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Values as Part of Reality:
An Internal Realist Response
To Non-Cognitivism in Ethics

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A mes Parents, qui ont su me guider vers la connaissance morale et qui m'ont appris le respect des valeurs humaines. A Robert, pour sa patience et son dévouement.

Abrégé

La possibilité de considérer l'éthique comme domaine cognitif est au centre des préoccupations contemporaines en philosophie morale. Par le biais d'une analyse du projet de réalisme interne d'Hilary Putnam, il a été entrepris dans cette thèse de discuter des changements qui pourraient être apporté aux conceptions habituelles des notions de vérité et à factualité de façon à ce que le discours philosophique soit dépourvu de la distinction fait/valeur. Une réponse à l'argument de Gilbert Harman est alors présentée pour montrer que face à ces modifications l'argument non-cognitif n'a plus de poids.

Abstract

The possibility of considering the ethical domain as cognitive is a principal concern of contemporary moral philosophy. Following an analysis of Hilary Putnam's internal realism, I discuss how our usual conceptions of truth and factuality should be modified in order to render philosophical discourse free of the fact/value distinction. I then present a response to Gilbert Harman's argument for non-cognitivism in ethics and argue that, within an internal realism that incorporates such modified conceptions, the non-cognitive argument no longer carries any weight.

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Introduction

Despite the general criticisms to which they have been subjected in contemporary philosophy, logical positivism and metaphysical materialism, (the view that we can think and talk of mind-independent entities in virtue of a causal relation of correspondence between terms in our languages and material objects, which are, for the metaphysical realist, paradigm mind-independent entities), still leave their mark in moral philosophy. The most haunting ghost of these philosophical traditions is the fact/value distinction. Grounds for the latter can be traced back to an empiricist conception of language associated with metaphysical materialism. Such empiricists hold an instrumental view of language, which they consider to be a mere tool for the communication of thought, the latter being considered as prior to language. The main feature of such an empiricism is that once definitions have been given to our words, the truth-status of our sentences will irreversibly be determined by the 'fabric of the world', without any intervention on our part. No room is left for input from the human use of words. Moreover, such empiricists, as their name suggests, hold that sensory experience is the correct foundation of our beliefs. Correspondingly, only those objects that are accessible to experimental sciences are considered really to exist.

A division of language into two functions, a descriptive and an expressive, is also a central feature of this doctrine. Words can thus have two kinds of meaning: a cognitive meaning or an emotive meaning, the former being the only one which contributes to the truth status of sentences. Correlatively, two modes of judgement are discerned: a passive mode and an active mode, which correspond respectively to the descriptive and the expressive functions of language. We are thus pictured as either reading the facts off the world, which is the activity by which we attain knowledge, or as responding

emotionally to the facts. The evaluative (expressive or emotive) function of language serves only to express attitudes or dispositions of the will. Furthermore, these two functions of language are deemed entirely separate such that they cannot collaborate in the formation of judgements or in the establishment of true propositions. Such tasks are exclusively attributed to the descriptive function. Hence the fact/value distinction, as there are two distinct functions of language, there appear to be two unrelated realms - the realm of facts and the realm of values- one of which is denied objective reality.

Non-cognitivism in ethics historically relies on this disparity between the evaluative domains and the domains deemed factual, in maintaining that there can be no moral knowledge and that moral judgements lack truth-status. The philosopher who is the closest to his empiricist roots is J.L. Mackie. He offers two arguments for non-cognitivism: 'The Argument from Queerness' and 'The Argument From Relativity' The former rests on the empiricists' restrictions on the ontological status of objects and claims that:

> If there were objective values, they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them it would be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.[1]

As already stressed, the only potential objects of knowledge are those which can be appraised by empirical experimentation. Since moral values fall short of satisfying this condition, Mackie concludes that if they were objective they would constitute a different class of entities which would require a 'special faculty' to be apprehended. 'The Argument from Relativity' rests on the peculiar character of moral disagreements to which variations in moral codes from culture to culture bear witness. Mackie maintains that, as contrasted with scientific disagreements, which he believes arise from inferences based on incorrect evidence, moral disagreements are the result of our adherence to different ways of life. He takes this variation in our moral practices to be an indication that morality is more a question of adhering to certain sets of conventions

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[1]Mackie 1977, p.38

than of apprehending some objective moral facts, because such differences in our moral values are better explained by appeal to our adherence to different ways of living, than by appeal to a capacity for the perception of objective values.

The non-cognitivist argument we will be concerned with in this thesis is one sketched by Gilbert Harman as the only version of non-cognitivism that will resist contemporary criticisms of the empiricist and metaphysical materialist traditions. It relies on modern developments in epistemology to show that the only viable kinds of explanations are those that we appeal to in our best explanations of our experiences. It will be referred to as Harman's non-cognitivism or as Harman's argument, although this will just be a figure of speech to facilitate the discussion, since Harman, although he offers it as a convincing non-cognitivist argument, does not endorse this sceptical position. The second chapter of this thesis will thus focus on a discussion of Harman's non-cognitivism, and a counter-argument will be presented against his contentions that an assumption about moral facts is not relevant to explanations of why we make the observations that we make, and that moral explanations do not figure in our best explanations of our experiences. It will stress: i) that an assumption about moral facts is a condition of the viability of moral discourse; ii) that a lot of our moral explanations are good explanations that are not overriden by any better ones; and iii) that even if Harman was right to believe that there are better explanations of our experiences that do not appeal to moral facts, we are not forced to endorse his criterion of ontological commitment if we are internal realists. A characterization of internal realism will be presented in the first chapter, and the particular conceptions of truth and factuality inherent in this doctrine will be relied upon to sketch the internal realist response to Harman's non-cognitivism offered in the second chapter. All of this will be done in the hope of showing that different ways of construing the notions of tru'. and factuality permit us to dissolve the fact/value distinction and to dilute the threat of non-cognitivism in ethics. Internal realism will be presented as a promising candidate for a framework within which to revise our usual conceptions of those notions.

Ch. I Internal Realism

Filling The Fact/Value Gap

Metaphysical materialism fails to explain some of our basic intuitions about morality. Indeed, this doctrine forces us to reject our common sense conception of morality in the same way in which it forces us to distinguish between common sense reality and Reality (with a capital R -that is, the reality of things-in-themselves) and to accept only the latter as what is actually the case. The distinction is the result of believing that science has a way of explaining things-in-themselves or 'real truth' because it describes objects as they would appear from a standpoint independent of any human point of view. The strategy here, and it is the one used by Putnam in his *Reason, Truth and History²*, then, will be to show that if knowledge acquisition is a matter of having a *direct* access to Reality then science is not more privileged than any other rational activity in securing it.

As a matter of fact, in RTH Putnam suggests that if it did not presuppose certain standards, standards of coherence, relevance and simplicity, the scientific method of inquiry and discovery would prove unsuccessful for it would rely on empty notions of truth and factuality. Something is needed for these notions to have content, something substantive that goes beyond the purely formal constraints on the truth predicate provided by 'semantic' or 'disquotational' accounts of truth and fact. To be useful, a notion of factuality or truth must tell us what sort of conditions a theory or description must fulfill in order to be fact-stating. The first question then ought to be one of a choice of criteria, criteria of rational acceptability as Putnam puts it, which will ground our notion of truth. This is what he affirms when he writes:

> If the notion of comparing our systems of belief with unconceptualized reality to see if they match makes no sense³, then the claim that science seeks to discover the truth can mean no more than that science seeks to construct a world picture which, in the ideal limit, satisfies certain criteria of rational acceptability. That science seeks to construct a world picture which is 'true' is itself a true statement, an almost empty and formal true statement; (...) *truth is not the bottom line*: truth itself gets its life from

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² This will be referred to as RTH for now on.

³ This is partly a consequence of the argument against the metaphysical materialist theory of reference. I shall say more about this in the discussion of internal truth.

our criteria of rational acceptability.

Once the criteria of rational acceptability are taken into consideration, a contentful definition of truth can be advanced for we now know what to expect from a sentence that is true: we expect it to be part of our best description of the world, one which satisfies the requirements of relevance, coherence, simplicity, (etc.), in the ideal limit of inquiry.

Now the question is: where do our criteria come from? They cannot be facts since factuality presupposes them. Where else could they come from, then, but from our values? But if they are values, if under every fact lies a value, the Realist can no longer pretend that the scientific method of inquiry gives us a direct access to Reality from a non-human standpoint, because we need the human standpoint to have the values. From an independent viewpoint we could not describe facts or talk about truth, we would not have an empirical world because we would lack the values necessary to describe it.

If we were to try to describe or explain the empirical world from such a standpoint it would be in vain, because we could not explain why it is a *good* explanation of the world. That is, we would be unable to explain how it meshes with the rest of our beliefs, why it is relevant to judge it to be such (and relevant not only given our other beliefs but also to a particular context), and more importantly, why it is a *useful* explanation *for* beings with our constitution. From such a standpoint, *we would not be able to analyse our experiences in a way that would make it possible to distinguish and categorize the different objects of experience or even to interpret our experiences qua experiences*, given that we would lack what is necessary to bring about this analysis and to decide what counts as a correct description of the empirical world. This is because we need to flesh out what sort of virtues our statements must reflect in order to pass for such descriptions. Having an empirical world and acquiring knowledge of it presuppose that we value certain things but not others. These valuations are guides for the interpretative activity that enables us to apprehend and to classify empirical objects so as to make them intelligible to us. If we did not first know *what we want our experiences to do for us*, if we did not have first an idea of what our explanations are supposed to accomplish for us, if we did not have first an idea of human flourishing which determines these things (that is, which determines what we should expect from our theories, which virtues they should reflect), then we would not have any useful and intelligible notion of an empirical world.

Hence, the Realist's contention that scientific matters have the privilege of being liable to explanation from a *mind-independent* point of view is falsified. The Realist must admit that scientific knowledge relies on our idea of cognitive flourishing in general, on our idea of the good, just as much as moral knowledge does, because an idea of the good is first needed in order to be able to provide contentful explanations, and/or descriptions, in order to have notions of justifiability and truth.

The above discussion makes it clear why I believe that having access to unconceptualized reality would be of no use for beings with our constitution, given the heed paid to the role played by our interpretative activities in rendering the empirical world intelligible. Let me just add, then, that Putnam already argues that the idea of a direct relation between our representations and Reality is incoherent because there is no way to explain how we would be able to single out one relation of reference as the one true relation. The outcome of this is that we a ought back to Kant's conviction that all we can really have access to are things-for-us. The only notion of reference that would make sense would have to designate a relation that would be internal to our representations. Hence, the metaphysical materialist cannot respond to us that we are only interested in the values of science because they lead to the desired match between things-in-themselves and our representations (this would require that we already are able to grasp the things-in-themselves). She must admit that our interest in those values is not guided by such a purpose, but rather that it comes from a conception of human cognitive flourishing

Now that we have seen that science is not more privileged than other modes of inquiry where the acquisition of knowledge is concerned, we can start filling the science/ethics gap by emphasizing that both science and ethics rely on values, since appealing to the latter was taken to be what distinguished ethics from science. Similarly, we can no longer discredit a sentence such as 'Molière's comedies are clever' simply because it is value-laden since sentences such as: 'The cream has gone off because the room was too warm' also express our values, in a sense, since their being correct descriptions depends on whether they reflect coherence, simplicity, relevance, (etc.).[4] We will need something more than its being value-laden to discredit a sentence. We can also show to anti-realists and other moral sceptics that not all

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[4] Indeed, so Putnam argues in chapter 9 of **RTH**, even the most basic categories in terms of which adequate descriptions of the experienced world must be couched reflect our values, and, ultimately, our conception of human cognitive flourishing.

values are mere expressions of feelings since, as Putnam remarks, holding that the values of science are mere expressions of feelings would be disastrous because it would mean that the whole of knowledge is subjective, since our notions of truth and factuality rely on those values -they cannot be more objective than the latter are. We must admit that the values of science, at least, are objective.

The 'Companion in Guilt Argument'

There are serious repercussions, particularly for the arguments of anti-realists in ethics against the objectivity of values, that accompany the realization that values underlie our notions of factuality and truth. The main objection is fleshed out in its most popular form in Mackie's arguments from queerness and relativity. It is claimed that the difference between disagreements over values and scientific disagreements reinforces the conviction that moral judgements are not grounded in reason while scientific judgements are. (Mackie interprets scientific disagreements as being due to inferences from false evidence; moral disagreements are considered as the expressions of different 'ways of life'.) He further contends that if values were objective they would be 'queer entities' given their action-guiding nature. Against Mackie's view of scientific disagreement we can urge a very different interpretation of such disagreements - and, ironically, science is what pushes us in this direction - which is due to our accepting as equally good, and equally 'true', competing theories that are equally successful in explaining the phenomena in a given domain, even if these theories are incompatible with one another. Think, for example, of the fact that we accept both the description of light as being constituted of electromagnetic waves and the description of it as a flux of energetic particles with no mass. Disagreements now seem to concern the decision to choose one theory as providing a more *relevant* explanation rather than the others for a given problem. But, as we pointed out earlier, relevance is a value. We must then admit that scientific disagreements are disagreements over values as well. This is one of the main implications of realizing that our epistemic notions rely on values such as coherence, relevance, simplicity, (etc.). Any divergences in what we take to be relevant, coherent, or simple will create disagreements as to which theory we should accept. The 'Companion in Guilt' argument is thus the following one, quoting Putnam on this (apologies for such a lengthy quotation but it is very much to the point):

> Part of my case is that *coherence* and *simplicity* and the like are themselves *values*. To suppose that "coherent" and "simple " are themselves just emotive words - words which express a "pro-attitude" toward a theory, but which do not ascribe any definite properties to the theory - would be to regard *justification* as an entirely subjective matter. On the other hand, to suppose that "coherent" and "simple" name *neutral* properties - properties toward which people may have a "pro-attitude", but there is no objective rightness in doing so - runs into difficulties at once. Like the paradigm value-terms (such as "courageous", "kind", "honest", "good"), "coherent" and "simple" are used as terms of praise. Indeed, they are *action-guiding* terms: to describe a theory as "coherent, simple,

explanatory" is, in the right setting, to say that acceptance of the theory is *justified*, and to say that acceptance of a statement is (completely) justified is to say that one ought to accept the statement or theory. if *action-guiding* predicates are "ontologically queer", as John Mackie urged, they are nonetheless indispensable in epistemology. Moreover, every argument that has ever been offered for non-cognitivism in ethics applies immediately and *without the slightest change* to these epistemological predicates; there are disagreements between cultures (...) over what is or what is not coherent or simple (...). These controversies are no more settleable than are controversies over the nature of justice. Our views on the nature of coherence and simplicity are historically conditioned, just as our views on the nature of justice or goodness are. There is no neutral conception of rationality to which one can appeal when the nature of rationality is itself what is at issue.[5]

The first problem to which Putnam alludes here is one that would arise f we refused to hold that our epistemic values are objective. As was stressed earlier, this would have the unfortunate consequence of rendering knowledge itself subjective, since justification and truth would inevitably have to be such. Putnam also emphasizes the prescriptive character of our notions of justification and truth - a character which we must accept if we are convinced that values underlie our epistemic notions, because these values themselves are prescriptive and normative. If its satisfying the 'right' values is what makes a theory justified, then that it is justified can mean nothing else but that one ought to accept that theory in the same sense in which saying that an action is praiseworthy means that one ought to do that action, because 'coherent', 'simple' as well as 'right' and 'good' and 'honest' are terms that prescribe a certain behaviour.

