Values, Reasons and Perspectives

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IV*—VALUES, REASONS AND PERSPECTIVES

by Alan Thomas

I

The aims of this paper are threefold. First, I want to explain away an apparent inconsistency that presents a challenge to both moral cognitivism and an impartial conception of moral reasons. Secondly, in drawing on Amartya Sen's concept of evaluator relativity to solve the problem, I want significantly to amend Sen's proposal. I will suggest that it runs together two different ideas, that its proper location is in the theory of practical reasoning, not the theory of value, and that it is illuminating to connect his analysis to wider discussions in metaphysics of perspectival and absolute representations.[1] Thirdly, I want to connect the account I present to recent investigations into the puzzling status of deontic constraints, with the aim of supporting Thomas Nagel's suggestion that there is an intimate connection between such constraints and the relation of agent and victim.

The problem I want to discuss is the following. Could two moral agents be confronted with the same situation, acknowledge that the values in that situation are the same for both of them, but come to different 'all things considered' judgements about what they ought to do? Our first response must be that they cannot. An agent's reasons for action cannot be detached from the values that he or she judges a situation to exemplify. Values and reasons must stand in some relation of determination or supervenience, such that the

1. Sen has already initiated this wider discussion, in 'Positional Objectivity', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1993), pp. 127–145. Sen discusses in this paper a range of perspectival representations, but does not deploy the distinction between different kinds of perspectivalness which I will argue is crucial in the application of his general theory to moral reasons.

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evaluative 'shapes' of situations ground an agent's judgement about what he or she ought to do.[2] Thus, a situation meeting the characterisation I have outlined would be, if not a formal paradox, inconsistent in a problematic way.

I have three commitments which make this apparent inconsistency a troubling prospect for me. The first is that I believe that situations which seem to meet this description are part of our moral experience. The second commitment that makes this apparent inconsistency in our judgements problematic is that I am a moral cognitivist, and believe that our moral beliefs can constitute knowledge of values. The third element of my position is that I believe moral reasons are impartial. Before expanding on these three points, I will describe a scenario which I take to be a plausible exemplification of the problem.

I will adapt for my own purposes the example discussed by Peter Winch in the course of his subtle paper, 'The Universalisability of Moral Judgements'.[3] Winch presented an interpretation of Melville's *Billy Budd: Foretopman,* which I will adapt in two ways. First, it will become important to eliminate the special problems of the fact that both Winch and I are writing about fiction. Secondly, it is unclear in Winch's presentation whether Winch and Vere make their respective judgements about the narrative on the same evaluative basis. My interest is in examples where this is so; where the parties broadly agree on the relevant range of evaluative considerations.

The protagonist of Melville's narrative, Captain Vere, unjustly condemns the innocent Billy Budd to death. Winch commented that while he, Winch, could not have acted in the way Vere did, there was a sense in which Vere had acted rightly for a person viewing the situation from his involved participant's perspective. In an important paragraph, Winch observed:

2. I take the useful expression 'evaluative shape' from Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Basil Blackwells, 1993), pp. 111–116. The idea is that evaluative properties are ordered according to a moral 'Gestalt' in which some considerations are viewed as more salient compared to others.

3. Winch's discussion was focused on the usefulness of universalisability as an instrument of practical reason, as his title indicates: 'The Universalisability of Moral Judgement', *The Monist,* vol. 49, no. 2 (April, 1965), pp. 196–214. I believe that on this point Winch was perfectly correct, and his results harmonise with other sceptical accounts of the usefulness of universalisablity, such as that of J.L. Mackie in *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 83–102.

> If A says, 'X is the right thing for me to do', and if B in a situation not relevantly different says 'X is the wrong thing for me to do', it can be that both are correct.... It may be that neither what each says, nor anything entailed by what each says, contradicts anything said or implied by the other....This certainly does not mean that if A believes that X is the right thing for him to do, then X is made the right thing to do by the mere fact that he thinks it is....[4]

Winch seems to have described the type of inconsistent situation that threatens cognitivism and impartialism and it is easy to see how one could construct from such a case both anti-cognitivist and anti-impartialist arguments. For example, a non-cognitivist could argue that the best way of explaining the apparent inconsistency is by denying that the two protagonists possess the same basis of moral knowledge. If their moral judgements are essentially practical, with a 'direction of fit' from world to mind, then the inconsistency in the judgements involved is easily explained. Some form of non-cognitivism would be the more appropriate diagnosis and indeed a more ambitious argument could conclude that moral cognitivism had been demonstrated to be false.

The second claim apparently threatened by the case Winch describes is that of the impartiality of moral reasons. A line of argument diametrically opposed to the above accepts that the agents cognise value, and looks for the source of the different practical verdicts in the particular character and personality of the individual agent. This explanation of the Winch/Vere scenario argues that it casts light on the personal nature of ethics, a sense of 'the personal' intrinsically opposed to the idea that moral reasons are impartial.[5]

The cognitivist or impartialist could, of course, just deny that our moral experience ever presents us with such cases. However, this seems to me unacceptable; the case is phenomenologically plausible and Winch's description of it compelling. Furthermore, at least one influential theory of practical reasons has been developed in response to it.[6] I hope to demonstrate that the description of the

4. Winch, 'Universalisability', p. 209.

5. See for example, R. Gaita, 'The Personal In Ethics', in *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*, edited by Peter Winch and D.Z. Phillips (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 124–50. My very different view of the relation between the impartial and the personal is indebted to Adrian Piper's 'Moral Theory and Moral Alienation', *Journal of Philosophy*, 84, 1987 pp. 102–118.

