10

RESPONSES[1]

Derek Parfit

1 Response to Simon Kirchin

Simon Kirchin's wide-ranging and thought-provoking chapter describes and discusses several of my moral and metaethical claims. Rather than trying to write a unified response, I shall discuss Kirchin's claims under several headings.

Incommensurability

Kirchin writes that

> value incommensurability is both seemingly a real phenomenon and . . . makes trouble for Parfit . . . . If Parfit had thought in a more detailed fashion about the phenomena of indeterminacy and imprecision, he may have been led to realize that value is complex and admits of incommensurability of a sort.
>
> (17 and 24)

These remarks puzzle me. Some normative questions are, I claimed, indeterminate in the sense that these questions have no answer. I also claimed that, when we ask about the relative of value of things that are qualitatively different, the answers are often imprecise. This *imprecision* is what Kirchin calls *incommensurability*. In these cases, when neither of two things is better than the other, these things would be imprecisely equally good. It would then be true that, if one of these things became better, these things might still be only imprecisely equally good.

Our awareness of such imprecision ought to affect our reasoning and our conclusions. In such cases, for example, the fact that B is not worse than A does not imply that B is at least as good as A. Though at *least as good as* is a transitive relation, *not worse than* is not transitive. If C is at least as good as B, which is at least as good as A, C must be at least as good as A. But if C is merely not worse than B, which is not worse than A, C *might* be worse than A. There are other

important implications. People often assume that, if X is in one way better than Y, and in no way worse than Y, X must be better than Y all things considered. That would be true only when *being not worse than* implies the precise relation *being at least as good as*. If X is in one way better than Y, and in other ways X and Y are imprecisely equal, we cannot conclude that X must be better than Y all things considered.

Since I made these claims about indeterminacy and imprecision, I don't know why Kirchin believes that I failed to realize that we ought to make such claims.

At one point Kirchin acknowledges that I made such claims. Kirchin writes:

> he thinks that his comments about incomparability and imprecision are such that they undercut many or all of Wolf's criticisms, despite what I have just said. But, in that case, he owes us a detailed explanation to that effect.
>
> (17)

He also writes:

> Parfit could challenge some of what I have said here. Perhaps his small passages in §121 can be built up to show that he has a more nuanced view of the guidance of action than I have saddled him with. But, again, we require detail of this more complicated picture.
>
> (19)

What Kirchin calls my "small passages" do amount to only seven pages. But in these pages I believe that I go further than most other philosophers in claiming that truths about relative value are often indeterminate or imprecise.

The singular sense of 'best'

Kirchin also asks why I use a 'singular' sense of the word 'best', and he suggests that it would be better to use 'best' in some other, non-singular sense. Our use of 'best' is in one sense non-singular when we deny that there is any single thing that is best, since there are two or more things that are equal-best, or are not worse than any of the other things. I often use 'best' in this weakly non-singular sense.

I cannot think of any other coherent non-singular sense of 'best'. For such a sense to be more strongly *non-singular*, this sense would have to imply that two or more things are not only *not worse* than anything else – which would merely put these things in the *single* class of such best things – but also that each of these things is *better* than everything else. For X and Y to be in this sense non-singularly best, it would have to be true both that X is better all-things-considered than Y and that Y is better all-things-considered than X. No such claim could be true.

The Triple Theory

In defending what I call the *Triple Theory*, I claim that

> (A) when Kant's Formula of Universal Law is revised in two ways, as it needs to be, this formula succeeds, but only because, as I also argue, this revised formula supports Rule Consequentialism.

I also claim that

> (B) Scanlon's Contractualist Formula should be revised in certain ways, and would then also support Rule Consequentialism.

Discussing these claims, Kirchin writes:

> Are we content to jettison so much of what is part and parcel of three familiar normative ethical theories simply to provide guidance in a fairly simplified and unified way?
>
> (25–6)

When I discuss Kant's Formula of Universal Law, I do suggest that we should give up one part of Kant's view. Kant's formula, I claimed, should not appeal to maxims in the wide sense that covers policies. Whether our acts are wrong, in Kant's sense of being contrary to duty, cannot depend on the policies on which we are acting. There are many possible policies acting on which is sometimes but not always wrong. One example is the Egoist's maxim 'do whatever is best for me'. I imagine someone who acts on this maxim when he keeps his promises and pays his debts, intending to preserve his reputation, and when he saves a drowning child, hoping to get some reward. Such acts, though having no moral worth, would not be wrong in the sense of being what Kant calls *contrary to duty*. I also suggest that Kant's formula should appeal, not to what *each* of us could rationally will, but to what *all* of us could rationally will. Kant seems to have assumed that this revision would make no difference.

If we drop Kant's appeal to maxims in the sense that covers policies, we are, as Kirchin says, jettisoning one of the familiar parts of Kant's moral view. But we are not abandoning Kant's view. We jettison something when we throw this thing away so that we can save the more valuable things that are left. We jettison a ship's cargo to save the passengers and the crew. Many Kantians have regretfully concluded that Kant's Formula of Universal Law cannot be made to work. I argue that, with these two revisions, Kant's formula *can* be made to work.

When I discuss Scanlon's version of Contractualism, I argue that Scanlon ought to give up two of his claims about what would be reasonable grounds for rejecting some moral principle. Scanlon claims that we cannot reasonably reject some

principle by appealing to the numbers of people who would bear burdens if this principle were followed. Suppose, for example, that some principle implies that doctors ought to give one person twenty more years of life rather than giving to each of a thousand other people five more years of life. These thousand people, I argue, could reasonably reject this principle by claiming that they together would fail to be given not a mere twenty years of life but a total of 5,000 years of life. These people would together have a stronger moral claim.

I also argue that, in some cases, we could reasonably reject some principle by appealing not to the burdens that would be imposed on us or others but by the ways in which, if this principle were followed, things would go much worse in the impartial-reason-implying sense. One example is a case in which, if we chose one of two energy policies, we would greatly lower the quality of life in future centuries. We might know that our choice of this policy would not be worse for any of the people who would later live because, if we had chosen the other policy, these particular people would never have existed. It would have been other people who would have later lived and had this higher quality of life. I argued that, if Scanlon allowed us to appeal in these special cases to claims about what would make things go much worse, Scanlon could keep his main claim that, in other cases, we could reasonably reject principles only by appealing to the burdens that these principles would impose on us and others.

Kirchin's remarks imply that, when I argued that Scanlon ought to revise his view in these ways, I was jettisoning claims that are part and parcel of our moral thinking. That is not so. I was defending the widely accepted claims that it matters morally how many people receive benefits and burdens, and that it may matter morally which of two outcomes would be worse in the impartial-reason-implying sense. It is Scanlon, I argued, who ought not to jettison these widely accepted parts our moral thinking.

Kirchin also writes:

> The Triple Theory in its present form does not work because there is at least one perspective, a particular Kantian view, that is missing from what Parfit has given us.
>
> (25)

I don't know why Kirchin believes that the Triple Theory "does not work", because this theory does not include a particular Kantian view. The Triple Theory isn't intended to include all Kantian views. When I defend the Kantian part of the Triple Theory, in Parts Three and Five of *On What Matter*s, I am discussing only Kant's Formula of Universal Law. I discuss some of Kant's other formulas and beliefs in Part Two and Appendices (F) to (I).

When Kirchin claims that the Triple Theory "does not work", he may instead mean that the Triple Theory permits some acts that most of us rightly believe to be wrong or condemns some acts that we rightly believe to be permissible.

But this objection to the Triple Theory isn't an objection to what I wrote. Though I claimed that we have strong reasons to accept this theory, I did not claim that we ought to. I also claimed that, if this theory's implications conflicted too often with our intuitions, we could justifiably reject this theory.

Actual consent

Kirchin repeats Susan Wolf's claim that, in discussing Kant's views, I ignore the importance of actual consent. That is not so. I wrote:

> Wolf objects that, by interpreting Kant in this way, I abandon the Kantian idea of respect for autonomy, which often condemns treating people in ways to which they do not *actually* consent. But I do not abandon this idea. Many acts, I claim, are wrong, even if people could rationally consent to them, because these people do not in fact give their consent. To cover such acts, I suggest, we could plausibly appeal to
>
> > the Rights Principle: Everyone has rights not to be treated in certain ways without their actual consent.[2]

These claims do not ignore the importance of actual consent.

Kirchin also repeats Wolf's objection that my arguments about the Kantian Formula commit me to rejecting principles that protect our autonomy. Kirchin does not, however, comment on the five pages in my Section 66 in which I respond to this objection. I shall not summarize these pages here.

Undefended assumptions

Kirchin writes:

> Parfit may not believe everything that Wolf or I load him with. But that requires correction from him, and if he does believe anything here he owes readers a defence. Further, such a defence has urgency *for Parfit* given that *OWM* is built upon the premise that seemingly conflicting theories can and should be seen as having more in common than we thought. In order to advance the Triple Theory we require a defence of the assumptions that allow it – or any other similar, unifying theory – to be advanced.
>
> (20)

I am puzzled by Kirchin's suggestion that I ought to defend the assumptions to which the Triple Theory appeals. I defend these assumptions in at least seventeen

of my chapters, which together amount to several hundred pages. Kirchin's claim should at most be that my attempts to defend these assumptions fail. When Kirchin discusses the objections to my view that are stated by Wolf and Wood, he similarly writes, "part of my aim is to encourage Parfit to say something in his defence" (10). I wrote two chapters in response to these objections.

Conflicting moral theories

Kirchin quotes a passage in which I write:

> it would be a tragedy if there was no *single true morality*. And conflicting moralities could not all be true.[3]

He remarks:

> If one views a normative ethic as, in part, a description of what is of value – that is, what values exist – then it could easily be the case that different kinds of ethical theory could all be true, *contra* Parfit's second sentence in the quotation.
>
> (19)

I agree that *different* ethical theories might all be true. My claim was about *conflicting* theories. Two theories conflict when they make or imply claims which are contradictory, so that these theories cannot both be true.

Kirchin also writes that "a moral vision that embraces conflict . . . may itself be morally important" (26). Kirchin's point here may be not that contradictory claims might both be true, but that, if people have different, conflicting theories, our attempts to resolve disagreements between such theories may get us closer to the truth. I would accept this important, Millian claim.

Moral methodology

When Kirchin discusses my assumptions about what he calls *moral methodology*, he partly endorses Wolf's objection that, rather than considering moral principles at a general level, I ought instead to appeal to our intuitive beliefs about particular cases. Kirchin later partly endorses Allen Wood's objection that, rather than appealing to our intuitive beliefs about particular cases, I ought instead to consider moral principles at a general level. These objections cannot both be justified. It can't be true both that our moral thinking ought to be about particular cases rather than general principles and that our moral thinking ought to be about general principles rather than about particular cases. Kirchin might claim that we ought to think about morality in only one of these ways. But he does not tell us which way we ought to use. I believe that we ought to think about morality in both these ways.