Hence the conclusion of the Companion in Guilt argument is that if ethical objectivity is ruled out on the grounds advanced by anti-realists in ethics, then objectivity in all areas of knowledge should be ruled out as well, since epistemic values are subject to the same problems as ethical values for they are as culturally determined. If Mackie's arguments are accepted, then we must be non-cognitivists and relativists about everything, science included; the metaphysical materialist picture of the world collapses altogether. To preserve it the Realist must admit the objectivity of values and sacrifice her sharp fact/value distinction. But there are good reasons for believing that this too would bring metaphysical materialism to its ruin. There seems to be no way out for

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[5] Putnam 1990, p. 138.

this doctrine.[6]

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[6]One of these reasons is that if the fact/value distinction is thus sacrificed, it will no longer be possible for the Realist to hold that judgements are factual only if they can be made from a point of view independent from the internal standpoint. The external/internal distinction will thus also disappear. However, the ground of metaphysical materialism lies in its conception of truth as correspondence to a mind-independent Reality. If the external/internal distinction is dismissed, truth as transcendental correspondence will have to be rejected as well.

On truth as idealized rational acceptability

Given that it rejects the fact/value distinction, and given what this implies for epistemology, we can surmise that the internal realist conception of truth will differ substantially from the one offered by metaphysical materialism. Firstly, as was stressed earlier, the notion of truth as correspondence to a mind-independent Reality will have to be abandoned because, among other things, (some of which have already been explained) it could not make sense of any of our values whether ethical or cognitive. This is because an idea of the good, of human cognitive flourishing, is needed in order to have those values. While it could be claimed (probably justly) that from a God's eye point of view ideas of human flourishing held by the different cultures can be observed, what could not be done from such a standpoint would be to *take a stance* towards which idea of the good should be endorsed. But this is indispensable to the acquisition of any knowledge whatsoever. This is what we tried to show earlier concerning the Realist counter-argument to the 'Companion in Guilt Argument'. It was argued that Realists could consider the values of science as instrumental tools that lead to the correct correspondence between our words and objects in The World, without taking sides toward - say - a 'given set of values', that is without feeling compelled to endorse those values and submit to their prescriptivity. However, this would not be adequate because what is needed to acquire knowledge is that one has the sense that there is a conception of rationality she *ought* to endorse, that there are values that *ought* to be expressed by our theories for them to be acceptable.[7] If cognitive values were not considered as prescriptive in this strong sense, if they were considered as neutral properties, then no sense could be given to our singling out one theory rather than another as the acceptable one, or to our choosing a particular conception of rationality.

The reason why the Realist conception of truth must be rejected, therefore, is that it presupposes that we are capable of separating the standpoint of our representations (what I call the human standpoint, here) from the mind-independent standpoint (the God's eye point of view which supposedly would give access to The World). This is why singling out the one true relation of correspondence between our words and Reality was so important. However, we have shown that in order to acquire knowledge we need to *endorse* certain values, that this can only be achieved if we are already embedded in a particular culture or way of life from which we acquire an idea of

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[7] See **RTH**, p.136.

human flourishing, and that our values cannot be divorced from our representations and interpretations. Hence, since the notions of truth and factuality are thus reliant on cognitive values, they will have to be as tightly linked to our representations.

The important difference between Realist and internal realist conceptions of truth is, then, that, for the internal realist, not only can truth only be determined from within a given framework or theory, but also, *it could not be a property of a world conceived as existing independently of those frameworks.* Correlatively, the question "Of what objects does the world consist?" could only be asked from within a theory. This thesis -which Putnam terms 'conceptual relativity'- will be discussed below.

What the internalist hopes to describe, then, is the world *as it presents itself to us,* and, correspondingly, the truth of a theory will consist in its fitting this internal world.[8] That there no longer is a problem of reference for the internal realist can be realized at once: there is no more need of singling out the true relation between our words and the objects of knowledge, since the latter are directly accessible.

What the appeal to human flourishing and to our idea of the good hint at, and this bears witness to Kant's influence on Putnam, is that there are conditions that our anthropology sets on objects of knowledge: psychological and epistemic conditions which constitute the main motivation for an *internal* conception of truth. The psychological conditions pertain to the limits that our psychology and biology sets on our cognitive capacity: an idea of human flourishing is indispensable for beings like us, in order to have a conception of rationality, one of truth and one of factuality; hence they are limits which constrain what are the objects of knowledge. The epistemic conditions for knowledge are conditions for the possibility of reference. The thing-in-itself did not satisfy those conditions, as was demonstrated by Putnam. The case is different for the things-for-us (that is, the objects of which we take the world to consist from within our frameworks; the only objects that 'matter' for the internal realist) because they are the objects of our representations. This latter claim (the one which identifies things-for-us with the objects of our representations) has to be qualified, however, to avoid confusions which could lead to the misidentification of Putnam's position with an idealism à la Berkeley (all there is are ideas in our minds etc.). This

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[8] I use here the expressions 'the world', and 'the internal world' as opposed to 'The World' or 'The external World' interchangeably to refer to what Putnam takes to be the only notion of the world available to us: the world as it presents itself to us, the world of things-for-us.

clarification is, I believe, the motivation behind Putnam's claim that:

(...) the mind and the world jointly make up the mind and the world.[9]

What is emphasized by this is that the world does not present itself to us pre-cut into objects, but rather that those objects or the divisions of reality, are defined by the different conceptual schemes. This is the part where *the mind* makes up the mind and the world. That *the world* makes up the mind and the world can be explicated by directing our attention to the following passage.

> Internalism does not deny that there are experiential *inputs* to knowledge; Knowledge is not a story with no constraints except *internal* coherence; but it does deny that there are any inputs *which are not themselves to some extent shaped by our concepts*, by the vocabulary we use to report and describe them, or any inputs *which admit of only one description, independent of all conceptual choices*. The very inputs upon which knowledge is based are conceptually contaminated; but contaminated inputs are better than none. If contaminated inputs are all we have, still all we have has proved to be quite a bit.[10]

What is expressed here is the non-negligible role of experience in the assignment of 'labels' to objects. Or, more precisely, what this tries to explicate is that, although our conceptual choices determine the division of the world into objects, once these choices are made, once we have 'decided' to adhere to a particular conceptual scheme, what will count as an object is not arbitrary, but has to coincide with the information acquired by experience. This is important because, on the one hand, if objects were solely designated by the different theories, the only thing that would be needed for any theory to be a valid theory would be that it is coherent within itself, that is, that the labelling of objects does not contradict other theoretical beliefs. This, in turn, would push us towards idealism or towards facile relativism. If there is nothing else than coherence within a given theory to tie down our beliefs, then once the conditions for that theory to be consistent are satisfied, one could say that 'anything goes'. That is to say that any theory could claim whatever it pleased about the world providing that this claim is consistent with the rest of the theory.

On the other hand, if counting as an object was a matter of coinciding with 'pure

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empirical data', data not modulated by our conceptual schemes, we would be faced with the problem of self-identifying objects, and thus be hurried toward the other side of the border. Hence the importance of the inter-dependence of the world and our representations. By insisting that the labelling of objects is under the control of both theory *and* experience, by insisting that the mind *and* the world make up the mind and the world, internal realism prevents us from being dragged on either side, and leads us to a sort of neutral zone: the Narrow Path.[11]

What then is the role of experiential inputs in a doctrine which advocates the unavoidable mind-dependency of notions of truth and factuality? I think Putnam would respond by stressing that the only way *for us* to make sense of the world, the only way *for us* to succeed in analysing, understanding and integrating experiential inputs, the only way *for us* to consider 'the fact of the matter about the world' as a fact of the matter, is by filtering all the external information through our conceptual schemes, because notions such as fact, objectivity, truth, etc., get their content from within given discourses or schemes. We can only make sense of the world within a theory. We have to accept this with humility: we cannot escape our condition.[12]

Internal realist truth and objectivity will have to be reflective of this humility. This is why Putnam speaks of 'objectivity and rationality *humanly speaking*' and of objectivity '*for us*'. The latter expressions allude to the epistemic and psychological conditions on knowledge that were introduced earlier, and serve to reiterate the point that creatures with our constitution are subject to certain conditions concerning the acquisition of knowledge. These conditions make it such that truth for us can only be internal, and also, that objectivity for us could only be determined from within a given discourse or framework.

Now, if truth is not a correspondence with representation-independent reality, if it is in this sense internal to our conceptual frameworks, and if our conceptions of truth and objectivity are thus dependent on our idea of human flourishing, then saying that a

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[11]See Putnam 1983, "Why There Isn't a Ready-Made World", p.226.

[12]See RTH p.54, also preceding citation, note 10.

sentence is true cannot mean anything other than that it is justified for beings like us to believe it. Hence, the identification of truth with (idealized) rational acceptability. (Following Putnam's own usage, I will refer to such a notion of truth and to correlative notions of factuality and objectivity as 'epistemic' notions or concepts.) Moreover, Putnam stresses both in **RTH** and in **TMFR** that truth cannot be equated with mere rational acceptability. The reason why this is so might best be explained by discussing first its treatment in **RTH** and the confusions to which it led, in order to shed a 'stronger' light on the clarifications offered by Putnam in "Why Reason Can't Be Naturalized"[13] and in his _Realism With a Human Face_.[14]

In **RTH** Putnam writes:

> To reject the idea that there is a coherent 'external' perspective, a theory which is simply true 'in itself', apart from all possible observers, is not to *identify* truth with rational acceptability. Truth cannot simply *be* rational acceptability for one reason; truth is supposed to be a property of a statement that cannot be lost whereas justification can be lost. The statement 'The earth is flat' was, very likely, rationally acceptable 3,000 years ago; but it is not rationally acceptable today. Yet it would be wrong to say that 'the earth is flat' was *true* 3,000 years ago; for that would mean that the earth has changed its shape. In fact rational acceptability is both tensed and relative to a person. In addition rational acceptability is a matter of degree (...)
> What this shows, in my opinion, is not that the externalist view is right after all, but that truth is an idealization of rational acceptability. We speak as if there were such things as epistemically ideal conditions, and we call a statement 'true' if it would be justified under such conditions.[15];

and goes on to explain that the ideal conditions are to play in philosophy the same role played by frictionless planes in physics.

There were several problems with this claim. Firstly, since what will count as 'ideal conditions' had not been explicitly specified, it was not clear that Putnam was not appealing to some notion of truth absolutely inaccessible for beings like us at any point

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[13] See Putnam 1983, p.229.

[14] I will refer to these writings respectively as **WRCBN** and **RWHF** from now on.

[15] See **RTH** p.55, emphasis added.

of time. Secondly, given the vagueness of this notion of idealized rational acceptability, it was difficult to understand what would justify us in saying that 'the earth is flat', although rationally acceptable 3000 years ago, *was not true then*, since truth, as Putnam had presented it was supposed to be context-sensitive and theory-dependent, etc. Thirdly, one was left wondering if, indeed, this was not a return to the externalist picture, given Putnam's appeal to the earth's not having changed its shape to explain that this sentence 3000 years ago could not be true.

The Putnam of **WRCBN** and of **RWHF** advanced the following reasons why it is very important to avoid identifying truth with assertibility. Firstly, doing this would suggest that it is possible to specify the truth-conditions of sentences in an exhaustive way; that is, that it is possible to determine in a stipulative way what are the assertibility conditions for all the sentences of our language. As Putnam argues, this is impossible because it would require that we be capable of formalizing rationality. But, this in turn, is impossible as well, because if rationality could be thus specifically defined, we could not make sense of our rationally criticizing our rational activities themselves, a practice in which we partake everyday. In order for this to be possible we need to have a conception of rationality prior (not in time but logically) to this practice; we have to *presuppose* rationality to critically assess our activities. This is what Putnam affirms by writing:

> (1) talk of what is 'right' and 'wrong' in any area only makes sense against the background of an inherited tradition; but (2) traditions themselves can be criticized. (...)
>   What I am saying is that the 'standards' accepted by a culture or a subculture, either implicitly or explicitly, cannot *define* what reason is, even in context, because they *presuppose* reason (reasonableness) for their interpretation. (...) Reason is, in this sense, both immanent (not to be found outside of concrete language games and institutions) and transcendent (a regulative idea that we use to criticize the conduct of *all* activities and institutions).
>   (...) Philosophers who lose sight of the transcendence of reason become cultural (or historical) relativists.[16]

The identification of truth with acceptability would thus amount to surrendering to cultural relativism, and would put in danger our identity as *critical thinkers*.

We are thus left with the task of elucidating what Putnam means by 'ideal conditions', (and there won't be much 'elucidating' to do because his treatment of this

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[16] WRCBN p.235, emphasis added.

subject in **WRCBN** and **RWHF** is sufficiently clear). Firstly, in many passages the expression 'ideal conditions' is replaced by 'sufficiently good conditions' or 'better conditions' which emphasizes the fact that what Putnam alludes to by using it, is not something which would forever lie outside our reach. On the contrary; the ideal epistemic conditions are defined thus:

> (...): If I say "there is a chair in my study", an ideal epistemic situation would be to be in my study with the lights on or with daylight streaming through the window, with nothing wrong with my eyesight, with an unconfused mind, without having taken drugs or been subjected to hypnosis, and so forth, and to look and see if there is a chair there. Or, to drop the notion of "ideal" altogether, since that is only a metaphor, I think there are *better and worse* epistemic situations *with respect to particular statements.*[17]

What this means is firstly, that ideal epistemic conditions are capturable by creatures like us; the internal realist conception of truth does not 'outrun the possibility of justification', it is within our reach. Secondly, better and worse conditions are determined within a given discourse, context or framework. What turns out to be the ideal epistemic situation in science, for example, will be different from what will be ideal in morality. (One can already presage how this will be used as a defense of internal moral realism.) Moreover, given the inter-dependence of the empirical world and our representations, what will turn out to be a better situation will not be a matter of opinion. And, 'betterness' or 'rightness', given the unformalizability of reason, will 'go beyond justification'. This is because, once again we have to be able to say what, in the ideal limit of inquiry, will be a better or worse conception *of rationality itself*; but this requires that we recognize the transcendence of rationality. These are the two constraints which direct the answer to the question: 'what is the better situation?'

Thus Putnam's answer to those who were having qualms with his treatment of the truth-status of 'the earth is flat' today and 3000 years ago is: 'the earth is flat' was rationally acceptable 3000 years ago, but not true, because we *are*, today, in a *better* epistemological situation in science than we were then, that is to say that we are justified, today, in believing that the sentences 'the earth is not flat' and 'the earth is round' are true, (whether or not they were rationally acceptable 3000 years ago) because all the optimal conditions for these sentences to be acceptable obtain while none of their defeasibility conditions do. There should be no problem with our asserting this given the progress in science. Another way of explaining this is to stress

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[17] **RWHF** p.viii

that 3000 years ago, circumstances were not 'epistemically ideal', in the specified sense, for asserting the sentence "the earth is flat" - not 'epistemically ideal' given *their understanding of that sentence*, that is. To suggest that we should not say things like this given the other precepts of internal realism, would be to neglect the fact that this doctrine recognizes that rationality is both immanent and transcendent, as we saw above.

