

Ethical Inquiry as Problem-Resolution: Objectivity, Progress, and Deliberation

by

Amanda L. Roth

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Elizabeth S. Anderson, Co-Chair
Professor Peter A. Railton, Co-Chair
Professor Laura Ruetsche
Associate Professor Jonathan M. Metz

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As humans we engage in a variety of types of inquiry in trying to understand the world and ourselves. Practical inquiry is a special sub-class of inquiry in which we aim to answer not just the questions of what the world is like or what we are like, but also *what to care about* and *what to do*. Within the practical domain we can further classify different sorts of questions about what to do; the sub-class of questions I am interested in are those in the ethical domain—what sorts of lives should we aim to live? Which ideals should we commit to? What sort of life would be good for each of us?

In thinking about ethical inquiry, a few major questions arise. First, how—if at all—do we make progress ethically? Is the ethical domain like the scientific domain in the sense that over time our theories get better at capturing the world? Is there any sense in which changes to our ethical beliefs or practices are genuine improvements? Or are major shifts in ethical beliefs and practices simply changes of mind?

Second, what does ethical deliberation look like? Can we rationally deliberate about ends or is deliberation only of means? In cases of conflict between seemingly incommensurable ends, how can we resolve such conflicts in a rational manner?

And finally, in what sense—if any—can inquiry in ethics be objective? Is ethics analogous to science in terms of how to conceive of objectivity? Must our understanding of objectivity in ethics require convergence, mind-independence, value-neutrality, or really-reality (in which case, the possibility of ethical being objectivity looks bleak)?

Each of these topics corresponds to a major chapter of this dissertation. In these chapters, I will present and argue for conceiving of ethical inquiry in terms of solving-problems, and answers to the above questions about progress, deliberation, and objectivity will fall out naturally from the development of this view. Before beginning by taking up the question of how to conceive of ethical progress in chapter 2, I want to offer a bit of background to the project as a whole. In section *I*, I say more about the nature of ethical inquiry as I understand it. In section *II*, I offer some background about the work of pragmatist John Dewey, as I will appeal to various aspects of Dewey's ethics throughout this dissertation. In section *III*, I try to situate this dissertation within the typical breakdown of applied, normative, and meta-ethics in moral philosophy. In section *IV*, I draw a distinction between different sorts of moral concepts and explain my own use of terminology in this vein. Finally, in section *V*, I offer a short outline of the structure of the dissertation.

I. Ethical Inquiry

Ethical questions about what to do are not typically referred to under the guise of "inquiry." Rather, philosophers typically speak of "practical *reasoning*" or "practical *deliberation*." The answers to the questions "what to do?" and "what to value?" after all, are of importance to us not primarily because we seek knowledge in these areas, but rather so that we can act and value. This might strike some as a significant contrast to the purpose of inquiry in the theoretical domain, since theoretical knowledge does not appear to be intimately connected to action or valuing in the way that practical or (more specifically) ethical knowledge is so connected.

Along these lines, I think there is also another commonly assumed dissimilarity between the practical or ethical realm and the theoretical realm. A typical picture of what we are up to in theoretical inquiry is trying to accurately represent what the natural world is like; the world here is often conceived of as existing independently of us, our beliefs, our desires, our attitudes, etc. such that even our best methods of investigation and the longest possible run of scientific inquiry could still result in our being fundamentally mistaken about what the world is like. This it would seem is possible because the facts of, say, physics would have been facts regardless of whether we humans had ever existed or had happened to observe them. As the pragmatist John Dewey (122-123) puts it, this model of knowledge involves a metaphor of “a spectator viewing a finished picture.”¹ The physical world—the picture—is taken to already exist with its fixed features prior to our viewing it; we inquirers, then, simply look at the picture and try to accurately represent what it is like.

But this traditional picture does not translate very well to the domain of ethics, as it seems odd to think that ethical facts would have been facts even if we humans had never come into existence or regardless of whether we observed them. And few philosophers would accept as appropriate the metaphor of a spectator viewing a finished painting—with the seeming implication that there is an independently existing moral order which we inquirers simply try to discover and accurately represent in our moral inquiry. Rather, it seems like humans are entangled in the moral world such that this aspect of the world importantly depends on what *we* are like; but a similar entanglement does not seem so obvious in the case of the physical world.

¹ Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

I agree that humans are importantly tangled up with morality and that the spectator metaphor fails in this domain; however, I am not convinced that there is such a stark difference between morality and the natural sciences on this score. In particular, I think that the spectator metaphor is also worrisome as a model of theoretical inquiry as it implies, mistakenly, that facts about the world are simply there for the finding and, as Dewey (1927, 3) puts it, that if we “[a]ccumulate enough of them, ... [then] their interpretation stares out at you.”² In actuality, given the underdetermination of a theory by evidence, “the power of physical facts to coerce beliefs does not reside in the bare phenomena.... No one is ever forced by just the collection of facts to accept a particular theory of their meaning, so long as one retains intact some other doctrine by which he can marshal them.”³

The spectator model, then, is objectionable inasmuch as it suggests that we can move easily from observation and collection of facts (i.e. viewing the painting) to a satisfactory theory (what would be, perhaps, producing a description or representation of the painting) without bringing anything to our interpretation of the painting. Given that we do have to bring background assumptions into scientific confirmation, we would do well to seek out a different model. Dewey offers just such an alternative—“that of the artist producing the painting.”⁴ Conceiving of ourselves as the painter makes clear the sense in which we are active participants in interpreting facts and constructing scientific theories. But does this model go too far in the opposite direction? Does Dewey here

² Dewey, John. *The Public and Its Problems*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1927.

³ Dewey 1927, 3; Quine, Willard. “Two Dogmas of Empiricism.” *Philosophical Review* 60, no.1 (Jan. 1951): 20-43. In addition, Helen Longino offers a helpful discussion of underdetermination and its consequences for the role of values in inquiry in *Science as Social Knowledge*, chapter 3. Longino, Helen. *Science as Social Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

⁴ Dewey 1957, 122-23.

mean that we as inquirers create the world, or at least that the facts in question are constructed by us? Wouldn't this mean, then, that we could produce any painting we like and thus imply a radical sort of constructivism about facts?⁵ But how could that be a satisfactory metaphor for inquiry? Aren't we trying, in scientific inquiry, to represent what the world is *really* like?

Dewey in fact rejects the idea that the pursuit of knowledge involves getting at the unchanging "Real." Rather, he suggests conceiving of knowledge as "the method of active control of nature and of experience."⁶ The fundamental point of inquiry, then, is not to come to an accurate understanding of what the world—conceived of as independent of and apart from us—is like. The point is to figure out how we—as part of the world—can better live in it through the use of intelligence. We are like the artist creating the painting not in the sense that we are creating the world—or even producing interpretations of or theories about how the world is in itself. We are like the artist because we are trying to employ certain techniques (e.g. different styles of painting) to certain materials (e.g. a canvas and type of paint) to produce a satisfying resulting painting. That resulting painting—and analogously, our scientific knowledge—needn't be understood as attempting primarily to represent "the Real," but rather can be conceived of as an attempt to intervene in the world and learn how to act as part of the world in a way that produces results that are satisfying to us (given whatever our

⁵ At first glance Dewey's metaphor might be taken to be offering a kind of constructivism about knowledge as described and attacked by Paul Boghossian in *Fear of Knowledge*. According to constructivism about facts as characterized by Boghossian (22), "[t]he world we seek to understand and know about is not what it is independently of us and our social context; rather, all facts are socially constructed in a way that reflects our contingent needs and interests." Boghossian suggests that one of the problems with this sort of view is that it seems that many common "objects and facts that we talk about...existe[d]" prior to us. But, Boghossian asks, how is it possible that we could have constructed things whose existence was antecedent to our own? Boghossian, Paul. *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.

⁶ Dewey 1957, 122-123.

particular concerns happen to be in that particular instance.) We might think, then, that Dewey leaves unspecified the purpose of the painting in the metaphor, because our purposes in inquiring about the world will be diverse and so as a result will our standards of satisfaction.

I believe we can see a contemporary analogue to Dewey's artist-inquirer analogy in much recent work in feminist epistemology and philosophy of science, which typically rejects the subject/object distinction, insists that inquirers are themselves part of the object of inquiry—the natural and social world—and suggests that emotional attachment and the bringing of values into scientific inquiry needn't undermine objectivity. Consider Elizabeth Anderson's "Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology" in which she (54) argues that the questions we ask in inquiry determine what sorts of answers will be satisfactory.⁷ Anderson appeals to the example of the Nation of Islam's *The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews* to demonstrate how the discovery or recounting of many true claims about the world can still be misleading since "[t]heories don't just state facts; they organize them into patterns that purport to be representative of the phenomenon being theorized, patterns that are adequate to answer some question."⁸ We can see, then, the sense in which inquirers are active in producing knowledge in the same way that the artist is active in the production of the painting; yet in both cases whether or not the resulting theory or painting is satisfactory depends upon

⁷ Anderson, Elizabeth. "Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology." *Philosophical Topics* 23, no.2 (Fall 1995): 27-58.

⁸ Ibid 38-39. *The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews* recounts many true claims about Jews and the slave-trade, but as Anderson puts it, the book fails "to put the facts into the larger context that would be required to assess their significance." The relevant question which the inquiry undertaken in the book purports to be answering has to do with whether Jews deserve special blame for their role in the slave trade (40). And true claims about Jews as slave owners or slave traders without reference to more general information about slavery and the slave trade cannot answer this question.

the questions or goals that prompted that inquiry or the artistic undertaking in the first place.

It is ethical inquiry understood in something like this vein that I focus on in this dissertation. While the spectator-viewing-a-finished-painting model is suspicious in the theoretical domain, this model is even more objectionable in the ethical domain. The idea that there is a moral order which would have existed regardless of our own existence and which we can discover simply through observation strikes most of us as absurd.⁹

Similarly, the goals of ethical inquiry and the questions which guide such inquiry do not lend themselves to a representational understanding of ethical truth. It seems to me that when we take up inquiry about what to do, how to live, or what is valuable, we do not aim to represent “the (ethical) Real” as accurately a possible. Rather, we want ethical knowledge inasmuch as it allows us to better live, act, and value. Thus, moral or ethical knowledge involves the very sort of control of experience in our own actions and evaluations that Dewey has in mind.

With this background in mind regarding what I mean by “ethical inquiry” I will, in the next four chapters, offer an account of what we are up to in this sort of inquiry—specifically, what it is to make an ethical improvement, how we can rationally revise our ethical ends, and how such improvements and revisions can be objective.

II. Dewey

⁹ Consider, for instance, Dworkin’s (104) “moral-field” thesis according to which “the universe houses...some special particles—morons—whose energy and momentum establish fields that at once constitute the morality or immorality, or virtue or vice, of particular human acts and institutions and also interact in some way with human nervous systems so as to make people aware of the morality or immorality or of the vice or virtue.” Dworkin, Ronald. “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Believe It.” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25, no.2 (1996): 87-139.

As is likely already clear, I will draw significantly on John Dewey's ethical works in the accounts of progress, deliberation, and objectivity I offer in this dissertation.

However, this is not a historically oriented project. Thus, I do not claim to offer anything like a comprehensive summary of Dewey's ethical works or a complete description of his account of inquiry.

