

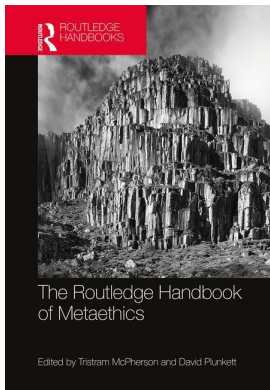
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Ethics and Morality

Stephen Darwall

Bernard Williams begins *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* with “Socrates’s Question”: how should one live? (Williams, 1985: 1). Ever since Socrates, Williams says, philosophers have taken this to be the fundamental question of *ethics*. Williams observes, however, that his contemporaries are usually concerned with “distinctive issues of morality,” such as “What is our duty?” (Williams, 1985: 4). But although the narrower ethical conception of *morality* “has a special significance in modern Western culture,” it is “something we should treat with a special skepticism” (Williams, 1985: 6). What is distinctive and, Williams goes on to argue, dubious about morality among ethical conceptions is its “peculiar” notion of moral *obligation*: the idea that all persons, just by virtue of having certain general capacities of agency, stand under universal, categorical, and inescapable moral requirements of right and wrong (Williams, 1985: 174–96; for a critique, see Darwall, 1987).

Not all philosophers follow Williams’s usage of ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’. But most accept the distinction he marks with it: between the broadest normative questions of how to live (also construed broadly to include motivations and feelings), on the one hand, and deontic moral questions of right and wrong, on the other. Ethics is the genus of which morality is a species. Thus Ronald Dworkin writes that “ethics includes convictions about which kinds of lives are good or bad for a person to lead, and morality includes principles about how a person should treat other people” (Dworkin, 2000: fn. 485; see also Appiah, 2005: xiii). And Allan Gibbard and T. M. Scanlon distinguish similarly between narrower and wider senses of ‘moral’ and ‘morality’, although Scanlon’s narrow morality, comprising obligations “we owe to each other,” may be even narrower than (deontic) morality, since the latter may include moral obligations owed to no one in particular (Gibbard, 1990: 40–1; Scanlon, 1998: 172).

It does not really matter what we call these two different ideas, so long as we recognize the conceptual distinction between them, and Williams’s terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ are as good as any. Without real loss, we might simply regard Williams’s as

a *stipulative definition*, or as a *reforming definition* that aims to replace undisciplined ordinary usage. What matters is whether, so used, these terms carve out an important conceptual distinction.

And they do. We cannot even understand Williams's simultaneous embrace of ethics and suspicion of morality—nor that of other morality critics like Friedrich Nietzsche and G. E. M. Anscombe—unless we mark this difference (Nietzsche, 1994; Anscombe, 1958; see also Slote, 1992). Nietzsche famously rejects morality, but he does so partly on the ethical grounds that morality undermines much that makes life worth living, at least for those capable of higher forms of human excellence.

In addition, some philosophers, like Philippa Foot and Richard Joyce, argue that morality raises special metaethical questions that do not arise in all ethical domains. Thus Foot famously argues that morality's pretension to provide "categorical imperatives" that give every agent (overriding) reasons for complying with them, irrespective of the agent's desires or interests, cannot be sustained (Foot, 1972). And Richard Joyce argues similarly that first-order moral claims are therefore "fictions" (Joyce, 2007a, 2007b).

For their part, morality's philosophical defenders—"moral philosophers," as we can call them—also insist on the distinctiveness of morality as an ethical conception. They think that the "modern" conception of morality is a significant historical achievement that, like the complementary modern doctrine of universal human rights, is well worth defending.

'Morality' refers alternately, then, to this narrower ethical conception and/or to what this conception is *of*, as we have so far identified it: universally binding norms of right and wrong. But this is probably too narrow a characterization. We will consider other proposals philosophers have made for demarcating the moral below. On all these views, morality comprises a proper subset of what is relevant to how human beings should live their lives in the broadest sense. Following Williams, we will use 'ethics' to refer to this broad normative subject.

Wilfrid Sellars famously defined philosophy as "the study of how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (Sellars, 2007: 369). Paraphrasing liberally, we might say that ethics is the subject of how we should (in the broadest possible sense of the term) live (in the broadest possible sense of the term). In effect, this identifies ethics with the normative in general, since all actions and attitudes (things for which we can have normative reasons) are parts of our lives in the broadest sense. Traditionally, however, certain normative subjects—epistemology, for example—have been distinguished from ethics, though even here, epistemologists sometimes talk about the "ethics of belief" (Chignell, 2010).