On Conceptual Relativity

In a previous section it was mentioned, while discussing Mackie's interpretation of scientific disagreements, that it is possible to consider two competing theories as both correct descriptions of the empirical world; it was suggested that scientific disagreements (at least in some cases) should be interpreted as disagreements over which theory is the most relevant, given a particular context.[18] That we accept both the magnetic wave theory of light and the particle theory of light (to use the example presented earlier), or, more generally, that there can be two different and incompatible theories that are equally successful at advancing explanations of a given phenomena, is a corollary of conceptual relativity. Conceptual relativity is the doctrine that, while admitting that truth is partly conventional and partly factual, denies that there can be a strict distinction between 'factual truth' and 'truth by convention'. Putnam argues that, while these two aspects of truth are found in everything we say that is true, one would commit a "fallacy of division" if she believed that the factual part and the conventional part of true statements could be discriminated.[19] Conceptual relativity can be otherwise described as a doctrine which subcribes to the scheme-relativity of answers to the question 'How many objects are there?', that is, that stresses that answers to questions such as this one, or such as 'Of which objects does the world consist?' can only be advanced from within given conceptual frameworks. The choice of a framework within which one will find answers to these questions, while depending upon the context within which the questions are asked, is a matter of convention, as Putnam stresses, but what these answers will be is a matter of fact. However, if we arrive at an answer such as 'there are three objects in the world', we cannot discern the factual from the conventional part of that statement that make it true (as we suppose it to be, for the sake of example), because both the conceptual scheme that we chose and the world determine, indiscernibly, what the answer to our original question will be.[20]

Another corollary of conceptual relativity is the promotion of a sort of pluralism, pluralism of schemes of description, where competing theories are not reducible to one another. This last feature is particularly important since it entails that diverse

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[18] see Ch.II, discussion of 'The Companion in Guilt Argument'.

[19] See Putnam 1990, p.x of the preface.

[20] See Putnam 1987, pp. 32-7.

alternative descriptions of the world are possible, even if these descriptions cannot be reconciled.[21] Furthermore, given that, as was stressed above, the choice of the correct scheme through which the phenomena should be interpreted depends on the context in which it occurs, or the context in which the explanation is required, it seems that in order to have a fully complete grasp of the empirical world one has to acknowledge the correctness of these competitive descriptions, and accept them despite their divergences. The Realist pretense that The One True Theory that best describes the world can be singled out from all the others is thus denied by conceptual relativity (and, by the same token, by internal realism): advocates of this doctrine must admit that the world has many facets. The reason why this is the case can be explicated by elucidating the origin and importance of conceptual relativity in a doctrine such as internal realism.

As with internal truth, conceptual relativity is grounded in the earlier mentioned pre-conditions to knowledge. We have stressed that given that: (i) the only intelligible notion of right assertibility for beings like us is one which is tightly linked to an idea of cognitive flourishing, and that (ii) the possibility of reference is dependent on our having an internal conception of truth, internal truth has to be context-sensitive, because internal truth, as epistemically constrained, is necessarily linked to practices of *assessing* the truth-status of propositions, and because deciding on the truth-status of propositions can only be done from within a given context. What this entails is that, given different contexts, the answer to a particular question (for example 'of which objects does the world consist', or even more mundane questions such as the one in Putnam's famous example about the pressure cooker concerning why it exploded[22]) will vary; hence conceptual relativity.

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[21]Accepting that there are incompatible theories that are not reducible to one another, as Putnam argues is an important feature of conceptual relativity (and thus, of internal realism), is, however, problematic. Indeed, what sense can we make of incompatible theories that are *not* reducible to one another. If T1 and T2 are incompatible theories, then, for a given sentence s, T1 affirms s and T2 denies it. But then, shouldn't T1 and T2 be intertranslatable? If so, how can they be intertranslatable and *not* reducible to one another? Moreover, if T1 affirms that s and T2 denies that s, for some s, how can both theories be true? Unfortunately, I could not address these questions in this context since a defense of internal realism on these matters would constitute a rather lengthy discussion of its own. However, I hope it will be part of further research on internal realism. I am grateful to Professor David Davies for pointing out this difficulty.

[22]See Putnam 1987, p. 37.

In the end, if we are faced with two competing theories, which both explain the facts equally convincingly, however distinctive and incompatible they may be, being pragmatic philosophers, we cannot dismiss one or the other on grounds of non-reducibility. Pragmatic philosophers ought to take the world (or our worlds) as presented in our indispensable discourses *as it is*, without philosophical evaluation according to the standards of some preferred metaphysics. If the wave theory of light, and the particle theory prove themselves to be correct explanations of the empirical world, then we must accept the magnetic wave theory and the particle theory, *no matter how irreconcilable they may be*. Refusing to do this would amount to the same thing as refusing to accept that there are chairs, tables, ice cubes, electrons, and, indeed, values. Part of the humility is that we take the world as it is, without trying to shape it by pre-established metaphysical assumptions. Putnam writes in **TMFR**:

> The heart of pragmatism, it seems to me, -of James's and Dewey's pragmatism, if not of Peirce's- was the insistence on the supremacy of the agent point of view. If we find that we must take a certain point of view, use a certain 'conceptual system', when we are engaged in practical activity, in the widest sense of 'practical activity', then we must not simultaneously advance the claim that it is not really 'the way things are in themselves'.[23]

If conceptual relativity is not admitted by internal realists, then the viability of the very 'Narrow Path' which they try to establish will be jeopardized, since they would then be 'dragged' on the side of metaphysical materialism. This is why it is such a crucial part of this doctrine.

By way of example for a discussion of conceptual relativity Putnam presents us with two possible ways of numbering the objects in the world: *à la* Carnap and/or (that's the question!) *à la* Polish logician.[24] Given a world of three individuals, a world *à la* Carnap would be one that would contain three objects: those three independent and unrelated individuals. A world *à la* Polish logician, however, would be one that would consist of each of these individuals in addition to objects constituted by the 'mereological sum' of every two of these individuals and the object composed of all three, that is, a world of seven objects.

The conclusion Putnam wants us to reach concerning this example is that even existence and the notion of object are context-relative. This is a reiteration and a

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[23]Putnam 1987, p.70. This is what I will refer to as Putnam's 'pragmatic principle', following Professor David Davies's terminology.

[24] See TMFR p.32 and RWHF p.97

consequence of the fact that an answer to the question 'Of which objects does the world consist?' can only be given within a particular framework. But the real lesson that is to be drawn from treating this example in the context of a discussion of conceptual relativity is not simply that there are two interchangeable ways of counting objects in the world, but rather that we should resist trying to interpret one theory in the language of the other by characterizing it as another way of saying the same thing only in fewer words or in a more practical manner. What conceptual relativity tells us about counting *à la* Carnap vs counting *à la* Polish logician is that they are both perfectly good ways of finding out how many objects there are, but the objects they come up with *are not the same objects*. The sentence 'there are three objects' uttered in Carnap's language *should not be interpreted as saying the same thing* as the sentence 'there are seven objects' in the Polish logician language. What is meant by 'object' in Carnapian is not at all what is meant by 'object' in Polish logician. *Those two notions of object are completely different* and thus cannot be reduced one to the other. This is because, as we said earlier, the descriptions that we advance are descriptions of the world in a context. Each discourse has its own standards and its own way of giving sense to talk of what 'exists' or is an 'object', and the context dictates which discourse it is appropriate to employ. Trying to reduce the definition of existence in a given discourse to its definition in another discourse would be suggesting that there is one way that existence should be defined over and above the standards established by each framework. In the case of this example, it would be to suggest that there is a determinate number of objects in the world, but different ways of saying just how many there are. But here we would be making the mistake of trying to determine which of these is the 'right' way and thus, of asking 'How many objects are there?' from outside any framework. To this question, however, nothing can be answered, because there is no fact of the matter concerning the number of objects when conceived from outside any particular framework.

Nevertheless, (once again) within a given framework, there *will* be a determinate and non-arbitrary answer to that question. Each conceptual scheme provides a 'right' way of counting in the light of its standards and of the rest of the empirical beliefs associated with it. But the choice of a theory of numbering is not a choice concerning the best or more useful way of tallying objects but a choice of *a way of looking at the world which is independent from other ways of looking at the world*. It is a choice concerning the facet of the world which will best serve our purposes, given the context at hand.

Rationality

In many places in this chapter I have had, for reasons of clarity, to anticipate the discussion that I am about to undertake concerning the role attributed to a conception of rationality in internal realism. This sec'ion will thus be partly a further development of this subject, but its principal aim will be to present a synopsis of the general proposal of internal realism. This synopsis is of utmost importance however, since it will then be argued that it is internal realism in its entirety that would provide a more adequate framework within which to find a solution to the problem of moral realism. An acceptance of a conception of internal truth as divorced from the rest of Putnam's project would not suffice.

What I hint at when I talk of the particular conception of human rationality associated with internal rea'ism is, of course, the one modelled in accordance with our human condition, our condition as rational beings as depicted by the pre-conditions to knowledge already exposed: the one offered by contemporary human science. The starting point of this whole 'doctrine'[25] is a recognition of the *interdependence* of 'truth' and 'factuality', a 'conception of rationality' and a conception of human cognitive flourishing (or a conception of the 'good'). I already showed how this is responsible for the rejection of the fact/value distinction by pointing to the importance of the role played by an idea of human flourishing in the acquisition of knowledge, how then this entails that truth should be internal, and, correlatively, how it is linked to the acceptance of conceptual relativity. The concept of rationality with which contemporary human science operates thus influences the determination of the epistemic concepts of truth and factuality. Although internal realism, as it stands in the literature with which we are working here, is based on a particular conception of rationality, Putnam's arguments should not be interpreted as relying on the importance of grounding our conceptions of the epistemic concepts on *this* particular concept of rationality, but rather as stressing the importance of the role of *any* conception of rationality in determining the answers to crucial questions such as 'what is it rationally acceptable to believe?', 'what is truth?', etc.. What Putnam is claiming, then, is that a conception of rationality is necessary for the elaboration of the epistemic concepts of truth,

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[25] I write 'doctrine' here to indicate that I am using this word in a very light sense here. Putnam himself insists on considering his internal realism to be nothing more than a proposal or project.

factuality, objectivity, etc., since the latter would not be practical concepts *for us* if they were elaborated on grounds alien to the cognitive values derived from an idea of human flourishing.

Hence internal realism considers having a conception of human rationality necessarily prior to any attempt to elaborate such concepts. Putnam illustrates the importance of rationality by stressing:

> If 'rationality' is an ability (...) which enables the possessor to determine what *questions* are relevant questions to ask and what *answers* it is warranted to accept, then its value is on its sleeve. But it needs no argument that *such* a conception of rationality is as value loaded as the notion of relevance itself.[26]

What Putnam alludes to in this passage is that, not only is it the case that we derive certain of our values from a concept of rationality (:what is relevant for us will depend on the conception of rationality we endorse), but also that we derive our conception of rationality from our values. This is because, as with any other notion, rationality only makes sense from within a particular context, and also has to respond to what we want such a conception to do for us. Hence we are brought back to the importance of having an idea of cognitive flourishing in our attempts to acquire knowledge of the world. This idea is indispensable in order to have a conception of rationality, which itself is indispensable for the determination of our values; and, as we have seen, our values are necessarily implicated in our grasp of 'the facts', including those facts about ourselves that we draw upon in rational reflection upon our conception of human flourishing.

As Putnam points out, this indicates that internal realism posits no foundation against which our idea of the good and our conception of rationality could be checked and revised, and hence, no foundation for knowledge. However, this is not a problem for internal realism, for this will not entail that our conceptions of rationality and our idea of the good cannot be revised -this I presume, is what is most likely to bother opponents of this doctrine- given the immanent-transcendent nature of rationality. As

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[26]RTH, p.202

Putnam rightly points out, despite the fact that 'rationality' is an intra-contextual concept, it is also transcendent in the sense that it serves as a regulative idea amongst the different frameworks. In other words, both our idea of cognitive flourishing and our conception of rationality, both dependent on a specific conceptual framework (the one of human science, presumably) can be revised in light of the information available from other frameworks concerning what are the facts. For example, our conception of human rationality can be revised, if necessary, to 'live up' to changes in what we take facts about the physical world to be, and similarly our idea of the good can be revised in light of changes in the moral facts. Of course, what these facts are still depends on the values that our conception of rationality dictates, but this conception never ceases to be constantly revised as our knowledge of the facts evolves.

Now that the concept of rationality inherent to internal realism has been fleshed out, it is important to discuss the sort of implications that assuming a conception of rationality entails for a conception of truth. A conception of human rationality has a bearing on the sorts of questions we can ask ourselves about truth, and, more precisely, it has an influence on *the level* at which it is legitimate for beings like us to ask ourselves questions about truth. I would like to argue here that, given our constitution (or our anthropology if you prefer), given the pre-conditions to knowledge, any interesting and useful conception of truth would have to be epistemic because any notion of truth that would be detached from an acknowledgment of the boundaries and limitations of our capacity to acquire knowledge would be pragmatically uninteresting and, more importantly, unattainable and incomprehensible.

It was stressed before that without values the notion of an empirical world would make no sense for beings like us. Similarly, it would be difficult to derive from a conception of truth which was detached from our capacity to *grasp* the truth, a truth predicate which would have practical content, that is, a truth predicate whose role would be to indicate what is rationally acceptable for beings like us to believe.

The point of having a non-epistemic conception of truth, I take it, was, according to Realists, that it would ensure that objectivity be preserved, and relativism and idealism avoided. The trouble is that we would not know what to do with such a conception of truth, we would not be able to use it in order to discern what is the case from what is not. This is because, as I said before, the truth predicate, under such a conception, would not have any useful role for us, for what concerns the determination of what we are warranted to believe. Hence, the Realist metaphysician might be satisfied -perhaps wrongly- with such a state of things, since objectivity, at least theoretically, would be preserved. However, in everyday life, we would still be faced with the problem of discerning which of our beliefs are warranted, at the risk of abandoning the fight

altogether, which would probably lead us into some sort of relativism as well. Hence, the problem which the Realist was hoping to resolve with a non-epistemic conception of truth, will reappear in our everyday practices. We could hold on to such a conception so as not to give up on the grand project of describing The World as it is independently of our representations (or perhaps as it is according to God) but this sort of truth would not be liable to being grasped by beings like us. It seems much more worthwhile and constructive to reflect on conceptions of truth that are in our reach, epistemic conceptions of truth.