6. The theory of practical reasons is that of David Wiggins, which I will discuss below. Wiggins wrote of Winch's argument, 'I, for one, am prepared to salute [it] as deeply interesting'.

case harmonises with independently plausible accounts of the nature of deontic constraints. Given my prior commitments to both cognitivism and impartialism it is incumbent on me to find an alternative diagnosis of the problem posed by the apparent inconsistency in the case Winch describes.

II

The first step towards a plausible solution of the problem I have outlined was made by David Wiggins. Wiggins's reconciliation of the kind of agency phenomena Winch has drawn attention to with moral cognitivism proceeds by making a crucial distinction between an axiological account of what Wiggins calls 'specific evaluations' and a separable account of moral reasons, the latter being located within the theory of practical reasoning.[7] 'Specific evaluations' are judgements that objects, persons or states of affairs exemplify certain evaluative properties.[8] An evaluation, when expressed, is straightforwardly assessable as true or false. However, to take up a practical attitude is to be disposed to perform an action, and that is not a cognitive exercise.[9] Wiggins is more inclined to compare practical reasoning to constructivist mathematics, involving 'the compossibility of objectivity, discovery, *and* invention'.[10] Wiggins proceeds to build on this distinction an alternative approach to the initial problem, which for reasons of space I will not discuss in full here. The essence of his alternative solution is to appeal to 'cognitive underdetermination', value pluralism and value incommensurability in order to claim that reasons only weakly, not strongly, supervene on the 'weightings' of values.[11] My alternative argument, on the contrary, takes as its starting point Samuel Guttenplan's critique of Wiggins on precisely this point. I want to develop a solution to the problem that is still

7. David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth,* Second Edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), especially the essays, 'Truth, Invention and the Meaning of Life' and 'Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgements'. Wiggins was soon to change his mind on this key point, claiming in 'What Would Be a Substantial Theory of Truth?' in Z. van Straaten (ed.), *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P.F. Strawson* (Oxford University Press, 1990), that the space of practical reasons sustained all the marks of plain truth. I will not be addressing this later position here.

8. Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, pp. 95–96.

9. Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, pp. 95–96.

10. Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth*, p. 130.

available to the cognitivist even if reasons *strongly* supervene on values.[12]

This distinction between the axiological and the practical dimensions of moral judgement is, in my view, a crucial first step towards solving the problem. The task is to see if combining this distinction with the acceptance of the determination of reasons by the evaluative shapes of situations allows any scope for the claim that two competent judgers can nevertheless reach different 'all things considered' verdicts about what one has most reason to do. I apply the axiology/practical reasoning distinction to different aspects of one and the same moral content—a 'dual aspect' view. According to this view, moral reasons have a double aspect. Viewed under one aspect, they are belief states, the proper objects of moral knowledge. However, under another aspect they are the conceptualisations of a situation which an agent would employ in their final deliberative verdict as to what they had most reason to do, 'all things considered'—his or her 'maxim'. Corresponding to each aspect is a different governing norm. Qua cognitive states, moral reasons are answerable to truth in their dimension as specific evaluations. Qua 'maxims', moral reasons are answerable to the formal constraint of impartial acceptability. A single content can be responsive to these two demands since in my view they are compatible.

In outline, my solution is to use the distinction between the two aspects of moral content to describe two different ways in which such contents are perspectival. I take this term from general metaphysics, and argue that as objects of knowledge moral judgements exhibit a weak form of perspectivalness that arises when a judgement is indexed to our metaphysical 'point of view'.

11. That is, that there can be no change in the supervening practical reasons without a change in the *weighted* subvening values (weak supervenience) as opposed to the claim that there can be no change in the subvening values without a change in the supervening practical reasons (strong supervenience). I claim only that this is a useful way of viewing Wiggins's argument, not that he would approve of the terminology—I suspect he would not!

12. The problem, as identified by Guttenplan, is that Wiggins's strategy involves claiming that judgements about specific evaluations are robustly cognitive, whereas comparative judgements about these values are not. Guttenplan argues that Wiggins's twin theses of value pluralism and incommensurability cannot prevent this transfer of robust 'factuality' from evaluation to judgement, and hence he is committed to a strong supervenience claim. The issue is controversial, but I am sufficiently persuaded by Guttenplan's argument to try an alternative tack on behalf of cognitivism. See Samuel Guttenplan, 'Moral Realism and Moral Dilemmas', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, vol. LXXX (1979/80), pp. 61–80.

