

EVIDENCE FOR MORAL KNOWLEDGE

by

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B.Phil., University of Pittsburgh, 2010

Submitted to the Faculty of

The School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2010

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES AND
UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE

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My aim in this thesis is to examine two sources of plausibility for moral anti-realism. First, I address some popular arguments that appeal to moral disagreement, ultimately finding that the route from disagreement to anti-realism is less clear than it might seem. Second, I outline one particular argument from moral luck, which highlights the inexplicable coincidence of our moral beliefs and objective moral fact. In response to this argument, I show how our moral sentiments can serve as a specific kind of evidence for moral knowledge, namely evidence that connects our moral opinions *non-accidentally* with objective moral fact. In that way, on the view developed in this thesis, our moral sentiments make objective moral knowledge possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.0 DISAGREEMENT AND MORAL ANTI-REALISM.....	3
3.0 THE ARGUMENT FROM MORAL LUCK	14
4.0 MORAL EVIDENCE AND DOXASTIC JUSTIFICATION	22
5.0 MORAL SENTIMENTS AS EVIDENCE.....	27
6.0 CONNECTING TO THE MORAL FACT.....	33
7.0 DISPOSITIONS AND MORAL LUCK.....	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	42

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My greatest debt of gratitude is to my advisor and teacher, Kieran Setiya, for his patience, astute guidance and immense dedication to my success. He has been devoted to raising the caliber of this thesis since I began working with him, and without his help, I would never have learned as much as I did from writing this work. I also sincerely thank the other members of my committee, John McDowell, Karl Schafer and Sharon Street, for their comments and for making the subject of this thesis so much more intelligible to me through their own work. Lastly, this project would not have been conceivable without the support and encouragement of Nashid Chaudhury; for intently listening to all my musings, worrying on my behalf and always reminding me that there are some things I will never doubt—I am thankful without end.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is notoriously difficult to motivate skepticism about the idea that there is an objective physical world. If I suggested, even persuasively, to a group of people that a Cartesian ‘evil demon’ might be distorting their perceptions, I doubt that many would feel compelled to change their beliefs about the world. It seems that our perception of physical properties is authoritative in such a way that we are rarely inclined to doubt the existence of these properties. And when we do call such perceptions into question, we usually do so as part of an armchair exercise to establish why we ought to believe what we already do.¹

Unfortunately, evaluative perceptions are more frequently and more seriously threatened. There is a certain plausibility granted to *anti-realism about moral properties*—roughly the thesis that moral properties are projected, constructed or otherwise subjectively manufactured. This is most evident in the fact that while the Cartesian skeptic is mainly a theoretical construction, the anti-realist about moral properties is a real person, residing in academic departments throughout the world. What is it about anti-realism of this sort that makes it so much more plausible (and persuasive) than anti-realism about physical properties? In this thesis, I want to consider two potential sources of this plausibility, namely the appeal to moral disagreement and the appeal to

¹ As Descartes says: “But you must bear in mind the distinction I have insisted on in various places, between the conduct of life and the investigation of the truth. For when it is a question of managing one’s life, it would certainly be completely foolish not to believe in the senses, and there has never been anything but ridicule for the skeptics who neglected human interests to such an extent that their friends had to look after them to stop them hurling themselves over precipices; and therefore I have pointed out elsewhere that no one in their right mind has ever seriously doubted such things” (Descartes 1642: 351).

moral luck.

Under the influence of non-cognitivists and error theorists, we might think that the source of plausibility for anti-realism is that we disagree about moral properties in ways that we do not disagree about physical properties. For instance, some error theorists note that moral opinions can vary fundamentally between different time periods, regions and cultures while fundamental disagreement about physical qualities is rare. But does this fact *really* lend support for anti-realism about moral properties? The claim of the second section of this thesis is that it is difficult to conceive of how moral disagreement *can* drive us to moral anti-realism. I will argue that many popular ways of thinking about the route from disagreement to anti-realism are misguided.

In the third section, I take up Sharon Street's argument from moral luck. Street argues that realists are faced with an inexplicable coincidence between purportedly true moral beliefs and the beliefs that causal forces have lead us to believe. She presses realists to explain the coincidence not only because it is unlikely, but because we have no non-question-begging evidence for the truth of our moral opinions. As she formulates it, Street's worry is vulnerable to objections from Dworkin (1996) and McDowell (1987), who might argue that the non-moral facts about a moral scenario are sufficient evidence to avoid the puzzle. In the third and fourth sections, I reformulate her worry in a way that avoids McDowell's insistence that the non-moral facts are sufficient evidence for moral knowledge. What we need, on my formulation of Street's worry, is evidence that (1) doxastically justifies our moral claims and (2) connects our claims non-accidentally with the moral fact.

I hypothesize that *moral sentiments* are evidence of this sort. First, as I argue in section five, there is good reason to think moral sentiments can doxastically justify our moral claims. Second, as I show in section six, our moral sentiments—which I will have already shown can act

as evidence for our moral opinions—are connected non-accidentally with objective moral fact. This second conclusion will rely on the phenomenological claim that moral sentiments have *representational* content, or content fixed by the circumstances in which we have them. It will follow from this principle that we must have a basic disposition to have correct moral sentiments. Thus, when sentiments are used as evidence for moral opinions, we can think of our opinions as connected with objective fact. My account is one in which moral opinions are connected non-accidentally to objective moral fact *by way of* evidence in the form of moral sentiments. In the last section, I show where this account leaves Street’s worry.

As might be clear, I have two overall goals in this thesis. The first is to outline two general sources of intuitive plausibility for anti-realism. The second is to respond to one pressing argument in support of anti-realism, namely the appeal to moral luck. I want to illustrate how this particular argument raises serious epistemic concerns about evidence for our moral claims. The aim is to show that there is a way of answering these concerns consistent with both moral realism and general epistemic standards for knowledge.

2.0 DISAGREEMENT AND MORAL ANTI-REALISM

Moral disagreement has occupied a prominent and peculiar place in meta-ethics for the last century. Some moral philosophers, like G.E. Moore, point to disagreement to prove that moral values are not subjective while non-cognitivists, like A.J. Ayer, point to disagreement to prove that moral values *are* subjective.² The crucial difference between Moore and Ayer is that while Moore thinks we have *fundamental moral disagreements*, Ayer thinks we only engage in *secondary moral disagreements*. Fundamental moral disagreement involves different opinions about moral concepts; that is to say, individuals with opposing moral outlooks differ fundamentally because they differ in opinion about what it means to be ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Secondary moral disagreement involves differences in whether a specific instance falls under the aegis of a particular moral concept. In these disagreements, no meta-ethical issues arise; it is a matter of showing whether a particular instance merits being called ‘stealing’, ‘murdering’, ‘lying’, and so on.

In this section, my ultimate goal is to argue that moral disagreements, when we understand what they are about, do not lend any support for anti-realism about moral properties. First, I want to argue against one of Ayer’s arguments for anti-realism by showing that the relevant sort of moral disagreement is always *fundamental*. Second, I will consider two principles on which we might be able to extract skepticism from disagreement, and find that they

² See Ayer (1948), especially p. 110-112, and Moore (1922), especially p. 333. For a general discussion, see Johnson (1959).

are both false. Thus, I will conclude that moral disagreement cannot drive us to anti-realism.

To begin, we should put aside worries about non-moral knowledge. When two people are in disagreement about some moral matter, we should suppose that they have all the relevant non-moral facts to make their moral verdict. Thus, we should exclude from consideration the case in which you think that an action is wrong because you did not see or hear what was *really* going on. So the situation in which I think someone acted wrongly because of false information, like thinking that someone is stealing another person's money because I didn't hear that the transaction was authorized, is irrelevant. If I make a moral verdict, I do not make it based on false information about the non-moral facts. When people disagree based on misinformation, there is nothing substantial about the debate and we should not expect that the disagreement will persist for long.