On this use of 'ethics,' *metaethics*—the inquiry into philosophical questions about ethics—shares much with what philosophers increasingly call *metanormative* inquiry. Indeed, the very origins of metaethics, whether in G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* or earlier in Henry Sidgwick's path-breaking chapter on "Ethical Judgments" in *The Methods of Ethics*, are mostly driven by general issues about normativity (Moore, 1993; Sidgwick, 1967: 23–38). Moore's well-known "open question" argument, which Moore uses to argue that the ethical property of (intrinsic) goodness cannot be identified with any natural property, arguably implicitly relies on the fact that goodness is a normative concept—one that entails normative reasons, or "oughts" (Frankena, 1976: 14; see also Darwall, 1997: 690–2).

This point is only implicit and unacknowledged in Moore, but it is explicit in Sidgwick's earlier argument, from which Moore drew, that ethical judgments "cannot legitimately

be interpreted as judgments respecting ... any facts of the sensible world" (Sidgwick, 1967: 25). The reason that ethical judgements are not reducible to empirical judgments, Sidgwick says, is that they all contain the "fundamental notion expressed by the word 'ought'" (Sidgwick, 1967: 32). Even "instrumental" oughts like 'If you want not to burn the cake, you ought to take it out of the oven' cannot be so reduced, Sidgwick showed, since unlike 'If you do not take the cake out of the oven, it will burn,' the former contains a "dictate of reason" (Sidgwick, 1967: 34).

By and large, then, use of the term 'metaethics' is consonant with the broad sense of 'ethics' as concerned with normative questions of how we should live (in the broadest sense). Metaethical questions are a subpart of metanormative questions in general.

Of course, if morality, by contrast, is a specific ethical conception, it is nonetheless *an* ethical conception. So metanormative questions about morality are also metaethical questions. Some of these—for example, those concerning the nature, conditions, and possibility of moral obligation—differ from those concerning normativity in general. They concern, among other things, morality's distinctive normativity.

We do not really have a term that stands to 'morality' as 'metaethics' stands to 'ethics'. Perhaps we should call this *metamorality* or, more felicitously, *metamorals*. Just as metaethics deals with philosophical questions about ethics, which are mostly about normativity in general, so also is metamorals concerned with philosophical issues about morality. Metamorals will thus be concerned with philosophical issues that arise with respect to this distinctive normative conception and its putative object—moral right and wrong.

SOME HISTORY

As Williams's invocation of Socrates suggests, ethics is at least as old as the ancient Greeks. And Williams is not alone in suggesting that morality is a distinctively modern ethical conception. In her famous "Modern Moral Philosophy," Anscombe criticized the preoccupation ethical philosophers have had since the seventeenth century with morality and its deontic, "juridical," or "law conception of ethics" (Anscombe, 1958). Modern moral philosophers posit a moral law, but Anscombe argued that just like legislated law, a moral law could not exist without a lawgiver.

Societies are, of course, structured by social obligations or *mores*, so they might be thought to legislate these obligations for their members. But *morality* is held to transcend any such locally posited norms. We can always ask of any contingent social or legal obligation whether we are morally obligated to follow it or not. The latter question cannot be settled simply by looking to social mores or to a society's laws; it turns on *morality's* norms. Although we sometimes use 'morality' to refer to "a *society's* morality" or even "an *individual's* morality," these are positive social facts. 'Morality', as modern moral philosophers use the term, refers to an essentially normative order that stands in potential criticism of all positive *moralties*. *Moral agents*, those subject to morality, are defined not by their membership in any particular society but by certain capacities of rational moral agency that make them capable of guiding themselves by the moral law, which binds them simply as one moral agent among others.

Anscombe thought there could be such a moral law only if it has a legislator that transcends any earthly jurisdiction. However, with notable exceptions, most modern moral

philosophers have not been prepared to ground morality in theology. Most argue, indeed, that morality is not the sort of thing that could derive from any being's will, even God's. Anscombe thought this left modern moral philosophy with deontic concepts lacking any "discernible content except a certain compelling force," which could only be "psychological" (Anscombe, 1958: 18). She has not been alone in holding the metamoral position that what Hare called "prescriptivity" is a mark of moral judgment (Hare, 1963).

To appreciate the distinctiveness of morality as an ethical conception, compare it to the view of ethics one finds in Plato and Aristotle. It is notable that 'morality' does not even appear in standard English translations of Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle does contrast "moral virtues" with "intellectual virtues," but by this he just means virtues that have to do with passions, actions, and character rather than with the intellect. For Plato and Aristotle, the central ethical concepts are all species of the good: virtue; intrinsically choiceworthy, noble (*kalon*) action; and the good or benefit of human beings. Much of what modern ethical philosophers consider under the heading of morality, Plato and Aristotle discuss under the virtue of justice or intrinsically choiceworthy just action.