When Kirchin discusses Wood's comments on my view, he repeats Wood's thought that, if we think about certain particular cases, such as those that are called *trolley problems*, this method leads us to the Consequentialist assumption that "the chief bearers of value are states of affairs" (21).[4] In Kirchin's words, "Other considerations, such as 'circumstantial rights, claims and entitlements', which people have in real-life situations, are 'ignored or stipulated away'" (21). These claims seem to me inaccurate. Of the people who appeal to trolley problems and other such cases, most use such cases to argue *against* Consequentialist assumptions. That is how such cases are used by, for example, by Philippa Foot, Judith Thomson, Frances Kamm and Warren Quinn. These people appeal to such cases in order to defend various non-Consequentialist beliefs about people's rights and entitlements, and to defend distinctions between killing and failing to save and between killing people as a means and as a foreseen side effect. Thomson's original trolley problem did challenge the view that the negative duty not to kill always has priority over the positive duty to save people's lives. But Thomson's aim was in part to show that this challenge to widely accepted non-Consequentialist moral beliefs could be restricted to a few unusual cases.

Kirchin's chapter contains many other interesting and important claims, most of which I accept. My aim here has only been to respond to some of Kirchin's objections to what I wrote.

2 Response to David Copp

Near the start of his very helpful chapter, David Copp writes:

> If Derek Parfit is correct . . . the naturalist's project is deeply misguided. Indeed, he makes the astonishing claim that normative naturalism is "close to nihilism" . . . He holds that if normative naturalists are correct that there are no "irreducibly normative facts," then normativity is "an illusion."
>
> (28)

There are, I believe, some normative naturalists whose views are close to nihilism. These people claim that, because all facts are natural facts, there are no irreducibly normative non-natural facts. If there were no such facts, nothing would matter, since we would have no reason to care about anything. But Copp's version of Naturalism is not, I am glad to learn, of this kind.

Copp describes properties and facts as *natural* if they are of a kind that would be "'countenanced' in . . . 'a scientifically constrained view of what exists'" (31). These natural facts about the world are also, I would add, empirical in the sense that we might have empirical evidence for or against our belief in them. There are some other facts that are not in these senses natural and empirical, such as logical, mathematical and modal facts.

Copp also distinguishes two conceptions of facts, which he calls *worldly* and *propositional*. Some examples of worldly facts are facts about concrete objects and their causally efficacious properties. On a wider and more finely grained propositional conception, facts are true propositions. To illustrate this distinction, Copp compares the trivial fact that

> (A) water is water,

with the significant scientific discovery that

> (B) water is H_2O.
>
> (34)

Copp claims that, though (A) and (B) state the same worldly fact, these claims state different propositional facts. As this example shows, some propositional facts may be more important than less finely grained worldly facts.

When Copp discusses normative naturalism, he writes:

> On the worldly conception of a fact, the naturalist claims that normative facts are natural facts. On the propositional conception, however, the naturalist can agree that normative facts are *not* natural facts. This may be confusing, but it is an important point.
>
> (34)

This point is indeed important, since it shows that we should distinguish between two significantly different versions of normative naturalism. Some naturalists claim that all normative facts are worldly facts which are natural in the sense that we could have empirical evidence for or against our beliefs in such facts. Copp's view is not of this kind, since he believes that there are some *non-natural* normative facts. Copp's view partly overlaps with the views of those whom I earlier called *Non-Metaphysical Non-Naturalists* and now call *Non-Realist Cognitivists*.[5] These people believe that there are some reason-implying normative truths that are not in this sense natural or empirical. These truths are in these ways like logical, mathematical and modal truths. Such truths are not empirically discoverable facts about the natural world, and they are not metaphysical in the sense that they have no weighty ontological implications. On this view, for example, mathematicians need not fear that arithmetic might all be false because there aren't any numbers. When Copp writes that "normative facts are *not* natural facts" (34), these seem to be the kinds of fact that he has in mind.

To illustrate his view, Copp supposes that

> (C) acts are wrong if and only if they undermine general welfare.

Copp then compares the claims that

> (D) some action will undermine the general welfare,

and that

> (E) this act will be wrong.

On Copp's view, if (C) were true, (D) and (E) would state the same worldly fact. When some act would undermine general welfare, Copp writes, there would be

> no extra or additional *worldly* normative fact such as the fact that this action will be wrong.
>
> (41)

But (D) and (E), Copp writes, would state different propositional facts, and the non-natural normative propositional fact that is stated by (E) would be different from the natural fact stated by (D).

We can now turn to properties. Some people use the word 'property' in a robust, ontologically weighty sense, which refers to causally efficacious features of concrete objects in the natural world, such as heat or mass. In another philosophical sense, two concepts refer to the same property if these concepts are *necessarily co-extensive*, because they apply to all and only the same things. One example are the concepts expressed by the phrases

> being the only even prime number

and

> being the positive square root of 4.

Since these concepts both necessarily apply only to the number 2, they refer to the same property in this necessarily co-extensional sense. We can also use the word 'property' in a wider, finer-grained sense. Any claim about something can be restated as a claim about this thing's properties. Instead of saying that the Sun is hot and that some proof is valid, we can say that the Sun has the property of being hot, and that this proof has the property of being valid. Since this use of the word 'property' adds nothing to the content of our claims, such properties are sometimes called *pleonastic*, and claims about such properties have no ontological implications. Though this use of the word 'property' merely restates some claim, it can help us to draw some important distinctions. We can say that, though the two arithmetical concepts that I have just mentioned refer to the same property in the

necessarily co-extensional sense, these concepts refer to different properties in the wider, more fine-grained pleonastic sense. Being the only even prime number is not in this sense the same as being, or *what it is* to be, the positive square root of 4.

When Copp supposes that

> (C) acts are wrong if and only if they undermine general welfare,

he writes that, on this view,

> [w]rongness is not some property in addition to the property of undermining the general welfare.
>
> (41)

When Copp claims that there is only one property here, he seems to be using the phrase "the same property" in the necessarily co-extensional sense. If Copp also used this phrase in the wider pleonastic sense, he could claim that the concepts *wrong* and *undermining general welfare*, though they refer to the same property in the co-extensional sense, refer to different properties in the finer-grained pleonastic sense.

Copp does not make this second claim. Though he distinguishes between worldly facts and the more fine-grained propositional facts, Copp rejects my similar distinction between the necessarily co-extensional sense of the word 'property' and the finer-grained pleonastic sense.[6] Since Copp rejects this conception of a property, he might reject my claim that the property of being the only even prime number is in this sense different from the property of being the positive square root of 4. Copp might also claim that, though some proofs are valid, these proofs do not have the property of being valid, since there is no such property. Such objections to this use of the word 'property' seem to me mistaken. As I have said, this sense of the word 'property' merely restates some claim in a way that adds nothing to the content of this claim. Since this sense adds nothing, if we claim that there are some non-natural normative *facts*, we have no need to add that there are some non-natural *properties*. The important question is only whether there are some non-natural normative facts. As we have seen, Copp claims that there *are* some such facts.

Copp makes some claims which may seem to deny that there are any such facts. For example, Copp writes that naturalists like him

> agree that the normative and the *non-normative* are importantly different, but they deny that the normative and the *natural* are importantly different since they hold that normative properties and facts *are* natural.
>
> (28)

This last phrase may seem to imply that there are no non-natural normative facts. But that is not what Copp means. Copp writes elsewhere:

> [i]n this chapter, unless I indicate otherwise, I will be using 'fact' in the worldly sense, to refer to states of affairs. But in some contexts the propositional conception will be at issue.
>
> (34)

In the sentence that I have just quoted, Copp does not indicate otherwise, so this sentence does not contradict his claim that, in the propositional sense, there *are* some non-natural normative facts.

As well as claiming that there are such facts, Copp claims that we need to think about these facts. He writes:

> if we did not have the normative concepts, we would be unable to have such beliefs as that torture is wrong . . . even though, as we are assuming for present purposes, the property of undermining the general welfare *is* the property of wrongness . . . a person could believe that torture undermines the general welfare without believing that torture is wrong . . . This would be a cognitive loss.
>
> (39)

> Moreover, if we lacked this concept, we could not have a policy of avoiding wrongdoing. Even if we saw how to avoid undermining the general welfare, we might not understand that this is how to avoid wrongdoing. These would be significant losses.
>
> (41)

Return to the passage in which Copp writes:

> [i]f Derek Parfit is correct . . . the naturalist's project is deeply misguided. Indeed, he makes the astonishing claim that normative naturalism is "close to nihilism" . . . He holds that if normative naturalists are correct that there are no "irreducibly normative facts," then normativity is "an illusion."
>
> (28)

Since Copp believes that there are some non-natural irreducibly normative facts, I don't regard Copp's view as deeply misguided. When I made what Copp calls my "astonishing claim", I was using the phrase 'Normative Naturalist' to refer only to people who believe that there are *no* non-natural normative facts. Nor do I believe that, on Copp's view, normativity is an illusion. Copp believes that there are some non-natural normative facts which are not what Copp calls worldly facts and which have no weighty ontological implications. This view overlaps with the Non-Metaphysical Non-Natural View accepted by Nagel,

Scanlon, me and others, which I now call *Non-Realist Cognitivism*. Copp and I seem to have developed our views in ways that resolve what used to be our main metaethical disagreement. That is, to me at least, a very welcome fact.

3 Response to Julia Markovits

In much of her impressive chapter, Julia Markovits defends what I call *Subjectivism about reasons*. On this view, all practical reasons are given by facts about how we might fulfill either our actual present desires or the desires that we would now have after informed deliberation. I claim that, as Markovits writes:

> Subjectivism . . . has deeply implausible as well as deeply troubling consequences.
>
> (55)

One such implication, she writes, is that, if our desires were "sufficiently weird" (55), we would have no reason to choose to avoid future agony. But this is not my main objection to Subjectivism. As Markovits also writes, what I claim to be most implausible is the Subjectivist belief that

> (A) we can have no reasons for desiring anything or having certain aims.
>
> (55)

Suppose we remember what it was like to be in agony, by being burnt or whipped. I wrote:

> According to Subjectivists, what we remember gives us no reason to want to avoid having such intense pain again. If we ask 'Why not?', Subjectivists have, I believe, no good reply.[7]

This objection does not apply only to imagined cases in which someone weirdly has no desire to avoid future agony. Even if everyone *has* this desire, we can ask Subjectivists why they believe that facts about what it is like to be in agony can't give us any *reason* to have this desire.