Similarly, I do not conceive of this project as merely applying Dewey's pragmatism to contemporary debates about moral epistemology and practical reasoning. Rather, I am simply taking a number of insights from Dewey and putting them to work in my own take on some central notions having to do with ethical inquiry. Thus there is an open question as to how "Deweyan" are the general conclusions I reach are.

The main insight that I appropriate from Dewey is his understanding of inquiry in terms of overcoming problems. We can see this underlying view at work in Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* in which Dewey emphasizes the importance of habits in human existence and ethics. For Dewey (1922, 41) a habit is "that kind of human activity which is...acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering...of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity."¹⁰ While we can often get along fine in the world by unreflectively living according to our acquired habits, we will inevitably find at some times that one habit conflicts with another habit, or with the new environment in which we find

¹⁰ Dewey (1922, 28-29) refers to the case of posture as one example of a habit. This example also allows us to see the sense in which habits depend upon material conditions and the environment. He states regarding a person with bad posture: "Conditions have been formed for producing a bad result, and the bad result will occur so long as those conditions exist. They can no more be dismissed by a direct effort of will than the conditions which create drought can be dispelled by whistling for wind" (29). Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct*. New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1922.

ourselves.¹¹ What, then, are we to do? Dewey (1922, 104, 128) suggests that the solution is to form new habits—or modify old habits—which are better suited to the new environment or situation of conflict and which are themselves “more intelligent...more informed with foresight...more flexibly responsive than [current habits]. Then they will meet their own problems and propose their own improvements.”¹²

Dewey (1922, 279) recognizes that this way of conceiving of moral situations in terms of conflicts between different habits or between habit and environment brings up a “perplexing [problem] of reflection.” In that case, after all, the scope of moral actions is infinite—for we cannot easily mark off a narrow arena of specifically moral conduct. We then face the question of “just how far to carry” reflection—“what to bring under examination and what to leave to unscrutinized habit?”¹³ For Dewey there is no easy answer to this question—for we can only do our best by experimenting and bringing the results to bear in future experiments as we attempt to overcome the conflicts we continue to come upon.¹⁴

For Dewey, then, progress in ethics is a matter of overcoming the conflicts—or “problems”—we come upon in living. This way of conceiving of progress does not require a prior conception of “the good” or any fixed ideal state of affairs toward which we might aim in trying to make progress. As Dewey (1992, 281) puts it, “[t]here are plenty of negative elements...in most of the situations of life, and we do not require a revelation of some supreme perfection to inform us whether or not we are making headway.” In “Theory of Valuation” he (46) offers the example of health as a parallel to

¹¹ Dewey 1922, 52-3.

¹² Ibid 104, 128.

¹³ Ibid 279.

¹⁴ Ibid 279.

ethics. In response to a patient with a health problem, a doctor tries to overcome the trouble. But in order to do this the doctor needn't have in mind an ideal conception of health; rather, s/he forms "a general idea of health...as a good (value) for the patient" based on the particular symptoms the patient exhibits and the doctors best hypothesis as to how these troubles might be mitigated or overcome.¹⁵

III. Situating the Project within Moral Philosophy

Having offered some background to Dewey's moral philosophy, I want now to say something about how this project is situated within moral philosophy taken more broadly. My concerns here focus mostly on ethical epistemology—particularly regarding the notions of objectivity and improvement in our ethical beliefs and practices—as well as practical reasoning—particularly regarding the question of how we can rationally deliberate about ends. Given its nature, this dissertation will touch on issues in applied ethics, normative ethics, and metaethics, but it would be too quick to characterize the project I take up here as being primarily a work in any of these areas.

The account of ethical inquiry I will argue for is in many senses metaethically neutral. For instance, I remain neutral on the issue of cognitivism throughout the dissertation; I tend to be largely uninterested in questions about ethical ontology; and my view does not clearly imply any particular position in the realism/anti-realism debate.¹⁶ On the other hand, however, some metaethical views will be ruled out by my account. Naive relativisms and subjectivisms—views according to which ethical beliefs or

¹⁵ Dewey, John. "Theory of Valuation." *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*. Vol. 2, 1-67. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1939.

¹⁶ Though I do not take a position on cognitivism, I will routinely refer to ethical and moral "beliefs" and not merely to attitudes or judgments. Here I use the term "belief" in the ordinary language sense.

expressions of ethical judgments are self-justifying and/or not subject to evaluation as better or worse—are incompatible with my view given my analysis of ethical objectivity and progress. Error theories are also incompatible with my view since if, as error theorists claim, all ethical beliefs are false, then there can be no sense of ethical improvement.¹⁷

The relation of this dissertation to applied ethics is quite similar to its relation to metaethics. I certainly do take up a number of applied ethical questions within the dissertation. This is most obvious in the case study I offer in chapter 4 in which I describe a conflict between men’s commitment to traditional masculinity ideals and men’s concern for their own health. While I do there implicitly offer a view about how best to solve that conflict, and while I do think the question of how to solve such conflicts is philosophically worthwhile in itself, I have an additional motive for offering the case study that goes beyond interest in the case itself. In particular, I offer the case study to help illuminate my view of ethical progress as a sort of problem-solution and to make clear what my notion of “dynamic deliberation”—in which deliberation can be both rational and *of ends*—looks like in realistic deliberation. So the philosophical issues at stake even in my discussion of the problem of men’s health and masculinity go beyond that particular conflict in living and also involve issues of ethical epistemology and practical reasoning.

¹⁷ Technically I suppose that my accounts of progress and objectivity could be read as merely offering a view about what it would take for our ethical inquiry and practice to count as progressive and objective, while keeping open the question of whether we actually do meet that standard. I think, though, that this way of looking at it gets things backwards. For I take it that plausibility of my account of progress largely derives from our considering our own experience of ethical change—whether individual or communal—and finding ourselves unable but to take of some of those changes to be improvements.

Finally, there is the question of whether this dissertation is a work of normative ethics. This seems to me a more fitting way to characterize my project than as either a metaethics or applied ethics project, though I think such a characterization still fails to capture precisely what this project is about. The major aim of a normative ethical theory seems to be to offer an account of moral permissibility, of obligation and supererogation, of duty, of moral-worth, or of virtue. Many of these notions do factor into my concerns in the dissertation, especially in chapter 5 where I offer some thoughts about the distinction between “the right” and “the good.” I draw this distinction intuitively throughout most of the dissertation and finally sketch the outlines of a hybrid view of the right which combines a contractarian framework with the problem-resolving view in chapter 5.

At the same time, however, much of what I am up to in this project might be seen to be undermining of the project of normative ethical theories as typically conceived. As I describe example cases of societal change and individual deliberation, I appeal to many different sorts of evaluative and deontic considerations that are associated with contrasting normative traditions. No one tradition, in my view, fully captures the variety of valuings, ideals, demands, and conflicts we experience in living. I intend for this dissertation—in offering an account of the nature of ethical objectivity, the process of ethical improvement, and the form of our ethical deliberation—to make room for all of these diverse sorts of valuings and conflicts. Thus, the spirit of my view speaks against the major normative theories inasmuch as we take each of them to be offered as *the* theory of moral obligation and permissibility or ethical goodness.

Having situated my project in terms of meta-, normative, and applied ethics, I want also to clarify some associated aspects of the project. I have said that a significant aspect of the project is to offer a picture of ethical inquiry, but I haven't said what sorts of phenomena which might be referred to as "ethical inquiry" I have in mind. By "ethical inquiry" I primary mean to point to the every-day inquiry—about how to live, what to value, what ideals to hold, and (at least in chapter 5) how to relate to others—that each of us faces as we live a human life. I contrast this type of inquiry with inquiry about normative ethical theories themselves—the sort of inquiry that is typically the domain of moral philosophers and students of moral philosophy courses. My view does, I think, have implications for the epistemology of this latter sort of inquiry—but any such implications are derivative. In the pragmatist tradition, I take our actual practice and experience of living as moral agents as fundamental in considering objectivity, progress, and rationality in ethics.

IV. Ethics vs. Morality

Having situated my view within moral philosophy taken generally, I want to make an additional clarification about my use of the terms 'morality' and 'ethics.' In both common-language usage as well as philosophical usage, these terms are often employed interchangeably. However, these terms do have slightly different connotations which can be brought out by considering the notion of morality in the wide versus narrow sense. A number of philosophers have drawn such a distinction for different purposes.¹⁸ Common

¹⁸ Scanlon (171-2) refers to narrow morality in terms of "what we owe to each other"—the domain of morality he intends to capture with his contractualist account—and contrasts it with concerns having to do with the duties involved in personal relationships, sexual morality, and ideals of excellence which involve concerns that are not primarily about "what we owe to each other." Williams (in a chapter entitled

to those drawing this distinction is a characterization of “morality” as being primarily concerned about how we can live together, what sorts of demands we can legitimately make on one another, and what our obligations to others are. At issue here are, are concerns such as justice, fairness, equality, reciprocity, and respect—concerns typically referred to as falling under “the right.” On the other hand, “ethics” is taken to refer to concerns about how to live best, ideals of excellence, and perhaps duties within personal relationships. We can refer to this domain as “the good,” with the main concerns being virtue and vice, integrity, and excellences.

For the purposes of this dissertation I will be considering issues of epistemology and practical reasoning only within the realm of ethics or the good—not in the realm of morality or the political domain. Thus, I reserve the term ‘morality’ when referring to issues of the right—what we owe to one another, what we can demand of others, what our rights are, etc. I use ‘ethics’ on the other hand to refer to issues of the good—what sort of life is good for an individual and what sorts of ideals one should aspire to. The reasons for maintaining this distinction will become clear as the dissertation proceeds and I say more about how exactly to draw a bright line between the two realms in chapter 5.

In anticipation of that explanation, we can note some obvious differences between the sorts of concerns that come up in the right versus the good. One important dissimilarity is that much of the good involves self-regarding questions about what sort of life would be best for an individual. Since people can live very different sorts of lives without necessarily causing conflict with others, there is little pressure here for all of us

“Morality, the Peculiar Institution”) notes that morality goes beyond deontic concerns such as obligation, but suggests that too often moral philosophy mistakenly subsumes all sorts of moral concerns under the “deontic” umbrella. Scanlon, T.M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. Williams, Bernard. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. London: Fontana, 1985.

to converge upon a single understanding of the good life. On the other hand, it is hard to see how we could successfully live together with radically different conceptions of human rights or of what we can demand of one another. There is, then, an important practical pressure toward convergence about these issues. I will suggest in chapter 5 that it follows from this difference that the nature of progress, objectivity, and deliberation differs in the domain of morality as compared to the domain of ethics. For the majority of this dissertation, I take up only ethics as my concern, but in concluding in chapter 5, I will offer some thoughts about how a view like mine might be expanded to apply to morality as well.

V. *The Structure of the Dissertation*

Having offered a bit of background about my view of ethical inquiry, the place of this project within moral philosophy, and my appeal to the work of John Dewey, I want to offer an outline of the organization of this dissertation.