When Socrates is asked by Glaucon and Adeimantus at the beginning of Plato's *Republic* to say why we should be just, his reply is not that justice is morally obligatory or that others' rights provide, in themselves, reasons to respect them. Rather Plato has Socrates argue that justice is both instrumentally and intrinsically good for the just person. For a modern like H. A. Prichard, however, who takes justice to be a central part of obligating morality, Socrates's argument seems to "rest moral philosophy on a mistake" (Prichard, 2002: 7–20). That complying with the moral law can benefit us, even intrinsically, is an important fact, but it cannot explain why morality obligates or establish any reason for being moral that might flow directly from that. For these tasks, Socrates's argument seems to provide a reason of the wrong kind.

Sidgwick makes a similar point when he writes that according to ancient Greek ethics, "right action is commonly regarded as only a species of the good" (Sidgwick, 1967: 106). To fully understand their ideas, we have to "throw the quasi-jural notions of modern ethics aside" (Sidgwick, 1967: 106). He thus agrees with Anscombe that modern moral philosophy differs from ancient ethical thought in holding that the "quasi-jural" or deontic notions of morality are not simply a different "species of the good."

Sidgwick draws a further, related contrast between ancient and modern ethics that concerns normativity or normative force. Whereas Greek ethical philosophy recognizes "but one regulative and governing faculty" or form of practical reason, in the modern view "there are found to be two—Universal Reason and Egoistic Reason, or Conscience and Self-Love" (Sidgwick, 1964: 198). Plato, Aristotle, and other ancients tend to be *eudaimonists*, holding that all normative reasons for action must derive from the agent's own good or happiness (*eudaimonia*). In Socrates's exchange with Glaucon and Adeimantus, it is simply assumed by all parties that if Socrates cannot establish that it is intrinsically or extrinsically beneficial to the just person to be just, he will not have shown any reason to act justly.

According to Sidgwick, however, the modern ethical view allows for the position that Prichard clearly assumes: namely, that the fact that an action would unjustly wrong someone and therefore be morally wrong is or entails itself sufficient reason not to do it. "Conscience," the mental power through which we make moral judgments, is itself a "regulative and governing faculty," an aspect of practical reason (Sidgwick, 1964: 198).

According to Sidgwick's moderns, morality can be an independent source of normative reasons for acting that are additional to any provided by any species of the good.

Notably, Sidgwick makes *two* contrasts between ancient and modern ethical conceptions (Sidgwick, 1964: 198). The moderns recognize both "Universal Reason" and "Egoistic Reason," whereas the ancients recognize only the latter. And the moderns accept the demands of "Conscience" no less than the recommendations of "Self-Love." These are potentially different contrasts that track two different ways of juxtaposing the moral and the prudential that had currency in the early modern period and continue to today. "Conscience," whose contrast with "Self-Love" Sidgwick draws from Joseph Butler, has a conceptual link to the deontic notions of right, wrong, culpability, and so on that both Williams and Anscombe take to define morality. It is a mental faculty through which we hold ourselves accountable for complying with the moral law (Butler, 1983; Sorabji, 2014; Darwall, 2015b).

By "Universal Reason," however, Sidgwick means nothing deontic but rather considerations either of overall benefit or well-being or of impersonal good (as he puts it, what is good "from the point of view of the Universe") (Sidgwick, 1967: 382; Parfit, 2011). The idea that an impartial or impersonal perspective marks out a standpoint of moral, as opposed to personal, assessment—a "moral point of view"—runs through a proto-utilitarian (later utilitarian) tradition of Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and John Stuart Mill and then through more contemporary figures like Kurt Baier and Peter Railton (Hutcheson, 2004; Hume, 1978; Mill, 2002; Baier, 1958; Railton, 1986: 189).

In the 1960s, there was a debate concerning whether the "concept of morality" could be captured in formal terms of universality, prescriptivity, and categorical bindingness, or whether it had a necessary "material" content such as human flourishing, interpersonal relations, or the general good (e.g. Baier, 1958; Foot, 2003a, 2000b; Frankena, 1965, 1966; Hare, 1963; Falk, 1965). More recently, "moral functionalist" views, like that of Frank Jackson, tie morality to "mature folk morality" (Jackson, 2000; see also Smith, 1994). This contrast between formal and material conceptions of morality answers to Sidgwick's two different markers of modern conceptions that we noted two paragraphs above.