I realize that it might be objected that if the internal realist maintains that truth must be epistemic, she must also admit that, even if it is granted that internal realism is not a facile relativism, it still holds on to conceptions of truth, rationality and knowledge that are at least relative to human beings. Hence she must agree that perhaps truth, knowledge and the world might turn out to be totally different for other sorts of beings. However an internal realist would not and should not be bothered by this. While conceptions of rationality, knowledge and truth are indeed conceptions for us, and are dependent upon a conception of rationality, whether what we take the empirical world to be is what the World 'Really' is is not a question that we should ask ourselves at all. For the internal realist, there is no gap between what it is rationally acceptable to believe about the world (according to our best theory about this, that is the one that we would endorse under ideal conditions[27]) and what the world is really like. This is because questions concerning the 'reality of things' only make sense if asked from within conceptual frameworks which function with standards of rational acceptability dependent on a conception of rationality. This is why the answer to the question 'Is the world really the way we would describe it in our best conceptual frameworks?' is a

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[27]It is understood here that the internal realist does not identify 'what the world is really like' with our **current** 'best theory'.

trivial 'yes'; and the question 'Is the *World Really* like the way we describe it?' does not make sense at all for the internal realist, because she cannot conceive of extra-contextual facts[28], since the notion of 'facts' only acquires content from within a given context. Hence, there are no 'hidden facts'.

Whether we are uncomfortable with the situation described by the internal realist's opponent depends on whether we are still under the spell of metaphysical materialism. It also depends on how far our pretensions will outweigh our humility. Efforts to strive for a non-epistemic conception of truth reveal both that we over-estimate and under-estimate human nature. It shows both that we deem ourselves capable of more than we can achieve (as the Realist does by believing that we can grasp extra-contextual facts), and that we fail to have the wisdom to realize that sometimes doing our best involves recognizing our limits. Part of recognizing our limits involves realizing that our epistemic concepts must depend on a conception of rationality. John McDowell once very cleverly wrote, in a different context, something which looks very much like the sort of call for humility that internal realism proclaims:

> We should accept that sometimes there may be nothing better to do than explicitly to appeal to a hoped-for community of human response.(...) (...)[W]e would be protected against the vertigo if we would stop supposing that the relation to reality of some area of our thought and language needs to be contemplated from a standpoint independent of that anchoring in our human life that makes the thoughts what they are for us.[29]

An internal realist must consider truth as epistemic. Taking this as a first step away from metaphysical materialism is on a par with the rejection of the fact/value

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[28]It does not allow for questions that are asked from a standpoint detached of any context whatsoever.

[29]John McDowell, 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following' in *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, Holtzman and Leich, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Boston and Henley.

distinction in influencing the development of the other crucial concepts of this doctrine as what they are. These steps both originate from the realization that answers to metaphysical questions presuppose *non-metaphysical* assumptions or else rely on empirical premisses concerning the boundaries of human rationality. That the conditions for knowledge are not metaphysically grounded can be further explained by pointing to the effect that it is common-sensical to admit the importance of the role of an idea of human cognitive flourishing in the acquisition of knowledge. It suffices to look at ordinary ways of talking about our reflections, and of interpreting (and/or analysing) our own and others' reflections qua reflections to realize the emphasis put on the cognitive values in critical activity. The tendency to eliminate the import of values on our modes of reflection while describing them and to 'purify' our discourses of values, is a by-product of the scientific revolution. Such importance has been put on the scientific method that it has become nearly mandatory to 'scientificise'[30] our ways of talking about everything that is to be taken seriously. This is why expressions such as 'well, anyway, this is a value-laden judgement, of course!' to dismiss certain positions as worthy of consideration in theoretical discussions, has become fashionable.

This 'scientificising' activity originates from our having given supremacy to science over every other means of understanding, explaining and discovering things. It is not necessarily a 'natural' thing for beings like us to do. It is very common, even in science, for people to be reminded of the importance of paying heed to the usefulness, helpfulness to the advancement of knowledge, relevance, etc. of a new theory. These are, in fact, some of the key features that are examined when the scientific community

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[30] The verb 'to scientificise' will be used as a short way of refering to the tendency to eliminate the import of values on our modes of reflection and to 'purify' our cognitive discourses from any evaluative references discussed above. I will be obliged to the reader if she\he excused me for taking the liberty of bending the correct usage of english language by introducing this new word. It reveals itself very useful in the context, since recurrent references to this tendency are necessary to ensure the clarity of the present exposé.

attempts to decide whether or not to accept a newly developed theory; and this bears witness to the value-ladenness of science itself.

What is to be gained by discussing and reflecting upon conceptual relativity is perhaps that we ought to bring science back to a more humble level. Perhaps we ought to demote science from the God-like position in which our wonderment at what it can indeed achieve has encouraged us to place it. The scientific method has its value, needless to say, but scientific reasoning is not the only mode of reasoning available to us. That it is successful in certain fields, as it has proven to be, is evidence that we should continue promoting the utilisation of the scientific method in those fields. But if it fails to be successful in other fields, or if it pushes us towards unfortunate conclusions à *propos* their cognitive status, then perhaps we should be more prudent in light of those results, and stand back from them to see whether it is not possible that we have other ways of reasoning available to us that would be specific to the practices involved in these different fields.

When I say that 'scientificising' is not necessarily a 'natural' thing to do, I also mean to direct your attention to the fact that when science wasn't as fully developed, our knowledge of the physical world was certainly a lot less accurate, but we nevertheless often succeeded in discerning what is closer to the truth from what is further, and in acquiring knowledge in those areas which lost their cognitive status with the advent of the glory of science, despite the fact that not all our discourses were impregnated with this scientific way of speaking about things. Speaking about things in a scientific way is artificial for human beings however practical it may be when discussing matters which depend on the scientific method, as much as speaking about things in the business jargon, or in the philosophical jargon for that matter, is artificial. But if we were capable of so distinguishing near truths from complete falsities it cannot be exclusively in virtue of the scientific method, since the latter was only very partially

fleshed out then. It must thus have been in virtue of something else, in virtue of some other way of reasoning about things, which is perfectly plausible given the immanent-transcendent nature of rationality. This suggests that the boundaries of human rationality do not end and could not have ended where the boundaries of science end. It has already been mentioned that given that we were able to make certain kinds of correct judgements prior to the development of science, it cannot exhaust rationality. The discussion of conceptual relativity can also contribute to reinforcing this point.

One of the implications of conceptual relativity, as was previously stressed, is that, since truth is context-sensitive, given particular contexts, frameworks or discourses, what will be ideally acceptable will depend specifically on what better or worse situations will amount to in each distinct discourse. To this is added the fact that given the context-relativity of the notion of truth as idealized rational acceptability, notions of object and existence will only have determinate content within a given discourse. Similarly, we can expect that the traditional notion of objectivity will lose its place as the ultimate indicator of the representation-independent nature of judgements, and that if it is preserved, it will have to be redefined in accordance with the notion of internal truth, to indicate some sort of authority of judgements that would be made from *within* a representation. How this can be done and what this objectivity might amount to will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter, in a discussion of a proposal of how it could be fleshed out for the particular case of the moral discourse. For the time being, however, the interesting thing is that, given conceptual relativity, there will not only be a plurality of frameworks, (that there already is a plurality of discourses is a trivial fact that even metaphysical materialists would admit), but also, a plurality of standards for the objectivity of judgements, a plurality of ways of discovering truth and, more generally, *a plurality of modes of reasoning.*

That it would be wrong to insist that these modes of reasoning coincide with the

scientific mode of reasoning is easily understandable. Firstly, one of the reasons why the scientific method and the scientific way of reasoning have had such a big appeal and have been seen as the only secure method of achieving truly objective knowledge is that they were believed to be deprived of any evaluative components. But, this having now been refuted by Putnam's Companion in Guilt Argument, the scientific discourse loses its unique character. It is certainly not more influenced by values than any other discourse, but it still depends on values for its viability as a 'good' conceptual framework for beings like us (that is, one that depends on the right values). That scientific discourse is fact-stating can no longer be used to defend its supremacy over other discourses, since, if it does indeed state facts, it is only in virtue of its method's reflecting a certain number of values.

The rejection of the fact/value distinction, moreover, can also be seen as a condition for the success of any theory of knowledge, since developing accessible conceptions of truth and cognition is incumbent on realizing the importance of an idea of human flourishing. This gives all the more reason for asserting that it is important even for the success of the scientific mode of reasoning that we cease to view it as a discourse detached from the influence of our evaluations. If we persisted in this direction we would be demeaning the fact that it is a successful way *for us* to arrive at a certain number of discoveries, since the latter can only be meaningful if the method by which they are arrived at fulfills our cognitive needs.

The first reason (and probably also the most important for metaphysical realists) for wanting the scientific mode of reasoning to be the mode of reasoning *par excellence*, to be used in all fields where it is hoped to achieve a certain level of objectivity, is thus eliminated. Being set free of this weighty metaphysical burden, we are now better equipped to reflect on the sort of influence it should have (if it should have any at all) on the other modes of reasoning, and the place it should have among them. But before

broaching this topic, let's say a few words on the motivations for believing that human rationality provides us with more modes of reasoning than solely the scientific one.

If, indeed, each context determines what idealized acceptability is, if, indeed, each discourse defines its own cognitive notions, and if, indeed, this is due to the fact that the only way to make the world intelligible to us is by attempting to grasp it from our representational point of view, within particular contexts, then it trivially follows that the explicit expression of human rationality can only occur within particular contexts. *As far as the immanent nature of rationality is concerned*, it is also context-sensitive in the sense that it depends on the specific frameworks to be assessed in such a way as to enable the determination of standards of rational acceptability to which the critical concepts of truth, objectivity, etc., will respond. Hence, no concept of rationality is available from outside any framework.

That the contexts cannot be reduced to the scientific context is also easily understood, but requires that we assume all that has been said about internal realism concerning the pre-conditions for knowledge, the conception of truth as idealized acceptability, conceptual relativity, etc.. The scientific mode of reasoning can be taken to be one of the immanent ways by which rationality expresses itself. To be a mode of reasoning to which all other modes can be reduced, it would require that it has at its disposal a concept of rationality that is not only immanent-transcendent in the sense clarified earlier, but that is founded outside the framework of science or any framework. The reason why this is the case is that it would have to allow for differences in the way the critical concepts are fleshed out, since according to internal realism, each context defines these critical concepts according to its own standards, and this could only be done if it was 'extracted' from all contexts itself.

So far, so good; it could be argued, indeed, that the scientific mode of reasoning has the property of being both immanent and transcendent, and thus that it operates with

the only regulative concept of rationality, hence, that it is co-extensive with rationality. However, it is my conviction that what would be meant by science as defined as having an immanent-transcendent nature would be very different from what those who advertise the supremacy of science mean by it, and that it would in no way satisfy the motivations behind this sort of promotion of science.

The motivations are the following: 1) as previously mentioned, to make the study of the subject matter of fields that are not purely scientific as value free as possible; 2) to replicate in other fields the success of the scientific method in the pure sciences in terms of the possibility of discovery and predictability, etc, thus entailing the necessary application of the scientific conception of truth to these other fields.

The first of these motivations has already been dealt with and proved vain. It is the second that is of primary interest here. To be acceptable as being of an immanent-transcendent nature, the scientific mode of reasoning would have to leave open the possibility of divergences from the usual conception of truth (and perhaps of drastic divergences), in order for the latter to be able to respond to the standards of each different context. But that would not be compatible with imposing the scientific conception of truth on all discourses, and with promoting the scientific method. In fact, the scientific method would not be promoted at all, apart from its re-assertion as a good method for the study of the 'pure'[31] sciences. And, science would then just be used as an interchangeable way of using the word 'rationality' and would have very little to do with what we take science to be now.

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[31] 'Pure' sciences is used here in an unorthodox way to distinguish the fields that are rightfully studied using the scientific method from those which some philosophers are now trying to make conform to scientific fields such as the domain of ethics and the domain of intentionality (which is, agreeably, not as obviously a bad candidate for science as ethics, the actual debate about it being a witness of this). This use of 'pure' is not meant to distinguish what are usually called the pure sciences from the applied sciences, it includes domains such as physics and chemistry, as well as biology and bio-technology, for instance.

For one thing, as a conception of science, it would be much broader than the one we are used to. It would have to be pluralistic in its explicit expression as a mode of reasoning. Hence, the scientific method itself would not gain in popularity, unless it can be shown that it is applicable to all contexts. But that this could be achieved is very implausible because it would first have to be shown that it can accomplish the things that we want to achieve in each of these contexts; it would have to express the virtues that we want to realize in these contexts. The non-cognitivists' arguments in meta-ethics show how studying morality from the point of view of science fails, (think particularly of Mackie's Argument from Queerness).

The problem is that from the scientific point of view one misses the point of morality by not grasping the sorts of virtues we expect ethical discourse to have. The only viable way out of the problem of moral objectivity is to admit that ethics has its own standards, and cannot be reduced to science. I believe this to be the same for other discourses (for instance, it is the case for the intentional discourse) that are so different from the scientific discourse in the way they are ordinarily used that it is not surprising that they could only be transformed if they had to conform to the latter.

But, for reasons that must be obvious by now, it is my conviction that a theory of knowledge (as well as a 'method'[32] of knowledge acquisition) must be subservient to common sense, and hence that if it jeopardizes the integrity of ordinary discourses and thereby violates our ordinary common sense judgements of what it is reasonable to assert, than it is not a good theory of knowledge for these discourses.[33]

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[32] Method here is put between scare quotes because it is not obvious that the modes of knowledge acquisition can always be explicitly described.

[33] 1) Calling the scientific method a theory of knowledge is pushing the point, of course. But if science were co-extensive with rationality, in the way that promoters of science hope it to be, a theory of knowledge would indeed have to account for the ever binding nature of this method.
2) I am not making, here, any claims as to the possibility of there being things that might not be graspable in ordinary 'common sensical' ways but which nonetheless might be objects

Some may find that basing this argument on an assumption that internal realism is right makes it question begging. I thus want to provide reasons why I do not believe it to be so question begging. Internal realism is based on a conception of humanity which has more to do with the empirical facts about humanity than with any metaphysical aim. The real assumption on which this argument is thus based is the one that the reader recognizes the plausibility and perhaps, if I'm lucky, the accuracy of the picture of human rationality offered by internal realism.

Hence if rationality were co-extensive with science, the concept of science would have to undergo a complete revolution to make it fit the demands of the plurality of human discourses. But then, this enterprise (the one of showing that rationality is co-extensive with science) would simply look like a switch of terms. It is preferable, surely, to reserve the term 'science' for the particular mode of reasoning with which it is usually associated.

By way of conclusion, let me re-affirm that if rationality is thus not co-extensive with science, it leaves open the possibility that rationality expresses itself in different ways, in domains of ordinary life that differ from the usual scientific domains. In light of this, we will see in the next chapter what response an internal realist could direct against the arguments of Mackie and Harman.

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of knowledge. I am only saying that when common sense does not lead to obvious mistakes, and when ordinary ways of reasoning lead to satisfyingly good results in terms of the applicability and practicality of judgements thus acquired, then they should not be excluded from the group of legitimate ways of acquiring knowledge, even for the sake of science, especially if applying the scientific method to these domains means leaving out some crucial parts of their inherent practices, as I argued would occur in ethics.

Ch.II Internal Realism and The Moral Realism\Anti-Realism Debate

Non-Cognitivism in Ethics: Gilbert Harman's Moral Relativism

As with Mackie's position in meta-ethics, Harman's non-cognitivism arises out of the realization of an apparent disparity between the way science functions and the way ethics functions, and focusses on the possibility of objectivity and factuality in ethics.[34] However, Harman offers an interestingly different line of argument, which, when conjoined with Mackie's conclusions, serves to clarify the doctrine of non-cognitivism.