In my view, the heart of the dissertation is chapter 2, in which I offer an account of ethical progress—how it is that some sorts of beliefs or practices can be better than others, and how we as ethical and epistemic agents can learn in the domain of values. One might think that ethical progress—in the case of beliefs—is simply a matter of getting closer to ethical truth or—in the case of practices—is a matter of getting closer to some ideal end-state, fully meeting the ultimate ethical principles, or maximally fulfilling the appropriate ethical ideals. However, I find such suggests worrisome and in their place offer a conception of ethical progress that does not presume that there is a particular ethical end-state, unchanging ultimate ethical principles, or fixed ethical ideals. On my

view, making ethical progress is a matter of solving the problems that we come upon in trying to live.

The issue of progress in ethics fittingly leads us to questions about deliberation. In discussing ethical progress in terms of solving problems, I speak of improvement in ethical beliefs and practices both on the individual level as well as on the communal level. In the individual case in particular, we must ask what occurs during problem-solving in terms of a deliberator's ends and means. Though I think there is an understandable tendency to think of problem-solving in terms of finding the appropriate means for pursuing one's ends, this is not the sort of picture Dewey has in mind, nor the picture I want to offer of ethical improvement. I will argue in Chapter 3 that on a means-end picture of deliberation changing or revising of one's fundamental ends cannot be rational nor an outcome of learning, and that this in turn brings into doubt any claim that the change or revision is genuinely progressive. Given this worry, I spend chapter 3 arguing for a dynamic view of deliberation according to which deliberation is *of* ends and thus revision of ends is rational.

In Chapter 4, I ask what sense of objectivity, if any, we want in ethics and demonstrate how my account of progress and deliberation makes good on that understanding of objectivity. I suggest that we should care about ethical objectivity inasmuch as it is connected to the mistakenness, genuine disagreement, the appropriate appreciating the perspective of others, and a sense of learning or improving within ethics. I then offer a procedural account of objectivity which captures all of these aspects of inquiry but which does not involve other characteristics commonly associated with

objectivity such as convergence, value-neutrality, really-realness, and mind-independence.

As noted above, throughout these chapters I remain concerned primarily with the good and leave aside issues having to do with our obligations or duties to others. However, in my concluding chapter—Chapter 5—I take up in a preliminary way the question of what my account might say about the right. There I describe the beginnings of a hybrid view which combines a contractualist theory of our obligations to others with a problem-solving view of the good.

Chapter 2: Ethical Progress as Problem-Resolving

On election night 2008, just after polls closed on the west coast and the election was called for Barack Obama, a historic moment was noted. Not only had the U.S. elected its first African-American president, but the it had done so at a time when Jim Crow was still within living memory; at the time of President Obama's birth the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was still three years away and his parents, a white woman and black man, would have been forbidden from marrying in almost a full half of the country. So juxtaposed, the elimination of Jim Crow and the election of Obama seem all the more remarkable—what changes the U.S. has seen in a relatively short time. Are we not obviously a *better* society, at least in these respects, today as compared to fifty years ago?¹⁹

I take the public understanding of Obama's story to be a story about how ethical progress is possible. But in bringing a philosophical outlook to this story—or others like it—we must ask whether it is really compelling as an example of progress? Is genuine ethical progress possible at all? What makes us think that the changes to our beliefs and practices about how to live, how to treat others, and how to govern ourselves which have

¹⁹ I want to emphasize here that what is at issue throughout my discussion of progress is not the character, moral merit, or blameworthiness of individual agents, but rather the epistemological status of the values and ethical beliefs themselves. We can leave as an open question what judgments to make about the character, moral merit, and blameworthiness of individual members of previous generations who supported racial segregation while still judging that our own egalitarian values and beliefs are *better* and hence that improvement has been made. In addition, I use the term “belief” throughout this chapter to refer to our ethical attitudes. Here I do not intend to take up a cognitivist metaethical view—on that question I remain agnostic for the purposes of this chapter—but rather I mean to invoke the ordinary language sense of “belief.”

occurred since the time of Jim Crow are actually *improvements* and not mere changes of mind or taste? In what follows I want to vindicate our sense that events like the election of the first black President of the United States can indeed be ethically progressive by positing and defending a particular way of conceiving of progress in the domain of values.

Before laying out my argumentative strategy, I want to discuss the motivation of such a project. Why should we focus on a notion of progress in the domain of values? One reason is suggested by the example above. If we cannot vindicate the idea that some ethical values or beliefs are better than others and that we can make better or worse changes with regard to our own ethical beliefs and practices, then we seem to lose all ground for thinking that our current racially (more) egalitarian beliefs and practices are preferable to the Jim Crow beliefs and practices of the recent past.²⁰ What, after all, could be our ethical objection to a racially stigmatizing belief or policy if we have no notion of progress and no way to conceive of some values as more worthy or better justified than others?²¹ Similarly, a lack of a plausible way of evaluating values and judging some to be improvements upon others would seem to undermine our confidence in our own values. We might ask, “Why should we avow these values and not the values

²⁰ Of course, I do not mean here to imply that racism in the U.S. was (or is) a southern-only problem, that de jure racism was (or is) the only sort that matters, nor that racism is no longer a problem in the contemporary U.S. Still, I do think that despite whatever ongoing problems of racism we may face in the U.S., the idea that things are no better today with regard to racism in the U.S. than they were fifty years ago is implausible.

²¹ We might, perhaps, appeal to our own sentiments or our simple dislike of racial stigmatization in objecting to them. But unless we accept some story as to how certain sentiments or preferences can be more worthy than others (and that our own sentiments or preferences are the type which are more worthy), our objection will not come to much. We will still have to admit that those who like racial stigmatization make just as a good a case in favor of it as we make against it.

avowed by some other individual, group, or culture?”²² Likewise, if we have no notion of ethical progress, what can an individual make of her own transitions in values? Can she understand herself as having made and corrected a mistake in her former ethical beliefs and practices if progress is not possible?

Of course, not just any notion of progress will provide us with the same sort of confidence in our beliefs, the same justification for avowing some values and not others, or the same way of understanding our own value transitions in terms of being mistaken and rectifying a mistake. For instance, one common-sense conception of ethical progress posits an ideal ethical end-state. On this sort of utopian view, there is one and only one way for the world to be that is ethically best and progress can be understood in terms of coming closer to that ideal end-state.²³ An archetypal example of utopian evaluative progress is offered by Stan Godlovitch in “Morally We Roll Along: (Optimistic Reflections) on Moral Progress.” According to Godlovitch (273-6), ethical progress requires a sense of both culmination (that a process is guided by an appropriate end-state) and amelioration (that things are genuinely getting better). In Godlovitch’s words, a “utopian” account is one that holds that there is one and only one “superior determinate end-state” toward which we advance.²⁴

²² Note here that I am not suggesting that a notion of ethical progress need imply anything in particular about how we should think about or interact with other groups of people who accept radically different values. From the perspective I offer in this chapter, how to respond to diversity in ethical systems amongst different cultures remains an open question which can be answered only through a substantive discussion of the importance and interaction of potentially conflicting ethical values such as tolerance and human rights.

²³ Godlovitch, Stan. “Morally We Roll Along: (Optimistic Reflections) on Moral Progress.” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 15, no.3 (1998): 271-286.

²⁴ Godlovitch does recognize that there may, after all, be no final truth about morality, but he insists that in order to think and talk about moral progress, we must imagine that we are “on the right track,” that we getting it “finally right,” and that an appropriate culminative state exists (Godlovitch 276, 278.) This admission is a bit puzzling, however; if there turns out to be no final truth about morality, then (at least according to a utopian view) wouldn’t moral progress be impossible?

Another way of conceiving of ethical progress is in terms of a fixed evaluative standard that is not an *end*-state; I refer to this conception of progress as quasi-utopian.²⁵ On this sort of view, there need not be any one state of the world that is best; the fixed standard of evaluation might even allow for continual changing or improvement of the world. But as is the case with regard to the utopian account, on this view we will understand progress in terms of the fixed evaluative standard; progress is a matter of making changes in accord with the fixed standard.

The utopian and quasi-utopian views might seem to have much going for them. It does seem *prima facie* plausible, for example, that we can compare two or more performances (say in athletics or academics) only if we hold an unchanging standard of evaluation at the time of both of the performances. How, after all, could we find one performance better than another if we did not have a constant standard in mind? At this point in the chapter I have not said enough to show how we can make such comparative judgments without an unchanging standard in mind. I can say, only, that one of the major goals of this chapter is to make this possibility plausible. For now, I will simply gesture toward the kind of concern with these cases that can lead one to a non-utopian path. One might wonder if improvements in the standards themselves are possible and, if so, by what constant (likely higher order) standard comparative judgments about this sort of change could be made? And is it not possible that in some cases the higher order standards themselves are revisable and hence that, all the way up, there is no ideal end-state or constant standard at work. This kind of case—translated into the domain of ethics—will be the focus of much of the following chapter.

²⁵ Technically given the way I break down utopian/quasi-utopian/non-utopian, “quasi-utopian” is functioning as a sort of umbrella term under which both views that posit an ideal end-state and views that posit merely an unchanging standard of evaluation fall.

A third picture of progress that rejects the utopian and quasi-utopian pictures can be described in evolutionary terms; consider the sort of picture we find in Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn's view, of course, is often accused of failing to sufficiently explain the objectivity and rationality of science. In particular, critics object that while Kuhn may be able to account for progress during normal science, he cannot account for the progressiveness of scientific revolutions in which a paradigm shifts occurs. After all, we can perhaps see a kind of constant standard—in the form of puzzle-solving—at work in normal science, but there seems to be no standard at work in the case of paradigm changes. Thus progress on Kuhn's view is sometimes thought to be secured only in local form—relative to a particular paradigm.

The sort of view I am after is in the family of Kuhn's evolutionary model. Like Kuhn's view of scientific progress, my account of ethical progress does not posit an ideal ethical end state or any sort of unchanging standard of evaluation.²⁶ However, I also take the criticism that Kuhn fails to sufficiently account for progress through paradigm changes quite seriously.²⁷ A major point of this chapter will be to show that my view can account for progress even through radical ethical changes.²⁸

The view I will be offering takes inspiration from the ethical work of John Dewey—like Dewey, I will conceive of progress in terms of resolving problems. This conception allows for the rational revision of ends as well as means, while still providing for the possibility of progress even as our standards of evaluation or the ethical ends

²⁶ Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

²⁷ I do not mean here to take a position with regard to such criticisms of Kuhn. Rather, I simply want to take a lesson from the controversy over Kuhn's model of scientific progress and address potential parallel criticisms of my account of ethical progress directly.

²⁸ And, in fact, I will argue that other non-utopian accounts of progress that share this sort of evolutionary model fail on this ground.

toward which we aim change. Such an account of progress offers a response to the sorts of concerns raised above about justification, confidence, and rectifying mistakes. I will argue that we can gain a measure of epistemic confidence and justification in our own ethical beliefs through a process of experience, feedback, and revision.

My overall aim in this chapter is to elaborate on such an account and, in so doing, to offer a compelling way of understanding events such as the election of the first black President of the U.S. as an instance of genuine progress. The structure of this chapter is as follows. In section *I*, I put forth some clarifications as to the framing of this chapter, the particular goals I aim to accomplish, and some assumptions with which I begin. In section *II*, I put forth a major challenge which all non-utopian accounts face—a tension between maintaining objectivity and rationality, on the one hand, and explaining how radical revisions of values can be progressive on the other hand. I suggest that numerous accounts of non-utopian progress in the literature fail to satisfactorily negotiate this tension. In sections *III* and *IV*, I spell out my own non-utopian account of progress in terms of problem-resolution and consider and respond to two intuitive objections in order to more fully develop the view. I then gone on in section *V* to show how the problem-based view overcomes the tension posited in section *II* by allowing us handle even radical value transitions without abandoning objectivity or rationality. Finally, I conclude in section *VI*, by considering an important lingering worry about the problem-resolving view and gesture toward a response.