If (philosophical) ethics is as old as the ancient Greeks, moral philosophy—the philosophical exploration of morality—is arguably a more recent development. All origin narratives involve some arbitrariness and artificiality, but the figure who most stands to modern moral philosophy as René Descartes stands to modern theoretical philosophy might be Hugo Grotius, whose *On the Law of War and Peace* was published in 1625 (Grotius, 2005; for discussion see Darwall, 2012). There, Grotius argues that all moral agents are subject to a common natural (moral) law that obligates them independently of their interests or whether God commands it, and that this law enshrines basic human rights. He thereby sets for the modern period the fundamental metamoral problem of how the distinctive normativity of moral obligations is to be grounded, since he raises the question and denies that it can be answered either by the agent's interest or divine command. (Grotius's own answer is what he calls "sociability" [Darwall, 2012].)

ETHICAL AND MORAL CONCEPTS

A simple way of expressing Sidgwick's contrast is to say that while ancient Greek ethics recognized only one fundamental normative ethical concept, the good, the moderns

came to recognize two, the good and the right. But this simple formula masks a good deal of complexity that is implicit in Sidgwick's proposal. Even for Sidgwick (1967: 106), Greek ethics recognized different "species of the good," including, he says, "right action." But the notion of "right action" we find in Plato and Aristotle is nothing deontic; it is simply that of an intrinsically choiceworthy (fine or noble) act, something that is worth doing simply because it is the kind of action it is. Similarly, Greek ethics clearly has the idea of *virtue*, as we see in Aristotle's claim that the best life for human beings is a life of virtuous activity. This already gives us three different species of the good: virtue; intrinsically good (choiceworthy) action; and eudaimonia, meaning the agent's good or well-being. These three concepts are knit together in what we might think of as the fundamental thesis of Aristotelian virtue ethics: the *best* life is one of *virtuous* activity—that is, of activities that express virtuous dispositions to choose intrinsically *good* acts.

Now, 'best life' is actually ambiguous. It can mean life that most realizes the agent's good. Or it can mean life that there is most normative reason for the agent to realize (perhaps because it most realizes the agent's good, or perhaps not)—that is, the life that answers Socrates's question. Ancient ethical writers tend to be eudaimonists. Even when, like Aristotle, they see the agent's good as consisting in virtue, they nonetheless hold that the agent should aim at such a life because it will realize her eudaimonia. Moreover, eudaimonism is such an unquestioned assumption of their ethical framework that the distinction we make between the claim that a life will most realize the agent's good, on the one hand, and the claim that because such a life will most realize the agent's good, it is how the agent should live (how she has most normative reason to live), on the other, is not a distinction that they tend to mark explicitly. Eudaimonism is not so much an explicit, contestable ethical doctrine in ancient Greek ethics as a basic framework principle that governs implicitly and unquestionably. This does, however, give us a fourth ethical (normative) notion—that of a normative reason—that is at least implicit in ancient Greek ethics, even if it is not explicit.

So far, we have four ethical concepts: *a person's good* or well-being; *virtue*; *intrinsically choiceworthy action*; and a *normative reason* for acting. In the sense of 'good' that contrasts with 'right,' only three of these refer to species of the good. The concept of normative reasons, or 'oughts,' is both more general than and arguably contained within *both* concepts of the good and concepts of the right. (How this might be, we will consider presently.) Modern moral philosophers (in our sense of philosophical defenders of morality) hold that morality is a source of normative reasons that are not reducible to the good.

Normative reasons are also more general than reasons *for acting*. There are many different attitudes (intentions, beliefs, desires, and emotions) that we can have for reasons. Indeed, what we call attitudes arguably just *are* mental states of which it is intelligible to ask: *for* what reason do we hold the attitude? (Anscombe, 1957; Hieronymi, 2005). And when we have an attitude—say, a belief or a desire—for some reason, the reason for which we have it will be a consideration we take to be a *normative reason to* have it—that is, a consideration we take to count in favor of having it (Darwall, 1983; Scanlon, 1998).

Take desire, for example. When we desire something—say, a refreshing drink—there will generally be aspects of the object of our desire that we take to be reasons *to* desire it: for example, that drinking it will be refreshing and pleasant-tasting. There being reasons to desire it makes the drink good in the sense of being *desirable*, and this is similar for any attitude for which there can be normative reasons. The choiceworthy is what there is

reason to choose; the estimable, what there is reason to esteem; the credible, what there is reason to believe; and so on. For every attitude, it seems, we can frame a normative concept that is necessarily instantiated just in case there are reasons (of “the right kind”) for having that attitude (Hieronymi, 2005; Darwall, 2006: 16–17). This gives us a host of further ethical concepts in addition to those of someone’s good or well-being, virtue, and the intrinsically choiceworthy (Anderson, 1993; Scanlon, 1998).