The appeal of Harman's position is that it is grounded on a more sophisticated conception of science -for example, he acknowledges the theory-dependence of scientific observations- and thus is less liable to easy dismissal, and constitutes a more challenging counter to contemporary more-realist positions. Nevertheless, as we will see, on what I take to be the most plausible reading of his argument, it is just as much influenced by metaphysical materialist assumptions as Mackie's, and can be subjected to criticisms similar to the ones directed against him. It can thus be conceived of as a sophistication of the non-cognitivist position, one which corresponds much more to the sort of questions raised by modern philosophy; nonetheless, as will be argued, it does not provide more convincing grounds for believing that non-cognitivism threatens the possibility of moral cognition.

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[34] Mackie's non-cognitivism was characterized in the introduction.

Hypothetical deliberation in ethics

Harman's first worry concerns the role of observation in attempts to confirm moral principles. He invites us to undertake a thought experiment which consists in reflecting upon the following two situations: (Quoting Harman)

A)   You are a doctor in a hospital's emergency room when six accident victims are brought in. All six are in danger of dying but one is much worse off than the others. You can just barely save that person if you devote all of your resources to him and let the others die. Alternatively, you can save the other five if you are willing to ignore the most seriously injured person.[35]

B)   You have five patients in the hospital who are dying, each in need of a separate organ. One needs a kidney, another a lung, a third a heart, and so forth. You can save all five if you take a single healthy person and remove his heart, lungs, kidneys, and so forth, to distribute to these five patients. Just such a healthy person is in room 306. (...) If you do nothing, he will survive without incident; the other patients will die, however. The other five patients can be saved only if the person in room 306 is cut up and his organs distributed. In that case, there would be one dead but five saved.[36]

According to Harman these situations are subject to the following principle: (referred to hereafter as principle P or as P)

'If you are given a choice between five people alive and one dead or five people dead and one alive, you should always chose to have five people alive and one dead rather than the other way round.'[37]

He also paints an imaginary scenario in which you experience catching hooligans deliberately setting a cat on fire, which is supposed to work as a pump for our gut intuitions about morality, by means of which he will attempt to convince us of the plausibility of his position.

Concerning the thought experiment, Harman indicates that the principle would advise us, in the first case, to sacrifice one person for the sake of the others; which seems

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[35]Gilbert Harman, 1977, p.3.

[36] idem p.6

[37] idem p.3

right, while, in the second case, it would encourage us to do something which, on the face of it, appears to be wrong: taking the life of the healthy bystander to save the patients in need of organs. This leads Harman to conclude that the principle has been simultaneously confirmed and disproved.

These examples are particularly interesting since rather than simply being thought experiments, they also portray moral situations which are not at all implausible. They are, moreover (at least in the case of the first two), complex moral situations which do not admit of obvious and clear cut answers, but which demand immediate resolution. However, Harman deems it necessary to specify that reflecting on such examples is not to be mistaken for comparing an hypothesis with the world, that we are merely comparing the principle with 'our *feeling* about certain imagined examples', that this, if similar to comparisons of scientific hypotheses with one's '*sense*' of what occurs in particular situations, is not as clearly similar to comparing hypotheses *with the world*. He then continues by asking whether moral principles can be tested in the same way that we can test scientific principles, that is, '*in real experiments, out in the world*'; whether we can *perceive* rightness or wrongness; whether we arrive at a *conclusion* that a person is wrong when judging so, or whether we simply *see* that she is wrong, in virtue of some moral 'sense' resulting from our upbringing.[38]

I would like to begin the discussion of Harman's position, by making the following critical points concerning his treatment of this thought experiment. It would be improbable that Harman misunderstands or completely disregards the complexity of the situations he describes. However, it seems that his discussion of the thought experiment is not sufficiently thorough to support his conclusion, for there are obvious things which make his analysis of the corroboration (or non-corroboration) of P by these

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[38]See Harman 1977, p.4

hypothetical situations problematic.

Due to their complexity, we can expect that both scenarios will be 'under the jurisdiction' of more than one principle. Hence, judging that in the second case, following principle P will not lead to the best action possible, morally speaking, might simply be an indication that P does not apply to situation B. It could also happen that some other principle, amongst all the ones that apply to similar situations, or considerations about people's rights, overrides P in case B. Whether this is an indication that situation B disproves P, however, is the question which we should address. It is clear, if we follow Harman's characterization of P, that the fact that it is overriden by another principle would mean that it is disproved by situation B, since, if it is correct it should always apply to situations of the same type. However this involves, on the part of Harman, endorsing a view of moral principles as delineating absolute obligations. The outcome will be different, however, if one holds the contrary view that moral obligations are only prima facie, for then it is possible that there are other principles that compete with P concerning their application to situation B, without this jeopardizing the status of P. This is because prima facie principles, although they apply universally to moral cases of the same type, do not apply exclusively to those cases. Hence, there may be distinct prima facie principles that apply to a given situation and that recommend, in that situation, incompatible courses of action. What this entails for decision-making is that the agent must determine to which actual obligation she is bound. However, that this actual obligation conflicts with one of the principles that apply to the situation does not imply anything concerning the confirmation-status of that principle.

It would seem that Harman confuses the issue of the relevance and/or (exclusive) applicability of a principle to a given situation with that of its confirmation. Confirmation of moral principles, like confirmation of scientific principles, cannot be

achieved by apprehending the given hypothesis as isolated from other hypotheses and precepts already established as valid in our theory. In fact, corroboration of principles is done against all the evidence made available by previous hypothetical testing taken with the body of already accepted rules and principles. Hence, all that could be derived from an analysis of thought experiments that are restricted to specific situations such as the ones we are presented with, is an answer concerning whether or not the principle in question is relevant to an evaluation of what to do in the eventuality of such occurrences. This question would admit of three answers: i) that the principle is relevant and is not overriden by other principles, ii) that the principle is totally irrelevant to the situation, or, iii) that it is relevant to the situation but is overriden by considerations that are deemed more important; which in no circumstance could jeopardize the status of confirmation of the principle. Confirmation of principles properly speaking can only be determined against the more general background of a theory.

If, on initial consideration of this thought experiment, principle P seemed to have been both confirmed and disproved, it is due to some sort of 'intellectual mirage'. Any profound analysis of the example would show that the problems raised by the result of applying P to B could not alone entail the disconfirmation of P. Confirmation goes beyond the particular results arrived at by applying a principle to given situations. It involves things such as the general efficiency of such principles at contributing, together with other principles, to the development of a theory which provides accurate explanations and descriptions of moral situations and workable tools to direct actions and deliberation. Given the complexity of moral situations, and, correspondingly, given the diversity of moral precepts that guide moral deliberation, it appears that the first thing that is necessary to ensure the general efficacy of principles in contributing to the development of a useful and workable moral theory is that we hold moral principles as

prima facie.

Harman confronts the problems of confirmation precisely because he refrains from adhering to such a view of moral principles and obligations. A moral theory which is grounded in a conception of moral principles and obligations as absolute does not stand a chance of meeting the requirements for a cognitive conception of the moral domain. Indeed, its moral principles are then ascribed an inconsistent confirmation-status, since the mere applicability of possibly conflicting principles to a given situation entails the necessity of 'disconfirming' all those which do not lead to the actual obligation, even though they may be confirmed in other situations. The situation is much more hopeful in the case of a moral theory which presupposes a conception of principles and obligations as prima facie.

Hence, it appears obvious that Harman does not provide convincing grounds for his view that moral principles seem as easily disprovable as they are confirmed. More importantly, as Nicholas Sturgeon also stresses, Harman fails to show that this is a distinctive problem for morality since scientific principles themselves could seem as easily discredited as they are confirmed when analysed in isolation.[39] One cannot, therefore, focus on this particular issue to highlight the 'problem with ethics'.

Unfortunately, given the way Harman sets up his argument, the conclusion of his thought experiment seems to be at the origin of worrisome questions concerning the nature of moral hypothetical deliberation. (These were enumerated at the beginning of the preceding discussion.) From an internal realist point of view, one could feel inclined to make the following remark concerning the claims about hypothetical deliberation in morality. It is not clear what justifies the claim that these examples could not, should not, and do not constitute plausible hypotheses rather than mere

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[39]See Sturgeon 1984, p.231.

thought experiments. As I mentioned earlier, they are plausible situations: it is very likely that some people might find themselves faced with similar circumstances. Indeed, I am quite sure that someone is, at this very minute, struggling with the complexity of such a situation, and wondering how such a principle would apply to this particular context, and if it applies at all, thus taking this principle as an hypothesis which she *is comparing with the world.*

In the case where a scientist is indeed considering some thought experiment concerning an explicit principle and confronting it with her 'scientific sense' (the case which Harman seems to believe to be similar to the moral case), she is evaluating what will happen if she does X, perhaps knowing that X might not be a probable empirical event at all, although reflecting about it might lead her on the right path to pursue her experiments, or might help in highlighting interesting problems within her theory.

Similarly, comfortably installed in front of my computer, perhaps I am not engaged in anything other than a thought experiment while considering these examples. What is worrisome is that, whereas in the scientific case he allows for the possibility that some cases of hypothesis consideration will be cases of comparison of these hypotheses with the world, Harman seems to hesitate to allow for this in the moral case. However, it seems obvious that every time we take a moral decision, especially in complex situations where it is not always clear what action is called for, we are undergoing such deliberation of our hypotheses.[40] The very fact that moral deliberations are deliberations the results of which have to lead to decisions or actions, is enough, it seems, to

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[40] The claim is not that, in ethics, thought experiments could only be real instances of comparison of hypotheses with the world if one is actually confronted with a moral situation. We can imagine a situation where a physician would appeal to an ethicist looking for advice as to what to do in circumstances such as situation A. The ethicist will try to come up with *real* suggestions, ones which will be practically workable and as morally justified as they can be, even though there will be no immediate repercussions to her reflection.

consider them as legitimate cases of testing hypotheses with the world.

Take, for instance, a very simple hypothesis concerning human reactions to certain events (putting aside for a moment the physiological basis for such reactions), for example the hypothesis that if hot water is dropped on someone's lap, that person is likely to express some feeling of pain or discomfort; no one will argue that this is not an hypothesis about the world. If any one did, it would mean that she does not include facts about primitive human behaviour as part of the things that belong to the body of knowledge about the world.

The question then is, if those sort of hypotheses can be considered as ones that are tested against the world, why can't hypotheses about events that affect human beings *morally*, even though they may have no physiologically identifiable basis, be tested against the world, in the sense that being part of the body of knowledge about human interactions, and thus just a sub-class of the body of knowledge about human beings, they are legitimate objects of knowledge?

Moreover, any decision as to which human reactions should be considered as 'real wordly events' should be carefully undertaken in the light of the difficulty of distinguishing those of our reactions that have an obvious physiological or physical basis from those that do not. There is a fine line between reactions that can be straight-forwardly attributed to our biological nature or to our psychological nature --reactions which can be explained in physicalistic terms by refering to nerve responses to certain stimuli or lesions in the brain for example-- and those such as intentional responses and moral reactions which it is more difficult to associate with any precise physical basis which renders problematic the matter of how we would go about reducing discourses

about them to physical discourse.[41]

If the sceptical argument against the testability of hypotheses in morality sketched out by Harman works, one of the consequences may be that it would be difficult to justify not also applying it to other sorts of cases such as the ones intimated above; and then, perhaps, it might reveal itself to be a more general sceptical argument about testing any hypothesis whatsoever. However, Nicholas Sturgeon suggests that Harman's discussion of the theory-ladenness of observations rules out the possibility of interpreting this sceptical argument as a standard verificationist argument against the possibility that moral hypotheses have empirical implications, in which case the argument could not be generalized as a broader kind of scepticism.

Perhaps it should be left up to the discretion of the reader to decide to what extent Sturgeon, perhaps in an effort to focus on more interesting parts of the argument proposed, presents a charitable interpretation of this particular point. However, Harman's own writings in the first chapter of *The Nature of Morality* do invite more severe interpretations. For example he claims that:

'(...) scientific hypotheses can also be tested in real experiments, out in the world.';

and asks:

'(...) can you ever perceive the rightness or wrongness of what [one] does?',

It appears that even if such a charitable interpretation is granted, the question of why Harman hesitates to consider moral hypotheses as comparable to 'real experiments out in the world' will continue to preoccupy the internal realist. It has already been shown that such lack of faith on Harman's part could not be due solely to the problem of

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[41] That no such separation can be drawn without engendering dilemmas for philosophy (of mind particularly; dilemmas involved in attemps to determine the possibility or impossibility of attaching intentional states to brain states, for example) should be a good enough reason for caution if not a source of worry for any one who attempts to restrict the notion of belonging to the world to objects that can be described in physicalistic terms.

simultaneous confirmation and disconfirmation of moral principles when tested in isolation, without this also engendering problems for science. Since the problem cannot seriously be taken to concern the particular confirmation procedure of ethics, the obvious question is whether the problem for Harman is grounded in a worry that there might be a disparity, either between the extent to which scientific and moral beliefs can be taken as having empirical implications, or between the kind of background against which moral principles are supposed to be tested, and the one against which scientific principles are tested. Let's see why these two possibilities will be equally worrisome for internal realists, and thus how even a charitable interpretation à la Sturgeon might not be satisfying.

The internal realist notion of belonging to the world is hardly restricted to particular categories of objects, let alone exclusively to objects that would be perceivable. As we have seen in the discussion of contextual relativity, and of the context dependency of notions such as the one of existence, internal realism endorses much broader notions of reality and even of the world. These will influence what will count as real experiments out in the world, (unless reasons are advanced for believing that the notion of 'experiment' belongs exclusively to scientific contexts[42]), and the internal realist's response to Harman's claims at the very beginning of the discussion on moral hypotheses might be that if he did not restrict these notions to physicalistic standards he would avoid worries concerning the possibility of moral hypothetical deliberation.

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[42]Harman could not adhere to such a view of the place that should be assigned to the notion of 'experiment' without this engendering problems for the legitimacy of the questions his non-cognitivism attempts to answer. An inquiry into the possibility of testing moral principles by experimentation must pre-suppose that, in principle, there is nothing inherent to *the notion of 'experiment' itself* that prevents its application to the moral domain. Otherwise, the inquiry could be dismissed as irrelevant. The author thus has first to assume that 'experiment' *is* a notion that has its place in the moral discourse, and then proceed to explain what features *of the moral domain* (rather than features of the notion of 'experiment') renders testing moral principles by experimentation impossible.

In science, testing an hypothesis amounts to comparing the results that it predicts with the ones which would be achieved if it was directly applied to *the physical world*. In ethics, testing an hypothesis amounts to comparing the results that it predicts with the ones which it would lead to if directly applied to *moral situations*. In the case of principle P, situation A revealed it to lead to the expected results insofar as it fulfilled the task for which it was appealed to, the one of leading to the best possible moral action. Situation B, as we saw, revealed it to lead to an untenable moral situation; untenable *against the body of things we value*.

The difference between testing hypotheses in science and in ethics is, then, that in science the hypotheses are tested *by experimentation, against the evidence presented by the physical world* (as interpreted through a suitably coherent body of theoretical beliefs about it), whereas in ethics, as I stressed above, they are tested against the evidence presented by *the body of things we value* (as extracted from a suitably coherent body of theoretical moral beliefs).