I. Clarifying the Project

I want to begin by clearing away some misconceptions about what I might be up to in this chapter. In the introduction (and throughout the chapter) I write of different types of social changes—the civil rights movement, the election of the first African-American president, the feminist movement. Yet, I refer to progress in the “ethical” domain—as opposed to the “moral” or “political” domain which might seem to better fit the examples to which I appeal—throughout the chapter. My choice of terminology here is purposeful and requires some explanation.

I set myself in this chapter a modest goal of explicating and defending as plausible a particular model of progress in the domain of the good—that is, with regard to questions of how to live and to which ideals to commit. The ethical domain contrasts with the domain of the moral—in which questions of our obligations to others and what others can demand of us dominate—as well as the domain of the political—in which the major questions are how to govern ourselves and what the state owes to us as citizens.²⁹ The examples I appeal to in this chapter clearly involve questions of all three sorts and, of course, it is impossible to tease out the strands of any given domain of value in any particular example. What I intend with these examples, then, is to provide some intuitive

²⁹ Why can't these domains be tackled with one unified model of progress? Why must the right and the just wait? It seems to me that a unified problem-resolving model which applies to each of these domains can be offered, but some modification will be required for any particular domain in accord with the characteristics of that domain that differentiate it from the other two. For instance, questions of what our obligations to others are and what others can demand of us seem to require a kind of intersubjective agreement or convergence which is not necessary in the realm of the good. It may, of course, be the case that different sorts of lives are good ones for different individuals since what is good for an individual seems to be a non-other-regarding question. But issues of the right are by their nature other-regarding; thus, what is at issue with regard to the right is not merely how to live, but how to live *with each other* and conflicts in views about what is right will likely impede our ability to live together at all. Similarly, considering the domain of the political adds additional complications to our problem-resolving model. Here our question is not how to live or even how to live with each other, but how to structure an institution like the state and to what extent such an institution should use coercive power for the sake of the right or the good. (See Scanlon 1998 (pages 171-6) for a similar way of distinguishing the right and the good.) See chapter 5 of this dissertation for more discussion of the good and the right.

motivation for the general outline of the problem-resolving view I will be putting forth.³⁰ I put off a fuller discussion of the problem-resolving account as it might apply to the moral and political domains for the future.

In a similar vein, I want to make clear that I am not interested in vindicating our view that *particular* cases of change—the end of Jim Crow or the changes brought about by the second-wave feminist movement—are progressive. Rather, the cases I refer to throughout the chapter are of a kind; they are instances of what we take, commonsensibly, to be progressive. It is in this spirit that I refer to them—if any recent social changes in the U.S. can make a plausible claim to progress, surely the movements against race and gender based stigmatization and oppression can.

Nor am I interested in defending a global historical claim about the tendency of the human race or of individual societies to progress ethically throughout history. My concern here, rather, is the very idea of evaluative progress. I aim to show that it is *possible* that some ethical practices, beliefs, or values could be better than others and that, therefore, some transitions from worse to better practices, beliefs, and values can count as genuine moral improvements.

The project I am undertaking in this chapter, then, is to offer a model of what ethical progress might be like. There is a sense in which I base this model of specifically ethical transition and improvement on a more general model of epistemological improvement. Of great importance to my view are questions of when we are warranted

³⁰ If I am solely concerned in this chapter with the good, then why not choose examples which are less complicated by such obvious association with the right and the just as well? One answer is that much of what is said in this chapter will be relevant to a future development of the problem-resolving view within the domain of the right and the just. More importantly in the context of *this* chapter, a second reason is that examples which are purely concerned with the good are likely to be significantly more controversial than examples in the domain of the right and the just. This fact about our moral disagreements about non-other-regarding virtues or ideals I take to be evidence for my claim that convergence is not likely or necessary in the domain of the (purely) good.

in our beliefs and how we can justify claims about improvement in our beliefs (whether ethical or non-ethical). The role played by epistemic reasoning and norms in my view will become particularly apparent in section V as I appeal to a notion of practical or emotional coherence.

A final caveat here is a point about what follows from understanding ethical progress in terms of epistemological improvement and/or warrant. Evaluative progress, as I understand it and will attempt to vindicate it, is a higher order notion. In thinking about the idea of progress in purely non-evaluative domains, it is clear that at issue are comparisons between (first order) beliefs. One cannot, then, sensibly make a claim to progress merely by holding many first order beliefs to be true or even by achieving convergence on these beliefs. The notion of progress requires more than this—it requires a richer set of related concepts having to do with warrant or justification or improvement.³¹

With the general aim of this chapter and the background assumptions I begin with now a bit clearer, I will now move on to say more about the main challenge for non-utopian accounts of progress which I hope to overcome.

³¹ The picture I am offering here, then, contrasts with other philosopher's approaches to the notion of moral progress. For instance, in "Moral Progress," Ruth Macklin (373) identifies the major threat to the possibility of moral progress as the lack of agreement about what normative ethical theory to accept. Her solution to this difficulty is to put forth two plausible moral principles which she thinks will be accepted by proponents of all of the standard normative ethical theories—the principle of humaneness (which has to do with sensitivity to pain and suffering) and the principle of humanity (which requires recognition of dignity and respect for autonomy). Since, according to Macklin, all standard normative ethical theories can accept these principles, it provides a way to understand moral progress; moral progress just is better adherence to these two principles (371-2). In my view, Macklin misidentifies the major threat to the possibility of moral progress. The worry as I understand it is about warrant—why are we warranted in believing the things we do about morality, why are we warranted in thinking that some moral views or practices are *better* than other moral views, and how do we know which ones are which? So I think the main reason for skepticism about ethical progress is not that we cannot obtain convergence upon first order normative beliefs, for even if Macklin is correct about convergence on the two principles she lays out, the mere fact of convergence offers no answers as to the questions about warrant and improvement. Macklin, Ruth. "Moral Progress." *Ethics* 87, no.4 (1977): 370–382.

II. *Non-Utopian Progress and the Tension*

I've suggested thus far that I will be putting forth a non-utopian model of progress. Let me say a bit more here about what is problematic about a utopian (or quasi-utopian) view. One difficulty is discussed by Michele Moody-Adams (168), who points out that the utopian view coupled with doubt about our knowledge of the proper moral destination leads quickly to skepticism about the possibility of ethical progress.³² An additional worry comes from Dewey, who is generally skeptical of the idea of unrevisable ends or an ideal end-state and who suggests that we regularly conceive of progress even when we do not have a fixed or ideal end toward which we aim. Even if an ideal end-state or unchanging standard of evaluation did exist, it is not obvious that it could help guide us in our actual ethical inquiry. This is because, as Dewey (15-16) held, ethical inquiry begins when we face a particular trouble in a given context; our concern in actual ethical deliberation is never to find a “finally right” way of living, but rather to solve the concrete troubles we are facing.³³

I find Dewey's concerns and suggestions intriguing and so I want to further develop and refine a Deweyan understanding of progress and deliberation which is thoroughly non-utopian. Other philosophers have previously taken up the project of putting forth a non-utopian account of ethical progress, but their motivations typically

³² Moody-Adams, Michele. “The Idea of Moral Progress.” *Metaphilosophy* 30, no.3 (1999): 168-185. Moody-Adam's criticism can also be applied to quasi-utopian accounts.

³³ Consider, for instance, Dewey's example of a doctor who sees that a patient is suffering medical troubles and tries to produce a situation in which these troubles will not exist or are at least mitigated. The doctor does not necessarily have in mind some ideal end-in-itself view of health; yet she or he can still determine whether the patient is making progress without having a fixed idea of health as the goal state (Dewey 1939, 46). After all, in many cases patients have little chance of reaching anything like an ideal state of health and must instead accept trade-offs with regard to different sorts of health-related troubles and goods. There are likely better and worse ways to fail to be healthy—better and worse trade-offs to make—but appeals to an ideal conception of health are unlikely to help in sorting the better from the worse. Instead of a fixed ideal of healthiness, we need a deliberative-end-in-view—an end to be aimed at in this particular context.

differ significantly from mine given that it is Dewey's insights that undergird my non-utopian view. I will argue that other sorts of non-utopian accounts (in particular, those offered by David Wiggins, Michele Moody-Adams, and Richard Rorty) fail where a Deweyan account succeeds—with regard to the tension between maintaining rationality and objectivity in ethics and explaining how radical ethical transitions can be progressive.³⁴ This tension is a result of the difficulty in constructing a non-utopian account of ethical progress that is neither too conservative nor too liberal. A conception of progress that is too conservative will inappropriately limit what sorts of changes can be progressive, while a conception that is too liberal risks losing grasp of rationality and objectivity. My purpose in the rest of this section is both to say what is ultimately unsatisfactory or incomplete about each of these accounts—and thus to lay out the major challenge I intend my own account to meet—but also to recognize the valuable insights each offers as to what a non-utopian account of progress should look like.

In my view, David Wiggins and Michele Moody-Adams offer views that err in the first direction of the tension put forth above. According to their views, ethical improvement arises through the deepening of concepts (for Moody-Adams) or the drawing of distinctions within or refinement of the concepts we have (for Wiggins)—not through the introduction of new concepts. Moody-Adams denies that progress can be achieved through the introduction of truly new concepts, because, she claims, it is impossible for us to assimilate new concepts into our web of values.³⁵ Wiggins's view also rules out the possibility of ethical progress taking the form of radical ethical change,

³⁴ Wiggins, David. 1987. *Needs, Values, Truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Moody-Adams 1999 Rorty, Richard. "Dewey and Posner on Pragmatism and Moral Progress." *The University of Chicago Law Review*. 74 (2007): 915-927. Rorty, Richard. *Feminism and Pragmatism*. Tanner Lecture on Human Values. 1990. <http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/rorty92.pdf> (accessed Apr 5, 2008).

³⁵ Moody-Adams 170-3.

for he rigidifies moral concepts to our moral sensibility here and now.³⁶ This means that were our sensibility to change in the future, the change would fail *a priori* to be an improvement.³⁷ Neither Moody-Adams nor Wiggins, then, allows *radical* ethical change to count as progress.

Here I must say more about what I mean by “radical” change and “new” values. I have in mind cases in which we replace older values with new contrasting values not merely in order to maintain coherence and consistency in our system of beliefs and values, but because the new values are seen to be *better* in some additional sense—because the new values speak to us, answer our concerns, or we are better able to live with them.