Markovits does not directly answer this question. She suggests an indirect answer when she writes:

> Subjectivism does not entail that we can have no reasons for our desires . . . Desires are candidates for the same sort of justification *coherentists about justification* take beliefs to have: desires are justified when they are part of a coherent web of desire.
>
> (73)

These claims imply that

> (B) we would have a reason to have some desire when our having this desire would make our set of desires more coherent.

Though we can justify some of our *beliefs* in this coherentist way, no such claim applies to our desires. Our beliefs are incoherent when they conflict, so that these beliefs cannot all be true. Our desires can be incoherent, or conflict, only in the quite different sense that we cannot fulfill all of these desires. But such conflicts do not show that these desires are not justified. If we wanted both to save one person's life and to save someone else from going blind, but we would not be able to fulfill both of these desires, that would not make this pair of desires in any way irrational, or less than fully rational. As Markovits points out, our desires may also fail to cohere in the weaker sense that we care about several things for their own sake, and these desires cannot be given some unifying explanation, such as the explanation that hedonists give. But we should not assume that, for our desires to be justified, we must be able to give them some such unifying explanation. We can rationally care about several distinctively different things.

We can next compare these claims:

> (C) Our reason to want to avoid future agony is given by the fact that, if we were later in agony, we would be having sensations that we intensely dislike.
>
> (D) Our reason to want to avoid future agony is given by the fact that our having this desire would make our set of desires more coherent.

If Markovits believed that (C) was true, she would appeal to (C) rather than to (D). There are some other people who would be unable to appeal to (C). When these people claim that we have a reason to act in some way, these people *mean* that, after informed deliberation, we would be motivated to act in this way. I understand why these people believe that facts about what it is like to be in agony could not give us a reason to want to avoid future agony. As these people could rightly claim, the fact that we would be motivated to act in some way isn't a *reason* to be motivated to act in this way. But Markovits often claims that she uses the phrase 'a reason' in the purely normative sense which we cannot helpfully define by using other words, but which we can also express with the phrase 'a fact that counts in favour'. I don't know why Markovits believes that what it is like to be in agony can't count in favour of wanting to avoid future agony.

Markovits refers to my "worry that Subjectivism entails a bleak and nihilistic picture of the normative world" (56). This worry is, I believe, justified.

If not even facts about agony could give us any reason to want to avoid future agony, we could have no such reason to care about other things. As we might more briefly say, if even agony doesn't matter, nothing matters. Markovits writes:

> if we accept Subjectivism, Parfit argues, *then nothing matters*.
>
> (71)

and, earlier,

> [a]ccording to the Subjectivist, things *matter*, ultimately, *because they matter to us* . . . According to the Objectivist, by contrast, things *matter to us*, when we are reasoning well, *because they matter*.
>
> (58)

As Markovits here rightly claims, Subjectivists believe that some things matter in the *psychological* sense that we care about these things. Objectivists believe that some things matter in the *normative* sense that we have reasons to care about these things. When Nihilists claim that nothing matters, they are not claiming that no one cares about anything. That psychological claim is clearly false. Nihilists mean that, as Subjectivism implies, no one has any reason to care about anything.

Markovits discusses and defends two versions of Subjectivism. In her elegant formulation, some Subjectivists discuss *which* reasons there are, and others discuss *what* reasons are. I shall first consider Markovits' claims about this second, metaethical question.

Describing the metaethical debate between those whom she calls *Subjectivists* and *Objectivists*, Markovits writes:

> What they disagree about is what is involved in some fact's *counting in favor of* an action.
>
> (57)

Markovits appeals to claims about what she calls our "idealized desires". These are the desires that we have, or would have, after some process of informed deliberation. Markovits states her view in different ways. Subjectivists, she writes, claim to give

> the right account of what *grounds* reasons for action – of what *makes* some consideration count in favor of acting.[8]

On what we can call this *Grounding Version* of Markovits' view, or

> GVM: when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, this property of this fact makes this fact count in favour of this act.

Markovits also writes:

> Subjectivism . . . aims to provide an informative account of what property a certain property is *identical to*: in this case, the property of being a reason . . . . *what it is* for a fact to count in favor of an action is for that fact to show how the action would help fulfill some idealized desire.
>
> (57)

According to this *Identity Version* of Markovits' view, or

> IVM: when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, that is *the same as* this fact's counting in favour of this act. Showing how some act might fulfil such a desire is *what it is* for some fact to count in favour of this act.

Markovits may assume that we don't have to choose between these versions of her view, since we can accept both GVM and IVM. According to this Combined Version of her view, or

> CVM: when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, this property of this fact both *makes* this fact count in favour of this act and *is the same as* this fact's counting in favour of this act.

Markovits compares her view with the scientific discoveries that water is H_2O and that heat is molecular kinetic energy. Markovits might compare CVM with the fact that

> H: when the molecules in some object move energetically, that both *makes* this object hot and is *the same as* this object's being hot. Having such energy is what it is to be hot.

The similarity of these claims may seem to support this version of Markovits' view. But when we look more closely, I believe, we can find that this analogy fails and in a way that counts against this view.

We can first note that, when H claims that having molecular kinetic energy *makes* an object hot, this relation of *non-causal making* here implies *being the same as*. So we can drop this use of 'makes' and shorten H to

> H2: having molecular kinetic energy is the same as being hot.

We can similarly shorten CVM to

> CVM2: when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, this property of this fact is the same as this fact's counting in favour of this act.

Though these claims seem similar, *being hot* is not relevantly like *counting in favour*. In the sense that is relevant here, 'being hot' means

> having the property that has certain effects, such as causing us to feel certain sensations, melting solids, turning liquids into gases, etc.

Scientists discovered that

> H3: when the molecules in some object move energetically, that is the same as this object's having the property that has these effects.

The property *that has* certain effects is not the same as the property *of having* these effects. We can claim that

> the Sun's brightness is the property *that makes* the Moon shine,

but we should not claim that

> the Sun's brightness is the property *of making* the Moon shine.

Being what makes the Moon shine isn't the same as *making* the Moon shine. As we might more fully say:

> the Sun's brightness is the property that has the different property of being the property that makes the Moon shine.

We can similarly claim that

> molecular kinetic energy is the property *that has* certain effects,

but we should not claim that

> molecular kinetic energy is the property *of having* certain effects.

Having molecules that move energetically isn't the same as causing us to feel certain sensations, or melting solids, or turning liquids into gases, etc. We can add:

> nor is molecular kinetic energy the same as these effects.

Return now to the property of *counting in favour*. We can similarly claim that

> the property *that makes* some fact count in favour of some act isn't the same as the property *of making* this fact count in favour of this act.

We can add:

> nor is this property the same as the property of *counting in favour* of this act.

As these remarks imply, Markovits might be able to defend the Grounding Version of her view, but she could not defend the Identity Version. Markovits might claim

> GVM2: when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, this property of this fact may be the property *that makes* this fact count in favour of this act. But this property could not be the same as the property *of making* this fact count in favour of this act. Nor could this property be the same as the property of *being made* to count in favour of this act, or the property of *counting in favour* of this act.

As she could more briefly say:

> showing how some act might fulfil such a desire couldn't be the same as counting in favour of this act.

Though I believe that these properties couldn't be the same, it is worth pointing out that if – impossibly – they were the same, Markovits' view could not give us any positive substantive normative information. Suppose – impossibly – that

> (E) showing how some act might fulfil such a desire is the same as counting in favour of this act.

Markovits could not then claim that

> (F) when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, that would give this fact the different normative property of counting in favour of this act.

On this version of Markovits' view, there would be *no* such *different* property. Her view would tell us only that

> (G) when some fact shows how some act might fulfil such a desire, this fact would have the property of showing how this act might fulfil such a desire.

This would be what Markovits herself calls a bleak reductive view.

Markovits might reply that scientists made a significant discovery when they realized that

> (H) when some object has molecular kinetic energy, that is the same as this object's being hot.

This claim is significant even though it does not imply that when some object has molecular kinetic energy, that gives it the *different* property of being hot. (H) does not merely tell us that

> (I) when some object has molecular kinetic energy, this object has molecular kinetic energy.

Markovits might similarly claim that

> (J) when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, this property of this fact is the same as the property that makes this fact count in favour of this act.

Even if these properties were the same, Markovits might say, (J)'s truth would give us important normative information. (J) would not merely tell us the trivial truth that when some fact has the property of showing how some act might fulfil such a desire, this fact would have this property.

This appeal to this scientific analogy may seem to answer my objection. Other normative naturalists have made similar claims, whose plausibility helps to explain how such views have been defended by some of the best moral philosophers. But as before, I believe, this analogy fails. We should agree that if (J) were true, this claim would give us important normative information. But (J) states the non-reductive Grounding Version of Markovits' view. We could restate (J) as

> GVM3: when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, this property of this fact is the same as the property that makes this fact have the different, normative property of counting in favour of this act.

I have mainly been discussing the reductive, Identity Version of Markovits' view. This view claims that

> (K) when some fact shows how some act might fulfil such a desire, this property is the same as the property of counting in favour of this act.

This claim, I have argued, could not possibly be true. Showing how some act might fulfil some desire couldn't be the same as counting in favour of this act.

But if – impossibly – (K) were true, (K) could not give us positive substantive normative information. Unlike GVM3, (K) could not tell us how some fact's explanatory property makes this fact have the different, normative property of counting in favor of some act. (K) denies that there is any such different property.

As these remarks imply, when normative naturalists appeal to scientific analogies, such as the discovery that heat is molecular kinetic energy, they can make various true claims which seem to support their view. Though these analogies, I believe, fail, this fact is far from being obvious. These analogies fail in a fairly subtle, particular way. When we discuss the reductive version of Markovits' view, we must distinguish between the property *that makes* some fact count in favour of some act and the property *of making* some fact count in favor of some act. This distinction is easy to miss. That is why Markovits writes both that her Subjectivism gives

> the right account . . . of what *makes* some consideration count in favor of acting,[9]

and that her view gives

> an informative account of what property a certain property is *identical* to . . . [or of] *what it is* for a fact to count in favor of an action. (57)

These claims, I have argued, cannot both be true, and Markovits ought to accept the first, non-reductive version of her view. Markovits should claim that when some fact shows how some act might fulfil some present idealized desire, that makes this fact have the different, normative property of counting in favour of this act.

If Markovits accepted this version of her view, that would enable her to strengthen her view, by dropping some of her other claims. Markovits writes that she accepts my worry about some "*reductive-naturalist* versions of Subjectivism . . . [which] equate normative-reasons facts with purely psychological facts about our motivational dispositions" (72). One example is the view that

> (L) if we would be motivated to act in some way after informed deliberation, that is the same as our having a reason to act in this way.