So then, the relevant kinds of debate involve two people equally knowledgeable about the circumstances in question (insofar as non-moral facts go). My first goal is to dismiss the argument from disagreement given by A.J. Ayer. He intends to support a version of anti-realism in which moral claims have no propositional content. Following Moore, he contends that if there is no debate about fundamental moral claims, then anti-realism must be true. The thought here is that if we *did* disagree about fundamental moral claims, there would be reason to suppose that those concepts are somehow objective and 'out there' for debate. Moore argues that when two people disagree about moral questions, they do not merely make statements about how things appear to them, but rather how things actually stand in the world. Moore thinks that it follows from the fact that there are fundamental disagreements that there is objective moral fact.³

Like Moore, Ayer thinks that anti-realism is true if we do not have fundamental moral disagreements. Unlike Moore, he goes on to say that all actual debates are secondary in nature,

³ See Moore (1922), p. 334.

so there is no fundamental disagreement and anti-realism is true.⁴ My strategy against Ayer is to argue that the distinction between fundamental and secondary disagreements has no substance. I will show that his argument for anti-realism fails because all disagreements are substantively fundamental. To make my point, I need only argue that secondary moral disagreements are fundamental because, assuming that the relevant moral disagreements are either fundamental or secondary, it will follow that all relevant moral disagreements are fundamental.

Consider the admittedly controversial example of disagreement between two people, George and Emily, about abortion. Suppose George's position can be summarized as the claim that abortion is murder and murder is wrong, so abortion is wrong. Emily's position can be summarized as the claim that abortion is not murder so although murder is wrong, abortion is not wrong on account of being murder. In this case, George and Emily disagree about whether having an abortion falls under the aegis of 'murdering'. Since there is no apparent disagreement about the relevant moral claim that murdering is wrong, this debate appears on the surface as a secondary disagreement. However, we should give this case a closer look. We can think of secondary disagreements as having to do with minor premises and fundamental disagreements as having to do with major premises. In this case:

(Major) Murder is wrong
(Minor) Abortion is murder

George and Emily, in having this secondary disagreement, are supposedly disagreeing about (Minor). They take (Major) to be given by their shared moral outlook. But what does it mean to question whether abortion is murder? Naturally, it means thinking about whether abortion is characteristic of murderous action. But then, George and Emily must be thinking about whether abortion is characteristically the kind of thing they would take (given their moral outlook) to be

⁴ See Ayer (1948), p. 110-112.

wrong. In effect, their disagreement about whether abortion is murder is a disagreement about whether abortion is wrong. So, we have:

(Major₁) Abortion is wrong

(Major₁) is what is at issue in the secondary disagreement between George and Emily. We assume that perfect knowledge of the non-moral facts give George and Emily accurate information about what abortion is. So, what's at issue is whether the moral predicate 'is wrong' applies to the set of non-moral facts that constitute 'the act of having an abortion'. How is this disagreement different from a fundamental one? It involves whether the concept of wrongness applies to the act of an abortion. Substituting various 'secondary' debates in the way described here leads us to think that whenever individuals are engaged in moral disagreements, moral concepts are in question. In other words, *all disagreements that are not the result of misinformation are fundamental*. This should not strike us as completely unintuitive. It makes sense that whether murder is wrong depends on whether it is the type of thing characterized by acts like abortion. Similarly, whether abortion is murder depends on whether it is the type of thing that can be described as murderous action.⁵ It seems that Ayer is wrong about moral disagreement and his argument does not lend support for anti-realism. We *do* have fundamental disagreements, even when it appears that they are secondary.

There are at least two roads still open to the anti-realist who wants to argue from moral disagreement to anti-realism. Both proceed indirectly by reliance on one or both of two principles. We might think:

- (R) If there are objective moral facts, we should be able to resolve fundamental moral disagreements.
- (N) If there are objective moral facts, there should be no fundamental moral disagreement.

⁵ David Wiggins (1975) argues that a similar thought is developed in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. This might be reason to reject the idea of codification in ethics, as John McDowell (1979) does.

In the remainder of this section, I will show how each of these principles, when coupled with observations about disagreement, can generate plausibility for anti-realism. Unfortunately for the anti-realist, I will also show how both principles are false and conclude that anti-realism does not garner plausibility from disagreement.

Some anti-realists implicitly rely on something like principle (R) when arguing for their position. Other anti-realists, like Gilbert Harman, appeal explicitly to the irresolvable nature of moral disagreement to support moral relativism.⁶ If there is an objective fact about some matter, it seems reasonable to think that if disagreements arise about that matter, we could simply look to the facts to resolve them. So, our inability to resolve disagreements is what supposedly casts doubt on moral realism. I want to argue that this thought leads us to a puzzling and counter-intuitive conclusion, namely *wholesale Archimedean skepticism*. Consider what it means to have a fundamental disagreement about physical facts. Such a disagreement might consist in disagreeing about whether it follows from the appearance of some feature of the world that there is such a feature in the world. So, for instance, we disagree fundamentally by disagreeing about the following claim: if it seems to me there is a chair in front of me, there is a chair in front me. Can we resolve such fundamental disagreements about the physical world? It seems obvious that conclusively resolving such a fundamental disagreement is beyond our reach.⁷ We can drive this point further by considering the logical case. If you and I disagree fundamentally about logic, we might disagree that it follows from the premises $P \rightarrow Q$ & P that Q . It should seem equally clear that resolving this kind of fundamental disagreement in logic is unattainable.⁸

If objectivity requires that we be able to resolve fundamental disagreements, then we

⁶ See Harman (1996), p. 20-22.

⁷ This motivates a turn to modest anti-skeptical projects. See Pryor (2000).

⁸ See Carroll (1901).

should not restrict anti-realism to the evaluative domain. We should doubt objectivity not only in the moral case, but also in the case of physics and logic. Where does this leave us? Suddenly we are skeptical not only about the evaluative domain but also about the world in general. We can call such global skepticism—borrowing from Ronald Dworkin’s terminology—*wholesale Archimedean skepticism*. I suspect that many would like to reject (R) at this point. But suppose we press further. Is it possible to make sense of this kind of wholesale skepticism? It seems true that we engage with independently-real and objective features of the world every day. I am naturally inclined to say that ‘there is a chair in front of me’ when it seems there is a chair in front of me. Richard Rorty attempts to defend global skepticism by appeal to a distinction between levels of thought and discourse. On the level of ordinary language, we say things like ‘chairs exist’ and the like. On a second, more philosophical level, we question whether Reality as It Is In Itself contains chairs.⁹ His position faces some serious obstacles; for instance, Dworkin points out a dilemma Rorty faces in holding this view. He says:

If he gives the sentence “mountains are part of Reality as It Is In Itself” the meaning it would have within our “language game” if any of us actually said it, then it means nothing different from “Mountains exist, and would exist even if there were no people,” and the contrast he needs disappears. If, on the other hand, he assigns some novel or special sense to that sentence—if he says, for example that it means that mountains are a logically necessary feature of the universe—then his argument loses any critical force or philosophical bite (Dworkin 1996: 96).

We should, at this point, wish to retract the principle (R) not only because it leads to a kind of skepticism that is unappealing but because such skepticism is in fact unintelligible. So, we accept, in other words, that there is no connection between objectivity and the ability to *resolve* fundamental disagreement. Instead, we might imagine that the problem is that we have fundamental moral disagreements in the first place. The thought is that we should be skeptical

⁹ See Rorty (1991).

about moral claims because (N) is true and we have fundamental disagreements about ethics and not about physics.

