole philosophical description of the world. We should be careful not to lose touch with where our work sits within the grand scheme of things and the fact that we are working towards filling in a universal picture; that of reality itself.

Justin J. Bartlett – 2018

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