Facts about such reasons are not normative, since they are merely facts about what would motivate us. Markovits defends the different view that

> (M) if we would be motivated to act in some way after informed and procedurally rational deliberation, that is the same as our having a reason to act in this way.

For our deliberation to be *procedurally rational*, we must meet certain normative standards, such as those of vividly imagining the effects of different acts, avoiding bias and wishful thinking and so on. Markovits claims that because this use of the phrase 'procedurally rational' is normative, her (M) is unlike the reductive view stated by (L), since (M) is a normative claim.

When I earlier discussed views of the kind that are stated by (M), I argued that these views are not relevantly normative. If we appealed to (M), we could make normative claims about which kinds of deliberation are procedurally rational. But these would not be normative claims about what we had reasons to want or reasons to do. As Markovits notes, the view that she states with (M) appeals to what Rawls calls *pure procedural justification*. On such views, there are no independent normative truths about what we have reasons to want or reasons to do. Our process of deliberation could be fully procedurally rational whatever we end up wanting or being motivated to do.

Of the Subjectivists who defend views like (M), some claim that when they say that

> (1) we have some practical reason,

they mean that

> (2) after informed and procedurally rational deliberation, we would be motivated to act in some way.

If this is what we mean by the phrase 'a reason', we could restate (M) as

> (N) if we would be motivated to act in some way after informed and procedurally rational deliberation, this fact would make it true that, after such a process of deliberation, we would be motivated to act in this way.

Though (N) uses the normative phrase 'procedurally rational', (N) is not a significant normative claim. Everyone could agree that (N) is trivially true.

Markovits, however, does not use the phrase 'a reason' in the sense defined by (2). She uses the purely normative concept of a reason that we can also express with the phrase 'a fact that counts in favour'. So Markovits could claim instead that

> (O) if we would be motivated to act in some way after such a process of deliberation, this fact would have the different, purely normative property of giving us a reason to act in this way.

This claim *is* relevantly normative. (O) is one of the non-reductive Subjectivist Normative views that I discuss in *OWM* §§2, 3 and 4. But if (O) is our only claim about which facts give us reasons, as these Subjectivists claim, this view implies that we have no reasons to be *motivated* in certain ways. To repeat my example, these views imply that

> (P) what it is like to be in agony gives us no reason to want to avoid future agony.

If Markovits accepted only the Subjectivist view stated by (O), she could not deny that her view implied (P).

Since Markovits uses the purely normative concept of a reason, she could cease to be a Subjectivist, and she could reject both (O) and (P). Markovits could claim that we do have such a reason to want to avoid future agony.

In several passages, Markovits comes close to accepting this different, Non-Subjectivist view. She also, I believe, conflates two different views. If Markovits distinguished these views, she and I might be able to resolve not only our meta-ethical disagreements but also our normative disagreements.

Markovits makes several excellent points about my list of ten ways in which I claim that some of us are led to accept Subjectivism about reasons, though that is not really what we believe. When I gave this list, I failed to state one other way in which we can be led astray. We may forget that Subjectivist views about reasons appeal to facts that are about only our *present* actual or hypothetical desires or other motivational states. I failed to repeat this claim because I assumed that I had made this claim sufficiently often in earlier sections of my book. But I see now that, if Markovits was mainly considering my descriptions of these ten ways in which we might be mistakenly led to accept Subjectivism, it would be easy for her to misunderstand my claims. If that is how she was led to reject my claims, her view may be closer to mine than she believes.

After describing these ten ways, I later wrote:

> It might next be claimed that my predictable future desire not to be in agony gives me a desire-based reason now to want to avoid this future agony. But this claim cannot be made by those who accept subjective theories of the kind that we are considering. These people do not claim, and given their other assumptions they could not claim, that facts about our *future* desires give us reasons.
>
> Some other theories make that claim. A value-based objective theory about *reasons* might be combined with a desire-based subjective

> theory about *well-being*. On such a view, even if we don't now care about our future well-being, we have reasons to care, and we ought to care. These reasons are value-based in the sense that they are provided by the facts that would make various future events good or bad for us. But if our future well-being would in part consist, as this view claims, in the fulfilment of some of our future desires, these *value-based* reasons would be reasons to act in ways that would cause these future *desires* to be fulfilled.[10]

When Markovits discusses these theories about well-being, she writes:

> [a]ccording to such views, the fulfillment of our present desires is in itself good for us.
>
> (68)

These theories of well-being do not claim only that the fulfilment of our *present* desires is in itself good for us. As I have said, these theories give as much weight to our *future* desires. Markovits continues:

> Parfit says that it follows from these views that we have *value-based, object-given* reasons to fulfill our desires rather than *desire-based, subject-given* reasons to do as we desire. But it is very unclear what this difference comes to.
>
> (68)

The distinction I intended is, I believe, clear. These Objectivists about reasons claim that we have reasons to do what would be best for ourselves in our whole life. If these Objectivists accept some desire-fulfilment of well-being, they claim that we have reasons to do what would best fulfil our future desires, to which we ought to give as much weight as we give to our present desires. We have such reasons to do now what would fulfil these future desires, whether or not we now care about the fulfilment of these desires. On these theories, for example, our future agony will be bad for us because of the strength of the desires that we shall later have not to be in this conscious state. That is why we all have reasons to want to avoid all future agony and to do what would avoid this agony if we can. These Subjectivists, in contrast, deny that we have any such reasons. These people believe that all of our reasons are given by facts that are about only our *present* desires or other motivational states. When applied to most people, these two views have very different implications.

Markovits also writes:

> [d]efenders of a desire-fulfillment view of well-being have already embraced the subjectivist thought that things matter *for* us, ultimately,

> because they matter *to* us. So there is something odd about accepting such a view of well-being while rejecting Subjectivism.
>
> (68)

Similar remarks apply. There would be nothing odd in both accepting a desire-fulfilment theory of well-being and rejecting Subjectivism about reasons. We may believe that we have strong reasons to care about, and promote, our future well-being. We would then reject the Subjectivist view that we have no such reasons, since our reasons are all given by facts about what matters to us now, or our *present* desires.

Markovits rightly criticizes theories which claim that our well-being does not depend at all on what matters to us. She then writes:

> if Objectivists embrace, instead, a conception of our good that is more beholden to our desires, such as a desire-fulfillment or a preference-hedonist view, Objectivism begins to look suspiciously like a less well-motivated version of Subjectivism.
>
> (71)

Similar remarks apply. When I discussed Objectivist theories about reasons, I supposed that these theories would often appeal to what I call *hedonic reasons*. One example is our reason to want to avoid future agony. In the three passages that I have just quoted, Markovits seems to be closer to accepting, not the Subjectivist view about reasons against which I argued, but an Objectivist view which appeals to some desire-fulfilment or preference-hedonistic view about well-being. If that is Markovits' view, as these and other passages suggest, we have resolved our main disagreements. Given the subtlety and plausibility of many of Markovits' claims, that would be good news for me – and, I hope, for Markovits as well.

4 Response to Philip Stratton-Lake

I am convinced by all of the arguments, and I accept all of the claims, in Philip Stratton-Lake's wonderfully precise and helpful chapter.

5 and 6 Responses to David McNaughton and Piers Rawling and to Kieran Setiya

Given the similarities between some of the main claims and arguments in Kieran Setiya's chapter and in the chapter jointly written by David McNaughton and Piers Rawling, I shall discuss these chapters together.

These chapters both discuss two kinds of reason. Some reasons I call *deontic* in the sense that these reasons are provided by the fact that some act is morally wrong.

All other reasons I call *non-deontic*. Our reasons to act in some way are *decisive* when they are stronger than any conflicting reasons, so that, if we know the relevant reason-giving facts, we ought rationally to act in this way.

In their rich and interesting chapter, McNaughton and Rawling claim that

> (A) there are no deontic reasons.

On this view, though we have various reasons not to act in ways that are wrong, the wrongness of these acts does not give us a further reason. In their words, "wrongness, if it were an extra reason, would be superfluous". Claims about wrongness merely add "idle cogs to the moral machinery" (116).

McNaughton and Rawling believe that my view conflicts with theirs. There may be no such disagreement. McNaughton and Rawling quote my remark that

> when certain acts would be wrong . . . we *can* claim that the wrongness of these acts gives us further, independent reasons not to act in these ways.[11]

But this quotation is incomplete. We can make this claim, I wrote, if we are using the word 'wrong' in one of several senses. When we claim that some act is wrong, we may mean that we have decisive moral reasons not to act in this way. We are then using 'wrong' in what I call the *decisive-moral-reason* sense. McNaughton and Rawling seem to use 'wrong' only in this sense. I claim myself that, if this is what we mean by 'wrong', we should deny that an act's wrongness gives us a further reason not to act in this way. The fact that we have these decisive moral reasons cannot, by itself, give us a further reason.

We can also use 'wrong', I claimed, in several other senses. There are several definable senses. When we call some act wrong, we might mean, for example, that this act is blameworthy, or unjustifiable to others, or that this act gives the agent reasons to feel remorse, and gives other people reasons for indignation or resentment. We might instead use 'wrong' in an indefinable sense, which we might also express with the words 'impermissible' or 'mustn't-be-done'. In the sentence that McNaughton and Rawling quote above, I wrote:

> when certain acts would be wrong *in these other senses*, we can claim that the wrongness of these acts gives us further, independent reasons not to act in these ways.[12]

We have such further reasons, I believe, not to act in ways that are blameworthy, or unjustifiable to others, or ways that give us reasons for remorse and give others reasons for indignation. These reasons may often not be as strong as the reasons given by the facts that would make some act wrong – such as the suffering that

this act would cause. But that does not show that an act's being blameworthy and unjustifiable to others give us no further reasons. Similar claims apply to the indefinable sense of 'wrong'. We shouldn't assume that, when some act is impermissible, or mustn't-be-done, that this fact cannot give us any further reason not to act in this way. Since McNaughton and Rawling do not discuss my claims about these other senses of 'wrong', I can hope that they would accept these claims. This disagreement would then be resolved.

McNaughton and Rawling also write:

> Parfit, then, 'double-counts': the moral reasons against an immoral act contribute twice, once in their role as reasons against the act and once in their role as contributors to the act's moral wrongness, which then itself gets counted as a further independent reason against the act.
>
> (114)

When we use the word 'wrong' in these other senses, the facts that we believe to make acts wrong don't count twice in an objectionable way. These facts may have two implications, but that is no objection. We can defensibly believe that certain facts about some act both give us moral reasons not to act in this way, and make this act blameworthy, unjustifiable to others, and something that mustn't-be-done, thereby giving us further reasons not to act in this way.

I shall now turn to Setiya's elegant, subtle and thought-provoking chapter. According to a view that Setiya calls

> *Wrong-Making Reasons*: whenever some act would be wrong, the nonmoral facts that would make this act wrong would also give us decisive reasons not to act in this way.
>
> Such reasons I call *non-deontic*.