This is roughly the strategy we see in John Mackie (1977), who argues from the diversity of moral opinions that we should doubt objective moral properties. He says: “radical differences between first order moral judgments make it difficult to treat those judgments as apprehensions of objective truth” (Mackie 1977: 18). It would be incorrect to say that Mackie thinks *mere* disagreement casts doubt on realism about moral properties (after all, we often disagree in the sciences too). He is best understood as thinking disagreement in the descriptive cases is different from disagreement in the evaluative cases. He says “...such scientific disagreement results from speculative inferences or explanatory hypotheses based on inadequate evidence, and it is hardly plausible to interpret moral disagreement in the same way...disagreement about moral codes seems to reflect people’s adherence to and participation in different ways of life” (Mackie 1977: 18). In the physical cases, Mackie wants to say that disagreement occurs because people sharing an outlook on the physical world (that is, sharing the same physical and logical concepts) disagree about what follows from a set of inadequate evidence. The same is not true in the moral case, where we have seen that disagreements always engage different moral concepts. We can be skeptical of moral properties because we disagree fundamentally, while we can’t be skeptical of physical properties because we do not disagree in this way.

The fact that we disagree fundamentally *only* in the moral case is *still* not enough to generate a skeptical worry. Dworkin recognizes that Mackie needs a further assumption; he needs to say that fundamental disagreement in the intellectual domain of morality ought to undermine objectivity. It certainly seems true that fundamental disagreement in the perceptual domain *would* undermine objectivity; if we disagreed fundamentally about whether our

perceptions were veridical, there would be reason to be skeptical about our perceptions. But we should recognize precisely why this would be the case. Objectivity in perception is undermined by fundamental disagreement because we think of objects in the world as *causing* us to have certain perceptions. For that reason, it is mysterious how we could disagree drastically about objective perceptual facts unless there were no such facts.

In the moral case, do moral facts cause our moral opinions? The thesis that moral beliefs are caused by moral facts—which Dworkin calls the ‘moral field’ thesis—postulates that our moral opinions are caused by some moral particles—which Dworkin mockingly calls ‘morons’. If the moral field thesis were true, we should be skeptical of moral objectivity on account of fundamental disagreement (in the same way we would be skeptical of perceptual objectivity if we disagreed fundamentally about perceptual facts). But the moral field thesis is not true, so Mackie’s argument does not succeed. Dworkin finds that the ‘moral field’ thesis cannot be both intelligible and true (Dworkin 1996: 104). While most realists are quick to reject this causal story, we open another door to skepticism if we do not have an account to replace it. This is precisely because the failure of the causal story lends a hand to anti-realists who want to argue that the notion of objective moral properties is unintelligible.¹⁰

John McDowell (1985) and David Wiggins (1991) endorse an alternative to the causal thesis that explains why fundamental disagreement is typical of the moral domain. The view—which we might call ‘sensitivity theory’—has a Humean root because it reserves a special role for moral sentiments. To understand what is meant here by sensitivity theory, consider the related view of dispositionalism.¹¹ According to dispositionalists, moral properties are objective properties but are only intelligible by appeal to subjective states. This view can be attributed to

¹⁰ Mackie’s Queerness Argument seems to take hold of this point. The same idea comes up in Leiter (2001) p. 76.

¹¹ For dispositionalism, see Lewis (1989).

David Lewis, who argued that “something of the appropriate category is a value if and only if we would be disposed, under ideal conditions, to value it” (Lewis 1989: 113). If the dispositionalist can be said to argue for the response-dependence of moral *properties*, the sensibility theorist I have in mind can be said to argue for the response-dependence of moral *concepts*.

I use the term sensibility theory then to refer to *moral concept response-dependency*. Like dispositionalists, sensibility theorists believe that moral claims are objectively true but only conceivable in relation to subjective states. Wiggins tells us that “we grasp the sense of a [value] by acquiring a sensibility all parties to which respond in a particular way to certain particular features” (Wiggins 1990: 74). McDowell agrees, saying that “[moral] properties are not adequately conceivable except in terms of certain subjective states” (McDowell 1985: 138). However, unlike dispositionalists, sensibility theorists believe there is more to the story of moral interaction than mere dispositions. McDowell claims that our moral beliefs are cognitive applications of the moral concepts given by dispositions. Using McDowell’s terminology, we decide that a particular instance *warrants* or *merits* the assignment of a particular moral concept. He says: “a virtue is conceived to be not merely such as to elicit the appropriate ‘attitude,’ but rather such as to merit it” (McDowell 1985: 142). In an analogy to fearfulness, McDowell tells us simply that “for an object to merit fear just is for it to be fearful” (McDowell 1985: 142). So while the dispositionalist thinks that *moral properties* are delivered by subjective states, the sensibility theorist believes that only *moral concepts* depend on subjective states and that the application of those concepts as properties of some particular action requires cognition.

There is much discussion of the circularity that might be entailed by McDowell’s view, but this objection is not relevant here.¹² The relevant point is that sensibility theory offers an alternative explanation as to how we interact with moral properties. And this explanation, which

¹² Some of these issues are examined in D’Arms and Jacobson (2000). Also see Blackburn (1993).

we can endorse over the 'moral field' thesis, explains why fundamental disagreement about moral properties is not problematic. Recall that Mackie thinks we should be driven to anti-realism by the prevalence of fundamental disagreements in moral matters. And if dispositionalism or the causal thesis were true, then we should think fundamental moral disagreement is impossible, unless there are no objective moral properties. But, in sensibility theory, there is nothing precluding fundamental moral debate. That is to say, there is nothing about sensibility theory that would make fundamental moral disagreement raise an issue about objectivity (as such disagreements in the physical case might). Thus, we should not be driven by fundamental disagreement to anti-realism about moral properties.

3.0 THE ARGUMENT FROM MORAL LUCK

There are many factors that we recognize as exerting influence on our evaluative beliefs. Many of us accept that if we were born in a different time period, location or culture, we would likely have had different moral opinions. For instance, we normally accept that if any of us were born in centuries past, our opinions about slavery, racism and human equality would be drastically different. This seemingly innocuous thought can generate a serious problem for realism about moral values. In this section, I want to outline how this observation causes problems for realism and begin to show what epistemic issues it highlights.

Sharon Street gives a powerful argument in this vein.¹³ She points out two standpoints from which we must see ourselves: the ‘practical’ standpoint, according to which our moral beliefs are mostly true in an objective sense, and the ‘theoretical’ standpoint, according to which our moral beliefs are the result of causal forces, like social norms and culture. Street notes that “there is a striking coincidence between (1) the normative judgments that are true, and (2) the normative judgments that causal forces led us to believe” (Street ms: §5). She goes on to say that if this unlikely coincidence is inexplicable—that is to say, if it is a matter of luck that causal forces have influenced me to have correct moral opinions—then my confidence that my moral beliefs are objectively true should decline. That is to say, if I cannot explain the very unlikely coincidence expressed in the practical/theoretical puzzle, my confidence that my moral beliefs are reliable indicators of objective moral truth should decline. As Street puts it:

¹³ Street (ms)

If one accepts [the] view that the coincidence between the true normative judgments and the judgments that causal forces led one to embrace is best understood as mere coincidence, then one must view oneself as the lucky one among all these agents—the lucky one whose causal history just happened to be such as to put one in a position to recognize the independent normative truth that all these other agents, due to their unlucky set of starting points are unable to see. And given that there are innumerable such agents (both real and possible), the odds of having won this “normative lottery” are even lower (to put it mildly) than those of having won the New York State Lottery (Street ms: §9).

Exactly how much confidence should I lose in the reliability of my opinions? Street thinks we should lose all confidence in our moral opinions as reliable indicators of objective truth. Her preferred solution to the puzzle is a brand of anti-realism, namely *constructivism*. According to this view, it is obvious why there is a coincidence between true moral claims and the claims causal forces have influenced us to make. According to the constructivism she has in mind, moral truth *just is* a function of the claims we have been led to make by causal forces.¹⁴ Before turning to how a realist might be able to respond to Street, let’s take a closer look at what’s going on in her puzzle.