By contrast, as maxims for an agent, moral judgements are perspectival in a stronger sense, in so far they directly map proposed actions under a description on to practical reasons.[13] Thus, the two aspects of moral content are to be related separately to the phenomenon of *perspectivalness.*[14] It is necessary to explain the various ways in which truth evaluable contents *per se* can exhibit perspectivalness. That is the task of the next section.

III

I take the terms 'absolute' and 'perspectival' to be predicates of modes of presentation of contents, not predicates of contents. One way to motivate this distinction would be via the theory of concepts: thus *perspectival* representations are made up of components that are only graspable from a perspectival point of view. The idea of a representation that can be grasped from any point of view corresponds to the metaphysical idea of an *absolute* representation.[15]

This contrast between perspectival and absolute representations can be used to illuminate a wide range of metaphysical disputes, centrally debates over objectivity. However, the terminology must be handled with care if the distinctive features of particular cases are to be respected. For the purposes of this argument I need to make two distinctions: between the genuinely perspectival and the merely observer relative and a related distinction within the class of perspectival phenomena.

My first distinction sets aside an irrelevant issue. The perspectival is defined in terms of the *peculiarities* of the concepts

13. I thus match Sen's characterisation of the 'narrow deontologist' at the end of 'Evaluator Relativity and Consequential Evaluation', *Philosophy and Public Affairs,* 12, no.2 (Spring, 1983), p.130.

14. I have already noted that the wider connection between Sen's view of moral reasons and the general metaphysical category of the perspectival has been made by Sen himself, though not, I will argue, in exactly the right way in the case of deontic constraints. However, there is an intriguing comment on page x of Sen's *Inequality Re-examined* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), Sen writes: 'Willard Quine has recently suggested to me that I should explore the comparison between [a] classificatory principle for the ethics of social arrangements based on the equalities that are preserved [....] and [....] the classificatory principles used in Felix Klein's attempted synthesis of geometry [...] in terms of the property of a space that are invariant with respect to a given group of transformations. I think there is an important general connection here, which can prove to be quite illuminating....'. My aim is to illuminate the character of this general connection.

15. Adrian Moore, 'Points of View', *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1987), pp. 1–20.

deployed by particular classes of judgers. Thus, there is a distinction between the perspectival and the merely relational. Consider the fact that in our best physical theory, relativity theory, ideas such as that of measurement become relativised to a framework of observer cum apparatus. Does this make physics perspectival? Not at all. Acknowledging this relativity is quite compatible with robust realism about the physical phenomena measured by the theory. Observer relativity is a contingent epistemic constraint on our access to the facts and does not condition them in any way. Furthermore, it does not rest on any of our peculiarities qua knowers. Thus the observer relative is not the perspectival.[16]

Matters are complicated, however, by the fact that a related distinction can be drawn *within* the general class of the perspectival. This second contrast I have in mind is the following: there is a contrast between cases where we accept that perspectivalness in representation is compatible with the objectivity of the facts represented, and cases where acknowledgement of perspectivalness seems to move us towards a denial of objectivity about the relevant range of facts.

Here are a couple of admittedly controversial examples. Take the perspectivalness of our colour judgements. Our colour concepts are conditioned by the peculiar character of our perceptual sensibilities; it is possible to imagine other makers of judgements with a different set of colour concepts. However, this does not seem, on reflection, to destabilise the objectivity of our judgements that the physical world is coloured. This is a case where we acknowledge perspectivalness and yet accept that colour judgements are objective judgements.

The matter is different when we turn to, say, qualia. Qualia, if there are any, are the contents of our subjective experience. They are 'what it is like' to experience sensations. However, they are philosophically controversial since they seem to introduce the dubious category of a perspectival fact whose nature is *exhausted* by the subject's perspective on it. In cases such as these it is difficult

16. This is denied by Hilary Putnam, who takes the observer relativity of physics to be an argument for 'internal realism', for example in 'Realism' in *Realism With a Human Face*, (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 5–11. Since Putnamian dialectic takes internal and external realism to be exhaustive, and external realism to be identical to the 'absolute conception of the world', one can infer that Putnam takes observer relativity to be an argument for perspectivalness.

to detach the content of the judgement from the subject's epistemic grasp of it, and I take it this lies behind our impulse to deny the objectivity of judgements about qualia.

My proposal is to take this distinction within the class of the perspectival and apply it to the two aspects of moral judgements I have already distinguished. However, to do so I am going to suggest a criterion for discriminating between the two cases. The criterion is whether or not it is possible systematically to transform judgements across different points of view. If we can systematically perform such transformations, this suggest to us that the perspective is, as it were, all in the epistemology. In such a case, perspective is conditioning our access to objective fact. However, if such transformation fails, we seem to have a phenomenon that is perspectival 'through and through'. This criterion seems intuitively plausible.

To apply it, we must ascend from the egocentric perspective of individual judgers and take up the standpoint of an intersubjective group of judgers so that we have a means of defining co-ordinates across which we can apply the transformation test. Take the twin cases of colours and qualia: one reason, I suggest, why we are happy to be objectivists about colours while admitting our colour concepts are perspectival is that colour judgements are stable across a whole class of judgers. However, qualia are not even stable across individuals. Picked out as they are epistemologically, as essentially captured by one's first person access to them, the asymmetry between their first and third personal characterisations makes us quite rightly sceptical of their aspiration to objectivity.