If this view were true, Setiya suggests, moral theories and moral beliefs would have little practical importance. In deciding what we ought rationally to do, we would seldom need to know that some act would be wrong. It would be enough to know the nonmoral facts that would make this act wrong, since these facts would by themselves give us decisive reasons not to act in this way. As we have seen, McNaughton and Rawling make similar claims.

Setiya does not commit himself to the truth of Wrong-Making Reasons, but he gives what he calls a "tentative defense" (125) of this view. According to what Setiya calls

> *Moral Rationalism:* we always have decisive reasons not to act wrongly.

According to

> *Deontic Reasons*: whenever some act would be wrong, this moral fact would give us a decisive deontic reason not to act in this way.

On Setiya's suggested argument:

> Moral Rationalism is true.
>
> If Wrong-Making Reasons were not true, it would be Deontic Reasons that made Moral Rationalism true.
>
> If Deontic Reasons is true, Wrong-Making Reasons is true.

Therefore

> Wrong-Making Reasons is true.

In a fuller statement:

> (1) We always have decisive reasons not to act wrongly.
>
> (2) If the nonmoral facts that would make some act wrong did not give us decisive non-deontic reasons not to act in this way, it would be this act's wrongness that gave us such reasons.
>
> (3) If an act's wrongness gave us such decisive deontic reasons, the nonmoral facts that made this act wrong would also give us decisive non-deontic reasons.

Therefore

> (4) The nonmoral facts that make some act wrong always give us decisive non-deontic reasons not to act in this way.

Premise (3), I believe, is false. When certain facts make some act wrong, these nonmoral facts may often give us decisive non-deontic reasons. One example is the fact that some act would give us some slight benefit in a way that would kill some innocent person. This fact would give us a decisive reason all by itself. But some other wrong-making facts may not by themselves give us such decisive non-deontic reasons. It may be true that

> (5) some nonmoral facts give us decisive reasons only when, and because, these facts make some act wrong, thereby giving us a decisive deontic reason not to act in this way.

To illustrate these claims, I discussed two familiar imagined cases. In the case that I called

> *Tunnel*, a driverless, runaway train is headed for a tunnel in which it would kill five people. As a bystander, you could save these people's lives by switching the points on the track, thereby redirecting this train on to another track and into another tunnel. As you know, I am in this other tunnel, so this redirected train would kill me.[13]

In what I called

> *Bridge*, the train is headed for the five, but there is no other track and tunnel. I am on a bridge above the track. Your only way to save the five would be to open, by remote control, the trap-door on which I am standing, so that I would fall on to the track. The train would then hit and kill me in a way that triggered its automatic brake, thereby stopping the train before it killed the five.[14]

In both these cases, you could save the five other people only in a way that would also kill me. You would have a strong non-deontic reason not to act in a way that would kill me. But this reason might not by itself be decisive, since it might be outweighed by your non-deontic reason to save the other five people's lives. There is a moral difference, many people believe, between these cases. In *Tunnel*, you could save the five in a way that would kill me only as a foreseen side effect. This act, many people believe, would not be wrong, so you would have sufficient reasons to save the five by redirecting the runaway train in a way that would also kill me. In *Bridge*, you would save the five only by killing me, not as a *side effect*, but as a *means* of stopping the train. This fact, many people believe, would make this act wrong, and this act's wrongness would give you a decisive deontic reason not to act in this way.

According to Setiya's premise (3), if some act's wrongness would give us decisive deontic reasons not to act in this way, the facts that made this act wrong would also give us decisive non-deontic reasons not to act in this way. *Tunnel* and *Bridge*, we may believe, provide a counterexample to this claim. Though many people would believe that, in *Bridge*, your act would be wrong, some other people reject that view. These people believe that *Bridge* is relevantly like *Tunnel*. On this view, in both cases, you could permissibly save five people's lives in a way that would also kill me, and it would make no moral difference whether you would be killing me as a foreseen side effect or as a means. Since both acts would cause four fewer people to die, you would have sufficient reasons to act in both these ways.

Many of us would reject this second view, since we believe that your act would be morally justified only in *Tunnel*. We may then believe that

> (6) the fact that you would be killing me as a means, in *Bridge*, does not by itself give you a decisive non-deontic reason not to act in this way. This fact gives you a decisive reason only indirectly, by making this act wrong, thereby giving you a decisive deontic reason not to act

> in this way. If this fact did not make this act wrong, this case would be relevantly like *Tunnel*, since you would have sufficient reasons to save the other five people's lives in a way that would also kill me.

If (6) is true, we could reject Setiya's claim that

> (3) if an act's wrongness gave us such decisive deontic reasons, the facts that made this act wrong would also give us decisive non-deontic reasons.

We might claim instead that

> (5) some facts give us decisive reasons only because these facts make some act wrong.

This objection to Setiya's argument does not depend on the view that there is a moral difference between *Bridge* and *Tunnel*. Some of us would reject (6). We should admit, however, that in other cases claims like (6) might be true. Since such claims might be true, Setiya's argument does not show that (5) cannot be true.

In considering this argument, we should also remember that the phrase 'morally wrong' can be used in different senses. When we call some act wrong in what I called the decisive-moral-reason sense, we mean that we have decisive moral reasons not to act in this way. Though these are *moral* reasons, they are not *deontic* reasons, since these reasons are given by the facts that *make* some act wrong, not by the fact *that* this act is wrong. If this is what we mean by 'wrong', I claimed, the fact that some act would be wrong would be the fact that we had these decisive reasons, and our having these decisive reasons would not give us a further reason not to act in this way. That would support Setiya's premise (3).

If we use 'wrong' only in the decisive-moral-reason sense, we may accept Setiya's premise (3). But if we use the other senses, I believe we can reject (3) and defensibly believe (5). One example is provided, I suggest, by the comparison between *Tunnel* and *Bridge*. People who believe that your act would be wrong in *Bridge* may believe not that you have decisive moral reasons not to kill me as a means, but that killing someone as a means is impermissible, and mustn't-be-done.

Setiya makes some other claims which may seem to support premise (3). He writes:

> assuming deontic reasons, a practically rational agent who knows the non-deontic facts that make an action wrong will conclude that the action is wrong and thus refrain from doing it . . . if knowledge of certain facts would prevent a practically rational agent from performing an action, those facts provide decisive reason not to act in that way. It follows that we must accept Wrong-Making Reasons.
>
> (131)

These claims do not, I believe, support (3), which is part of Setiya's argument for (4), the belief which he calls *Wrong-Making Reasons*. If some act's wrongness would give us a decisive deontic reason, Setiya's practically rational agent who concludes that some act is wrong might refrain from acting in this way because he recognizes this deontic reason. That may be true even if the nonmoral facts that make this act wrong do not, by themselves, give this person a decisive non-deontic reason. These wrong-making facts might give this person a decisive reason only by making this act wrong.

Setiya earlier wrote:

> If right and wrong have rational authority, a fully rational agent must recognize that an act is wrong when he knows the facts that make it wrong, and he must act on this belief, or he must act directly on the relevant facts. Either way, an agent who is not decisively moved by knowledge of wrong-making facts is less than ideally rational. It follows, through the connection between reasons and rationality, that the facts that make an action wrong provide decisive reasons against it.[15]

When Setiya makes these claims, his view is closer to mine. Setiya here recognizes that, when some rational agent refrains from doing what he believes to be wrong, there are two ways in which this may be true. This agent may be acting directly on the relevant wrong-making facts, because he believes that these facts give him decisive non-deontic reasons. But he may instead be acting on his belief that this act is wrong, because he believes that this act's wrongness gives him a decisive deontic reason. Since Setiya recognizes that this agent might be moved in this second way, he should not claim that it *follows* that the facts which make acts wrong always by themselves provide decisive reasons not to act in these ways. If Setiya's fully rational agent is moved not to act in some way by his belief that this act is wrong, he may also believe that the wrong-making facts give him a decisive reason, not by themselves, but only indirectly, by making this act wrong. This argument for Wrong-Making Reasons therefore fails.

Setiya also thinks

> (7) Unless he is moved by the facts that make an act wrong without needing to form deontic beliefs, we should conclude that he is not ideally rational.

But Setiya cannot, I believe, appeal to (7). If any ideally rational agent would be moved by his belief in some wrong-making facts without needing to form the belief that some act is wrong, that would have to be because it was true that

> (4) the nonmoral facts that make some act wrong would always give us decisive non-deontic reasons not to act in this way.

But Setiya's argument cannot assume (4) – or Wrong-Making Reasons – since (4) is what this argument is intended to show. We may instead believe that

> (5) there are some nonmoral facts that give us decisive reasons only when, and because, these facts make some act wrong, thereby giving us a decisive deontic reason not to act in this way.

Setiya claims that if some agent is ideally rational, this person would be moved by his beliefs in the wrong-making facts without needing to form the belief that this act is wrong. If that were true, this would have to be because these wrong-making facts would by themselves give this person a decisive non-deontic reason. But this ideally rational person may instead believe that some nonmoral facts give us decisive reasons only by making some act wrong. If that were true, this person's beliefs in these nonmoral facts might not move this person to act unless he forms the deontic belief that this act is wrong.

Though Setiya mentions my appeal to (5), he gives no argument against this claim.[16] As I note, (5) is in one way hard to assess. When discussing *Bridge*, we might believe that

> (8) if it would not be wrong for you to save the other five people's lives by killing me, you would have sufficient reasons to save these people's lives in this way.

We may find it hard, however, to assess (8), since this claim appeals to a counterfactual whose antecedent, we may believe, could not possibly be true. If we cannot imagine how this fact might fail to make this act wrong, we may find it hard to decide whether, if this fact did *not* make this act wrong, this fact would nonetheless give us a decisive reason. But there are some plausible arguments against the view that this act is wrong. When we consider these arguments, we may be able to imagine ceasing to believe that this act is wrong, and we may therefore be able to judge whether we would nonetheless have a decisive non-deontic reason. That is how it helps to compare *Bridge* with *Tunnel*. We may believe that in *Tunnel* it would not be wrong for you to save five people's lives in a way that you know would also kill me. This may help us to suppose that it would also not be wrong for you in *Bridge* to save five people's lives in a way that you know would also kill me. We may then conclude that if you have a decisive reason not to kill me in *Bridge*, this reason is given by the fact that killing me as a means would be wrong, in the sense of being impermissible, or something that mustn't-be-done.

There are other such examples. Consider, for example, the view that using artificial birth control is wrong. Even if the artificiality of birth control did not make such acts wrong, few people believe that this artificiality would give us

decisive *non*-deontic reasons not to act in this way. Similar claims apply to voluntary euthanasia or assisting suicide. We can plausibly believe that if we had decisive reasons not to act in these ways, that would be true only because these acts are wrong.