Street’s practical/theoretical puzzle is a coincidence that does not seem obviously explicable from a realist point of view. But, as Dworkin argues, there is nothing inherently problematic about the mere recognition of a coincidence. He thinks a “normative connection” is needed in order to undercut the objectivity of the moral beliefs I have.¹⁵ In other words, Dworkin thinks that, unless we can show how to argue from the causal origins of our beliefs to the view that our beliefs are false, then there is no problem posed by the coincidence. It is *just* coincidence that my moral beliefs (formed by causal forces) and the moral truth coincide. Street has to admit that some coincidences, like winning the New York State Lottery, are *just* inexplicable coincidences. She says that if I understand how I bought my lottery ticket and how this particular

¹⁴ See Street (ms) § 8 and Street (2008)

¹⁵ See Street (ms) § 8 and Dworkin (1996) p. 125.

ticket is chosen at random, “yet...continue to ask, ‘Yes, but why did I win? Why was I the lucky one?’ then my question is a confused request for a deeper explanation that doesn’t exist” (Street ms: §8).

To make room for the fact that some coincidences need not be explained, Street needs to distinguish between the kind of coincidence in which I win the lottery and the coincidence illustrated in the practical/theoretical puzzle. After all, she takes both coincidences to be incredibly unlikely¹⁶; why should I ask for further explanation of the practical/theoretical puzzle if I do not ask for further explanation as to why I won the lottery? To see why, consider the Street’s two examples in full. In the first example, I win the New York State Lottery and come to know this when television reporters appear at my door and checks arrive with large sums of money written on them. Despite terrible odds, it just so happens that I bought this particular ticket and it was the winning ticket (Street ms: §8). In the second example, I also win the New York State Lottery, but I have no idea that I have. No one has told me, or shown up at my door, and I have not even seen the drawing on television. I have no evidence to point to that would show that I have won the lottery. But nonetheless, I exclaim ‘I’ve won!’ (Street ms: §9). Street thinks the practical/theoretical puzzle is an instance of the second example, while the regular lottery case is an example of the first. If the practical/theoretical puzzle is like the first example, like Dworkin seems to think it is, then realism would not be in trouble.

As might be clear, the distinction between the first example and the second example rests on evidence, particularly non-question-begging evidence. In the first case, I have non-question-begging evidence for my claim that I’ve won the lottery (i.e. the reporters, the checks etc.). In the second case, I have no non-question-begging evidence for my claim. This crucial difference

¹⁶ ‘Winning’ the normative lottery is unlikely because, Street argues, there are “countlessly many internally consistent evaluative systems” (Street, ms: §9). In a similar way, we should imagine there are many tickets cast for the New York State lottery.

points to one way the puzzle can be avoided, namely by giving non-question-begging evidence (NQB):

NQB: Evidence for a claim P that can be recognized as evidence by A without presupposing A's belief in the truth of claim P.

Thus, the demand for non-question-begging evidence emerges as a loophole through which we can accept an inexplicable coincidence. We can then frame Street's demand as a disjunction: either the practical/theoretical puzzle must be explained or NQB must be given for moral claims. The coincidence is almost surely inexplicable (like 'winning the lottery') from the non-reductive realist point of view; in order to explain the practical/theoretical puzzle, one would need to perform a reduction of some sort (as Street does) or endorse the causal 'moral field' thesis. Surely, if the causal thesis were true, then there would be nothing lucky about the coincidence of my moral beliefs and the moral fact; the fact *causes* my moral belief. But, as we have already seen, the causal thesis is unappealing for many reasons, including the nightmarish physics it entails. What then is left for moral realists? Street's demand for NQB remains.

Moral realists like Dworkin (1996) and McDowell (1987) are wary of demands for NQB. In particular, McDowell holds that all the evidence needed for moral knowledge is technically question begging. As he puts it: the "necessary scrutiny does not involve stepping outside the point of view constituted by an ethical sensibility" (McDowell 1987: 162). Moral knowledge for McDowell is the product of exercising a certain skill or second nature that enables one to "see situations in a certain distinctive way" (McDowell 1979: 73). The virtuous person's *perception of the situation* constitutes his or her justification and silences any other competing reasons. He writes:

The view of a situation which he arrives at by exercising his sensitivity is one in which some aspect of the situation is seen as constituting a reason for acting in some way; this reason is apprehended, not as outweighing or overriding any

reasons for acting in other ways which would otherwise be constituted by other aspects of the situation (the present danger, say), but as silencing them (McDowell 1979: 55).

McDowell's talk of the virtuous person's perception of a situation recognizes the 'appetitive' or 'sensitive' element involved in justification. The integration of emotional (appetitive) and cognitive (rational) tendencies, coupled with proper upbringing and training, develops a second nature, which McDowell thinks constitutes 'moral sensibility.' The appeal of moral sensibility is derived from the fact that McDowell thinks moral guidelines are *uncodifiable*.¹⁷ We might think that if we were confronted by someone with a vastly different moral outlook, we would be able to delineate the 'moral rules' that guide our decisions. McDowell turns this point on its head, arguing instead that we might want to think that the virtuous person would be able to do something of this sort, but in fact, when we think about the individuals that we consider morally knowledgeable, they would have nothing to say in such a situation. So, on McDowell's view, the virtuous person is justified in making the moral claim (in fact, has knowledge of it) because he or she is 'seeing things properly.' We might say that in McDowell's view, if a virtuous person makes the moral verdict 'it is wrong to humiliate this person,' the only evidence for that claim must be the set of non-moral facts that describe the scenario of that person being humiliated (e.g. the context of the incident, the aggressor's actions and the victim's reactions).

McDowell gives us an epistemology that centers on the notion of "susceptibility to reasons," a term which describes the sensitivity that he believes is necessary in order to make true and justified moral claims (McDowell 1987: 162). We might think this is a weak epistemic view because evidence that can be cited only supports the moral verdict if we antecedently accept that the verdict is true. But we should not condemn the view so quickly; it rests on the generally accepted notion of non-propositional knowledge, or know-how knowledge. Borrowing

¹⁷ 'Codifiability' will come up in later sections. See McDowell (1979).

from the epistemology of Aristotle, McDowell appeals to the idea that we can have knowledge of *how to do something*. According to the ‘skill model,’ one can have knowledge conferred simply in virtue of seeing things in an ‘expert’s light’ (in the moral case, that would presumably mean the virtuous person’s lights). Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson give the analogy to a master chess player, who may not be able to codify his rules of action in propositional form, but we nonetheless see him as being *knowledgeable* about how to play chess (D’Arms & Jacobson 2006: 209). In this case, we think of the player as being knowledgeable because he wins games. In an analogous way, McDowell thinks the virtuous person has knowledge that cannot be codified, but is nonetheless vindicated by appeal to non-moral facts because he or she ‘gets this kind of thing right.’

If Street’s demand is framed as a demand for NQB in the face of an inexplicable puzzle, then we can see that she will meet resistance from realists like McDowell, who thinks that moral knowledge is achieved without any such evidence. Dworkin holds a similar view about moral reasons. He says that “We do have reasons for thinking that slavery is wrong and that the Greeks were therefore in error: we have all the moral reasons we would cite in a moral debate about the matter. These are not necessarily reasons that contribute to a causal explanation of anyone’s error on these matters” (Dworkin 1996: 122). Now, Street cannot claim that her puzzle is a demand *itself* for NQB, precisely because she is using the absence of NQB to show that the puzzle demands explanation. Here’s how the dialectic goes: Street gives the puzzle, and Dworkin (presumably) responds that the puzzle does not need explanation. In response, Street cites the absence of NQB as one reason why the puzzle demands explanation and Dworkin (and McDowell) denies that NQB is needed as well. What is left? Unless Street gives independent reason for thinking that NQB is required, then the puzzle will seem like the lottery case that

doesn't require explanation.