Another way of making the same point has been presented by Adrian Moore, to whose discussions of this issue I am indebted. Moore uses the idea of an 'external counterpart' for perspectival representations, in which we separate out the perspectival element of a judgement from its objective content.[17] The availability, or otherwise, of such a counterpart is another way of drawing the distinction I have made within the class of perspectival pheno-

17. The central metaphysical problem surrounding perspectival contents concerns their eliminability: whether it is possible, for any given perspectival content, to construct what Moore calls an 'external counterpart' of that content. This construction of an external counterpart allows one to separate the 'vehicle' and the 'content' of a perspectival representation, and to restrict the perspectival element to the former. See Adrian Moore, 'Points of View', p. 5.

mena. I suggest that the transformation test is a useful criterion for the availability of such an external counterpart.

I need some terminology to pick out these two different kinds of perspectival phenomena. I will refer to the first class, those which are stable across transformations, as 'perspectivally invariant'. I will refer to the latter class, those which do not systematically transform across an inter-subjective group of judgers, as 'perspective dependent'. Finally, I will call my epistemological criterion the 'transformation test'.

IV

The basis of my proposed solution is that the theory of value is only perspectivally invariant; its deep metaphysical relativity is quite compatible with robust cognitivism at the level of its content for the makers of evaluative judgements. However, a judger's proposed maxim of action is perspective dependent. Such maxims fail systematically to transform across different frames of description. Maxims only function as practical reasons relative to the individual agent's location within the intersubjective framework of reasons. Thus, the structure of practical reasons is perspective dependent, in that it displays the phenomenon which Amartya Sen has called 'evaluator relativity'. My resolution of the initial problem is that *reasons* vary according to one's 'location' within the space of reasons, whereas *values* do not vary at all. However, to preserve my commitment to the impartiality of moral reasons, I further argue that reasons do *not* vary according to individual character or one's moral personality.

My argument takes a crucial distinction from Sen's account of evaluator relativity, and applies it not at the level of values, nor of agents, but at the level of the intersubjective structure of reasons. Sen's concerns are not those of the present paper. His interest lies in formulating a defensible version of consequentialism, but I take from his discussions two ideas.[18] The first is that the reasons that individual agents discern in states of affairs may vary with their relative 'location' *vis-à-vis* these states of affairs when the latter are viewed as potential outcomes of their agency. The second is

18. Amartya Sen, 'Rights and Agency', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 11, No. 1 (Winter, 1982), pp. 3–39; 'Evaluator Relativity and Consequential Evaluation' and 'Positional Objectivity'.

that this result is not relativistic: that this move is perfectly compatible with the content of the agent's reasons remaining 'objective'.[19]

I want to detach a structural proposal from the details of Sen's actual argument about the nature of value. Sen points out that classical consequentialism sees the values of outcomes as the same for all agents, whereas he argues that this is not so. For example, the state of affairs where Othello has murdered Desdemona is, in Sen's opinion, worse from Othello's point of view than from that of a non-involved spectator, since Othello is responsible for bringing about the state of affairs. His argument for evaluator relativity is centrally that the 'evaluator may be morally involved in the state of affairs he is evaluating, and the evaluation of the state may have to take note of that involvement'.[20] This intuition motivates Sen's basic thesis that, 'the goodness of a state of affairs[....]depends intrinsically (not just instrumentally)[....]on the position of the evaluator in relation to the state'.[21] Sen remarks that this position relativity need not be marked in ordinary language and that it is not up to the agent which location *vis-à-vis* an outcome he or she occupies:

> The fact of 'relativisation' does not in any way rule out the peculiar relevance of a particular value of a variable with respect to which the function is relativised....one of these roles is his own, and that specification 'closes' the relativised system and determines the 'solution'.[22]

The terminology of 'locations' and 'roles' in relation to outcomes is equivalent. They bear no more of a theoretical load than this: an agent can stand in the relation of 'doer' or 'viewer' of a potential act. I will return to this important point below.

I would argue that this distinction can be put to productive use in a different theoretical framework. This alternative strategy offers a solution to the current problem which preserves

19. Sen, 'Evaluator Relativity', p. 117. My theory hinges on the point that Sen's notion of 'objectivity' covers two different forms of perspectivalness in objective judgements. The view is not relativistic since it introduces the *relational* and not the *relative*, in order to preserve Winch's important point that he is not trying to resurrect Protagoreanism. Practical reasons are indexed to a location, but not constituted by that location.

20. Sen, 'Evaluator Relativity', p. 114.

21. Sen, 'Evaluator Relativity', p. 114.

22. Sen, 'Evaluator Relativity', p. 124. See also 'Rights and Agency', p. 37.

cognitivism and impartialism while also respecting Guttenplan's 'strong supervenience' claim. It does so by deploying the structure Sen has focused on within the theory of practical reasoning, not the theory of value. The failure of transformation that Sen has pinpointed should not be further explained by invoking different values, but should rather be explained by the status of these contents as practical reasons for an agent.