What do *moral* concepts add to these other ethical concepts? Again, we mean concepts, unlike Aristotle’s concept of moral virtue, that are essentially related to *morality*. Most obviously, there are the deontic moral concepts. These include the concept of *moral obligation* and its equivalents, moral demand, requirement, or duty; the contrary concept of *moral wrong*, or the morally prohibited; and the concept of the *morally permitted*. Though it may sound odd to say, what is morally *right* is what morality permits. When we speak of what is morally obligatory as *the* right action, that is because it is the only act morality then permits.

To deontic concepts we must add the concepts of *moral virtue, worth, or goodness* that enter into the moral appraisal of agents, motives, and (motivated) actions. How these concepts are related to deontic moral concepts is an important question. Immanuel Kant held, for example, that actions have moral worth and show (moral) good will only if they are done for the motive of duty (Kant, 1996: 4: 398). For virtue theorists, like Rosalind Hursthouse, who advance their virtue ethics as a moral theory, however, the concept of right is based on that of virtue rather than vice versa. What is right, Hursthouse holds, is what a virtuous person would characteristically do (Hursthouse, 2002: 17; see also Swanton, 2003). A virtue theorist might, however, like Hutcheson, attempt to avoid deontic moral concepts while grounding claims about what is morally best to do (most *morally choiceworthy*) in claims about what the morally best motives would prompt the agent to do (Hutcheson, 2004: 125).

A very different kind of moral goodness is the concept that takes the lead in utilitarian or consequentialist theories and related conceptions of morality and the moral point of view. This is the concept of what might best be called *moral desirability*, or what is desirable from the moral point of view. In “Moral Realism,” Railton equates “moral rightness with rationality from a social point of view,” by which he means the moral point of view of equal concern for the interests of all (Railton, 1986: 190). (In a subsequent work, however, Railton [1988] suggests a more indirect kind of utilitarian view that links the concept of right, as does Mill, to blameworthiness. We will consider this conceptual point below.)

Scanlon defines “philosophical utilitarianism” as the view that “the only fundamental moral facts are facts about individual well-being” (Scanlon, 1982: 107). But consequentialist utilitarians are also committed to the claim that it is morally desirable that people do well, and this means that they need the concept of moral desirability in addition to that of well-being. That individuals’ goods are realized is, they hold, a (morally) desirable thing itself.

Moral desirability in this sense is roughly equivalent to Derek Parfit’s “impersonally good,” or “good in the impartial-reasons-implying sense” (Parfit, 2011: vol. 1, 47). Impersonal goodness is not, we should note, essentially moral. Consequentialists, for whom promoting impersonal goodness provides the “point” or “goal” of morality, hold that impersonally good states of affairs would be good regardless of whether there were such a thing as morality or not. Even so, it is crucial to philosophical utilitarianism and

consequentialism as *moral* theories that these states are desirable from the moral point of view. This gives us two different senses of ‘morally good’: the morally estimable (or virtuous) and the morally desirable.

Whether these are the only kinds of moral value is an issue for normative moral theory. For consequentialists, the morally desirable and morally estimable senses of moral goodness exhaust the kinds of moral value, whereas Kantians and other non-consequentialists tend to hold that there is a fundamentally different kind of moral value—what Kant calls *dignity*—to which the appropriate response is neither esteem (as an appraisal of moral character and conduct) nor desire (as a response to possible of states that may be promoted) but rather a form of recognition or *respect* that shows itself in how we govern our conduct in relation to it (Kant, 1996: 4:434). (For a consequentialist attempt to accommodate the distinction between (desirable or promotable) goods and values to which the appropriate response is respect see Pettit 1989. Kant’s idea that persons have an inviolable dignity as ends in themselves is not that they or their existence are good, but that that they are entitled to respect (Darwall 1977).)

ETHICS, MORALITY, AND NORMATIVITY

We began with Williams’s identification of ethics with the broadest normative question of how to live. We can put this question in various different ways. How is it good or best to live? How should we live? How do we have most normative reason to live? And we can ask these questions of different components of our lives: actions, habits, emotions, motives, traits of character, and perhaps even modes of perception, attention, and outlook. There is also the question of what ways of living are best *for us*: which best promote our good or well-being? And there is the question of how the answer to this question relates to Socrates’s Question. Socrates didn’t distinguish between these two questions, but we can. That these are different issues is shown by the fact that it is obviously an intelligible position to hold that it is better to lead one’s life in a way that leads to greater well-being overall (that is, impartially considered) even if such a life benefits oneself less.

We contrasted these and other broad ethical questions with more specific questions of morality. How is it morally right and wrong to act? What ways of living are morally best? And what is the relation between living rightly and living well?