One way that Street might be able to avoid McDowell and Dworkin is by making a somewhat weaker demand. Although she demands NQB evidence, she really only seems to need evidence that fulfills two conditions: evidence that doxastically justifies our moral claims and connects them *non-accidentally* with moral fact. To see this, consider the solutions she gives, which highlight the need for a non-accidental connection between my moral opinions and moral truth. This is perhaps most explicit in her constructivist solution to the puzzle, which again posits that moral truth is a function of the beliefs that causal influence has led us to make. Since the moral truth and my moral opinions are functionally connected, there is an obvious non-accidental connection between them. Furthermore, her puzzle dissipates if we adopt a causal picture of the interaction between our moral opinions and objective moral truth, according to which our opinions are caused by moral truth. On such a view, again, there would be a *non-accidental connection* between my opinions and the truth. It seems clear that Street's worry is exploiting the epistemic struggle realists have to explain the reliable connection between our opinions and objective truth.¹⁸

So, the criteria for the evidence that Street really needs must justify our claims and provide a non-accidental link between my opinions and moral truth. I should base my opinion on some evidence E, which justifies my opinion and connects it non-accidentally with the objective moral fact. So, let's take Evidence for Moral Knowledge (EMK) to fulfill the following conditions:

EMK: Evidence for moral claim P that doxastically justifies claim P and is connected non-accidentally with objective moral fact.¹⁹

¹⁸ Additionally, she keeps the argument from 'proving too much' (that is, from applying to the descriptive domain as well as the evaluative) by pointing again to a causal connection between my perceptual beliefs and my surroundings.

¹⁹ We use doxastic justification here rather than propositional because my moral belief must be actually, rather than only potentially, justified.

This kind of evidence is more specific and weaker than Street's demand for NQB. Nonetheless, it should fulfill precisely what is needed to avoid the practical/theoretical puzzle. That is to say, if we cannot show how the puzzle can be explained, then we can avoid the puzzle by appeal to EMK, which connects our moral beliefs with objective moral fact. Now, it seems true that EMK might be met by non-question-begging evidence, but *not necessarily* so. As long as some piece of evidence both doxastically justifies my moral claim and connects it with the moral fact, we should think of that evidence as rendering the puzzle unproblematic.

In the remainder of this thesis, I plan to show that EMK is possible for moral realists. On my view, if we have EMK, then the coincidence of my objectively true beliefs and the beliefs that causal forces that have led me to believe is no accident. First, however, I must show how this weaker demand avoids the objections from McDowell and Dworkin that the non-moral facts are sufficient evidence for moral knowledge. To do so, I argue in the following section that the non-moral facts cannot doxastically justify our moral claims, and thus, they are not sufficient for moral knowledge. Later, in sections 5 and 6, I will give my proposal for what can meet EMK. And in section 7, I show where this account leaves the argument from moral luck.

4.0 MORAL EVIDENCE AND DOXASTIC JUSTIFICATION

Although I have proposed a weaker requirement than Street's NQB requirement, McDowell's objection remains. For him, all the evidence needed for moral knowledge is the non-moral facts surrounding a given moral scenario. In this section, I show why McDowell's view of evidence is insufficient. In particular, I argue that the non-moral facts are not sufficient for doxastic justification of our moral claims. It is important to note that the argument would not help Street's NQB requirement respond to McDowell's objection. As we will see, McDowell's account of evidence fails us not because the evidence is question begging, but rather because it cannot provide doxastic justification.

Suppose that John makes a claim there is an apple pie on his neighbor's windowsill. And that claim happens to be true because *there is* an apple pie on that particular windowsill. Suppose also that John is sitting with this windowsill clearly in his view. As most epistemologists would agree, John's claim is *propositionally justified* for two reasons: (1) the claim is true and (2) there is potential for John to justifiably believe the claim (in this case, there is sensory evidence). Now, if we wanted to say that John *knows* that there is apple pie on his neighbor's windowsill—call it belief P—we would need more than just the possibility of believing with justification. We would require that he not only *can* believe P with justification, but that he in fact *does* believe P with justification. In this case, the appearance of the apple pie in clear sight—call this evidence E—is the basis for his belief. In other words, if John makes claim P on the basis of E, and P is propositionally justified by E, then we would think he is in a position to possess knowledge. This

is of course a formulation of the *doxastic justification* condition for knowledge. If we accept this condition, like most epistemologists do, we might say that:

DXJ: If A knows that P, then A's belief that P must be doxastically justified.

I am not saying here that doxastic justification is a sufficient condition for knowledge (and I had better not say this, since Gettier (1963) has long shown it to be incorrect). I am claiming that if some claim P is *knowledge*, then we ought to think of P as not only true with possible justification, but true and in fact believed *with* justification.

Let's consider the case of moral knowledge and its relation to doxastic justification. If moral knowledge is *knowledge* of some sort, then DXJ will apply to it as well; that is to say, if A knows moral claim P, then A's belief that P must be doxastically justified. Anyone who objects on this point would need to accompany their complaint with reason to think that it is *not* the case (for as we have seen, it is the case for knowledge in other contexts). I do not think McDowell disagrees on this point. He agrees that particular moral beliefs are doxastically justified on the basis of non-moral facts about the circumstances (recall that the virtuous person's perception of the situation confers justification).

Now, consider what it means for an agent to have doxastic justification for some moral claim P. In the perceptual 'apple pie' case, the difference between mere propositional justification and doxastic justification was that John not only *could* but in fact *did* believe with justification. So we might analogously take it that for an agent to have doxastic justification for a moral claim P, he or she must believe P with justification, which in this case is the set of non-moral facts about the scenario (call them justification E). An agent is therefore doxastically justified in making moral claim P if he or she believes P on the basis of E.²⁰

²⁰ Of course, if the agent is doxastically justified, P must also be propositionally justified by E; I will refrain from explicitly adding this further condition whenever doxastic justification is mentioned from this point on.

We might then ask: how is it that an agent can be justified in believing P on the basis of E? The answer seems to be as follows: in order to be justified in believing P on the basis of E, the claim $E \rightarrow P$ must be propositionally justified.²¹ To make this point clearer, I will return to ‘apple pie’ analogy. We already know that in order for John to be doxastically justified in his claim that there is an apple pie on his neighbor’s windowsill, he must believe that there is an apple pie on that windowsill (P) on the basis that it appears to him that there is an apple pie on that windowsill (E). However, if the claim ‘if it seems to you that there is an apple pie on the windowsill, there is an apple pie on the windowsill’ (a form of $E \rightarrow P$) were not propositionally justified, he could not justifiably base claim P on evidence E. This is precisely because there would be no legitimate reason to think that evidence E and claim P were connected. It is important to note that I am *not* claiming that we must *believe* the claim $E \rightarrow P$ in order to have doxastic justification for moral claim P. I am claiming that in order to have legitimate doxastic justification for claim P, the claim $E \rightarrow P$ must be propositionally justified (or else we risk basing claims on arbitrary evidence). In his criticism of dogmatism, Roger White raises a similar point in the philosophy of perception. He tells us that unless we have antecedent justification for believing that our experiences match reality (justification for the conditional ‘if it seems to me that this card is red, it is red’), we cannot be justified in making claims about color (claims like ‘this card is red’) (White 2006: 546).