Moral Rationalism, I conclude, does not imply Wrong-Making Reasons. There are three ways in which Moral Rationalism might be true. When it is true that

(B) we have decisive reasons not to act wrongly,

these reasons might be provided either

(C) only by this act's wrongness,

or

(D) by this act's wrongness together with the facts that make this act wrong,

or

(E) only by the nonmoral facts that make this act wrong.

Setiya's argument does not show that only (E) could be true.

I conclude that, even if Moral Rationalism is true and Deontic Reasons is true, these claims do not imply Wrong-Making Reasons. We can plausibly believe that to know whether we have decisive reasons not to act in some way we may sometimes need to know whether this act would be wrong.

Similar remarks apply to the claim that

(A) there are no deontic reasons,

which is implied by (E). When McNaughton and Rawling defend (A), they seem to use the word 'wrong' in the decisive-moral-reason sense. They might agree that if we use 'wrong' in various other senses, as many people do, we can defensibly believe that an act's wrongness may give us at least some further reason not to act in this way. McNaughton and Rawling might defend (A) by appealing to Setiya's argument for (E). But this argument, I have claimed, does not succeed.

In other parts of their chapters, Setiya, McNaughton and Rawling discuss my claims about the revised Formula of Universal Law. According to one version of what I called this

> *Kantian Contractualist Formula*: everyone ought to follow the principles whose universal acceptance everyone could rationally will, or choose.[17]

What we could rationally choose, in the sense that is relevant here, is what we would have sufficient reasons to choose. This Kantian Formula succeeds, I argued, because it supports Rule Consequentialism.

According to Setiya's Wrong-Making Reasons,

> (4) the nonmoral facts that make some act wrong would always give us decisive non-deontic reasons not to act in this way.

After giving the argument for (4) that I have just been discussing, Setiya writes:

> Although it does not refute the Kantian formula, this line of thought casts doubt on its power to guide and illuminate practice. . . [I]f we accept Wrong-Making Reasons, what we have to learn from Kantian Contractualism is not of practical value. What then is the point of the Kantian project?
>
> (129)

He also writes:

> On any account, the use of Kantian Contractualism assumes a delicate balance of known and unknown normative facts. I have argued that we almost never satisfy these constraints and that the Kantian formula is practically inert. Even if I am wrong, why fixate on this epistemic state? Why address someone who knows all there is to know about non-deontic reasons, including ones that bear on the treatment of others, but is oddly blind to deontic facts? There is nothing to prevent us from doing this, but why expect to learn valuable truths?
>
> (133)

When Setiya writes that "we almost never satisfy these constraints", he means that we almost never know about our non-deontic reasons to act in certain ways without also knowing whether these acts would be wrong. That might be true but is irrelevant here. Setiya is discussing what I call the *Deontic Beliefs Restriction*. On a rough statement of the Kantian Contractualist Formula, which is one version of Kant's Formula of Universal Law, everyone ought to follow the principles whose universal acceptance everyone could rationally will, or choose. According to the Deontic Beliefs Restriction, or

> DBR: when we ask which are the principles whose universal acceptance everyone could rationally choose, we should not appeal to our beliefs about which acts are wrong.

There would be no point in claiming both that

> (1) certain acts are wrong because we could not rationally choose that we all accept principles that permit such acts,

and that

> (2) we could not rationally choose that we all accept such principles because such acts are wrong.

These claims would go round in a circle, getting us nowhere. We can call this the *Circularity Argument* for the Deontic Beliefs Restriction.

When we apply the Kantian Contractualist Formula, in ways that follow this restriction, it is not because we have no knowledge about which acts are wrong. We believe that we have some knowledge, but we apply this formula to help us to decide whether these beliefs are justified and to answer questions when we are undecided about whether certain acts would be wrong. Though we don't appeal to facts about wrongness, that is not because we are *oddly blind* to these deontic facts but because appealing to these facts would make the Kantian Contractualist Formula vacuously circular. As I remarked, Kant follows this Deontic Beliefs Restriction. When Kant claims that his false promiser could not rationally will that his maxim be a universal law, he does not defend this claim by arguing that this man couldn't rationally will that people act in a way that was wrong.

Setiya also writes:

> What state of knowledge does the Kantian project address? . . . It assumes that we have knowledge of impartial reasons. But it does not assume . . . that we know what is right and wrong. Why focus our attention here?
>
> (132–3)

> Why is this state of limited knowledge—knowledge of impartial but not deontic reasons —an urgent target of ethical thought? Why not assume less knowledge and set a more ambitious challenge? Why not confront the normative skeptic? Or if that seems hopeless, why not aim for much less? A modest project would begin with those who know what to do, and why to do it, and defend their claim to know.
>
> (133)

Even to achieve this more modest aim, we would have to follow the Deontic Beliefs Restriction. When we defend our claim to know that certain acts are wrong, it would not help to appeal to the claim that these acts are wrong. Setiya's arguments do not, I conclude, show the pointlessness or unimportance of the Kantian project.

McNaughton and Rawling make some partly similar claims. They discuss what they call *deontological constraints*. According to one such constraint, it would be wrong to kill one person as a means of saving the lives of only a few other people. This claim states a constraint against *killing as a means*. We can follow Judith Jarvis Thomson's helpful terminological suggestion that when we *violate* some constraint, our act is wrong, but that when we *infringe* some constraint, this claim leaves it open whether our act is wrong. On this view, we are sometimes morally justified in infringing some constraint. One example might be the claim that we could justifiably kill one person as a means, if our act would save as many as a million or a thousand other people's lives.

If we believe that some act violates some such constraint, this belief is about the wrongness of such acts. According to one such constraint, it is wrong to harm some people as a means of saving others from greater harm. According to the Deontic Beliefs Restriction, when we apply the Kantian Formula, by asking which are the principles that everyone would have sufficient reasons to choose, we cannot appeal to our beliefs about the wrongness of acts that would violate such constraints.

In discussing these claims, I distinguished between two kinds of reason. Deontic reasons are given by the fact that some act is wrong. All other reasons are non-deontic. These other reasons include the reasons that are given by the facts which make some act wrong. Some of these reasons may be given by facts that give us what Ross called *prima facie* duties. Since these may not be actual duties, we can regard them as facts about some act that would make some act wrong unless this fact is morally outweighed by some other fact which justifies this act. If some act would be the breaking of a promise, for example, that would make this act *prima facie* wrong, but this act might be justified if we would have to break some promise to save some stranger whose life is threatened. Our reasons not to break promises are often called deontological, but they are not in my sense *deontic*, since we can have these deontological moral reasons not to act in some way even when these reasons are outweighed, so that the act in question is not wrong.

When McNaughton and Rawling discuss my claim that, when we apply the Kantian Contractualist Formula, we ought to follow the Deontic Belief Restriction, they suppose what they earlier question, which is that an act's wrongness might give us a further reason. They then write:

> If wrongness is an independent reason, why can't we dig in our heels and say that someone's impartial reasons are decisively outweighed by the wrongness of an act those reasons endorse?
>
> (107)

They also write:

> Parfit apparently sees the fact that some act would violate a constraint as a *deontic* reason against it – akin to the fact that it is wrong. And, as we

> saw in the previous paragraph, deontic reasons, in Parfit's view, are out of bounds at this point in the argument.
>
> (107)

They also write: "A constraint is a *prohibition* against harming people, even in pursuit of good ends" (103–4). A constraint so understood is the claim that some act is wrong, so our reason not to violate this constraint isn't merely *akin* to the reason given by the fact that this act is wrong. This reason would be given by the fact that this act is wrong.

McNaughton and Rawling say that they won't discuss my argument for the Deontic Beliefs Restriction. The Circularity Argument, given above, seems to me decisive. If we could appeal to our beliefs about the wrongness of act in deciding whether everyone could rationally choose that everyone accepts some moral principle, we could not also appeal to the Kantian Formula to help us to decide which acts are wrong.

In the remarks quoted above, McNaughton and Rawling might use 'violate' to mean 'infringe'. They might then be asking why we can't appeal to the reasons which are given by the fact that some act has some property which makes acts *prima facie* wrong, such as the property of being the breaking of a promise. The reason given by the fact that some act is *prima facie* wrong may seem to be *akin* to the deontic reason given by the fact that some act *is* wrong.

This is a good question, which I should have mentioned and answered. I would say that, in applying the Kantian Formula, we would be entitled to appeal to the nonmoral fact which makes some act *prima facie* wrong, as long as we don't appeal to this fact in a way that appeals to its *prima facie wrongness*. We might claim, for example, that we could all rationally choose that everyone accepts some principle that requires us not to break promises without some good reason. We might then appeal to our reasons not to break promises, such as those given by the need for cooperation, for confidence about what others will do, etc. My Deontic Beliefs Restriction claims only that if we claim that everyone could rationally choose that we all accept some principle that requires us to keep most promises, we can't appeal to the further belief that breaking promises is wrong.

McNaughton and Rawling then ask what view I accept about these moral constraints. They write that if Parfit

> endorses neither constraints nor quasi-constraints. . . his ultimate view is far removed from both Kantianism and rule consequentialism as they are commonly understood.[18]

They also write:

> Parfit, however, seeks to reconcile the two theories – so does he opt for constraints (forcing the rule consequentialist into the Kantian

> mould), quasi-constraints (forcing the Kantian into the rule consequentialist mould), or neither? We are not sure.
>
> (106)

I don't do either, nor do I need to. These claims misunderstand my argument that the Kantian Contractualist Formula implies Rule Consequentialism. In asking whether everyone would have sufficient reasons to choose some moral principle, setting aside deontic reasons, I don't need either to endorse or to reject constraints or quasi-constraints.

When McNaughton and Rawling state (in the quotation just now) that my "ultimate view is far removed" from Kantianism and Rule Consequentialism, they misunderstand me. I don't attempt to defend or even state any such ultimate moral view. I merely try to make some progress in answering certain questions. In Parts Three and Five of *On What Matters*, I defend the view that if Kant's Formula of Universal Law is revised in two ways, which I believe to be needed, this Kantian Contractualist Formula implies Rule Consequentialism. My view isn't 'far removed' from Kantianism and Rule Consequentialism, since this view is about the relation between these other views. In defending this view, I can leave it open which constraints or quasi-contrasts would be supported by this Kantian Formula and by Rule Consequentialism.

I have been discussing only the questions or objections that McNaughton and Rawling ask or present when discussing my claims. McNaughton and Rawling make several other plausible and interesting claims in the rest of their chapter, most of which I accept. Since these claims are not about my view, I shall not discuss them here.