Consider, for instance, a transition from an honor-based culture to a dignity based culture. There may very well be incoherencies in an honor-based world-view. For instance, concern with family honor may conflict with one’s sense of affection for and protectiveness of one’s children when a child “dishonors” the family by partaking in (or being victimized by) sexual activity outside of marriage and one is called by a concern for honor to shun or commit violence against the child. Coherence and consistency

³⁶ Wiggins 205-6. Thompson, Brad. “Moral Value, Response-Dependence, and Rigid Designation.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 36, no.1 (March 2006): 71-94. As Thompson explains, Wiggins’ move here is intended to provide some objectivity even as we conceive of moral concepts as response-dependent. For instance, if our color vision changed and tomorrow grass appeared to be red we wouldn’t say that the grass *is* red; we’d say it now looks red because we’ve rigidified to the actual world (71-2). This allows Wiggins to avoid the objections that according to his view, in a possible world in which the human sensibility reacts positively to causing unnecessary suffering, causing unnecessary suffering would be morally good in that world. Given Wiggins’ rigidification, however, causing unnecessary suffering would not be good in that world because it is not the human sensibility in *that* world that matters, but rather *our* human sensibility in *our* world; and according to *our* sensibility, causing unnecessary suffering is bad. My dispute with Wiggins, thus, is centered on his rigidification—the objectivity-saving move—rather than his general metaethical view (a sensibility theory).

³⁷ The *a priori* here strikes me as quite problematic. Shouldn’t it be an empirical matter whether some future change to our sensibility or our beliefs/practices is progressive? In addition, this formulation introduces an illegitimate relativism. The rigidification makes it the case that our views here and now are better than other possible views just because they are “ours” and because we hold them “here” and “now.”

concerns may show that there is a problem with such an honor-based world-view, but how does the solution of moving to a dignity-based culture emerge as a solution in response to these concerns? Such a radical change appears to go beyond more minimal moves necessary to preserve coherence. This is the sort of case I have in mind when I refer to “radical” changes or “new” values; and this is this sort of case that I suggest Moody-Adams and Wiggins cannot account for as progressive.

In contrast to Moody-Adams’s and Wiggins’s views, Rorty’s view leans too far in the direction of the second aspect of the tension. Like Kuhn with regard to scientific progress, Rorty looks to evolution as a proper model for ethical progress. Fittingly, then, Rorty emphasizes the importance of “prophecy” and “imagination” in producing moral progress; he states: “Prophecy...is all that nonviolent political movements can fall back on when argument fails” and similarly that “once one sees the need for something more than an appeal to rational acceptability by the standards of the existing community, then such an act of imagination is the only recourse.”³⁸ With regard to feminist intellectual work and activism, Rorty suggests that feminists “[drop] realism and universalism, [drop] the notion that the subordination of women is *intrinsically* abominable, [drop] the claim that there is something called ‘right’ or ‘justice’ or ‘humanity’ which has always been on their side, making their claims true.”³⁹ He imagines that Dewey would offer similar advice:

do not charge a current social practice...with being unfaithful to reality, with getting things wrong. Do not criticize it as a result of ideology or prejudice, where these are tacitly contrasted with your own employment of a truth-tracking faculty called ‘reason’ or a neutral method called ‘disinterested observation.’ Do not even criticize it as ‘unjust’ if ‘unjust’ is supposed to mean more than ‘sometimes incoherent even on its own

³⁸ Rorty 1990, 10; 18.

³⁹ Rorty 1990, 13.

terms'....[Instead] appeal to a still only dimly imaged future practice....[and] make invidious comparisons between the actual present and a possible, if inchoate, future (Rory 1990, 22-3).

Much of what Rorty says here seems quite congenial to my view if interpreted through the sort of Deweyan perspective I have been sketching out.⁴⁰ But still there seem to be other problematic aspects of Rorty's view—in particular, Rorty at times seems to abandon the idea that such radical changes can be both rational and objective.⁴¹ Consider, for instance, Rorty's suggestion that when argument fails or one must appeal to something beyond the status quo standards of rationality, one must fall back on prophecy and imagination.⁴² This implies that prophecy and imagination go beyond the realm of rationality or objectivity and here I disagree; I aim to put forth an account of progress and ethical change according to which we can understand even radical changes as part of a

⁴⁰ For instance, there are different ways of interpreting Rorty's implication that there is nothing *intrinsically* wrong with the subordination of women. One thing Rorty could mean here is that whether it the subordination of women is wrong depends upon what a group of individuals or a cultures thinks about subordinating women—that whether treatment is acceptable is a matter of mere opinion or consensus. This sort of relativism would mean that we could not criticize another culture (or even our own) if we disagree and so, if this were what Rorty meant, his view would be quite problematic for feminists. But we can also interpret Rorty as simply applying a general Deweyan point—that we should reject all talk of intrinsic value because means and ends, and hence instrumental and intrinsic value, are not sharply distinguishable—to a particular case.

⁴¹ Additionally, I do not agree with Rorty's suggestion that Dewey would shun talk of justice or injustice except inasmuch as a practice is incoherent in its own terms. While such incoherence will be of great importance to the Deweyan story I offer, I also emphasize Dewey's point about the "brute fact of value" which I believe leaves room for criticizing views which we find base, trivial, cruel, etc. even if we cannot point to such a view being incoherent.

⁴² An important question here is what Rorty means by "argument failing." Does this mean that reason cannot distinguish between two opposing views of the world or rather merely that an opponent is not convinced by argument? The latter needn't be a serious difficulty—after all, young-earth creationists are not convinced by argument, but it does not follow that reason cannot distinguish between the view that the earth is less than 10,000 years old versus over 4.5 billion years old; after all, we might think that young earth creationists' responses to evidence are *unreasonable*—ad hoc, inconsistent, incoherent, etc—in which case reason does seem to have something quite important to say against young earth creationism. Similarly, one might think—as Charles Taylor (209) argues—that reason is far from impotent in the ethical realm even though cases of serious ongoing ethical disagreement exist. Taylor suggests that cases such as the Holocaust should be understood not as indicating that rational argument lacks usefulness in shaping our moral views, but rather as cases in which people abandoned reason and appealed, instead, to rationalizations and special pleadings which, in fact, did not stand up to reason. People's abandonment of reason, however, needn't reflect badly on the ability of reason to distinguish between contrasting ethical claims. Taylor, Charles. "Explanation and Practical Reason." In *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, 208-231. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

learning process such that they can be rational.⁴³ My worry is that Rorty seems to have little to say about how we can distinguish between imaginative changes which undermine women's subordination as opposed to imaginative changes which further entrench women's subordination. What makes the former progressive and the latter regressive? I worry that the only sort of response Rorty can offer here is excessively relativistic—that the former change (and not the latter) is progressive because the former is the change *we* happen to be convinced by.

Thus, there exists a tension in attempting to account for radical evaluative transitions as progressive versus maintaining a sense of ethical rationality and objectivity for evaluative transitions. Moody-Adams and Wiggins safeguard rationality and objectivity at the cost of severely limiting what kinds of changes can count as progressive. Rorty, contrastingly, embraces radical change as the vehicle of progress while seemingly sacrificing objectivity and rationality. I aim to steer a course between those taken by Wiggins and Moody-Adams on one hand and Rorty on the other. After putting forth and defending my problem-resolution account of progress (in sections *III* and *IV*), I show how my view can successfully navigate that path (in section *V* and *VI*).

III. The Problem-Based Account

The “units” in which I will be thinking about ethical progress are units of overcome or solved-problems. This is a move taken from John Dewey, who is also interested in understanding progress in a non-utopian way. By “problem” I mean to pick

⁴³ Rorty himself is unclear on this point. In “Dewey and Posner on Pragmatism and Moral Progress,” a lecture given shortly before his death, he seems more optimistic about the possibility of such ethical transitions being rational. This strikes me as quite a different tone on this topic than can be found in his earlier *Feminism and Pragmatism*.

out a certain sort of experience of ourselves, our beliefs, our values, and the world. Problems arise when we experience trouble, difficulty, or conflict—when there is a disharmony amongst our empirical beliefs, our values, and our actual lives.

Why is it the case (or should it be the case) that “problems” play the role they do in our evaluative inquiry and deliberation? Dewey hints at an answer in the nature of ethical inquiry; according to Dewey, ethical inquiry is a habit that we engage in when we experience a lack or a need.⁴⁴ When we recognize an unfulfilled need or a conflict, we typically search for a way to overcome the conflict or meet the need. This just is the kind of inquiry that Dewey takes to be characteristic of ethical inquiry; as Dewey (163) puts it in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* a moral situation (i.e. a problem) is simply one in which judgment and choice are required to produce action.⁴⁵ He further states: “*Moral* goods and ends exist only when something has to be done. The fact that something has to be done proves that there are deficiencies, evils in the existent situation.”⁴⁶

In addition, Dewey (210-11) suggests that viewing moral situations as problems that call out for solutions provides a kind of empirical test by which we distinguish a true good from a false good; the test is whether the supposed good solves the problem that prompted our inquiry in the first place.⁴⁷ Here Dewey does not have in mind grand, abstract sorts of potential “goods” such as pleasure or happiness; rather, he refers to concrete ideals, courses of action, and ways of living which we must understand in their particularity within the problem-situations in which they arise as potential solutions.

⁴⁴ Dewey 1939, 15-6.

⁴⁵ Dewey 1957.

⁴⁶ Dewey 1957, 169. A similar picture can be found in LaFollette, Hugh. “The Truth in Ethical Relativism.” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 22, no.1 (1991): 146-54. Thanks to Nathan Nobis for pointing this paper out to me.

⁴⁷ Dewey 1922.

For all that I've said about Dewey's view and problem-solving thus far, it might seem that problem-solving (and hence ethical progress) is just a matter of technical or instrumental reasoning such that when we are solving a problem we are just determining the best means given a fixed end or even multiple fixed ends.⁴⁸ Take, for example, Dewey's roast pork case in which one considers placing pigs inside one's house and then burning it down as a means to the end of having roast pork for dinner.⁴⁹ The folly of such a pursuit is obvious—surely having roast pork for dinner is not an end that exists in isolation from other ends. Any deliberation we undertake about which means to take in pursuit of a given end must take into consideration to what extent the possible means are compatible or inconsistent with our other ends. But this point (if this is what Dewey has in mind) needn't generate any objection from a sophisticated instrumentalist—certainly the shelter and financial asset provided by a house will outweigh any value provided by a roast pork dinner.

However, Dewey's roast pork case can also be understood as illuminating aspects of his view that would indeed give instrumentalists pause. An important aspect of the roast pork example which Henry Richardson (1998 116-18) emphasizes is that ends and means ought to be revised in light of each other.⁵⁰ The point is not merely that it's

⁴⁸ Henry Richardson suggests that some of Dewey's rhetoric supports this interpretation of Dewey. Richardson, Henry. "Truth and Ends in Dewey." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1998): 109-47.

⁴⁹ Dewey 1939, 40-1. Dewey borrows the following story of the supposed origin of roast pork from Charles Lamb. One day a pig wandered inside a house and the house subsequently burned down. While the owners were searching for belongings in the charred remains, they burned their fingers touching the well-done pigs. When they brought their fingers to their mouths to soothe them they had their first taste of roast pork.

⁵⁰ Richardson (116-8) argues that Dewey is highlighting three points with the roast pork example: 1) that deliberation involves "ends in view"—ends that are "framed by the agent in relation to a context of action....they are formed in reaction to some problem, obstacle, or want of fulfillment," 2) that ends ought not be separated and remote in time from the context of action because present activity—even in cases in which we might typically describe the action as being a means to an end—is always to some degree its own end and undertaken for its own sake, and 3) that ends and means ought to be revised in light of each other. Importantly, with regard to the pork case, Dewey stresses (3).

ludicrous to burn down one's house in order to eat roast pork *given one's other ends*; rather, the point is that if that's what it would take to have roast pork, then roast pork isn't worth wanting (in this situation). The means are informing us about whether the end is worthy. In other words, we cannot trust a hypothetical ranking of preferences that we bring to deliberation; part of what we do in deliberation is change our preferences given the concrete problem situation that we face.