I will push this analysis further by considering what it means to have propositional justification for the claim $E \rightarrow P$. In the formulation of propositional justification that we have been using, it means that there is the possibility of believing $E \rightarrow P$ *with justification*. That is to say, propositional justification implies that doxastic justification is possible. It then seems correct

²¹ The use of a material conditional in this context might be misleading. I am using the form $E \rightarrow P$ not as a logical connective, but rather as a name for a kind of belief, which I think is expressed best by the conditional form. It may, however, lead to unintended technical issues.

to conclude that in order to have moral knowledge of claim P on the basis of E, doxastic justification of $E \rightarrow P$ claims must be *possible*. The route to this conclusion has been dense, so it is helpful to review how I have arrived here before moving on:

- (1) If we have moral knowledge of claim P, we must have doxastic justification for claim P.
- (2) In order to have legitimate doxastic justification for claim P on the basis of E, we must have propositional justification for $E \rightarrow P$.
- (3) Propositional justification of $E \rightarrow P$ implies that doxastic justification of $E \rightarrow P$ is possible.
- (4) Therefore, moral knowledge of claim P on the basis of E requires the possible doxastic justification of $E \rightarrow P$.

It may appear that this conclusion has been reached with a faulty assumption, namely that there can be such a thing as an $E \rightarrow P$ claim. The uncodifiability principle of McDowell's moral sensibility blocks thinking about ethics as composed of fundamental 'rules'. According to the uncodifiability principle, deductive reasoning in ethics is also generally misguided; McDowell believes that the process of making true moral claims is not susceptible to codification or being captured in any universal formula, including an encompassing conditional. As he puts it:

If one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong – and not necessarily because one had changed one's mind (McDowell 1979: 58).

If we do violate this principle, we should only do so with good reason because it seems plausible. However, I do not think we violate this principle if we conceive of $E \rightarrow P$ in such a way that E is composed of all the relevant non-moral facts needed to make a *very specific* moral verdict P. As long as $E \rightarrow P$ is a local principle about some set of details and some very specific moral verdict, we do not risk violating the uncodifiability principle. We therefore should not think of $E \rightarrow P$ claims as declaratory imperatives, but rather theoretical conditionals that state something of the

form ‘if these non-moral details (E) about scenario A are true, then this moral verdict P about scenario A is true’. And here the moral details need not be delineated explicitly; they can be ‘perceived’ through a moral sensibility. In that way, $E \rightarrow P$ is merely a theoretical construction that while we need to *able* to believe with justification, we rarely need to make explicit and in fact may not need to believe at all.²²

²² I am emphasizing here that *propositional justification* is all that is needed. I am not making the strong claim that one needs to *believe* the conditional $E \rightarrow P$ in order to have doxastic justification for moral claim P. This is why the argument detours through the notion of propositional justification.

5.0 MORAL SENTIMENTS AS EVIDENCE

Doxastic justification of some moral verdict P requires that it be possible to justify a claim $E \rightarrow P$, where E is the non-moral facts. But where are we to look for evidence for the justification of these claims? Surely we cannot again appeal to the non-moral facts about a moral scenario because these are part of the claim in question (in particular, they are the antecedent of the conditional). One line of response that I think McDowell might favor is that $E \rightarrow P$ claims have non-evidential doxastic justification. But what does this mean? The appeal to non-evidential doxastic justification at this point invites skepticism about the possibility of making justified moral claims. In particular, the obscurity of non-evidential justification risks turning McDowell's epistemology into the "bogus epistemology of intuitionism" from which he seeks to distance himself (McDowell 1987: 182). If we cannot give an account of why such a faculty is a reliable means of acquiring knowledge of these conditionals ($E \rightarrow P$), we cannot justifiably employ them as sources of doxastic justification. Furthermore, some antirealists see such obscurity as reason to doubt the realist program in general.²³ So, it seems that appealing vaguely to non-evidential doxastic justification here cannot give us what we need in order to have knowledge.

We can take from the exercise of the previous section that McDowell's view of evidence is not sufficient for EMK; in particular, his view about moral justification deprives our moral claims of doxastic justification. The hypothesis I would like to put forward is that *our moral*

²³ The most famous pressing of this problem comes from John Mackie (1977), whose argument from queerness tells us that such a faculty would be "utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else" (p. 38).

sentiments play this fundamental epistemic role: they justify E→P claims and thereby doxastically justify our moral claims. This will meet the first part of the criteria we have set for EMK. Recall that the two conditions for EMK are that it doxastically justify moral claims and it be connected non-accidentally with objective moral fact. In the remainder of this section, I will argue that moral sentiments doxastically justify our moral claims by justifying E→P claims. In section six, I will argue that, in virtue of their content, moral sentiments are connected non-accidentally with moral fact. Thus, sections five and six taken together will show that sentiments meet EMK.

Our moral sentiments appear as prime candidates for EMK in McDowell and Wiggins's sensibility theory, which was first introduced in section two of this thesis. According to sensibility theorists, our moral sentiments play a semantic role in our interaction with moral properties, which I will show entails that they also play an epistemic role like the one I am giving them. The 'semantic' role that I am describing can be understood simply as the claim that *moral sentiments are the source of moral concepts*.²⁴ McDowell and I are in agreement that this is the case. He again tells us that "[moral] properties are not adequately conceivable except in terms of certain subjective states" (McDowell 1985: 138). The intuitiveness of the semantic role of sentiments comes in part from the intuitiveness of the uncodifiability principle, which we have seen in other sections. If it is the case that moral guidelines cannot be delineated as a set of rules, then it seems that we must acquire moral concepts in a 'sensitive' way; that is to say, in such a way that we can apply the concepts in varying contexts. Sentiments are able to do just that, since they have the sensitivity needed to make judgments about a great abundance of moral scenarios.

In addition, there is a particular sense in which we can think of moral sentiments as the source of E→P claims. To see this roughly, consider the Kantian distinction between *a priori*

²⁴ The semantic role of sentiments is explored in McDowell (1985) and Wiggins (1990).

and *a posteriori* claims; we can see that $E \rightarrow P$ claims must fall into the category of *a posteriori* claims. If there was an analytic means by which to arrive at $E \rightarrow P$ claims, then we should suppose that a moral verdict could be derived from a set of non-moral facts. But the only way this would be possible is if we already presupposed something like an $E \rightarrow P$ claim in the first place (how else might we be able to transition from the non-moral facts to a moral verdict?). Since there is no obvious analytic route from the non-moral facts to a moral verdict, we should think that $E \rightarrow P$ claims are propositions known *a posteriori*. What does this assignment entail? It means that $E \rightarrow P$ claims are the kind of propositions known by sense perception. But surely, we are not seeing, hearing and tasting $E \rightarrow P$ claims. Rather, we can understand $E \rightarrow P$ claims as being delivered by our moral sentiments in place of our ordinary perception. We can easily see that our sentimental responses assign a moral value (P) to a set of non-moral facts (E). In fact, if $E \rightarrow P$ claims are available to us at all, it is difficult to imagine how else we come into contact with them.

If we accept this semantic role of moral sentiments, we seem bound to grant sentiments an epistemic role. The notion that something that performs a semantic role must also perform an epistemic one rests on the natural intersection of semantics and epistemology. It seems implausible that something could effectively give us a concept, yet fail to also be involved in the justification we have to apply that concept in certain ways. At the very least, we should consider the source of our concepts to be important considerations when we think about justification. We can easily add support for this idea with the philosophy of mind that McDowell himself puts forward in *Mind and World*. He tells us:

That things are thus and so is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, that things are thus and so, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world (McDowell 1994: 26).

He also tells us:

The need for external constraint is met by the fact that experiences are receptivity in operation. But that does not disqualify experiences from playing a role in justification...because the claim is that experiences themselves are already equipped with conceptual content This joint involvement of receptivity and spontaneity allows us to say that in experience one can take in how things are (McDowell 1994: 25).

In that way, sensory experience serves not only to give us concepts, but also plays a role in how we are justified as well. Since sensory inputs perform both semantic and epistemic roles simultaneously, I think it is misguided to separate those roles in moral epistemology; that is to say, if sentiments are doing semantic work, they must also be doing epistemic work. In fact, if we were not to grant sentiments such a role in our moral epistemology, we would be committing in the ethical case the same error McDowell accuses Donald Davidson of committing in the perceptual one; our ethics would be “frictionless spinning in a void” (McDowell 1994: 50).