7 Response to Douglas W. Portmore

In his impressive, rigorously argued chapter, Douglas Portmore criticizes some of my claims about Rule Consequentialism. According to one version of this view, which I called

> *UFRC*: everyone ought to follow the rules whose being followed by everyone would make things go best.[19]

We *follow* some rule when we succeed in doing what this rule requires us to do. According to what I called

> *the Ideal World Objection*: this version of Rule Consequentialism requires us to follow such ideal rules even when we know that, because some other people are not following these rules, our acts would have very bad effects.[20]

To illustrate this objection, Portmore imagines

> *The Unsolved Climate Case*: if everyone (or even just nearly everyone) makes the significant sacrifices required to drastically reduce their carbon footprints, then the climate disaster that will otherwise ensue in the next century will be averted. Unfortunately, no one is making, nor is anyone going to make, these sacrifices.
>
> (141)

When applied to this example, Portmore writes, UFRC requires us to make these sacrifices, which would be bad for ourselves and our families, even though, because no one else will act in this way, these sacrifices would be "completely pointless, doing absolutely no good whatsoever" (147).

This Ideal World Objection can, I wrote, be answered. These Rule Consequentialists could appeal to

> R1: Follow the rules whose being followed by everyone would make things go best, unless some other people have not followed these rules, in which case do whatever, given the acts of others, would make things go best.[21]

I claimed that

> (A) this is one of the ideal rules, since everyone's following R1 would make things go best. So UFRC does *not* require us to follow those ideal rules whose being followed by only some people would have very bad effects.[22]

Portmore denies that Rule Consequentialists could appeal to rules like R1. He writes:

> It might be thought that the ideal (or optimific) code would include a rule saying that one is required to bear the burdens of doing one's part in some possible cooperative venture only if one's doing so would not be pointless due to the unwillingness of others to do their parts. But even if the ideal code would include such a rule in certain possible worlds, it would not include such a rule in the possible world that I am imagining, which is one in which climate disaster would ensue if everyone (or nearly everyone) were to follow (or even accept) such a principle.
>
> (141–2)

This objection to (A) does not, I believe, succeed. There are two ways in which, in Portmore's *Unsolved Climate Case*, everyone might follow R1. That would be

true if everyone made the significant sacrifices that would together prevent the climate disaster. Portmore tells us to suppose that this won't happen, since no one will make these sacrifices. If that is true, however, everyone would again be following R1. If no one makes these sacrifices, everyone would be doing what, given the acts of others, would make things go best. So if these Rule Consequentialists appeal to R1, their view would not require anyone to make these pointless sacrifices, which would do no good. On this version of Rule Consequentialism, we would be acting rightly either if we all make these sacrifices or if no one does.

It might be objected that in Portmore's imagined case, Rule Consequentialists *ought* to require everyone to make these sacrifices, since that is the only way in which we could prevent the climate disaster. But Portmore would not make this claim. R1 permits us not to make these sacrifices only when, and because, these sacrifices would do no good. Portmore does not believe that Rule Consequentialists ought to require such pointless sacrifices. His main objection is, precisely, that UFRC must require these sacrifices even when they would do *no* good. I have argued that, as (A) claims, that is not true.

In the passage quoted above, Portmore claims that this Ideal World Objection also applies to those Rule Consequentialists who appeal to the effects, not of our *following* but of our *accepting* certain rules. According to one such view, which I called

> UARC: Everyone ought to follow the rules whose acceptance by everyone would make things go best.[23]

One such rule might be

> R2: follow the rules whose being accepted by everyone would make things go best, unless some other people have not accepted or followed these rules, in which case do whatever, given the acts of others, would make things go best.

Portmore's objection assumes that in his imagined case, climate disaster would ensue if everyone accepted R2. As before, that is not true. If everyone accepted R2, there are two ways in which everyone might follow R2. That would be true either if everyone made these sacrifices, thereby preventing the climate disaster, or if no one made these sacrifices, which would be pointless since, given the acts of others, these sacrifices would do no good. I conclude that, as I claimed, these Rule Consequentialists can answer what I called the Ideal World Objection.

As I wrote, however, there are other objections to these versions of Rule Consequentialism. Consider

> R3: Follow the rules whose being followed by everyone would make things go best, unless some other people have not followed these rules, in which case do whatever you like.[24]

According to UFRC, this is another ideal rule, since if everyone followed R3, things would go best. In asking whether this rule would be ideal, we ignore what would happen if some people did not follow this rule. In the real world, we would nearly always know that some people have not followed the ideal rules. So, in permitting us to follow R3, UFRC nearly always permits the rest of us to do whatever we like. That is clearly an unacceptable conclusion. According to what I called this

> *New Ideal World Objection*: Once a few people have failed to follow the ideal rules, UFRC implies that none of our possible acts would be wrong.[25]

Similar remarks apply to UARC, which appeals to the rules whose being *accepted* by everyone would make things go best.

To answer this objection, I claimed, Rule Consequentialists should ask what would happen if various rules were followed or accepted, not only by *everyone* but also by other numbers of people. Some of these rules should take conditional forms, telling us to act in different ways, depending either on what other people are doing or on what, on the evidence, we can rationally expect other people to do. When judged in these ways, rules like R3 would clearly not be ideal, since whenever some rule has been followed not by everyone but only by some people, R3 permits us to do whatever we like.

According to one such revised version of Rule Consequentialism, which Portmore calls

> PFRC: everyone ought to follow the rules whose being followed, not only by everyone but by any other number of people, would make things go best.

These more complicated rules would tell us to act in the ways that would make things go best given the number or proportion of people who are following these rules. According to the similar

> PARC: everyone ought to follow the rules whose being *accepted* by different numbers of people would make things go best.

Such claims tell us which acts are right in what I called the *fact-relative* sense. These theories ought to make different claims about what we ought to do in the *evidence-relative* or *belief-relative* senses. These senses of 'ought' are more important

than the fact-relative sense, both when we are deciding how to act and when we ask which acts are blameworthy. One such rule might be

> R4: do whatever, on the available evidence about what others are doing, would be most likely to make things go best.

When Portmore considers what he believes to be the best versions of such views, he writes:

> If the expected value of a code is to be calculated in terms of subjective probabilities, then there is no way for maximizing-expectation-rate PFRC to avoid implying that agents will be required to make pointless sacrifices in certain more fully specified versions of *The Unsolved Climate Case*. After all, if the comparative value of a world in which climate disaster ensues is low enough and/or the subjective probability that nearly everyone will follow a code requiring significant sacrifices is high enough, then the ideal code—that is, the code with the highest expected value—will require agents to make significant sacrifices. . . even though, as a matter of fact, there is. . . no objective chance that anyone will be making these sacrifices.
>
> (144)

As Portmore here points out, this version of Rule Consequentialism may require us to make significant sacrifices when the evidence available to us makes it likely that these acts would make things go best, even when these acts would in fact do no good. But this feature of these views is not, as Portmore assumes, a strong objection to them. We can similarly claim, for example, that what doctors ought to do, in the evidence-relative sense, is to treat their patients in the ways that, on the evidence available, are much the most likely to save these people's lives. It is no objection to this claim that there are some cases in which, because the evidence is misleading, such treatment would in fact kill some patients. Portmore's objection to this version of Rule Consequentialism therefore fails.

Portmore claims that similar objections apply to other versions of PFRC and PARC. He writes:

> rule consequentialism requires us to make significant sacrifices even when doing so is completely pointless, doing absolutely no good whatsoever.
>
> (147)

These objections assume that no version of Rule Consequentialism could appeal to some rule like

> R5: do not make sacrifices when these acts would be completely pointless, doing absolutely no good whatever.

Such rules, Portmore claims, could not be optimific, since there are bound to be some cases in which, if we believe that we are morally permitted not to make such pointless sacrifices, the effects would be very bad.

As before, I believe this objection fails. Several versions of Rule Consequentialism could appeal to R5 or to other similar rules. These views would never imply that we ought in the *fact*-relative sense to make such pointless sacrifices. These views might imply that such acts are morally required in the *evidence*-relative sense even when, because the available evidence is misleading, these acts would do no good. But that is no objection to these views.

I did not try to decide which versions of Rule Consequentialism would best answer the New Ideal World Objection, since that question was irrelevant to my main claims. Portmore writes that all possible versions of PFRC and PARC would be open to 'devastating objections'. Rather than describe these objections, Portmore refers to an article by Kevin Tobia. This article concludes:

> In this paper I have sought to explain a new way in which Rule Utilitarian theories can handle problems of partial acceptance. I contend that current forms of Rule Utilitarianism, namely Fixed Rate, Variable Rate, and Optimum Rate Rule Utilitarianism, can be improved upon by taking into consideration the likelihood that given acceptance levels will actually obtain.

Discussing his proposal, Tobia writes that "there are three main foreseeable objections . . . but I believe none critically damages this theory".[26] These claims do not describe a devastating objection to Tobia's suggested version of Rule Utilitarianism.

Portmore concludes:

> We have seen that rule consequentialism sometimes requires us to act in ways that we lack sufficient reason to act. This presents a dilemma for Parfit. Parfit should concede either that rule consequentialism (and, hence, Triple Theory, which entails it) is false, despite the putatively strong reasons that he believes we have for accepting it, or that morality doesn't have the importance he seems to attribute to it given that it has been undermined by his own substantive account of morality.
>
> (149)

Portmore's ingenious arguments do not, I have claimed, show the Triple Theory to be false. But Portmore makes several original claims, which may help us to

decide what one part of the Triple Theory ought to claim about some important kinds of case.

8 Response to J.L. Dowell and David Sobel

Those whom I call *Soft Naturalists* believe that, though there are no irreducibly normative properties or truths, we need to make some irreducibly normative claims, since such claims, when they are true, can help us to make good decisions and to act well. Soft Naturalism, I argued, cannot be true. Consider, for example, the Utilitarian belief that

> (A) when some act would maximize happiness, this act is what we ought to do.

This view, I wrote, can take two forms. Non-Naturalists like Sidgwick claim that

> (B) when some act would maximize happiness, this fact would make this act have the different property of being what we ought to do.

Utilitarian Naturalists reject (B), claiming instead that

> (C) when some act would maximize happiness, this property of this act is the same as the property of being what we ought to do.

We can argue:

> (1) (A) is a substantive normative claim, which would, if it were true, state a positive substantive normative fact.
>
> (2) If, impossibly, (C) were true, (A) could not state such a fact.

Therefore

> Soft Naturalism is not true.

I called this *the Triviality Objection*.