Now, as we just noted, it is possible to make the normativity of other ethical concepts explicit by spelling out their conceptual connections to normative reasons. Thus, necessarily, something is good in the sense of being desirable only in the case that there are reasons (of the right kind) to desire it; estimable only if there are reasons to esteem it; and so on. A number of philosophers have argued that taking normative reasons—what Gibbard calls the “flavorless” ought—as fundamental provides the best explanation of normativity (Scanlon, 2014; Gibbard, 1990: 49; Skorupski, 2013). But what about moral concepts? In what does their distinctive normativity consist?

A familiar thought is that moral obligations purport to provide those to whom they apply with normative reasons for acting that are categorical, in the sense of not depending on the agent’s ends or interests, and that also override other reasons for acting. There are, however, significant problems with holding that this is what *defines* moral obligations. First, it makes unintelligible any question about whether moral obligations actually do override

other reasons in all cases, since it makes it true that they do by definition. Anyone who asks such a question thereby shows a misunderstanding of the concept of moral obligation by asking it. Second, if providing overriding reasons is part of the nature of moral obligations rather than something that flows from it, then we cannot say that these reasons exist *because* the moral obligation does. The claim that moral obligations override is not simply that there can be categorical reasons (independent of the agent's interests and desires); that these can override any reasons for acting that are grounded in them; and that we use "morally obligatory" to refer to these reasons. There might, for example, be such reasons flowing from some intrinsic impersonal values—of precious artworks, say, or parts of nature—that have nothing to do with morality. 'Moral obligation' is not simply a term that we use to refer to such reasons, if there are any. The traditional idea that moral obligations override is that it is the independent fact of being morally obligatory that guarantees conclusive reasons.

Perhaps, however, we call reasons for acting "moral" when they have certain contents—being concerned with others' welfare, for example—and we say that these amount to a moral obligation when the reasons are overriding. But again, we thereby lose the capacity to *explain* the overridingness of the reasons by the existence of a moral obligation. The overridingness of moral obligations becomes a "concealed tautology," in Parfit's phrase (Parfit, 2011).

We should note, by the way, that nothing in the idea that moral obligations provide universal, categorical, overriding reasons entails that moral considerations or reasons always override. Nothing prevents the thought that though there are reasons that recommend an action as a morally good thing to do, they are not sufficient to make failure to do it morally wrong, hence they do not necessarily override reasons to do it as they would if the action were wrong. If there can be such so-called "supererogatory acts," (and my only point here is that nothing seems to rule them out conceptually), then the moral reasons that favor the action might not override other reasons for not doing it without any threat to the thesis that moral *obligations* are always overriding.

So the problem remains: if the existence of overriding normative reasons for action is not simply definitive of the concept of moral obligation in the way that the existence of reasons for desire is definitive of the desirable—and as the existence of normative reasons for other attitudes is, in general, definitive of the normative ethical concepts connected to those attitudes—how then are we to understand the distinctive normativity of morality and moral obligation? And how, given that understanding, might we attempt to account for the thesis that moral obligations do indeed provide overriding reasons? A promising approach to this question takes its cue from a passage from Mill:

We do not call anything wrong, unless we mean to imply that a person ought to be punished in some way or other for doing it ... by the reproaches of his own conscience. This seems the real turning point of the distinction between morality and simple expediency.

(Mill, 2002: chapter 5, para. 14)

Like Mill, a number of philosophers have argued recently that the defining normativity of deontic moral concepts of obligation, right, and wrong is tied to distinctive attitudes through which we hold ourselves and one another *accountable*, attitudes that Strawson famously dubbed "reactive attitudes," like resentment, guilt, and moral blame (Strawson,

1968; see also Brandt, 1979: 163–76; Gibbard, 1990: 42; Skorupski, 1999: 142; Darwall, 2006: 94–118). Moral blameworthiness can be understood in terms of normative reasons (or Gibbard’s “flavorless” ‘ought’) as what there is normative reason (of the right kind) to blame. The Millian point, then, is that it is a conceptual truth that:

An action is wrong if, and only if, it is an action of a kind that it would be blameworthy to perform were one to do so without excuse.

Similarly, an action is necessarily morally obligatory if, and only if, it is of a kind that it would be blameworthy to fail to perform were one to fail to perform it without excuse.

This proposal ties the moral normativity of deontic moral notions to that of blame-worthiness. The thought is not that moral wrongness—being a violation of a moral obligation—and blameworthiness are the same idea. They are not. An action may be wrong without being blameworthy, since there may be reasons to excuse it. The claim is that the above conceptual links exist between wrongness, blameworthiness, and excuse—and, through wrongness’s entailments with other deontic moral notions, between these latter and blameworthiness.