Indeed, interpreting Dewey's take on problem-solving as having only technical or instrumental reasoning in mind involves unfounded assumptions about the nature of problems—in particular, that problems come to us in a given case of deliberation as fully formed and unrevisable such that the solving of a problem plays the role of a fixed end. This is not the sort of view that I understand Dewey to have in mind, nor is the sort of view that I wish to articulate and defend. My account of problem-solving based deliberation is intended to be dynamic—it is such that *within a given case of deliberation* ends or problems themselves can be revised.

Consider, for example, the problem of “teenage pregnancy.” Most Americans would likely agree with the general statement that teen pregnancy is a problem. But agreement fades once we try to conceive of this problem with any degree of concreteness or to place the problem in a context that would guide us in thinking about what sorts of solutions are apt. Is teenage pregnancy primarily a public health problem—a problem of getting teens to act responsibly with regard to their sexual health by choosing reliable methods of preventing unwanted pregnancy—perhaps best approached in the same way we approach encouraging people to stop smoking or to get their children recommended vaccinations?

Alternatively we could understand the problem chiefly in terms of traditional sexual morality in which case pregnancy might be seen as merely a symptom of a deeper problem such as the breakdown of the traditional family or the rejection of religious views that take procreation to be the legitimating purpose of human sexuality. Still other ways of formulating the problem might see the trouble as at least partially socio-economic in nature by pointing to evidence that in the case of some teenage mothers from impoverished backgrounds, pregnancy at a young age is a deliberate choice given a (somewhat accurate) assessment of one's life chances in a society with such significant socio-economic stratification.⁵¹

Thus, in contrast to the common view that Americans disagree as to how to solve problems such as teen pregnancy, I suggest that we do not even agree about what the problem is; and this disagreement goes a long way in explaining why otherwise reasonable individuals can seem to act in completely unreasonable ways when confronting this problem and responding to evidence about the success of various types of potential solutions.

Despite the benefits of thinking of progress in terms of problem-solving, however, this type of framework also brings challenges of its own. In the next section, I want to consider and attempt to answer two such challenges.

IV. Some First Pass Worries: Modest Proposals and the Scope of Problems

Having just laid out some details of the problem-solving account, I would like now to consider two intuitive objections to this model. My intent here is to show that

⁵¹ Geronimus, Arline and Korenman, Sanders. "The Socioeconomic Consequences of Teen Childbearing Reconsidered." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107 (1992): 1187-214.

these objections do not cause serious difficulties for the problem-solving account and in so doing, to further develop the problem-solving account. I begin with what I call the modest proposal worry, which, I think is substantially related to the previous discussion of teenage pregnancy and Dewey's roast pork story.

Given what I have said about those cases, one might worry that on my view *any* change that makes it the case that a trouble is no longer pressing counts as a resolution to that trouble (or problem). But couldn't we sometimes make a trouble no longer pressing in morally abhorrent ways? Consider a sort of "modest proposal" in response to the problem of teen pregnancy: require all children as they reach the age of puberty to undergo sterilization.⁵² Couldn't such a proposed solution to teen pregnancy be a true solution to the problem (at least on some conceptions of the problem), and hence be an instance of ethical progress as I have characterized it? But wouldn't it be crazy to suggest that sterilizing all teenagers would be ethically progressive?

Indeed, that would seem crazy, but my view does not have any such consequence; rather, this objection stems from a misunderstanding about the nature of problems and problem-solutions as they figure into my view. How we conceive of a problem and what can count as a solution depends upon background values. As I suggested earlier, a diverse set of values leads Americans to find teenager pregnancy to be troubling, but common to most everyone who finds it to be troubling are: concerns about the wellbeing of the teenagers themselves as well as the children they might come to birth or parent, the consequences of becoming a parent at an early age in terms of future education and career prospects, the ability of teenagers to make making life-altering choices about

⁵² I allude here, of course, to the modest proposal offered by Jonathon Swift. Swift, Jonathan. 1996. *Modest Proposal and Other Satirical Works*, edited by Candace Ward. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

abortion and adoption or medical decisions having to do with a pregnancy, etc.⁵³ In other words, concerns about human suffering, psychological and emotional well-being, having decent life-chances, etc. are at least *some* of the considerations that lead all of us to find teen pregnancy troubling.

And *yet*, don't we find the idea of sterilizing pre-teens unacceptable for similar reasons? Won't concerns for human suffering, decent life chances, psychological and emotional well-being (as well as bodily autonomy and the like) lead us to find the idea of forcibly sterilizing teenagers problematic?

Put another way, when we conceive of the problem of teen pregnancy with any degree of specificity, the failure of the world to live up to the background values will be understood as part of the problem itself. So long as we take teen pregnancy to be a problem (at least in part) because of concern for the interests and well-being of teenagers themselves, then problem-solutions will have to stand up to these values; and policies that violate these values will fail as potential solutions.⁵⁴

Is this to say, though, that whatever background values we begin with are fixed? Am I suggesting that it is impossible to realize that we were mistaken about some values? Again, my view would be in trouble if it had these implications. But my view does not entail that fixity of background values. In fact, the possibility of revising values—even

⁵³ I do not mean here to be offering a “correct” conception of teen pregnancy. I expect, in fact, that individuals across the political spectrum would find such a conception lacking concern for important relevant values. All I mean to say here is that whatever fuller conception of the problem we might settle on, it will, at the very least, involve these sorts of values—concerns about human suffering, psychological and emotional well-being, having decent life-chances—in addition to others.

⁵⁴ Notice here that the considerations of the interests, rights, and dignity of teens need not be understood as fixed or absolute considerations. Rather, they are to be understood as those values which we actually have that prompted us to see teen pregnancy as a problem. We do not start our ethical inquiry from scratch, questioning which if any values are worth caring about; rather we always must begin from where we are.

the most deeply held background values—is at the heart of the story of ethical progress I wish to tell.⁵⁵

Rather, what I am suggesting is a certain kind of holism about our ethical inquiry; all of the various aspects of our system are revisable. Our goals, our values, our epistemic norms, our theoretical beliefs—all must face the test of experience.⁵⁶ If we think that we have a grasp upon a problem, but we find that the means needed to solve it are morally abhorrent or have failed to perform as expected in practice, then we likely have incorrectly identified our problem and further specification or revision may be needed.

In the course of specifying and revising our problems, however, there always remains the brute fact of value—that, as Dewey (1915, 46) puts it, “judgment at some point runs against the brute act of holding something dear as its limit.”⁵⁷ All values are revisable—all must face the test of experience. But it is not the case that all values can be revised or up for grabs at once. In any given attempt to conceive of a problem or search for a solution, some values will go unquestioned. (And, indeed, in a case like the teen pregnancy case one of the values that is likely to go unquestioned—or perhaps to be reevaluated and reaffirmed—are values having to do with decent life chances for teens, teens’ emotional and psychological well-being, as well as concerns for bodily autonomy

⁵⁵ And this, recall, is where I have suggested that the views of Wiggins, Moody-Adams, and Rorty fail.

⁵⁶ One question here is whether it can really be the case that *all* aspects of the system are revisable. For instance, is the epistemic norm of coherence itself revisable? Or is coherence constitutive of rationality? And if so, how can one (rationally) revise one’s norm of coherence? In my view coherence is both constitutive of rationality *and* a revisable epistemic norm. Given what we understand rationality to be, pervasive incoherence in one’s system of beliefs and values is obviously irrational. And yet, in saying this, we need not thereby also claim that this understanding of rationality and the resulting commitment to coherence is unrevisable. It is possible that in the future we could revise our understanding of rationality, such that we could come to think that coherence (as we understand it now) is not, in fact, constitutive of rationality. This is to say that it is not true *a priori* that coherence is constitutive of rationality.

⁵⁷ Dewey, John. “The Logic of Judgments of Practice.” *The Middle Works 1899–1924*. Vol. 8, ed. J.A. Boydston, 14-82. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979.

and privacy in reproductive decisions.) In any particular case of deliberation, then, values which we hold in this brute way will tell against many potential problem-resolutions.

So one might wonder, what determines whether in a given case of problem-solving we should reaffirm values, revise them, or reject them? To shed some light here I want to introduce a bit of technical terminology; I propose that we let the technical term “problem-resolutions” be the units of ethical progress and that we distinguish this term from looser speaking about solutions or overcoming problems. The term “resolution,” I think, strikes the right cord. Consider a typical discussion of a situation in which we say that a particular individual has “unresolved” family issues.” With this phrase we seem to imply that the person feels that s/he has suffered an unacknowledged wrong or has not been given his/her due. With regard to problem-resolving, then, for a way of dealing with a problem to be worthy of the term “resolution,” each relevant value must be given its due. This contrasts with merely “overcoming a trouble” which does not similarly imply giving each value its due; after all, we sometimes overcome a trouble by “getting over it” or by repressing feelings of resentment and anger, but this is not really the same as *resolving* it.⁵⁸

The trick, of course, is determining what that due is. It is not always easy to determine which potential values matter in a given situation or how much they matter. But at a minimum one thing that “giving due” requires is actually responding to the concerns that spring from values that we already hold. For the sake of coherence and consistency, we must either live up to those values, appropriately revise the values, or

⁵⁸ What matters here is not simply what a person feels at a conscious level, but also what sorts of psychic conflicts may have been repressed rather than dealt with.

reject the values if we find them not worth holding after all. Thus we will want to avoid “special pleadings” or “rationalizations”—i.e. ad hoc exceptions to values. And we might think, as Charles Taylor (209) suggests, that these sorts of pressures toward coherence and consistency can go a long way in showing the irrationality of many of the most obvious cases of morally abhorrent events in recent history.⁵⁹

So, resolving a problem, I have suggested, requires overcoming troubles in a way that does justice to all of the relevant values to which we are already committed. But this is so far only a necessary—not yet sufficient—condition for problem-resolving. At least one additional constraint is necessary—that the course of action we take up to overcome our trouble must not cause future problems of even greater magnitude or resiliency. We can see this with regard to the teen pregnancy case. If we sterilize all teenagers, who will be paying into social security when we retire? Or more generally, who will keep the American economy going? This is a problem that is unrelated to the original teen pregnancy problem, but it’s a problem of much greater magnitude. Thus even apart from the considerations of background values, causing the breakdown of the American economy will tell against sterilization as a problem-resolution.

How do we avoid causing new difficult, distressing, and resilient problems in the future? Dewey instructs us to use intelligence and imagination to think through the consequences of different courses of action and what it would be like to live with those results. But even diligent use of intelligence and imagination cannot always prevent the troublesome sort of future problems. Dewey recognizes as much when he states that,

⁵⁹ It is worth noting the heavy burden that coherence is bearing here. Other philosophers have also noted that we might do well to think about how coherence might play a significant role in ethics. See, for instance, De George, Richard. “Ethics and Coherence.” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 64, no.3 (1990): 39-52.