If this is what bothers Harman, the internal realist will simply feel inclined to remind him that each conceptual framework provides its own theoretical background against which to test hypotheses according to its purpose, and that this need not jeopardize the testability of both moral and scientific hypotheses, however different the backgrounds against which they are tested, because, as previous discussions on the fact\value distinction and on the peculiarity of morality as discourse and as theoretical domain have shown, the distinctiveness of ethics alone cannot constitute a problem for its status as a cognitive domain.

Harman's qualms concerning the possibility of testing principles arise from a failure to realize that moral principles do not, so to speak, stand on their own, as arbitrarily chosen sets of rules; that they are *constructions* out of something else. They are the result of the codification of our moral intuitions as the latter are manifested in our

particular moral judgements. Such codification is rendered necessary by the need to have general guidance for moral explanation and decisions in 'hard' situations. But moral principles do not (and could not) exhaust the content of our moral intuitions since they are, indeed, mere *codifications and generalizations*. Testing moral principles can be thus seen as involving a counter-check of those principles with our intuitions about what is morally recommendable in given cases. A principle is disconfirmed when it is judged to commend actions that are in conflict with what we would judge to be right in a given context. This appeal to intuition expressed in our moral judgements is the very thing that might bother Harman, as he dismisses right from the start talk of 'moral seeing' and since an appeal to our intuitions necessarily involves such an allusion. However, Putnam offers a line of argument to counter such dismissal of talk of 'moral seeing' by making an analogy with the mathematical case.[43] He stresses the importance that mathematicians grant to the role of (mathematical) intuition in understanding the necessity of some mathematical principles. Appeal to intuitions is not limited to this domain, however. It is commonly accepted by scientists that succeeding in science depends initially on having the 'right kind' of basic intuitions about the subject at hand, and a good part of scientific education aims at helping students to develop a 'scientific sense'. If appeal to a mathematical and/or scientific 'sense' is legitimate, then there is no reason why appeal to a 'moral sense' should be labelled as rendering morality mystical. Hence, we can give an affirmative answer to Harman's question 'can moral principles be tested by experiment, out in the world ?'. We put our moral principles 'under experimentation' by comparing their commands with what our intuitions would dictate, against the background of the body of things we value.

This state of affairs is satisfying for the internal realist because, granted that they are

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[43]See **RTH** pp. 138-145

deemed pragmatically indispensable, she takes our ordinary discourses at face value. This is Putnam's 'pragmatic principle' of ontological commitment cited in chapter I above. An externalist will be uncomfortable with this account of experimental testing in morality because she has reasons independent of the indispensability of discourses for dismissing 'the body of things we value' as a legitimate background against which testing is undergone, reasons that are akin to justifications for preserving a sharp fact/value distinction. But the internal realist is not compelled by such justifications since the internalist metaphysical framework provides her with compelling reasons for discarding this distinction.[44]

One of the things that justify such confidence in the indispensability of moral discourse is the conviction that adequate descriptions of moral situations require the use of the sort of normative-descriptive concepts (e.g. the one of 'considerateness' and the one of 'cruelty') alluded to by Iris Murdoch (and Putnam).[45] One indication of the importance of having a moral 'sense' is the role our intuitions play in helping us to determine which such concepts should be used to describe given situations, and to *see* that using a particular concept is *required* in an adequate description of a given situation. (Moral principles, if they stood on their own could not play such a role since those concepts are given content partly by our intuitions about what is valuable and what is not.) Putnam argues that the same thing that legitimizes the use of the concepts of 'chair' and 'table' in a given circumstance -that is that they are _required_ in order to have an *adequate* description- is what legitimizes the use of concepts such as the normative-descriptive moral concepts alluded to above in given moral situations.[46] Such

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[44]See ChI of this thesis, *The Companion in Guilt Argument*.

[45]See Iris murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970. The relevance of this to questions of supervenience will be discussed later on.

[46]See Putnam 1981, p.138.

legitimation, however, presupposes that moral discourse is taken at face value. Indeed, we are justified in criticizing someone who fails to use the concept 'chair' when it is adequate to do so because we take the discourse within which such concept is used, and our categorization of ordinary objects at face value. Similarly, to criticize the person who fails to use the term 'considerate' when she is required to do so we have to take moral discourse, and our categorization of objects within that discourse at face value. Once again, what allows internal realists to do this is that they have pragmatic grounds for taking our ordinary discourses at face value.

Harman's comparison of scientific and moral hypotheses as regards their testability is far from being unproblematic for internal realists. However there may be more profound problems which justify Harman's position. Let us have a closer look at his central argument.

The role of moral observations in corroborating theories

As can be surmised from the preceding discussion of Harman's treatment of moral hypotheses, his argument aims at showing that ethics is different from science in some important way. One such distinction lies in the role of observations in corroborating theories. He explains that two things are needed for this role to be well assumed: firstly, that the observer be in a certain psychological state, and, secondly, that there really is something there to be observed. The first of these two is necessary but not sufficient, the second is indispensable.

> He can count his making the observation as confirming evidence for his theory *only to the extent that* it is reasonable to explain his making the observation by assuming that, not only is he in a certain psychological "set", given the theory he accepts and his beliefs about the experimental apparatus, but furthermore, *there really was a proton going through the cloud chamber, causing the vapor trail*, which he saw as a proton."[47],

affirms Harman while discussing the example of a physicist who sees a vapor trail in a cloud chamber while attempting to test a scientific theory. He emphasizes his point by continuing:

> But if his having made that observation could have been equally well explained by his psychological set alone, without the need for any assumption about the proton, then the observation would not have been evidence for the existence of that proton and therefore would not have been evidence for the theory."[48]

What is claimed here is that, in order for an observation to corroborate a scientific theory that posits a given object or event, it has first to be evidence for the event (or object) in question. If it is sufficient to appeal to the observer's psychological "set" to explain the occurrence of the observation, then the observation cannot serve as a corroboration; hence the importance of also appealing to the existence of the object.

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[47]See Harman 1977, p.6, emphasis added.

[48]See Harman 1977, p.6.

Harman's argument is that in the moral case, observations can be explained solely by the psychological state of individuals, without there being any need to assume that there really is something out there which caused the observation. This is why he asks, in an earlier mentioned passage, whether in morality we arrive at judgements by way of *conclusions* or simply because we *see* that the event deserves an appreciation of a negative or positive polarity.[49] This is also why he asks whether the rightness or wrongness of actions can be *perceived*. He writes:

> Facts about protons can affect what you observe, since a proton passing through the cloud chamber can cause a vapor trail that reflects the light to your eye in a way that, given your scientific training and psychological set, leads you to judge that what you see is a proton. *But there does not seem to be any way in which the actual wrongness or rightness of an action can have any effect on your perceptual apparatus.* In this respect, ethics seems to differ from science.[50],

and,

> Certain moral principles might help to explain why it was *wrong* of the children to set the cat on fire, but moral principles seem to be of no help in explaining *your thinking* that that is wrong. (...)Moral principles do not seem to help explain your observing what you observe.[51]

'*Moral principles do not seem to help explain your observing what you observe*'. Harman clarifies this claim by first discerning two ways in which principles can be evidence for the observations that are made, which seems to play on the distinction between *simply making that observation* and *believing, or thinking* that you made an observation. From this he derives a distinction between two kinds of observation: weak observations and strong observations. On the one hand you could explain your observation that a given act of killing is morally wrong by pointing to the explicit

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[49]See the discussion of the nature of moral hypotheses, in 'Hypothetical deliberation in ethics', chapter II of this thesis.

[50]Harman 1977, p.8. Emphasis added.

[51]Harman 1977, no emphasis added.

command of the principle: cold blooded murder is wrong because the principle says that one ought not to kill (this is the weak kind of observation); on the other hand you could explain your observation by pointing to reasons independent of the explicit command of the principle that make you believe that you observed the wrongness of the act of murdering. It is a concluding/seeing distinction; in the first instance the principle mediates between your observation of the action and your observing ('judging') that the action is morally wrong. In the second instance your observation can be explained by *your belief that there is something there that you observed*, observation of which is independent of the stipulations of the principle, but which serves to corroborate it. It is a distinction between principles that *guide our observations*, and principles which *corroborate what we see*, with an assumption that there actually is something to observe, however different it would 'look' if we adhered to different background theories. It is a distinction between observations that would be, so to speak, dictated to us by our principles (the weak ones), and ones that are directly grounded in features of our experience (the strong ones). Harman affirms that scientific observations are of the latter sort, as contrasted to moral observations.

It is, however, important to qualify this latter claim of Harman by stressing that he does not mean to say by this that scientific observations are not theory-laden. He does indeed concede that our observations are what they are in virtue of the theories we hold. He affirms:

> (...)you see what you do because of the theories you hold. Change those theories and you would see something else, given the same pattern of light.(...)
> Observation depends on theory because perception involves forming a belief as a fairly direct result of observing something; you can form a belief only if you understand the relevant concepts and a concept is what it is by virtue of its role in some theory or system of belief.[52]

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[52]Harman 1977 p.5

Hence, Harman understands the importance of theories for the interpretation of observations. His argumentation is thus not based upon a belief that moral observations are too tightly linked to moral theories. He deems it to be similar in the case of science. He believes, nevertheless, that in morality 'the *explanatory chain* from principle to observation is broken':

> Conceived as an explanatory theory, morality, unlike science, seems to be cut off from observation.[53]

The link between physical theory and observation can be explained in the following fashion. If we start with the physical theory, the observation (in the weak sense of observation) can be explained in a stipulative way by appealing to the inner precepts of the theory to explain why -say- the vapor trail is observed and that it is evidence for the existence of a proton, in a manner similar to the moral case where the principle dictates to us how to interpret the moral action. Hence, in both morality and science one can start with the theory to advance an explanation of the observation. The problem concerning morality is that you cannot go the other way round: you cannot use the observation to explain or corroborate the theory. It is in this sense that Harman believes that moral theories are 'cut off from observational testing'. The point is that the very occurrence of the observation is evidence for the truth of the scientific theory. The explanatory loop can thus be closed in the scientific case. We have:

Physical theory←┐
    ↓   ↑
Explanation   ↑
    ↓   ↑
Observation →———↑
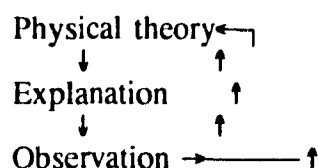
This is not allowed in the moral case according to Harman because, outside of the dictates of the principles, the actual wrongness of the act cannot be explained, nor is

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[53]Harman 1977 p.9

it evidence for the moral principle. He writes:

> In the scientific case, your making that observation is itself evidence for the physical theory because the physical theory explains the proton, which explains the trail, which explains your observation. In the moral case, your making your observation does not seem to be evidence for the relevant moral principle because that principle does not seem to help explain your observation.(...) The moral principle may "explain" why it is wrong for the children to set the cat on fire. But the wrongness of the act does not appear to help explain the act, which you observe, itself. The explanatory chain appears to be broken in such a way that neither the moral principle nor the wrongness of the act can help explain why you observe what you observe.⁴⁴

Several remarks can be made concerning this passage. Firstly -a clarification- the very first statement to the effect that the observation is evidence for the scientific theory because the theory explains the observation, may seem a bit ambiguous. What is meant is firstly that, observing the vapor trail is evidence for the physical theory because the latter explains why a proton produces a vapor trail thus explaining that we observe what we observe (i.e. the vapor trail); secondly, that scientific observations can be evidence for physical theory because physical theory posits the existence of the objects by reference to which we explain what is observed. Remember that earlier on Harman remarks that the problem for morality is that an explanation of your moral judgements does not require that we assume any moral facts.

The argument advanced by Harman in favour of this was that, in the scientific case, observations could be considered as evidence for the theory because the truth of an observation, (such as that there really is a vapor trail to observe there, hence, that there really is a proton passing through the cloud chamber) could be relevant to a reasonable explanation of why that observation was made (in the sense that having made that observation is evidence not only about the observer, but also about the physical facts), whereas in the moral case there seemed to be no link between the truth

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⁴⁴Harman 1977, p.9.

or falsity of the moral observation and explanations of why it was made."[55]

We will present, here, two internal realist arguments, the first of which will serve to show that Harman is wrong in believing that moral theory differs from scientific theory, in that we cannot make sense of 'strong' moral observations that delineate moral facts that are relevant to explanations of our moral judgements, in the same way that we can make sense of strong scientific observations. We will then provide an argument that explains that and why an assumption about moral facts is indispensable in moral practice.

Consider, first, the following argument. The fact that, in ordinary life, we use moral terms and we expect others to use the framework of moral discourse to describe particular events vouches for the objectivity of moral observation. Our observing that the event is best described as having a moral character is a first indication of moral facts, and the truth or falsity of *that* observation is relevant to our explanation of why it was made. In other words, my observing that the act of setting a cat on fire has a moral character is already evidence about the fact that there is something of a moral nature to observe there, independently of the polarity of my moral appreciation of it, and this fact can thus be relevant to a partial explanation of why I observed that the action was wrong. Moreover, since it is in the nature of moral facts that they are determinate (moral actions are either right or wrong, praiseworthy or blame-worthy, or, morally justified or morally unjustified), we are warranted in believing that if there is a moral fact to observe there, it is a fact about this event's having a moral character that is determinate in its polarity. Observations of the specific polarity of actions are theory-laden in the same sense in which scientific observations are theory-laden because moral theory is needed in order to provide us with the concepts necessary to make

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[55]Harman 1977, p.7

moral descriptions.

I suspect that an advocate of Harman's position might find that the claim that we can observe the moral character of actions upon perception of the act carries with it an intuitionist flavour, and might insist that I determine what sort of faculty makes this moral character accessible to us. One might try to reply to this challenge -along the lines of Mark Platts' reply to non-cognitivism- by pointing to an analogy between the recognition of such character in an action and the recognition of a face in an arrangement of black dots. Platts writes:

> There is only a face there to be seen because the dot arrangement is as it is; the dot arrangement *fixes* (subject perhaps to existing conventions of pictorial representation) whether or not there is a face there to be seen. Still we do not *see* the face by *attending* to that dot-arrangement, where that arrangement is characterized in terms free of picture and face-vocabulary... Thus we do not *infer* that the face is there from judgements in this non-pictorial, non-facial vocabulary about the arrangement of the black dots.[x]

In other words, the moral character is there to be observed because the situation is as it is. Given the conceptual tools made available to us by our moral theory, such a state of things will inevitably be interpreted as having a particular moral character.

The problem with this is that it could be taken to mean that the moral character of an action is *determined* by the *physical* state of things at that time, and that if reality (that is the physical reality for Platts) had been different, there might not have been such a moral fact to observe there, just as if the dots were arranged differently there might not be any face there to be seen. Hence, we might seem to be committed to offering an account of moral reality as reducible to physical reality.