Sen's 'framework' for evaluator relativity is a special instance of the phenomenon of the perspectival. Explaining how it relates to the two perspectival aspects of moral content I have already classified resolves the problem posed by the initial problem, and does so in a unified theoretical context. The further, crucially important, distinction I wish to draw may be clarified by examining the following remark of Sen's:

> It is possible to get trans-positional statements from positional ones. Further a state could happen to be good from every position. This does not make the goodness nonpositional, but only indicates that there is interpositional invariance.[23]

An ambiguity lies in the phrase 'it is possible to get trans-positional statements from positional ones'. Applying the criteria I described above it will be clear that they yield different results when applied to the two different aspects of moral content. The crucial issue in distinguishing between the two kinds of perspectival phenomena I have called the 'perspectivally invariant' and the 'perspective dependent' depended on how one applied the transformation test across classes of makers of judgements.

Applied to the present case, my claim is that values in a situation are the same for all agents, no matter how they are located *vis-à-vis* those values. Evaluative judgements systematically transform across viewpoints and are thus merely perspectivally invariant. While in the deepest metaphysical sense they are perspectival, in that the categories they deploy are anthropocentric, this is no more of a barrier to cognitivism about value than it is to cognitivism about colours. However, there is a different result when one examines the second aspect of moral judgements, their status as proposed actions under a description, or 'maxims', for an agent. This does not systematically transform across viewpoints: reasons

23. Sen, 'Evaluator Relativity', p. 115.

for an agent are sensitive to their 'location' in relation to outcomes and are thus perspective dependent, not perspectivally invariant. The former dimension of the judgements is systematically invariant across transformations, whereas the latter dimension is not.

This failure of systematic transformation expresses Williams's point that in understanding the use of 'role-reversal' tests in ethical thinking, where moral observers imaginatively occupy the 'location' in the space of reasons in fact occupied by another, imaginative empathy is not total identification. Thus, in one important sense, by the exercise of imagination the position of Captain Vere is intersubjectively accessible to us. However, this accessibility is constrained in two quite distinct ways, reflecting two different failures of transformation across viewpoints.

The first constraint, much stressed by Winch, is that the our third-personal access to the character of the deliberating agent can take that character as an 'object' for judgement, whereas for the agent him or herself it is what they deliberate *from*. This is quite correct, and is central to those arguments for grounding deontic options which are based on the importance of the 'personal point of view'. However, these arguments are not my central concern since in my view they implicitly draw on certain values. The inconsistent situation which is my main concern requires a shared evaluative basis.[24]

My focus is on the metaphysical impossibility of actually *being* Vere, occupying exactly his 'location', and hence accessing the 'all things considered' reason indexed to that location. This point is crucial to my argument, so it is worthy of further clarification. My argument is that it *does* make a difference to the reasons an agent has whether or not he or she is the agent that would carry out a particular act. This insight is well expressed by Solzhenitsyn's principle that even if evil will come into the world when one does not act, it is better that one's agency is not the instrument of such evil.[25] One can explore, deploying imagination at the service of

24. The 'personal point of view' simply gives rise to an inappropriate set of considerations in the case of Billy Budd. Consider two representative values correctly stressed by proponents of the 'personal point of view', namely, an agent's 'ground projects' or his or her 'integrity'. Neither value is threatened in the Billy Budd case and if they were introduced as the basis for practical reasons the charge of moral narcissism would be well placed.

25. The principle is discussed by Jonathan Glover in, 'It Makes No Difference Whether Or Not I Do It', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume*, 49 (1975), pp. 171–190. Glover quotes Solzhenitsyn from his Nobel acceptance lecture: 'Let the lie come into the world, even dominate the world, but not through me'.

practical reasoning, what it would be to face such a choice. One can imaginatively occupy the standpoint of the agent preparing to act. But this 'role reversal' test does not involve the fantasy of actually becoming the other person: sympathy is not identification or psychological fusion. The resulting amalgam of viewpoints would have little psychological plausibility as a model of a collective psyche.[26]

My account is quite compatible with meeting the requirement that the reason indexed to that location be impartially acceptable. Both Vere's (the agent's) and Winch's (the observer's) reasons are acceptable from an impartial standpoint that accepts the perspective dependence of deontic reasons, provided this standpoint also acknowledges the crucial 'viewer'/'doer' distinction. One steers the correct middle course by noting that while one cannot be Vere, and hence occupy his location, it is not by *virtue of being Vere* that he occupies his location. This would be to confuse accident with essence. I will return to a related point—that unless the reason is indexed to the location not the individual, one is open to the charge of moral narcissism.

V

The previous section has set out the basic elements of my resolution of the problem. However, I need further to specify how it is compatible with the initial constraints I assumed of cognitivism about value, and impartialism about moral reasons. I will clarify each of these points in turn.