Another way of putting this point is that we are accountable for complying with moral obligations in a way we are not for acting in accordance with normative reasons for acting generally—even, indeed, with moral reasons. Blame and related reactive attitudes like resentment and guilt implicitly hold their objects answerable for their conduct; they implicitly address a demand to their objects and bid for their objects to hold themselves answerable through a reciprocating attitude like moral guilt, which Mill calls “the reproaches of ... conscience” (Strawson, 1968: 85; Darwall, 2006: 94–118; Mill, 2002: chapter 5, para. 14). Nothing like this follows from doing what fails to accord with other normative standards.

But if the normativity that is distinctive of deontic morality is justification for reactive, holding-accountable attitudes, what then is the relation between moral obligations and reasons *for acting*? What can vindicate morality’s implicit claim that there is never sufficient reason to do moral wrong? We will return to this at the end of the next and final section, in which we discuss how the difference we have noted throughout between ethics in general and morality in particular is reflected in the difference between metaethics, or metanormative theory, on the one hand, and metamorality, or metamorals, on the other.

METAMORALS

The distinctiveness of morality and moral concepts within ethics more generally bears careful attention at the level of metaethics and metamorals. Consider, for example, the debate between different varieties of internalism and externalism. *Judgment internalists* about some part of the ethical domain hold that actual or counterfactual motivation is essential to a genuinely ethical (or normative) judgment in that domain. And *existence or motivational internalists* hold that actual or counterfactual motivation (of the agent) is a necessary condition of the truth of some relevant ethical judgment about what the agent should do. Focusing on the latter, note the difference between two different kinds of internalist arguments that Williams gives. Most famously, Williams argues in “Internal and External Reasons” that any normative reason for acting must be something on which

the agent could act in the sense that she would do so were she to deliberate correctly from her “motivational set” (Williams, 1981). Williams’s famous claim that there are no “external reasons,” and that all practical reasons must be “internal” in this sense, is a claim about ethical (normative) reasons for acting in general. In “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame,” however, Williams makes a very different kind of argument about the role of internal reasons in *morality* (Williams, 1995). He argues, I think correctly, that it is a presupposition of *blame* as a reactive attitude that the person one is blaming could not have had sufficient reason to do what she is being blamed for doing. It is a kind of pragmatic contradiction to blame someone and simultaneously acknowledge that she had good reason to do what one is blaming her for doing. This means that moral blame for some action can be justified only if there was conclusive reason not to have so acted.

Williams’s object in making this point is to put pressure on the idea of morality from a different direction than he pursued in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985). There, he held that morality tends to overreach and constrain agents in ways that undermine their integrity. But in “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame” (1995), Williams argues that deontic morality’s signature reactive attitudes, like moral blame, cannot always be justified if his general “internal reasons” thesis is correct. Presently, I will argue that his observation can actually be turned into a defense of morality and its claim to provide conclusively overriding reasons for acting. My point here, however, is simply that we need to take care in metaethical debates, whether they concern ethics in general or morality in particular.

Another example occurs in debates over what Jonathan Dancy calls “moral particularism” (Dancy, 1993, 2006, 2009). Dancy argues that “moral thought and judgment” do not require general “moral principles” and that moral truth can be irreducibly particularistic (Dancy, 2006: 76). However, Dancy’s arguments for this position seem insufficiently attentive to morality’s distinctiveness as an ethical conception. His case for moral particularism largely depends upon a general holism about normative practical reasons—that, for example, the valence of a practical reason is not intrinsic to it but can be affected by other “defeaters” or “enablers” in a way that is familiar from epistemology—so that there are unlikely to be true general principles about normative reasons. This may seem plausible enough about normative reasons in general, but that is nonetheless consistent with the existence of features of morality that make general principles requisite there.

If, for example, deontic moral truths about moral obligation, right, and wrong are tied conceptually to accountability—if, that is, it is a conceptual truth that an action can be morally wrong if, and only if, it is an action of a kind that would be blameworthy to do without excuse—then deontic moral truth is likewise tied to conditions for intelligible accountability. That this may provide a necessary role for moral principle can be shown by deontic morality’s similarity to law. An essential feature of the contrast between rule by decree and the rule of law is that the latter involves publicly accessible rules whose interpretation is backed by judicial principle. Of course, morality differs from law in various ways—for example, in not being promulgated. But if morality is like law in respect of accountability for violations, and if accountability in general requires a sharable public standard, since a person cannot intelligibly be held accountable for complying with standards that are inaccessible to her, then there may well be a rationale for general principles in morality that does not hold in general in other normative or ethical domains (Darwall, 2013).