Two objections might be immediately raised about the claim that sentiments must play an epistemic role similar to sensory inputs in the perceptual case. The first is minor and dismissible, but the second is more problematic. The first objection might be that I push the perceptual metaphor too far, which in numerous places McDowell has warned against. But the motivation for an epistemic role for the sentiments does not come from the metaphor of perception; it simply comes from our notion of knowledge as entailing doxastic justification. Of course I lean on a perceptual metaphor in which sentiments take on the same function as sensory experiences, but that is for the sake of making the position both clear and intuitive. The fact that they indeed do function in the way I have described is not simply an inappropriate push on the perceptual metaphor; it is a fact about how we think about the intersection of semantics and epistemology.

The second objection concerns the regress that my argument in section four initiates. In

my argument there, I stated that we need doxastic justification for P claims, which means we need propositional justification for $E \rightarrow P$ claims (which in turn implies the possibility of doxastic justification for $E \rightarrow P$ claims). Now, if I insist on having justification for P claims by having justification for $E \rightarrow P$ claims, and I think that sentiments can justify $E \rightarrow P$ claims, why then should I not require further justification for $S \rightarrow (E \rightarrow P)$ claims, where S symbolizes sentiments? Is there reason to press the need for further justification in the earlier case, but not in the later one? This is a serious problem, but there is reason to stop the regress here.

I will pursue one line of response. The issue at hand is whether appealing to non-evidential justification is any less of an epistemic shortcoming at the stage in which I do it than the stage at which McDowell might. He might be inclined to non-evidentially justify $E \rightarrow P$ claims, while I seem only content to non-evidentially justify $S \rightarrow (E \rightarrow P)$ claims by appeal to the epistemic role of sentiments. My basic reply is that in the latter case, the case in which I think non-evidential justification is acceptable, we simply cannot ask further questions about justification when our sentiments are veridical (while in the former case, we *can* ask further questions about justification). In other words, $S \rightarrow (E \rightarrow P)$ claims are such that when our sentiments are veridical, there are no further questions to ask about why the claim is justified. That is to say, an $S \rightarrow (E \rightarrow P)$ claim says something of the following sort: 'if it seems to me (by my sentiments) that these non-moral facts entail this moral verdict, then these non-moral facts entail this moral verdict.' Now if our sentiments are veridical, then there are no further questions we can ask about the justification for $S \rightarrow (E \rightarrow P)$ claims. This suggests that the regress initiated in section 4 should stop with $S \rightarrow (E \rightarrow P)$ claims.

In this way, the view I am describing might be in line with a certain kind of disjunctivism about $E \rightarrow P$ claims. The perceptual disjunctivist would agree that we do not need antecedent

justification for the conditional 'if it seems to me that such-and-such is the case, then such-and-such is the case.' The disjunctivist might say that if we are indeed having veridical experiences, then we are automatically justified in believing that such-and-such is the case. In fact, no further justification can be requested and none is needed. My claim about sentimental responses is similar. If we are indeed having veridical sentimental responses, then we are fully justified in believing $E \rightarrow P$ claims and in fact cannot ask for any further justification. In the next section, I argue that we are disposed to have veridical sentiments (that is, sentiments in line with the normative fact) and as a result, we can have justification for $E \rightarrow P$ claims on the basis of moral sentiments.

6.0 CONNECTING TO THE MORAL FACT

In the previous section, I showed that there is reason to think that sentiments play an epistemic role similar to that of sensory evidence. In that way, the analogy to the perceptual case in the previous section can be taken to suggest that moral sentiments are ‘appearances of value,’ in the same way that evidence from our senses can be taken to be ‘appearances of the physical world.’ In this section, I give an account of how moral sentiments are *connected non-accidentally with moral fact* and in that way, I give reason to think these ‘appearances of value’ can act as EMK. In virtue of this non-accidental connection, our moral sentiments can meet both requirements of EMK and thus the practical/theoretical puzzle will not cause realists trouble.

The non-accidental connection exists precisely because of *the content of moral sentiments*. My claim is that content of moral sentiments is fixed by the dispositions that individuals have to respond in certain circumstances. As a result, we must have *a disposition to have correct moral sentiments* because the content of those sentiments is fixed precisely by the dispositions that we have. Since it seems that we must have a general disposition to have correct moral sentiments, then our sentiments as ‘appearances of value’ can connect our moral claims with objective moral fact when used as evidence. It is important to note that this disposition for veridicality is not tied only to the content of moral sentiments; some philosophers argue for the analogous claim in the perceptual case, in which we are disposed to have veridical perceptual

experiences.²⁵

In what follows, I move more slowly through the above line of thought. Suppose there is an individual that does not experience any moral sentiments. How might we bring about sentimental responses in this individual? Suppose that we supply the individual with an exhaustive listing of sentimental responses in every possible moral scenario. It seems clear that even if the individual did adhere to this list, he or she could do little more than feign the experience of sentiments. What seems required in order to have sentiments is some kind of disposition to respond in certain circumstances in the first place. In the absence of such a disposition, it is mysterious how an individual can have sentimental responses at all. But furthermore, we think of sentiments as being applicable in some circumstances and not others. Because it is implausible to imagine an individual as having contentful sentiments without being disposed to have them in certain circumstances and not others, it is natural to think that the content of a particular sentiment is in fact given by the circumstances in which we have them.

This is a phenomenological claim about the *representational* character of sentimental responses; that is to say, my claim is that the content of moral sentiments is given by facts about the world. Mark Johnston makes a similar point about aesthetic qualities (and suggests that his conclusions can be extended to the moral case); he says:

The world disclosed to an affectively alive person is a world of default pathways marked out by fully determinate versions of the appealing and the repulsive, the erotic and banal, the beautiful and the ugly. The world such a person senses is thus layered with significance, it presents things to be done and avoided, continued and broken off, and does this prior to any deliberation or planning of action on his or her part (Johnston 2001: 213).

Why should we think *moral sentiments* have representational content? First, if we are realists about moral properties, it should not seem peculiar that sentiments have representational content.

²⁵ See Christopher Peacocke (1983) and Ralph Wedgwood (2005).

If there are objective moral properties, there is nothing peculiar about the claim that the content of moral sentiments is given by certain sets of non-moral facts. After all, if there are objective moral properties, then there should be sets of non-moral facts that warrant approbation and others that warrant disapprobation. Second, as suggested earlier, we have moral sentiments in some circumstances and not others. We might have two natural reactions to this observation. On one hand, as I suggested, we can take this to show that the content of moral sentiments is representational; that is, the content is given by the circumstances in which we have them. On the other hand, we can take this observation to suggest a projectionist account on which our subjective moral sentiments are projected onto a morally neutral world. Why take the former stance rather than the latter?

First, Mark Johnston tells us that the latter view has no more empirical content than the former. Against projectivism about aesthetic qualities, he tells us: it is possible that “creatures like us had a better chance of survival because we happened to be attuned to the disgusting, and so were repelled, *inter alia*, by infectious animal corpses and wastes, which were just disgusting anyway” (Johnston 2001: 185). But, taken by itself, this is just reason to see both accounts as equally likely. Johnston’s major point is that a projectionist account of aesthetic qualities will not do justice to the “authority of affect,” namely the ability of our affective states to direct our desires and action.²⁶ On my view, moral sentiments have the same authority, namely to inform our moral beliefs and our actions, so any projective story will fail to grant our moral sentiments the authority they seem to command.