An internal realist, however can argue that reality (as it presents itself to us) is saturated with morally relevant attributes, and justify such a claim by appealing to the fact that certain types of events are immediately and unavoidably interpreted as events

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[x]See Mark Platts, *Ways of Meaning*, p. 244.

of a certain moral character in their ordinary assessment, just as certain kinds of objects are automatically interpreted as physical or natural objects. Hence, it is not that we *project* a moral reality upon a world otherwise amoral, but rather that the only way for us to understand certain kinds of wordly events is to interpret them in morally loaded terms, because the conceptual framework of morality is the one that is available to us in order to understand, evaluate and explain these sorts of events. We may recall, here, Iris Murdoch's discussion of the importance of our normative-descriptive vocabulary. A description or explanation will count as an *adequate* description or explanation of the situation whose occurrence is to be explained if it reflects the 'right kind' of virtues. Its reflecting the 'right kind' of virtues depends on whether the describer has available a certain set of concepts and sees the need to use them. In the occurrence where she would fail to use those concepts in her description, the latter is liable to be criticized for being inadequate or not perspicuous, whether or not the statements she used were true. Part of having the humility of accepting our epistemic condition is thus to acknowledge the conceptual categorizations used in ordinary life. A failure to do so might be an indication that we look at the world (or should I say, The World) from a point of view independent of our practices, with all the problems we know this to entail. The internal realist does not need to appeal to a 'special faculty of moral perception' nor to allude to a reductionist picture *à la Platts* of how moral observations are made, to explain why we make the observation that we do. She simply relies on the indispensability of our conceptual categorizations in descriptions of events.

Harman insisted that moral facts are not relevant to explanations of the *moral* observations that we make. He goes even further in claiming that for moral facts to be explanatorily relevant they have to be part of our best explanation of the act which is observed itself. His contention that the problem with the case of the children and the cat is that the wrongness of the act does not help explain the act which you observed

itself, however, can be countered in light of the previous discussion. Indeed, if the action is apprehended by 'attending' to the state of things as divorced from the wheels of our moral theories and practices, its moral character will not be apparent because it is only in the conceptual framework of morality that we can judge where the fact of the matter lies in moral situations. However, this does not imply that the moral character of an action is not relevant to an explanation of the act which you observe itself. It would seem that to advance a *complete* and interesting description and explanation of the act one would necessarily have to appeal to both its non-moral and moral characteristics. Moreover, since the moral character of a given situation is part of the general 'state of things' in that situation, observing the moral character *is* relevant to an explanation of the act itself since it provides information concerning facts about the way such action is apprehended when analysed from the perspective of morality, and facts about the morally relevant characteristics of this 'state of things' or situation.

This whole discussion presupposes that we *can* separate the physical attributes of a situation from its moral attributes. My intuitive conviction, however, is that whereas such separation is possible at the level of theorizing about our capacities for observation, it is not possible when we actually are observing, and this not for any mystical reason, but simply because we are embedded in moral practices which give us certain sets of concepts, (such as our normative-descriptive concepts), to use in descriptions and explanations, and which inevitably guide our interpretation of the state of things, and indicate to us the sort of behaviour prescribed by the situation.[57] In this

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[57]The case of the amoral person will, of course, engender problems for claims of this sort. I would argue that having an interest in morality is indispensable for being a person, and unavoidable for human beings, and hence that the case of the amoral person can only be a pathological one. However discussing this involves broaching complex issues such as the one of personhood. I hope that this will constitute the object of further research.

respect, it appears illegitimate for Harman to make a negative claim about moral observations on grounds accessible only at a second order level of theorizing about our capacity for observation, when in our actual experience of having observations we would not be able to achieve what he seems to believe to be indispensable. He challenges moral realists to explain how the moral wrongness of an action can be relevant to an explanation of 'the act we observe itself'. However if the latter is not the action which presents itself to us as having *both natural and moral characteristics*, (moral characteristics which are then necessarily relevant to an explanation of our observation) then the act Harman is talking about is not 'the act we observe itself', it is a construction out of it, a construction made necessary by theoretical demands of a second order, perhaps.

Hence, my answer to Harman is that if he believes that my observing that the children's action was morally depraved is not part of an explanation of why I judged it to be wrong, then he fails to understand something about the way moral terms are used and about the way moral concepts work. If Harman's suspicion is that I would assume as a fact that the children are wrong regardless of whether the action is morally depraved or not, thus making the fact of the matter about this irrelevant to an explanation of my beliefs, then he has misunderstood the way normative/descriptive expressions such as 'moral depravity' relate to the concept 'morally wrong'. This is because, an adequate apprehension/description of the children's action in normative-descriptive terms such as 'moral depravity' necessarily entails a 'thin' moral judgement on the children's action, such as that it is wrong. More precisely, a user of moral language cannot both endorse such an adequate description and still refuse to admit that the action is morally condemnable, without this raising doubts about her linguistic competence. She must assume as a fact that morally depraved actions really are condemnable in order to judge that the children performed a morally wrong action.

Otherwise, using the expression 'morally depraved' in the way Harman suggests, would be an indication that this person missed something about how normative-descriptive concepts relate to 'thin' moral judgements.[58]

In light of the previous points, we can maintain that the internal realist does not need to appeal to a 'faculty of moral intution' to explain how we observe the moral character of actions. She does not need, either, Platts' reductionist-sounding analogy. This is because one of the advantages of internal realism is that, as a consequence of its convictions concerning the fact/value distinction, and of its contention that in order for knowledge acquisition to be possible for us it has to be realized from within the conceptual frameworks delimited by particular discourses, it allows us to look at the different characteristics of reality without having to rank them in a hierarchical manner. Thus, it makes unnecessary attempts to reduce one of these classes of characteristics to another. This does not mean that the problem of supervenience does not occur for the ethical discourse and should not bother the internal realist. In fact, one of the things the internal realist would suggest is that moral reality is supervenient on the facts concerning human actions. The difference, however, between talk of the *supervenience* of moral reality on the natural world and talk of the *reducibility* of moral reality to natural reality is that such supervenience does not require that all our moral statements be *translatable* in physicalistic terms. Indeed, moral reality supervenes on natural reality, but all this means is that moral judgements depend on the *morally relevant characteristics* of the natural world (that is, on those characteristics that must be included in an adequate description of the circumstances of actions), not on its physically or otherwise relevant characteristics.

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[58]Of course, we can imagine cultures where the moral depravity of one's actions may be praiseworthy. However, to hold that they would be *morally* praiseworthy would be counter-intuitive, given the values that underly the use of concepts such as the one of 'moral depravity'.

We have thus shown how the internal realist can make sense of moral observations in the *strong* sense, and of corresponding moral facts that enter into the explanation of our making the observations that we make. But the internal realist can advance further reasons for making sense of 'strong' moral observations that are not exhausted (and that are quite independent of) the sorts of points raised in the preceding discussion. One of the important features of moral discourse as it is used in ordinary life is that it is useful only to the extent that it is assumed to be fact-stating. A pre-supposition that moral judgements are factual has to be built into moral theory in order for moral discourse to serve its purpose, that is, to allow us to make judgements that will provide us with both information concerning the moral situation at hand, and also, most importantly, strong reasons for action. In order to be able to derive all-binding prescriptions from our moral observations we have to be able to see our reasons for endorsing the moral views we do as issuing from factual judgements, otherwise we are left with no real moral reasons for action other than sheer random choice.[59] However, it is obvious from our everyday practice that our moral convictions have nothing to do with random choices -on the contrary, we often provide very strong seemingly rational reasons for holding the moral views that we hold. Even though we do not appeal to those reasons every time we make a moral judgement, it is possible for most of us to explain our views in an elaborate and articulate way. Moreover, it is also transparent in our practice that we take our moral judgements to be factual.

I believe it to be generally accepted that the distinctive feature of moral discourse is the relative importance of its prescriptive purpose in comparison to other discourses. We expect our moral observations to inform us not only of the moral characteristics

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[59]Of course, this is not going to be a satisfactory answer for Harman. We will see in the following discussion why an interal realist, however, will not find this problematic.

of this or that situation, but especially, and much more importantly of the implications for our actions that follows assessment of such characteristics. This is a function of the normative-descriptive vocabulary we employ (that is, terms such as 'wicked', 'cruel', 'inconsiderate', etc.;). It appears that we take our moral observations to be interesting only to the extent that they can provide us with guidance for acting, and with reasons for action. The main role of our moral judgements is to advise us about what it is morally commendable for us to think and do. The question to analyse before attempting to respond to Harman's non-cognitivist, then, is whether moral discourse would preserve its prescriptive nature if it were one within which no factual judgements could be issued. If the suspicion that this purpose would be lost is vindicated, then we will have sufficient reason to hold that moral discourse and theory should involve an assumption concerning moral facts. It will then suffice to stress, once more, that in its ordinary use moral discourse is considered as fact-stating to support the belief that moral discourse and theory do indeed involve such an assumption. Again, someone might find the legitimacy of grounding this argument in what we do disputable. However I expect its force to reside in its resting on an analysis of *reasons for what we do*, rather than on an endless re-hashing of what we do. It will aim to show that there are important and valuable reasons why moral theory should include the assumption in question, (and it rests on the success of our moral practice to justify our confidence that it is exercised in a certain way for specific reasons), reasons which explain that this assumption is unchallenged in our everyday practice.

A suggestion to the effect that moral theory and discourse depend, indeed, on such a pre-supposition for their success can be attributed to Wiggins.[60] His remarks concern the relation of a non-cognitive interpretation of morality to the problem of the

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[60]Wiggins, D. 1976, p. 335-50.

meaningfulness of life, but they can be extended to the problem of prescriptivity without this constituting an illegitimate extrapolation of Wiggins' views. In fact, they focus on a comparative analysis of the bindingness of moral prescriptions (or the motivational force that the potential meaningfulness of life can have) for the agent who believes that the only ground for his moral convictions is his 'appetitive state' (to use Wiggins' terminology) or 'psychological set' (to use Harman's), and for the one who takes his moral convictions to issue from a rational appraisal of the facts. Wiggins presents the example of Sisyphus who is condemned to roll stones uphill for the rest of his life, without ever succeeding at bringing them to the top, and, following Richard Taylor's discussion, analyzes what would be required for Sisyphus to find meaningfulness in his life. He concludes that Sisyphus will find meaning in his activity only to the extent that he believes his activity to be *objectively* worthwhile. Similarly, moral agents find meaningfulness in their actions only to the extent that they can view their reasons for performing them as objectively grounded. This is because in the absence of a presumption of the truth of their moral judgements, it is not clear that moral agents will derive from their moral observations the kind of incentive necessary to bring them to act following the recommendation of those judgements. As Wiggins stresses, if all there is to our moral choices is a desire to satisfy certain psychological states or a conformity to one's psychological set, without there being anything in the intentional object to give it intrinsic worth, then there is no reason why we would chose to do a particular action or have a particular belief rather than another. In other words, in the case of the moral claim that murder is wrong, if we cannot attribute objective validity to such a claim, then nothing prevents us from deriving from it that we ought to kill, rather than the contrary. This is because once the agent understands that her moral convictions, however related they may be to her psychological set, or to the satisfaction of her appetitive states, have no factual status, she no longer is

bound by any strong reasons for acting in accordance with those convictions. Hence the link between our moral beliefs and the prescriptive recommendations they contain is broken.

We have suggested that the main purpose of moral discourse is to enable us to make judgements which will provide us with strong recommendations. However, the prescriptive purpose of moral discourse will be jeopardized if agents do not assume that moral judgements are factual or 'objective'. It thus seems reasonable to admit that such an assumption is presumed in moral discourse and theory, especially given that, as was previously stressed, such a presupposition is transparent in our everyday moral practice. It is enough, for the internal realist, that we show that moral discourse would fail to fulfill its purpose in the absence of such a pre-supposition to justify talk of moral facts and objective moral reality. This is because, given that no foundation can be appealed to to otherwise verify that our discourses are fact-stating, it suffices to rely on their indispensability to justify that we take them at face value.

Moreover, an explanation in terms of the observer's psychological set cannot be a good explanation, let alone one that is better than those based on an assumption about moral facts, because it fails to explain that and why the observer would find the prescriptions of her moral theory binding. It would be an incomplete explanation, whereas explanations based on an assumption of the factuality of moral discourse are much better explanations of why we have the moral beliefs that we have.

Harman's non-cognitivist, relying on the distinction between our beliefs and the facts, could reply to this that whether or not we *take* our judgements to be factual in ordinary moral practice is irrelevant to the question of whether our judgements actually are factual. However, such a response engenders further problems, especially when the distinction between the facts and our beliefs about the facts is apprehended from an

internal realist perspective rather than from an externalist perspective.[61] Firstly, against what should our moral judgements be evaluated in order to decide their factual status? Internal realism does not admit of a foundation against which all judgements can be evaluated since it endorses a non-found⸱⸱⸱⸱⸱⸱al conception of knowledge. There is thus no basis, for the internalist, for questioning whether moral discourse *really* is factual, given the indispensability of our moral 'pictures'. As we explained in the preceding chapter, questions of that sort, however crucial answering them may be for the externalist, do not make sense for the internalist. Hence, any such background against which non-cognitivists would want moral judgements to be assessed would have no weight for the internal realist; this include⸱ the criterion of ontological commitment advanced by Harman, which we are therefore also challenging.

Harman contends that scientific principles are justified by their *explanatory role*, and that scientific facts are thus vindicated by the fact that appeal to them is necessary in order to have explanations of our observations that are better than others. We have, however, stressed that there are very important pragmatic reasons why we should assume that moral discourse is fact-stating. This can be extrapolated to a suggestion that perhaps the *pragmatic role* of our moral principles can be appealed to to serve as a similar kind of vindication for our moral facts. In other words, even if it was true that moral theory is explanatorily isolated this may not entail that there are any problems with the cognitive status of the moral domain.

However, even the claim that moral theory is explanatorily isolated can be challenged. Firstly, the very fact that Harman speaks of it as being *isolated* shows that there is a type of explanation which he privileges over other kinds of explanation. And, of course it is easy to understand, reading his text, that he favours scientific

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[61]This is because such a question only makes sense for the externalist because she posits a foundation against which all facts can be evaluated.

explanations, for reasons already explained in the characterization of his position. However, for internal realists, a criterion of ontological commitment which focusses on the explanatory role of principles could not be taken to apply to all discourses without discrimination, because, ultimately, each discourse has its own criterion of what will count as a good explanation in view of its own purposes. Similarly, each discourse also posits its own criterion of ontological commitment according to the nature of its object and according to its particular goal. It could thus be suggested that one of the reasons why ethics seems explanatorily isolated when compared to science is because, on the one hand, ethical explanations, given the particularity of ethical discourse, are different from scientific explanations. On the other hand, it could also be argued that ethics is more concerned with advancing reasons for action than with explaining our observations, and thus responds to totally different criteria of ontological commitment. This is possible because internal realism endorses a non-foundational conception of knowledge, where the establishment of standards of rationality is left to the discretion of each discourse. Hence, it may very well be the case that compared to science ethics seems explanatorily isolated. But this is not a problem for ethics, because comparing it to science and rendering its cognitive status dependent on its capacity for meeting the standards of science is illegitimate, since it has its own standards of rational acceptability. Harman is wrong to believe that its explanatory isolation is a problem for ethics. But not only is he wrong concerning the criterion of ontological commitment, but even if we accepted the latter it is not clear that we could arrive at his conclusions since there seems to be a way of looking at moral explanations which shows that they are not overriden by better ones. Harman is wrong on both counts.

Moral observations and the goal of ethics

Despite all of this, the appropriateness of the notion of moral *observation* is still questionable. Harman affirms the following things concerning moral observations:

1) The fact that you made a particular moral observation when you did does not seem to be evidence about moral facts, only evidence about you and your moral sensibility.