Similarly, Rawls held that it is essential to a conception of justice that it be publicizable, and this “publicity condition” figures centrally in his argument from the original position for justice as fairness and against forms of utilitarianism (Rawls, 1971: 130). Critics sometimes pointed out against Rawls that this is an implausible condition, since whether everyone should accept some doctrine and whether it is true seem to be different matters (see Parfit, 1986: 41; Scheffler, 1982). However, although this is often true, and there is no simple entailment in general from the fact that a claim should be (even) universally disbelieved to the claim’s being false, this entailment may nonetheless be valid for deontic moral claims. This is owing to deontic morality’s connection to accountability. While there is certainly no conceptual bar to essentially esoteric normative truth in various domains—for example, in aesthetics, or even concerning well-being or ethical vice and virtue broadly conceived—there does seem to be a conceptual bar to esoteric *morality* as a standard of moral accountability. Here, insensitivity to differences between morality and other normative or ethical conceptions can lead to error.

Again similarly, issues in metamorals about the possibility of moral expertise, about the general accessibility of moral knowledge, and about moral testimony depend upon features of morality that do not hold true across the ethical domain. There seems to be nothing problematic in the idea of esoteric aesthetic knowledge, or even of great swaths of normative truth that are inaccessible to many. But if, again, moral obligations are what we are accountable for doing, it is hard to see how these could be similarly inaccessible. We can hardly be accountable for not doing wrong if we are not also accountable for knowing what is wrong. Arguably, however, we cannot intelligibly be held accountable for that unless it is possible for us to know what is wrong. But this line of thought, plausible as it is in *metamorals*, hardly holds in metaethics across the board.

Finally, let us return to the issue of how moral philosophers might defend the claim, seemingly essential to morality, that moral obligations entail overriding reasons for compliance. As we saw before, it is little help to simply define moral obligations in terms of overriding reasons, since that makes the claim that moral obligations override a concealed tautology. Foot argues that there is an uncontroversial sense in which moral obligations are “categorical” and “inescapably” require us to act contrary to our interests and aims, but that this is similarly true of any putative normative requirement—for example, etiquette. Both sets of requirements hold categorically *from their respective “points of view”* (Foot, 1972: 308–11). However, this does not entail that either hold *sans phrase*, much less that moral obligations and oughts override other reasons.

A promising way of trying to meet Foot’s challenge is to recall Williams’s point about blame presupposing that moral obligations provide genuine (not just perspective-relative) reasons that override other reasons. Putting this point together with a Strawsonian analysis of moral blame—as a reactive attitude that has various presuppositions and therefore justification conditions—may form the basis of a promising line of response.

Notice, first, that skeptical questions (like those of Williams, Anscombe, and Nietzsche) about morality’s normativity and about whether moral obligations provide overriding reasons differ from skepticism about normativity and normative reasons in general. This is itself an aspect of the distinction between ethics and morality that we have been exploring throughout this essay. Even if normative reasons for attitudes and actions exist in general, moral skeptics argue, there is reason to be suspicious of *morality’s* claim that moral obligations provide overriding reasons for acting. Their skepticism

about morality is not supposed to depend on a general skepticism about normativity and normative reasons.

The next point is that moral blame is an attitude that can be had *for reasons*, and so is justifiable or not dependent upon whether there are normative reasons to blame. In this way, blame and its kindred reactive attitudes are like belief, desire, intention, and other attitudes. Assuming there can be normative reasons for attitudes in general, we should suppose that there can be normative reasons for blame, unless we have some special reason for skepticism in this particular case.

Assume, then, that Williams (1995) is right in thinking that blame presupposes sufficient reason not to have done what the person is being blamed for doing. Blame is a form of holding someone answerable. But if the person blamed can show that she had sufficient reason for acting as she did, then she will have successfully answered the blame and shown it to be unwarranted—that is, shown that there was not in fact sufficient reason to blame her for her action.

But if it is a conceptual truth that an action is a violation of a moral obligation only if it is of a kind that *would* be blameworthy were it to be done without excuse, it necessarily follows that if the action is morally required (and no excuse exists), then sufficient reason to blame the person would exist. And since this reason would not exist if there were not sufficient reason for the person not to have done what she is blameworthy for doing, it follows further that if there was a moral obligation for her not to have done it, then there was sufficient reason for her not to have done it (Darwall, 2015a).

This is much too brief a presentation to show that an argument along these lines can actually work. I present it in conclusion here to reinforce the difference between general skeptical issues about normative reasons and normativity—which is a staple of *metaethics* and metanormative theory in general—and skeptical worries about the normativity of morality more specifically in *metamorals* in particular. The strategy of the argument is to claim that the normativity of morality stands or falls with normative reasons for (deontic) reactive attitudes like moral blame. So long as the general problem of normativity can be solved and there can be normative reasons for attitudes, it would seem that reactive attitudes like moral blame can be justified also. And if they are, they bring normative reasons for acting in their train.

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