“experience [should] becom[e] constructively self-regulative....The very fact of experience...includes the process by which it directs itself in its own betterment.”⁶⁰ The mark of intelligence, according to Dewey, is our ability to learn from the past how to best proceed with new problems. In other words, our methods of identifying problems and picking the best solution are not fixed; our own successes and failures will inform us as how to make changes to those methods.

Once we recognize that part of resolving problems is minimizing the production of new more serious problems in the future, we must attend to the question of the scope of problems—how do we distinguish one problem from another? When seemingly unrelated troubles which we encounter are caused by an underlying situation, do we have two problems or only one? If we manage to overcome one trouble only to then be affected by another similar trouble, have we really solved the problem, or are we just masking symptoms?

Here I think we should look again to Dewey’s example of health problems. The importance of going beyond treatment of symptoms and discovering the relevant underlying medical causes is quite obvious in these cases. If physicians concern themselves only with overcoming symptoms, they risk allowing serious underlying medical difficulties to fester. But of course, what is a symptom and what is an underlying cause is not always clear. Take a patient suffering fatigue, dizziness, and iron-deficient anemia. For some patients, low iron stores may itself be the underlying problem and iron supplements may be a solution.⁶¹ But for others the anemia may be both a cause of symptoms and a symptom itself of a more serious medical disorder such as intestinal

⁶⁰ Dewey 1957, 95.

⁶¹ Some mostly innocuous causes of low iron stores are hereditary disposition, low meat consumption, and heavy menstrual periods.

bleeding. We expect medical professionals to consider and rule out these serious underlying conditions as ultimate causes. A physician who only treats fatigue and dizziness but allows intestinal bleeding to go unnoticed has not solved the patient's problem.

Similarly, in the case of ethical, social, and political problems, accurate identification of the scope of a problem is likely to be one of the main challenges to resolving problems. Take, for example, the situation of women in the U.S. prior to and during the second wave of the women's movement in terms of career and family life. For (middle-class, white, heterosexual) women one major work/family difficulty at this time a lack of access to or opportunity for education at many elite institutions, powerful and well-paying careers and meaningful work (other than traditionally feminine jobs) more generally. There are complications here, of course, as we consider women whose race or class intersected with their sex/gender leading their relationship with work and family to different from middle-class white heterosexual women. For example, at the same time that white middle and upper-class women were denied access to the sorts of professional careers that middle and upper-class white men enjoyed, many black and working-class white women did—and were expected to—work outside of the home though typically in non-professional working-class or traditionally feminine jobs.

The conception of this work/family problem that seems to have developed among many feminists was understood primarily in terms of constricting gender ideals (especially those that relegated women to the role of homemaker and mother), overt discrimination against women in education and employment, and hostile environments in the workplace. The resolution to the problem so-conceived is exactly what transpired

during the second wave of the women's movement—the broadening of socially appropriate roles for women, legal changes ending overt sex discrimination, and legal protections for women in the workplace—all of which have significantly opened up opportunities for women.⁶²

It is quite clear, however, that even with these changes, many women (and more and more men) still face substantial work/family obstacles today. The nature of these troubles, though, has significantly changed; prior to second-wave feminism when many elite colleges and universities were all-male, when the term “sexual harassment” had not yet been invented, and when women were thought to be unfit for powerful careers. In contrast, now the trouble for women who have managed to obtain education at elite schools, who are legally protected from harassment, and who have begun climbing the ranks of the career-ladder is more a matter of how to satisfactorily combine career and family life—e.g. how to work out domestic and parenting duties in dual career households and how to avoid one's domestic and parenting responsibilities negatively impacting one's career (and vice-versa).⁶³

How should we understand the relation between these two kinds of trouble? We could think of the difficulties in the 1960s-70s and the 1980s-today as two distinct problems—one that was successfully solved in the 1970s and one that is still ongoing. Looking back to the anemia example, however, I suggest instead that we think of these

⁶² This way of conceiving of the problem and going about trying to solve it is obviously quite problematic given the situation I described earlier for black and working class white women. It seems that such solutions are not very well tailored to solve the problems of these women.

⁶³ Williams, Joan. “How the Tenure Track Discriminates Against Women.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Oct 27, 2000.
Williams, Joan, Manvell, Jessica, and Bornstein, Stephanie. ‘Opt out’ or Pushed Out?: How the Press Covers Work/Family Conflict. The Center for Work Life Law—UC Hastings College of the Law. 2006. http://www.uchastings.edu/site_files/WLL/OptOutPushedOut.pdf (accessed: May 11 2008). This is not to say, of course, that this is the only career-related trouble women today face or to deny that discrimination—though typically in more subtle and perhaps unconscious forms—is still a problem.

troubles as symptoms of the same condition—that is, different manifestations of the same root problem.

On this understanding we can say that the conception of the problem during the second wave was faulty. At that time the problem was primarily understood in terms of oppressive gender norms and legally permitted discrimination and harassment. Feminists and law-makers were right to think that the resolution of that problem *so-conceived* was legal change and a loosening of gender norms. But we are now in the position to see a new way of understanding our current troubles as the natural result of attempting to fix our earlier troubles. The root problem was not merely that women were denied access to education and career opportunities; the problem was and is that our public/work and private/family distinctions which undergird the structure of family and work in the U.S. have been constructed with an assumed gendered division of productive and reproductive labor.⁶⁴ The underlying “disorder” which caused the career/family problems, then, goes far deeper than the second-wave attempts at solutions acknowledged.

There is, however, an important worry here about insisting that there is really only one (unresolved) problem which has been causing work/family troubles since before the second wave. If we haven’t resolved *the* career-family problem, then—since ethical progress just is a matter of resolving problems—it seems to follow that we haven’t made any progress. But, this conclusion is quite counter-intuitive; how could anyone doubt that ending de jure sex discrimination was progressive?

⁶⁴ In short, the traditional gender division of labor (at least amongst middle and upper-class families) assigns to males the role of providing for the family through labor in the public sphere and assigns to women the role of taking care of the home and rearing the children. We might think, then, that the structure of work in the U.S. was developed with a certain sort of person in mind—the main breadwinner of the family whose body is not subject to pregnancy, childbearing, or breastfeeding and whose domestic needs (including producing and rearing children as well as reproducing his labor potential) are met by his wife. Though women have now entered the public/work sphere in massive numbers, the structure of work has gone largely unaltered.

Similarly, if we say that the troubles of women of a few generations ago and those of today are manifestations of the same problem, then it looks as if we haven't managed any sort of problem-resolution. And since we understand ethical progress in terms of problem-resolutions, it would appear that we haven't made any progress. But, there is still room on my view to affirm that such changes were indeed progressive. After all, we would not today be able to see the problem as we can see it now if it were not for our prior attempt at conceiving and solving our problem. It was only by making the insufficient changes that we now better grasp our problem and so can consider more compelling potential solutions.⁶⁵ Progress in this sense, then, would be diagnostic—we have a better grip on what the fundamental problem is now than we did thirty years ago.

But doesn't progress in the career/family case also go beyond mere diagnosis? Women are better off today than they were prior to the second wave. The legal and social changes which have taken place in the past few decades did overcome serious troubles women were facing. By insisting that in our attempts to resolve problems, we must look to the underlying cause of troubles, I do not mean to suggest that responding to symptoms is not progressive in its own right. Again, there is a parallel with the anemia case. After taking iron supplements a patient may experience relief from bothersome symptoms like fatigue and dizziness even if her iron remains below normal because of an underlying problem. Further investigation to find the underlying cause is obviously important here. But even if the underlying cause hasn't been discovered, a patient whose

⁶⁵ This is not all that different than the way a physician might go about treating anemia and anemia-related symptoms. One might begin with an iron supplement and check in a few months later with regard to the fatigue, dizziness, and iron levels. If the iron levels improve and are maintained and the fatigue and dizziness have faded, then no more treatment is necessary; the problem has been solved. However, if the iron levels remain low or cannot be maintained without vigilant use of supplements, further investigation is warranted.

dizziness and fatigue have gone away is better off than before. Treating the symptoms is, in a genuine sense, progressive.

This is just to say that what counts as a medical problem and how best to conceive of a particular problem is tricky business. But the slipperiness of problems and the manner in which at different stages in the diagnostic and treatment process a health difficulty might either be viewed as a problem in itself or as a mere symptom in no way undermines our belief that there can really be better and worse ways to conceive of medical problems and more and less successful ways to overcome them given our health-related values. In these cases, the end of overcoming a symptom functions very much like a Deweyan end-in-view. At any given time, we are aiming toward that end both for its own sake and for the sake of other ends (as in when we aim to overcome the patients' fatigue for its own sake as well as for the sake of making a more precise diagnosis). Just as it is with the domain of health, so I suggest it is with the domain of ethics.

V. *Ethical Values and Radical Revisions*

In the last two sections I laid out the problem-resolving account and considered a number of potential objections to that view. I'd like now to return to some claims I made at the outset of this chapter: First (I claimed) that the views offered by Wiggins, Moody-Adams, and Rorty were unable to successfully navigate the tension between maintaining rationality and objectivity and accounting for radical revision of value. Second, I claimed that my view can do better. I'd like now to say something about how my account can make good on the latter claim. That is, I want to put forth a case of radical transition in values that still maintains a sense of rationality and objectivity. So in the rest of this

section I will lay out some details of an example of a radical transition and then go on to characterize that transition as the result of a kind of learning process.

Consider the story of Tim Zaal as a potential example of this sort of ethical transition. Zaal is a former racist skinhead who currently works with the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles in providing educational programs promoting tolerance. Zaal became part of the skinhead movement as a young adult and eventually entered into a relationship with a woman he met through the movement and began a family a family with her. The couple began introducing their son to neo-Nazi ideas early on; Zaal's son's first words, for instance, were "nigger" and "kike." Meanwhile, Zaal and his partner were preparing for the Aryan war—hiding thousands of rounds of ammunition under the child's crib—initiating young teens into their Nazi organization, and assaulting gays in the streets.

What was the turning point for Zaal? There does not seem to have been any one event that provided the critical moment, but there were a number of interrelated events that led Zaal to begin to see himself and the neo-Nazi movement in a new light. One event that seems to have contributed to Zaal's eventual abandonment of the movement was an incident in which his partner suspected that their child might have American Indian ancestry. She insisted that if this were true, she would kill the child herself. This came as a shock to Zaal as he realized he did not share his partner's willingness to kill their child if he turned out to be of less than "pure" blood. After a number of other incidents involving threats to his son's safety, Zaal began to question his lifestyle. He also came to doubt the justice of the Aryan code which set up a hierarchy in which people like Zaal took great risks while leaders remained relatively safe and away from the eye of

the law. Within a few years of breaking off the relationship with his partner and leaving the movement, Zaal had begun dating a Jewish woman and a few years after that he became involved with the Museum of Tolerance.⁶⁶

How can we, on a non-utopian view of ethical progress, make sense of a story like Zaal's as an instance of a warranted ethical revision? One path to take is to rationally reconstruct Zaal's revision of his values on the basis of some type of epistemic value such as explanatory success or coherence. Surely Zaal's views were flawed on grounds of coherence; for instance, he likely believed anti-Semitic and racist stereotypes despite also having available the empirical evidence to show the falsity of those views. Yet this type of empirical deficiency does not fully explain Zaal's radical transition/problem-resolution; the transition which actually occurred was far different than the minimal transition which was required by such an empirical conflict. Zaal could have retained his commitment to the goals of the neo-Nazis, yet decided that it was not worth endangering his son or going to jail for him to be an active part of trying to achieve those goals. But Zaal did not make these sorts of changes to his worldview. Instead, he undertook a 180° degree change.