In their impressive chapter, J.L. Dowell and David Sobel describe their main aim as that of showing how Non-Analytical Naturalists, whom they call *NANs*, could answer my Triviality Objection. They write:

> Parfit's Triviality Objection purports to show that NANs are unable to do so much as state informative identities between the normative and the natural . . .
>
> (153)

This remark misdescribes my objection. I did not argue that Naturalists would be unable even to state identity claims like (C), nor did I argue that if, impossibly, such claims were true, they would not be informative but would be trivial. I wrote that, if (C) were true, this truth would be far from trivial. (C) would give us substantive normative information. But this information would be *negative*. We would learn that, when acts would maximize happiness, this fact could not give these acts the *different*, normative property of being what we ought to do, since (C) implies that there is *no* such different property. If we learnt that there is no such different property, what we learnt could not, as Soft Naturalists claim, help us to make good decisions, and to act well. In a phrase that I often use to sum up this Triviality Objection, claims like (C) could not give us any '*positive* substantive normative information'. Perhaps because Dowell and Sobel never use or mention this often repeated phrase, they do not discuss my Triviality Objection.

There is one passage in which Dowell and Sobel come closest to discussing my objection. When I argued that claims like (C) could not give us positive substantive normative information, I considered the suggestion that (C) might be claimed to imply that

> (Q) when some act would maximize happiness, this act would have certain other non-normative properties.[27]

Dowell and Sobel comment:

> Here is the entirety of Parfit's argument against this second strategy:
>
> > Naturalists believe that substantive normative facts are also natural facts. Since (Q) is not a normative claim, (Q) could not state a normative fact.
>
> Recall that this is part of an overall argument to show that the NAN cannot so much as state her central identity claims in a form that would meet all of her requirements. From these compressed remarks, it is far from immediately clear why (Q)'s failure to be normative would pose a problem for the NAN. After all, the NAN who defends (C) is not claiming that (Q) is a normative claim. She is claiming that (C) is.
>
> (159)

As before, these remarks misdescribe my view. I did not argue that according to these Soft Naturalists *claim (Q)* is normative. As Dowell and Sobel point out, these Naturalists believe that *claim (C)* is normative. I argued that, to defend their view that (C)'s truth would give us positive substantive normative information, these Naturalists cannot appeal to the fact that (C) implies some other

non-normative claim, such as the claim stated by (Q). If (C) implied some other, non-normative claim, that could not help to show that (C) might indirectly give us positive substantive normative information. What Dowell and Sobel call "this second strategy" therefore fails to answer this argument against Soft Naturalism.

I should admit, however, that Dowell and Sobel's misunderstanding of my argument may be partly my fault. After discussing other possible answers to this objection, I wrote that this objection "shows that Naturalism cannot be true".[28] I should have again included the word "Soft", since, as I pointed out myself, the Triviality Objection could not show that what I called *Hard* Naturalism cannot be true.

In the rest of their chapter, Dowell and Sobel make several interesting claims about the informativeness of some statements about the identity of some property and of various ways in which there can be non-semantic explanations of the cognitive significance of some identity statements. But none of these claims apply to my Triviality Objection against Soft Naturalism. Nor, I believe, do these claims support objections to any of my other claims.

9 Response to Julia Driver

In her agreeably humane and sensible chapter, Julia Driver writes that she is not criticizing my defence of the view that there are some irreducibly normative truths, such as the truth that some things matter in a reason-implying sense. Driver aims instead to describe and defend a view according to which there are moral truths without the mysterious underpinnings of non-naturalism. On these views, she holds, "things still matter as much as anything can be said to 'matter'".[29]

These claims imply that nothing can be said to 'matter' in what I call the *purely normative reason-implying sense*. Driver may believe that nothing can be said to matter in this sense because the belief in normative non-natural truths would commit us to mysterious ontological claims. She suggests that, on my view, "We have gotten rid of supernatural agents in accounting for normativity, only to rely on another hidden, occult realm" (183). In my Chapter 31 and Appendix J, I discuss this widely accepted objection. I argue that some non-empirically discoverable truths, such as logical, mathematical and modal truths, and purely normative truths, have no weighty mysterious ontological implications. These truths do not imply that there is any such hidden, occult realm. Since Driver does not discuss my arguments, I don't know why she rejects them, so I cannot try to reply.

Driver makes some suggestions about how these arguments fail. Driver writes: "Analogies with mathematics abound. But tautologies are necessarily true, and empty". Mathematics does not, I believe, consist of empty tautologies. "Appeals to mathematics do not help", Driver also writes, since some of these mathematical

truths, though necessary, are "accidental" in the sense that they lack "a unified non-disjunctive proof". If some mathematical truths lack such a proof, that does not, I believe, make these truths "accidental" in some damaging sense. Driver adds that, in such cases, "there is no real explanation provided as to why the claim is true" (all from 182). These remarks seem to imply that even if Non-Naturalists could justifiably claim that normative truths had the same status as these logical and mathematical truths, that would achieve little. If we can justify such claims, that would, I believe, achieve a great deal. When we consider the most fundamental truths of these kinds, we should expect there to be no further explanations of why these claims are true. We may be unable to explain why no statement or proposition could be both wholly true and wholly false, or why two plus two must equal four, and could not possibly equal three or five. But this inability does not, I believe, cast serious doubt on our belief in these truths. If some normative truths have the same kind of truth as such logical and mathematical truths, that would be enough to show that some things can be said to matter in the sense that we have purely normative reasons to care about these things.

Driver briefly discusses some of the truths that I claim to be fundamental and not to be explicable in other terms. One example is the truth that pain is bad in the reason-implying sense that we all have reasons to want to avoid or prevent future pain. If we can't explain why it is bad to be in agony, Driver suggests, this claim involves "a kind of arbitrariness" (183). The badness of pain, Driver suggests, consists only in how we respond to pain. She also discusses my view that some moral truths

> are necessary: if it is true that, for example, torturing people for fun is wrong, it is true in all possible worlds . . . [But] finding comfort in necessity is relying on an illusion. Necessity does not provide a reassuring bedrock.
>
> (175)

I wasn't trying to find such a bedrock. I made such claims because I don't see how torturing people for fun could fail to be wrong.

Driver's aim, she writes, is not to criticize my non-naturalist view but to defend a naturalist view that she calls *Substantive Humean Constructivism*. "Substantive forms of constructivism", Driver writes, "were not adequately discussed in *On What Matters*" (173). That is true. I made no attempt to discuss these forms of Humean Constructivism, partly because I know too little about them. I shall, however, end by repeating some remarks about Hume. Driver doubts my belief that we all have reasons to want to avoid future agony. As I also claimed, however, Hume believed that we have such reasons. It is true that, in a much quoted passage, Hume writes:

> 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter.[30]

But Hume seems here to be using the word 'reason' to refer to the mental abilities that lead us to form true beliefs. Hume may mean that such preferences cannot be false. Hume did not discuss whether we have reasons to have desires of the kind that Driver calls *external* and I call *object-given* and *value-based*. But Hume writes:

> So little are men govern'd by *reason* in their sentiments and opinions, that they always judge more of objects by comparison than from their *intrinsic worth* and *value*.[31]

He also writes that we mistakenly "desire objects more according to their situation than their intrinsic value".[32] When Hume talks of our preferring our own acknowledged lesser good to our greater good, he seems to be referring to our tendency to prefer lesser goods in the near future to greater goods that would be more remote. Discussing this *bias towards the near*, Hume writes:

> There is no quality in human nature which causes more fatal errors in our conduct. [33]

That is a very strong criticism. As these and other remarks show, Hume believed that when we prefer such lesser goods, we are failing to be *governed by reason*. Such preferences are in this sense contrary to reason. We are preferring what we have no reasons to prefer and strong reasons not to prefer. When Hume claims, in the passage quoted above, that such preferences are *not* contrary to reason, he is forgetting, or misstating, some of his normative beliefs. We should distinguish between Hume's *stated* view and his *real* view.[34]

Notes

1 All page references in the main text are to this volume.
2 *OWM* 2, p. 143.
3 *OWM* 2, p. 155.
4 *OWM* 2, pp. 66–70. Wood says that Kant's Formula of Humanity tells us "that the fundamental bearers of value are not states of affairs at all, but persons and the humanity or rational nature in persons" (*OWM* 2, p. 68).
5 *OWM* 3, §38.
6 In his n. 14.
7 *OWM* 1, p. 82.
8 Markovits used this phrase in the first submitted version of her chapter. Though she does not use this phrase in the revised, printed version of her chapter, my comments about this phrase do not, I believe, misstate her view. If Markovits intended to drop this version of her view, one of my aims is to argue that this would be a mistake.
9 Again, from the original version of her chapter.
10 *OWM* 1, p. 74.
11 *OWM* 1, p. 173.
12 *OWM* 1, p. 173, emphasis added.

13 *OWM* 1, p. 218.
14 *OWM* 1, p. 218.
15 Setiya (2011), p. 1287.
16 He does, however, consider my response. Setiya suggests that, to answer his argument for the practical irrelevance of moral theories, we might revise our definition of 'deontic reason', so that this phrase covers reasons that are provided by the nonmoral facts that make acts wrong.

This response, he suggests, would achieve little. I agree. Setiya also writes:

> There are hints of this in Parfit's book, as when he suggests that features of an act that make it wrong "might give you a decisive reason not to act in this way" but "only by making this act wrong." He goes on to say: "[this] decisive reason would have to be deontic" and that "[you] would not have decisive non-deontic reason not to act in this way". . . These remarks can be interpreted in two ways. On one reading, Parfit adopts the broad definition according to which non-deontic facts that count as reasons because they make acts wrong are themselves deontic reasons. On the second reading, he claims that they "give us" deontic reasons, which consist in deontic facts, since they make such facts obtain.
>
> (n. 32)

Setiya's second reading is correct. When I claimed that, in some cases, this decisive reason might have to be deontic, I did not use that phrase to cover non-deontic reasons. After giving this correct reading, Setiya adds nothing. He gives no argument against (5).

17 In various places, but see *OWM* 1, p. 342.
18 In a previous draft.
19 *OWM* 1, p. 405.
20 I discuss this objection in *OWM* 1, §45.
21 *OWM* 1, p. 317.
22 *OWM* 1, p. 317.
23 *OWM* 1, pp. 377–419.
24 *OWM* 1, p. 317, where, confusingly, I call this principle *R2*.
25 *OWM* 1, p. 316 where I state this objection in a form which applies to Kant's Formula of Universal Law.
26 Tobia (2013), p. 651.
27 *OWM* 2, p. 354.
28 *OWM* 2, p. 356.
29 From the original version of her chapter.
30 Hume (2007), *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Section III.
31 Hume (2007), Book II, Part II, Section VIII.
32 Hume (2007), Book III, Part II, Section VII.
33 Hume (2007), Book III, Part II, Section VII.
34 Hume's beliefs about such reasons are well discussed in Wiggins (2006).

References

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