First, the metaphysical status of value. The deep metaphysical relativity of value means that moral values, like secondary qualities, are anthropocentric. However, just as in the case of secondary properties, their explanatory indispensability indicates that anthropocentricity does not debar these properties from figuring in knowledge claims.[27] In order to pass the test of reflective stability, one may have to concede an even more 'local' form of perspectivalness tying such properties to culturally local categories, but again this is no obstacle to their figuring in

26. A point made by Bernard Williams in his rejection of Hare's 'World Agent' model for practical decision, as presented in *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method and Point* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). Williams writes, 'Any one agent who had projects as conflicting, competitive and diversely based as the World Agent's would be (to put it mildly) in bad shape', Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 88.

27. David Wiggins, *Needs*, pp. 155–60, also my *Value and Context* (forthcoming) chapter four.

knowledge claims.[28] Thus, these concessions that moral contents are, while cognitive, also perspectival does not take one further than *perspectival invariance*.

Secondly, I will clarify the different form of perspectivalness exemplified by deontic maxims. An emphasis on the personal nature of ethics is quite compatible with the impartiality of moral reasons. The confusion between taking moral reasons to be impartial and to be impersonal is widespread, but it must be admitted that it is fostered by some of the terminology in this area.[29] Critics of impartialism argue that the position ignores the personal dimension of ethics, such as character, integrity and individuality. This is quite mistaken. The objection runs together the claim that ethics is impartial with the claim that ethics is impersonal: impartialism is perfectly compatible with the personal, but not with the partial. Impartialism requires that personal values and reasons should be represented from the impartial point of view, but has no objection to them *per se*.[30]

The exact test involved in determining the impartial acceptability of reasons cannot be fully specified here, but I would argue that impartiality is a norm implicit in reason-giving practice which is internal to our moral outlook.[31] Much of the criticism directed against the norm of impartiality takes it to be a constraint derivable from the nature of practical reasons as such, and thus implicated in the Neo-Kantian project of an a priori derivation of substantive ethical constraints from a 'pure' and thus formal account of reason. This is not my understanding of the norm of impartiality.[32] I view it as a moral norm internal to our practice

28. Contra the claim of Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chapters eight and nine. I argue for this claim in *Value and Context*, chapter two.

29. Such as the equation of 'objective' and 'impersonal' in Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), in the key chapters XI and XII.

30. Adrian M. Piper, 'Moral Theory and Alienation'. My use of the term 'represent' is deliberate, following Rawls's use of the idea of the original position as a 'device of representation'. The impartial point of view is in my view merely a heuristic standpoint, and should not be metaphysically interpreted as a special, non-perspectival view of our reasons from some Archimedean standpoint. The point of the impartial point of view is to endorse reasons we are already committed to, not to generate reasons itself.

31. I take this conception of an impartial reason from Nagel, *Possibility*, chapters X–XIII; I take it to be separable from that work's commitment to *external* reasons. The later *View From Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) is much clearer about the status of the norm of impartiality as I would understand that term, clearly adopting the position described in footnote 30.

32. This is another point of agreement between myself and Winch; Winch's target was the stronger claim that a substantive moral norm of impartiality was derivable from the meaning of the word 'ought'.

which shapes 'how we go on' in moral argument. It is best expressed, in my view, in Scanlon's contractualist commitment to grounding moral reasons on considerations that an agent will not reasonably reject, in so far, I would add, as that agent is rational.[33] Partial reasons are not reasons we can put before other agents, at the 'tribunal of their reason', without rejection by a perfectly reasonable interlocutor.[34] This transposition of the norm of impartiality to a perspective within, rather than external to, moral practice, weakens its demands, but does not make them negligible.

VI

It is useful to compare my treatment of the Billy Budd case with those of both Wiggins and Winch. Wiggins's treatment of the example of Winch and Vere making incompatible judgements concerning the fate of Billy Budd is as follows: given the plurality of values in play, there is no incompatibility between the observer Peter Winch arriving at a different 'all things considered' judgement about what he ought to do from that of the involved agent, Vere. Both parties were making the same judgements as to a panoply of values displayed by the apparently inconsistent scenario, but their respective 'weightings' or emphases led to the situation presenting them with a different evaluative 'shape'. Hence the differential finding. But my response, following Guttenplan, is that this line of argument is quite compatible with there being, in fact, a *single* best 'all things considered judgement' as to what one ought to do in this situation.

My view is that Wiggins's value pluralism must be supplemented by an agency dimension which allows a wider range of 'perspective relative' judgements about what one may do in the envisaged scenario. Unlike Sen, I do not take this to be a judgement about the values in play in the situation: values are the same for all agents. It is deontic space rather than evaluative space which is 'curved', moulded relative to the agency dimension introduced by

33. I take this important qualification from Christine Korsgaard's paper, 'Scepticism about Practical Reason', *Journal of Philosophy* (January, 1986), pp. 5–25.

34. I borrow the phrase 'tribunal of reason' from Jeremy Waldron's 'Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 37 (1987) pp. 127–50. The essentials of Scanlon's contractualism is presented in 'Contractualism and Utilitarianism', in Sen and Williams, *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

considering oneself as a potential agent in the situation. The individual moral agent is located in a system of intersubjective reasons whereby his or her relative 'location' is a parameter within his or her decision making. The strong supervenience of reasons on values is compatible with different reasons being indexed to different 'locations' within a single, inter-subjective framework of practical reasons.