Furthermore, the idea that moral sentiments get their content from the circumstances in which we have them is supported by the non-moral sensitivity of our moral sentiments. For instance, taking Gilbert Harman’s famous example, suppose that we witness two depraved

²⁶ See Johnston (2001).

people setting a cat on fire. There are many non-moral facts involved here. If I change some non-moral facts, like the color of the walls in the room in which it happens, there is presumably no change in our sentiment of disapprobation about the scenario. But, if I change other non-moral facts, like whether it is a real cat or merely a toy, our moral sentiments are bound to change. From a materialist standpoint, changing whether it is a toy and changing the color of walls are quite similar; all I have done is changed some non-moral fact. But, our moral sentiments seem extremely sensitive and attuned to these changes in non-moral facts.

If my sentiments exhibit some coherence, then *something* must be guiding me to the appropriate sentimental response. My claim is that our moral sentiments get their content from the circumstances, so the circumstances guide us to appropriate moral sentiment. So, on my view, it makes sense that our moral sentiments are heavily context sensitive. But, the projectivist has more difficulty in accounting for our sensitivity. How do our moral sentiments, if projected, remain so sensitive to the non-moral facts? The natural answer is that *we* are in some way sensitive to the non-moral facts, so our subjective responses are attuned to changes in the circumstances. But then, to account for the sensitivity our moral sentiments, even the projectionist must agree that the circumstances inform our sentiments. Once projectionism has made the admission that the content of our sentiments is somehow informed by the circumstances, the most natural explanation of the content of our moral sentiments becomes the representational account. If we *must* appeal to the circumstances in order to understand the content of moral sentiments, and we can sufficiently understand such content as representational, why appeal to anything else (i.e. our subjective point of view)? That is, once we need to appeal to the circumstances in which we have moral sentiments in order to understand the content of those sentiments, it becomes natural to suppose that the content of moral sentiments is

representational.

It follows from this notion that sentiments have representational content that we must have a disposition to have correct moral sentiments. This is because the only way in which we could read the content of sentiments from dispositions is by looking at *the circumstances in which we are in fact disposed to have sentiments*. We could not, for instance, reasonably read the content of sentiments from the circumstances in which we were *not* disposed to have sentiments. Since the content of a sentiment is given precisely by the circumstances in which we are disposed to have that sentiment, we must have a general disposition to have *correct* moral sentiments (we could *not* be disposed to have incorrect sentiments, since sentiments derive their content from the circumstances in which we are disposed to have them). ‘Correctness’ here means corresponding with normative fact or truth, as it does for Wedgwood (2005). It then seems that this disposition connects our sentiments with moral fact such that these ‘appearances of value’ can connect our moral beliefs with objective fact.

Some philosophers may find that I appeal to sentiments to fulfill an epistemic role that could be satisfied equally well by moral belief. It might be thought that beliefs have the same connection with truth and as a result, they can perform the same epistemic role that I give sentiments. But this is misguided; while it is ultimately true that moral beliefs have a connection with the truth, this connection *is derived from* the relation of those beliefs to moral sentiments. We might consider Ralph Wedgwood’s ‘epistemology of normative belief’ as an attempt to show how such beliefs as have a “weak connection with the truth” (Wedgwood 2005: 62). But the connection he draws between normative belief and truth is itself mediated by our justification for relying on our ‘intuitions’.

The relevant difference between beliefs and sentiments is that sentiments are the means

through which we come in contact with moral fact. The philosopher that wants to give normative belief the same role I give moral sentiments would also argue that the content of a certain *non-moral belief* is given by the circumstances in which we have that belief. If he also takes the content of a *moral belief* to be given by the circumstances in which we have the belief, then we ought to think that moral facts are given in circumstances in the same way non-moral facts are. But then, we would be thinking that moral properties impinge on our minds in the same way other properties do, which is what led Mackie to an 'error theory' about moral properties. So, thinking that the content of moral beliefs is given directly by the circumstances in which we have them threatens to undermine the very idea of moral fact. For that reason, we should not think that the content of moral beliefs is given directly by the circumstances in which we have those beliefs. Moral beliefs cannot enjoy an essential connection with truth *directly*; they do so only derivatively from moral sentiments.

7.0 DISPOSITIONS AND MORAL LUCK

The view described in the previous section makes a fairly weak claim. I claim only that we have a basic disposition to have correct moral sentiments. It is completely consistent with the idea that we have a disposition to have correct sentiments that we sometimes (or even systematically) have *incorrect* sentiments if our dispositions are being interfered with or disrupted in some other way.²⁷ For instance, our dispositions can be distorted through, borrowing Mark Johnston's terminology, the phenomenon of *masking*.²⁸ When a disposition is masked, its manifestation is blocked even when the relevant circumstances obtain. The typical example is a fragile glass cup, which we all take to have a disposition to break when dropped from a sufficiently high distance from the ground. But, suppose that the cup's disposition is masked by being wrapped in packing material. When the cup is dropped, it would presumably not shatter, but this would not change the fact that the cup does in fact have a disposition to break under those conditions. A similar example can be found in Alexander Bird (1998), who uses the example of a poison and its antidote. We take it that a poison has a disposition to harm the person who has ingested it; but, if its antidote is administered quickly, the disposition is not realized. Nonetheless, we still think of the poison as having its deadly disposition. My claim about moral sentiments is similar. They are disposed to be connected with the moral fact, but are subject to interference from, for instance, social and cultural pressures. This explains why individuals in different societies may not have

²⁷ This thought is further developed in Wedgwood (2005).

²⁸ See Johnston (1992), p. 233.

felt the appropriate disapprobation about matters we would take to be manifestly immoral, like slavery, racism and the abuse of women.

Because the claim is admittedly weak, it seems that we admit a form of contingency on this view. As I have already said, it is fully consistent with this thesis that our particular sentiments might not be veridical and thus our claims not connected with the moral fact. So, whether my beliefs are objectively true is contingent on the presence of social conditions that allow the manifestation of my disposition. So, how far have I come from Street's original puzzle? The progress is this: if we did have correct moral sentiments, it would be *no accident*. We have, after all, a basic disposition to have correct moral sentiments; the value of this disposition is to allay worries from skeptics like Street. When Street points out that the coincidence of the practical/theoretical puzzle is unlikely, we need only point to our moral sentiments as truth-tracking evidence. In other words, we should not be surprised if our moral beliefs happened to be true because our evidence ('EMK') is disposed to be connected with the moral fact. To put the point briefly: we have inside information that we've won the normative lottery.

Still, the view leaves us with worries about whether anyone truly *is* connected by their moral sentiments to the objective moral fact. It is also consistent with the view that everyone's dispositions are being interfered with, and thus, that no one's moral beliefs are connected with the moral fact. For instance, all of our dispositions must surely be affected by the influence of social upbringing. How can we be sure that our dispositions are being expressed? The account given here is not prepared to answer this question; it only secures the fact that moral knowledge is legitimately possible. I think we may be able to find comfort against this worry with the hope that our social development is connected in some way with our human nature. So, although it is

possible that our dispositions are consistently distorted by society, we should not think that our social practices are developed completely in opposition to our basic dispositions as human beings.

I end by addressing the peculiar stance this thesis has taken on moral knowledge. On many versions of Humean sentimentalism, moral sentiments have been pinned against the prospects of moral knowledge. That is to say, many philosophers accept that objective and justifiable moral knowledge is beyond the reach of sentimentalists precisely because they give moral sentiments such a central role in morality. In this thesis, I have adopted a view on which moral knowledge seems impossible *without* moral sentiments. On my view, moral sentiments are required not only for the doxastic justification of our moral claims, which is essential to our moral knowledge, but also to avoid worries from moral luck. Although it is *possible* that we can think of our moral opinions as justified by some other evidence, it is difficult to imagine how any other kind of evidence will fulfill the roles I have given moral sentiments. In fact, I see no other way, aside from this appeal to our dispositions, that realism can guarantee the possibility of objective moral knowledge.

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