2) (...)there does not seem to be any way in which the actual rightness or wrongness of a given situation can have a given effect on your perceptual apparatus.

3) The moral principle may explain "why" it is wrong to set the cat on fire. But the wrongness of that act does not appear to help explain the act, which you observe, itself.[62]

It would be very difficult to present a line of a.gument which would prove that Harman is wrong in believing that rightness and wrongness do not have any effect on our *perceptual apparatus*. However, by appealing to ordinary moral practice, one can show that this needn't bother us because *the aim of morality is not to explain perception nor is it to describe the perceivable aspects of reality* , but it is to help us understand the *moral relevance* of our actions by explaining how they can affect others, other living beings and the progress of humanity, to provide us with knowledge of how to minimize the negative effects of our actions, to help us develop our abilities for practical reasoning, and more importantly to help us *reason* about what is morally required from us as a species. It is precisely because ethics and science differ in their respective goals that we cannot take them as discourses that share an ontology in any reductive way.

Another way of explaining this would be to say that ethics is concerned with *different questions*, questions which differ from inquiries concerning the natural properties of

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[62]Harman, 1977, pp.7-8.

events, by wondering about their moral characteristics such as those that explain how they relate to ideals of justice, equality, freedom, etc.. Science aims at describing, understanding, and discovering the natural aspects of worldly events, their physical, chemical, biological and even social characteristics. Ethics aims at describing, understanding and discovering the moral aspects of worldly events. To see that these two domains are different it suffices to realize that the very nature of their respective inquiries not only fulfills distinct functions but also involves different methods.

Science is dependent upon experimentation to arrive at its ends because its object is of a sensible nature: scientific objects can be heard, seen, smelled, and touched, in other words, perceived, whether simply in virtue of our senses or in virtue of various kinds of apparatus that permit the extension of these senses beyond their natural limits. We have discussed earlier a way in which ethics is also dependent upon experimentation by stressing that testing moral principles consists in 'checking' their commands in particular situations with the ones which we would intuitively believe such situations to require. We have thus offered an account which allows us to make sense of talk of moral 'perception' or moral 'seeing', by analogy to talk of scientific perception. However, despite the usefulness of the analogy between scientific perception and moral perception, and the analogy between scientific experimentation and moral experimentation, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these are metaphors that are only useful to the extent that they are also accompanied by the relevant substantiations. This is an allusion to the fact that, for an internal realist, perception and experimentation depend on the sort of virtues the discourse within which they are used is supposed to reflect. This explains the differences between what counts as 'perception' or as 'experimentation' in ethics and in science. Even these will have to reflect the sort of virtues this discourse aims at reflecting. Moral experimentation and scientific experimentation involve different methods because they have different

goals.

Hence, it suffices to realize that ethics and science have different goals to support the claim that the moral framework is not reducible to the scientific one. As can be recalled, internal realism stresses that each discourse determines its standards of rational acceptability in relation to its function. Determining these standards is indispensable to an appreciation of the ideal conditions that will guide decisions as to the truth or falsity of judgements. Conceptual relativity tells us that what will amount to a better or worse situation can only be determined from within a given framework in light of those standards (where those standards are not reducible to the standards of different conceptual schemes) and, thus, in light of *what this framework is supposed to do for us*. Against this, positing that moral discourse can be cognitive only to the extent that it is similar (adheres to similar standards) to the scientific one appears unreasonable.

In fact, those alleged dissimilarities to which Harman points in all his arguments are the very things that justify believing that ethics is a domain independent of science. That it is a cognitive domain can be established within an internal realist framework by appealing to our ordinary practice given the conception of rationality as instantiating itself as multiple distinct modes of reasoning, proposed at the end of the preceding chapter.

Since moral observations and scientific observations have been shown both to be capable of corroborating theories, despite their differences, (or, since it has been shown that scientific observations, when compared to moral observations, do not corroborate theories in any privileged or special, more binding way) Harman's argument cannot be used to counter a belief in the possibility that there are moral facts, unless he is also prepared to maintain that there might not be scientific facts either.

Moreover, providing a metaphysical framework within which the notions of factuality

and objectivity are distinguished from the sense given to such notions within the contexts of scientific inquiry is indispensable if one wants to hold this sort of non-naturalist position in meta-ethics, to explain how there can be facts (such as moral facts) that are neither similar nor reducible to natural facts.

Internal realism offers such a framework by holding that factuality is dependent upon particular conceptual frameworks, and cannot be determined from outside those frameworks, hence rendering it possible to make the claim that moral facts can only be assessed within the framework of morality by adding that different frameworks have different standards for deciding what is factual and what is not in light of their particular aims and goals; that there is no homogeneous conception of factuality that can apply to all frameworks independently of those aims and goals.

Upon reflecting on Putnam's discussion of conceptual relativity, it becomes obvious that we are justified in saying that *moral facts involve a different class of existing objects*, since existence itself is determined from within conceptual schemes. We are thus justified in believing that there are moral objects that are not reducible to natural objects that exist. (This refers, again, to earlier discussions where we stressed that there are no well-defined physicalistic descriptions that can capture the class of actions whose descriptions would ordinarily use normative-descriptive concepts such as 'cruel', 'wicked', 'considerate', etc.) The reason why the non-cognitivist will be confused by discussions of existing moral entities is that his conception of existence is related to a conception of the way the world is independently of our capacity to acquire knowledge of it. For internal realists, however, the concept of a fact depends upon the concept of rational acceptability, and is thus epistemically constrained -and this applies also for the concept of 'existence'. Moreover, the question of whether there *really* are moral facts does not make sense for the internal realist because, as we have seen in the discussion of conceptual relativity, talk about what classes of entities there are only makes sense

from within a given framework. This is why the non-cognitivist does not need to be worried by the fact that moral facts constitute a different class of entities. This in no way challenges the *completeness* of the scientific descriptions of the world: such descriptions are complete (or have the potential to be complete) *for the purposes they serve*, even though they do not include moral facts. Relative to the conceptual scheme of science, there are no moral facts, and relative to the moral conceptual scheme there are moral facts. Rather than this alluding to the incompleteness of scientific descriptions, it bears witness to the different purposes of scientific and moral discourse.

Conclusion

We can draw together various strands of argument and focus the conclusions of this thesis if we consider another sort of issue that might bother a moral sceptic, who could maintain, for example, that moral observations seem to be related much more to one's emotional reactions than to facts about a moral situation. One could adhere to the model of corroboration of theories which I suggested, and yet maintain that in morality we arrive at our conclusions by *seeing* that an action deserves an evaluation of a specific polarity, rather than by *judging* that this is the evaluation that it deserves.

To counter claims of this sort I would like to appeal to two points that were discussed earlier. Firstly, only someone who has a pre-established conception of factuality will consider ethics to be in opposition to science in its demand of a cognitive status. More precisely, only someone whose metaphysical position leads her to believe in a fact/value distinction will see ethics as unqualified for uncovering facts. Her judging the situation to be such is due to pre-established definitions: facts are defined in relation to scientific aims; the aims of ethics are fundamentally different; hence ethics is not factual.[6] However, Putnam already stresses that values underlie our concepts of truth, factuality, and objectivity in science as well as in any other field, which provides us with reasons to believe that factuality cannot be exclusively associated with domains which do not depend on values, without this engendering problems for the very possibility of making factual judgements in science itself.

Besides, this would be an uninteresting way of broaching the problem, as I already claimed, because it is based on artificial considerations, considerations detached from

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[6]See the introduction for a detailed account of how these things are related.

our practices and our ordinary ways of talking about things, and thus never provides an answer to the actual possibility of moral cognition. Once we make an analysis of ordinary moral practice and discourse we realize that we do speak and act as though there were moral facts and as though we arrived at moral conclusions by way of judgements issued from a rational evaluation of moral situations.

Some may feel that appealing to ordinary language uses and common practice is not enough to support a positive argument in favor of moral realism. Let me then suggest that usual 'tactics' in moral deliberation are sufficiently similar to paradigmatic *rational* practices to corroborate the view that moral judgements are, indeed, arrived at by way of reasoning.

The first remark that I would like to make in this context is directed against the picture of value-acquisition implicit in discussions which contrast moral *feelings* to moral *reasons*. This picture of value-acquisition can be linked back to Hume who talked about an instinctive reaction of empathy towards the other as the basis of our moral convictions.[64]

What encourages some people to believe that morality is much more concerned with individual or 'collectively encouraged' feelings than with reasons is, perhaps, that the reasoning underlying moral judgements is often not apparent at the moment of making a given judgement. We seem to be able to say that setting the cat on fire is wrong immediately upon observation of that act.

However, it is also possible that the reason why moral reasoning is not transparent in all our moral judgements is that we have distanced ourselves from those reasons because of too frequent confrontations with similar situations. In other words, it is not that we *feel* that the act is wrong, but rather that we are so used to judge acts of that

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[64] See David Hume, A treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge/ P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, 1978, vol.III.

sort as wrong, that we no longer need to recall our reasoning before making such a judgement.

This could be better understood by analogy with the mathematical case. Each of us once had to draw pies and persons in order to decide in how many pieces two pies should be cut in order to share them among four people. Once we reach maturity, all of us can divide much more complex numbers automatically. We no longer need to reflect on the concept of division prior to finding an answer to those problems. It has become automatic. This does not mean, however, that were there to occur a special case, either in the moral situation or the mathematical one, we would not be able to return to those reasonings in order to re-assess them.

The reason why I am so convinced that moral reasoning does occur as more than just a re-evaluation and reworking of arbitrarily established principles in relation to general rules and particular cases, is that the central question of morality is one of a choice of a way of living which will be the most admirable. This choice requires that we reason on what can make our human lives admirable in order for us to be able to have an ideal towards which to strive. This requires that we reason on such things as what should be our relation to others, to other beings, etc.. Further, it requires that we reflect on the actions that will most likely help us to approach this ideal. Only then can we try to develop general rules and principles that can be applied to actual situations.

That our emotions or 'feelings of sympathy' will play a role in attempts to determine principles of action is unavoidable because we are emotive beings as much as we are rational beings, and because we need our sensibility to be able to understand the demands of others in relation to our own. However, only our reason can help us order our interests in relation to the ideal we set for ourselves. Only our reason can lead to an understanding that others' interests or the interests of the community must override ours in certain situations. Only our reason can make us progress from those individual

and communal interests to the interests of humanity. And, only our reason can help us criticize the very ideal of admirable life that we set before ourselves.[65] Hence, we did not arrive at the values that underlie our moral judgements by simply attending to our feelings about the situation at hand, but by reasoning upon the relation to the world and to others that our ideal dictates. *Our values themselves, as they enter into moral choice, are rationally weighed, ordered and chosen.*

The biggest problem for emotivist meta-ethical positions is that they seem to be unable to explain moral progress. However, there are witnesses to moral evolution through time. The most obvious example is the fact that slavery has been abolished. More subtle ones involve the increasing tolerance of ways of living deviant from the 'normal' ones, the decreasing level of outward racism in our societies etc.

Emotivists could reply that our sensibility has become sophisticated. But this begs the question, for in virtue of what has it been sophisticated if not in virtue of rationality?

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[65] It would be interesting to note that the difference between what is suggested here and consequentialist theories is that contrary to the latter, internal realism in ethics allows for the possibility of criticizing this moral ideal as much as it allows for the possibility of criticizing the more general ideal of human flourishing. To the contrary, consequentialist moral realist doctrines which are developed on the pattern of foundational theories of knowledge posit the ideal of maximizing utility or happiness as an absolute end-point which serves as a rational basis for moral knowledge. The means to achieve maximizing utility can thus be rationally revised, but the ideal of morality itself cannot. This however has the unfortunate consequence that it cannot allow for the possibility of seeing moral progress express itself as an evolution of our conception of what the regulative ideal of morality should be. We should leave open the possibility that we ought to strive to do more than just maximize utility or happiness. There may be actions that we ought to do whether or not they satisfy those utilitarian ideals. Moreover, we should also leave open the possibility that there is a *plurality of regulative moral ideals* which depend on the relative importance and the goal that different cultures assign to morality in their quest for knowledge of the world. It may very well be the case that the reason why consequentialism has so much success in western culture is that it gives a relatively more important role to knowledge acquired from other domains; this would also explain why non-cognitivism has been popular for so long. There may be cultures who place the acquisition of moral knowledge at the center of their lives. These may have a much stricter ideal.

An internal realist response to naturalist moral realist positions could be developed around this problem. This too, however, will have to be part of another project.

The best explanation of moral evolution is that our capacities for moral reasoning and our moral understanding of the world have improved, and thus that we now have a better ideal of an admirable life, and better rational tools to evaluate it and guide its application via principles. For the internal realist, moral progress and scientific progress cannot be dissociated, given the interdependence of an idea of human flourishing and of a conception of rationality: if our conception of rationality has evolved, then our idea of human flourishing also evolved, and *vice versa*. That science has evolved is not independent of the fact that our conception of rationality has evolved (we argued earlier that a conception of rationality is necessary prior to any quest for knowledge), and hence, not independent of the fact that our idea of human flourishing, also, has evolved. But if our idea of human flourishing has evolved, then so has our ideal of admirable life. Moral progress and scientific progress go hand in hand.

The discussion of the role of moral reasoning in effecting moral judgements and in choosing moral values in ordinary moral practice can be combined with the suggestion that rationality expresses itself in different and non-reductive modes of reasoning in different conceptual schemes to counter arguments to the effect that ethics is a non-cognitive domain.

I would like to conclude this discussion by making the following remark. Despite their differences, ethics and science can be reconciled not only by stressing that they are both cognitive domains, but also by recalling the importance of having an idea of human flourishing, an idea of the good, prior to any quest for knowledge. In the preceding chapter we discussed the role played by such an idea in the choice of our cognitive values. The ideal of an admirable life which I suggest is the guide of our judgements in ethics is not foreign to this idea of cognitive flourishing.

In fact, The Companion in Guilt Argument could be further developed to claim that, however different in their methods and in their standards of rational acceptability,

ethics and science both depend on the same initial step of positing an idea of the good. That this idea of the good, however rationally postulated, is also charged with our 'feelings' is unavoidable insofar as we cannot divorce the demands of our sensibility from the rational elements that, collaborating with them, influence our reflection on the sorts of things that can make us flourish. If ethics is to be condemned for letting similar feelings emerge through its judgements then so is science, because, even if scientific judgements appear to be devoid of their presence, it cannot be claimed that scientific inquiry itself enjoys such freedom. Moreover, given that the end of our general quest for knowledge is to have a picture of reality that will satisfy the idea of the good, it is not clear at all that science dominates ethics more than it is its servant.

Internal realism, by insisting that notions of objectivity, factuality and truth can only be determined from within conceptual frameworks, and by stressing that those conceptual frameworks must be considered as non-reductive insofar as they involve different practices and different aims, makes it possible to maintain that ethics is on a par with science in its exigency of a cognitive status. Moreover, moral cognition is rendered possible without necessitating a reconstruction of moral practice and a re-interpretation of moral concepts to make ethics fit to meet the standards of science; an occurrence that would have the unfortunate consequence of depriving ethics of its particularity.

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