Thus, in my solution, the respective judgements of Vere and Winch contain hidden indexicals which indicate their relative location *vis-à-vis* the envisaged outcomes: this perspectivalness is the perspective dependence of maxims. This form of perspectivalness follows from the fact that such maxims are indexically tied to the location from which they are made, and hence perspective *exhausts this aspect of their content*. This is compatible with the cognitive content of the reason exhibiting only perspectival invariance, since the evaluation of a content as a reason for action and its evaluation as an object of cognition focus on different aspects of one and the same state. Furthermore, this is compatible with the agent's proposed maxim conforming with the formal constraint of impartial acceptability.

The comparison with Winch's position is also of interest. The central difference between my argument and the line of enquiry Winch inaugurated is my undemanding use of the metaphor of 'location'. I use it simply to draw the viewer/doer distinction. In explaining this distinction, this is the point at which I must set aside the special problem that Winch is writing about a fictional case. One can hardly apply a viewer/doer relation to such a case since Winch is not going to intervene in a fictional narrative.[35] So let me restrict my account to actual cases, where 'viewer' and 'doer' are both in a position to assume either role.[36] A similar point is that it is irrelevant that Vere is 'involved in' while Winch is 'detached from' Billy Budd's case; if I switch to a non-fictional example I can take 'involved' and 'detached' as a distinction between practice and reflection that is accessible to both protagonists. This is obscured by the fictional case, and the terminology of 'viewer' and 'doer' carries these overtones too. But my argument is intended to apply to cases where both protagonists could act, if they decided to, and

35. Unlike, for example, in Woody Allen's 'The Kugelmass Episode', in which Professor Kugelmass gets trapped in the text of *Madam Bovary*.

36. This also allows for the possibility of giving true moral advice in 'if I were you form'.

both can reflect on the difference it makes to be the person who actually brings the outcome about.

Unlike Winch and those influenced by him I do not take Captain Vere's character, defined by the moral capacities and incapacities revealed to him in deliberation, as a determinant of his 'location'. I regard this line of argument as misguidedly psychologistic, and would draw a distinction between a theory of an agent's reasons and a theory of reasons for an agent. The account I have presented here takes it that the reason available to Vere is determined by the evaluative shape of the situation, his 'role' as potential agent, and the constraint of impartiality. It is thus a theory of an agent's reasons. Whether Vere has the psychological capacity to 'access' this reason is a separate matter located in moral psychology. There is a great deal we can say in appraising Vere's reasoning, obviously relevant to our appraisal of his virtues and vices of character. This, however, is a theory of reasons for an agent and does not determine what the normative content of his reason should be.

I can agree with Winch that moral decisions such as Vere's can be instruments of self-knowledge. As such, they blur the line between 'deciding' what to do and 'finding out' about oneself. I can also agree to the epistemological claim that as a consequence of the link between moral decision and self-knowledge, one can only understand Vere's decision by imaginative empathy with his deliberative process, which deploys his first personal deliberative vocabulary. However, I would still press a distinction between the evaluation of the psychological *process* leading to Vere's decision and its *product*. Ignoring this distinction lapses into psychologism and reduces the normative force of the content of Vere's conclusion to the psychological processes that generated it.[37]

VII

The use of Sen's distinctions certainly offers insight into how one can defuse the challenge with which this paper began. But it might

37. I find a connection here between Winch's discussion of Vere and his view of the methodology of the human sciences more generally, in *On the Idea of a Social Science* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958).There is a mistaken slide from the correct and important view that hermeneutic understanding begins with the 'agent's point of view' to the error of taking the first personal point of view as incorrigible. For a penetrating discussion of a position called 'vulgar Wittgensteinianism' that may, or may not, be Winch's, see Charles Taylor's 'Evaluative Realism and the Geisteswissenschaften' in Holtzmann, S. and Leich, C., (eds.) *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981).

seem to leave the key question open: why should there be the phenomenon of evaluator relativity, or in my terms an ineliminably perspectival dimension to the intersubjective structure of reasons? I believe this point can be satisfactorily addressed by focusing on the dimension which introduces the relativity, namely, the dimension of potential agency. Different maxims are consequent upon viewing oneself as the potential author of an act.

The key question, however, is why the agency dimension alone should be the focus of the problem. The assumption I have worked with throughout is that the values exhibited in a situation are the same for all judgers. Thus, I cannot avail myself of Sen's explanation that being the agent of an outcome makes that outcome evaluatively *worse* than an alternative. Nor am I identifying 'maxims' with intuitively known deontic constraints that offer an independent constraint on action functioning separately from the evaluative dimension—a 'dual source' view.

To address the issue, it is useful to reflect on the example mentioned above which Sen uses to express his intuition: that when Othello kills Desdemona, the resulting situation is worse from the point of view of Othello than from that of an observer. I want to set alongside this the equally powerful intuition that from the perspective of evaluation alone, the badness of the state of affairs resulting from the action can be judged to be the same by anyone. The agency dimension introduces, in my view, a special reason indexed to the location Othello occupies *vis-à-vis* the outcome, namely that of potential agent. But there seems no reason to infer from this that the value of the outcome varies relative to 'location'.

In my account, this special reason is to be located in the agency perspective, but that is a special perspective on the facts—not a special kind of perspectival fact, as Sen's alternative diagnosis would have it. Here, as in more general metaphysical discussion, one can object to 'perspectival facts' on the grounds of 'double counting'. If alongside every absolute fact we must place a perspectival one to accommodate the perspective of the observer/judger, the same state of affairs is being counted twice. It is thus hardly surprising that Sen can accommodate his view within a consequentialist framework: in Sen's theory the disvalue of an evil act counts twice when we take the perspective of its author into account. This is implausible.

My argument against Sen is a straightforward one: he can offer a theoretical backing for his intuition about the 'authorship' of acts and value, whereas I can accommodate both this intuition and the intuition most directly opposed to it. There is indeed something special about the reasons agents have for viewing outcomes as potential effects of their agency, but this special status of such maxims need not be further explained by a difference in the values involved. We have the countervailing intuition that the evil Othello brings into the world is not *more* evil when judged from any particular point of view—including Othello's own. Thus, by conceiving of moral contents under two aspects and taking the special status of maxims as an explanatorily primitive idea, both intuitions are satisfactorily reconciled.

However, placing this much theoretical emphasis on the agency perspective may seem *morally* problematic. If the peculiar character of deontic constraints is explained by the special relation into which agent and victim are placed, does this not invite agents to become morally narcissistic or self-indulgent? I would address this concern by noting that if an agent declares 'I just cannot do it', simply on the basis of the Solzhenitsyn principle, the special reason is indexed to their 'location'—it is not indexed to them. They are not excusing just on the grounds of being the particular person they are. Their remark is not mere autobiography, although it is that as well.[38]

This emphasis on the agency perspective converges with other recent work on the topic of justifying deontic constraints as opposed to deontic options. More than one commentator has drawn out the connections between the distinctive character of deontic constraints and agency. Nagel's and Korsgaard's recent work on grounding deontology has focused on personal relatedness, and has located deontic reasons as supervenient on such relations as victimhood and acting as the agent of another's suffering.[39] I should emphasise that while Nagel's and Korsgaard's discussion of deontic maxims are compatible with the account presented here, their account of values is not. Both write within a contemporary

38. It would not mark a slide from the 'critical' to the 'clinical', as Cavell has nicely put it. I should re-iterate at this point that my focus in this paper is on deontic options, not constraints. In the case of deontic options, it *would* be relevant to cite the indexical link between having the personal projects one has, and being the person one is.

39. Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, p. 139; Christine Korsgaard, 'The Reasons We Can Share', in Paul, E.F., Miller, F.D. and Paul, J. (eds.) *Altruism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 24–51.

discussion shaped decisively by Scheffler's work, in which deontic constraints appear more problematic than deontic options. They both, quite independently, look to the agent/victim relationship to explain the puzzling status of deontic constraints and to use this relationship to elucidate the Kantian injunction to treat persons as ends and never as means.

Korsgaard further emphasises the inter-subjective nature of the collective structure of deontic reasons.[40] However, both Nagel and Korsgaard offer a direct equivalence of reasons and values, which leads them to overlook the distinction between the two kinds of perspectivalness moral reasons exhibit. Thus, Korsgaard maintains that the ontological status of values is that they are 'inter-subjective' as opposed to 'objective' or 'subjective', on the grounds that this is the status of the corresponding reasons.[41] This seems to me clearly mistaken, even if read as 'transcendentally inter-subjective', which would be equivalent in my argument to the idea of the perspective dependent. Evaluative discourse has stronger cognitive credentials than this. To adapt one of Wiggins's remarks it would be 'false or senseless' to judge that the cruelty of an act could not be an object of knowledge. There seems to be no sense, not even a transcendental one, in which 'we' give it this cognitive status. This single content, however, can also be deliberated over as a maxim, under which deontic aspect both Nagel's and Korsgaard's accounts of its special status as a reason are supportive of the argument I have developed.[42]

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40. Korsgaard, 'Reasons We Can Share', p. 25.

41. Korsgaard, 'Reasons We Can Share', p. 25; 'I have assumed an equivalence or at least a direct correspondence between values and practical reasons.... In this I follow Thomas Nagel'.

42. Let me anticipate two 'matters arising': first, the position set out in this paper is intended to be a contribution to 'descriptive' rather than 'revisionary' ethics. Any proposal to revise or eliminate the structures I have described arise, in my view, at this later stage. A second, connected, point is that while I have located Sen's relativity within the theory of practical reasoning, not the theory of value, I have left it open whether or not there is an indirect link between the agency dimension and the theory of value—for example, the proposal that persons be treated as ends and never as means because of their capacity for 'endorsing' themselves as valuable. These issues seem to me to be open to further consideration.

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