Why did Zaal choose such radical ways of solving his problem—conceived in terms of a conflict within his system of empirical beliefs and values—if more minimal ways would have done just as well? I think the answer is that in the last sentence I've mischaracterized Zaal's problem. His problem was not just a matter of having a

⁶⁶ Sansegundo-Montero, Yolanda. "From Vengeance to Tolerance." *Tusk: The Student Magazine of Cal State Fullerton* 6 (2006) <http://tuskmagazine.fullerton.edu/tusk2005/vengeance/vengeance1.html> (accessed: Sept 10 2009).

consistent or coherent belief/value system—his problem was how to have a coherent and consistent belief/value system *that he could live with*.

Here I am emphasizing the idea of being able to “live with” our values and this, I think, perhaps gestures toward a kind of coherence that does not properly get taken into account in our traditional ways of talking and thinking about coherence. I want to suggest that there is a kind of emotional incoherence which we can see, in particular, when we consider Zaal’s point of view as he and his partner suspected that their child may be part of an “undesirable” race. We might say that Zaal here found a conflict between the value of being a good father and being a good neo-Nazi (or member of the Aryan community) as he understood those values.⁶⁷ Of course, this sort of a conflict could be solved by revision to the values—e.g. understanding a good father within the context of neo-Nazism. But these revisions, I propose, were not the sort of revisions that Zaal could live with. Though they may have strictly speaking restored consistency and coherence between his beliefs and values, they could not restore a kind of practical or emotional coherence.

I want to suggest, here, that Zaal came upon a kind of evidence about what is good—what is worth pursuing, what ways of life are valuable—in finding himself emotionally and psychologically unable to live in certain ways.⁶⁸ The point here is

⁶⁷ Another way to put this is that Zaal came to see that the way of life he thought he had as a good father and a good neo-Nazi—was not possible. And seeing the impossibility of the way of life he thought he was living sent Zaal searching for another way to live.

⁶⁸ We might say that Zaal took part in a sort of “experiment in living” which yielded evidence about what sort of life is good for him. The idea here is that determining what a good life is requires more than mere theoretical investigation. Elizabeth Anderson (4) makes this point explicit: “We test our value judgments by living in accordance with them, and seeing whether we find the results satisfactory. One way they can be satisfactory is by continually *enriching* our experiences, by helping us discover *new* things we value, that we had not imagined before.” Anderson, Elizabeth. “Reply to Critics of My ‘Uses of value judgments in Feminist Social Science’.” *Symposia on Gender, Race, and Philosophy* 2, no.1 (2006): 1-6.

similar to a point we might draw from work on moral psychology and the committing of atrocities which describes how various psychological mechanisms and social arrangements were necessary for many actual perpetrators of atrocity to be able to take part. Specifically, these mechanisms and arrangements allowed individuals to take part in these atrocities while avoiding being honest with themselves about what they were doing and what they really valued.⁶⁹ The inability to be honest with oneself about what one is doing or the inability to live with the values one thinks one is committed to can be understood as a kind of evidence for those that have these experiences. This is a sort of evidence which does not fit into our usual way of thinking about evidence and confirmation of theories. These facts about what it is like to be a Nazi or neo-Nazi certainly can function as evidence from the perspective of an outsider inquiring about the goodness of such a life. But there is a significant aspect to this evidence that is first personal—a reasoner who has actually experienced being part of Nazism/neo-Nazism knows not only the same facts that we know, but also knows what it is like “for *me*” to take part in these actions.

<http://web.mit.edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/sgrp/2006/no1/Anderson0106.pdf> (accessed Apr 5 2008). See also Anderson, Elizabeth. “John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living.” *Ethics* 102, no.1 (1991): 4-26.

⁶⁹ Glover, Jonathan. *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. In the case of the Nazis, these mechanisms included increasing bureaucratization and division of labor in running the death camps, ‘cold jokes’, and purposeful humiliation. Primo Levi also offers an insight on the topic, recalling an instance in which Jews who had been stuffed into railcars for days or weeks relieved themselves in plain sight when let off the train for a few minutes. Nazi guards and bystanders “did not hide their amusement...[and] openly expressed their disgust: people like this deserve their fate, just look at how they behave. These are not *Menschen*, human beings, but animals, it’s clear as the light of day” (342). This sort of humiliation seems non-sensible even from the point of view of Nazi dogma—why go out of one’s way to humiliate Jews when the goal is to exterminate them? Franz Stangl, the commandant of Treblinka, in response to this question stated that the point was “[t]o condition those who actually had to carry out the policies. To make it possible for them to do what they did.” Laurance Thomas (376) puts this point in terms of respect—by forcing the Jews to live in subhuman conditions it became “very nearly impossible for Nazi soldiers to experience the Jews as worthy of respect.” Thomas, Laurence. “Morality, Consistency, and the Self: A Lesson from Rectification.” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2001): 374-81.

This is particularly important when we consider cases of the good—what kind of life to lead, what sort of person to be—rather than the right—what we owe to each other, what we can demand of one another, etc. In the case of the good it is of utmost importance what it is like for *me*—for each of us—to live in different ways; after all, it may be that the sort of life that is a good life for me is not good for others.⁷⁰

I'm suggesting that we can reconstruct the learning process by which Zaal came to solve his problem by rejecting neo-Nazism. And we understand his own experience of living as a neo-Nazi as a kind of first personal evidence that eventually demonstrated that such a life was not for him. If this is so, then there need be no difficulty in allowing such a radical transition—from neo-Nazi to tolerance educator—to count as progressive while maintaining a sense of rationality and objectivity.

Now I've just suggested that we can see Tim Zaal's transition in terms of him determining what sort of life was best for *him*. But I think we can also use this problem-resolving lens to see how *we* resolve problems about how to live with one another. Recall the example I mentioned at the outset of the chapter—the end of Jim Crow and the election of an African-American president. It is clear that during the civil rights movement Americans found they were unable to live with one another in the old ways—just consider of black protests, the violent reaction of southern law enforcement, and the need for the intervention of the National Guard to maintain order in southern cities.⁷¹

⁷⁰ There is room for views about the good life to differ amongst different individuals, but there seems to be a much greater pressure toward convergence in the case of the right.

⁷¹ Sokol, Jason. 2006. *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975*. New York: Vintage. Sokol (14) highlights the extent to which the protests and demonstrations of the civil rights movement interrupted the dominant narrative about race relations and the moral beliefs inherent within it. According to the dominant narrative, blacks required white paternalism, whites were the friends of blacks and understood them, race-relations were good, blacks were happy with their position in society, and segregation was good for both whites and blacks (14). For instance, according to Sokol, during the early period of the movement, when King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference came to

And note that many white individuals, particularly northern whites and white southern moderates found they were unable to live with the values they had previously—perhaps passively—espoused as they saw the fruition of those values playing out in the form of fire hoses and dogs being used against peaceful black protesters.⁷² A radical change to the old way of life—a change that we might see as having led to the very possibility we have now actualized, that of a popularly elected black president—was required to restore peace and order. So, while I have been emphasizing the first personal aspect of problem-resolution, there is also, I think, much to be said about the second personal aspects of problem-resolution—about how we resolve problems together.⁷³

VI. *Conclusion: A Lingering Worry*

In conclusion, I want to flag an important worry with regard to Zaal's transition and gesture toward a response. I've argued that we can understand Zaal's way of resolving his problem as the outcome of a certain sort of process—and hence as maintaining a sense of rationality and objectivity. However, to show that Zaal's way of resolving his problem was rational is not yet to rule out alternative ways of resolving that

Albany, Georgia, "Whites felt themselves besieged by 'outside agitators,' and the majority of residents could barely believe their eyes when the 'good Negroes' of Albany—'their Negroes'—demonstrated that they were anything but content. In the face of black protest, the white myth of 'good race relations' blew away with the wind" (12). If, as the dominate narrative claimed, whites understood blacks and blacks were happy with the status quo, why were blacks protesting? If blacks were inferior such that white paternalism was required, how had they managed to organize a movement that was able to interrupt the daily lives of white Southerners in such significant ways? The need for a new (or at least a revised) narrative to account for the unfolding events was pressing. Thus, we can see that one needn't have begun with racially-egalitarian sympathies in order to have encountered a problem during the civil rights movement; even determined segregationists shared this problem as their system of beliefs and values began to look more and more incoherent.

⁷² Sokol suggests that for many moderates the transition to acceptance of integration came not as a result of being won over by the black demand for equality, but rather as a result of witnessing the inevitable outcome of segregationist commitments—the violent suppression of African-American protestors (31).

⁷³ Of course, to talk of situations in which we solve "our" problem of how to live together is to venture into the arena of the right. As I stated earlier, fully developing the problem-resolution account with regard to the right goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

problem which are equally rationally. Why, one might wonder, couldn't a transition go in the other direction and still make a claim to being progress? For instance, if one finds oneself having emotional trouble dealing with exterminating Jews despite one's deep commitment to this goal, couldn't one resolve this problem by attempting to push away one's emotions? And thus, couldn't one rationally think genocide to be a good thing since genocide would be, in that case, something one could live with?

Here I think it must be stated up front that we cannot deny that this is *possible*. Whether one could resolve a problem of emotional incoherence by wiping out one's emotions involves both empirical facts and values. This proposed problem-resolution will fail, of course, if an individual cannot undertake it without violating background values to which they are committed or if the course of action leads to even worse troubles than the original problem. I think there is much to be said in favor of the hypothesis that in actual cases of Nazis or neo-Nazis, the proposed problem-resolution would fail for one or both of these reasons.

Consider, for instance, the sorts of values that would speak against squashing out normal human emotions—the desire to experience typical familial bonds, romantic love, or affectionate friendships and perhaps the desire to maintain an Aryan community in which loyalty and compassion (for other Aryans at least) is important. An individual who is considering this course of action will have to ask themselves: is this is what I/we have to do in order to make the world pure, is it worth it?

We cannot rule out a priori, of course, that someone could answer that question in the affirmative and could go on to bear the costs. However, one who does so still remains rationally criticizable for any glaring incoherencies, special pleadings, or refusals

to acknowledge evidence within their system of beliefs and values. Thus, if Taylor is correct in his view that Nazi beliefs and values are special pleadings, such ways of living will still fail to be rational. Hence such ways of living cannot make a claim to be equally as good as the contrasting tolerant way of life (so long as the tolerant way of life avoids or overcomes the special-pleadings and incoherencies that the intolerant way of living commits). There are, after all, many dimensions of criticism available here, including dimensions of rational or epistemic criticism.

This way of responding to the worry, however, still leaves open the question of whether a Nazi or neo-Nazi lifestyle might be *ethically* criticizable in a way distinct from criticizing of the norms of reasoning involved in such a lifestyle. If a person finds that they can live with the Nazi/neo-Nazi lifestyle *and* that they can live with any incoherence, inconsistency, or refusal to respond to evidence which the lifestyle requires, then would this not still be a good life for him or her? Indeed, I think that it may turn out in some cases that a good life—or at least *one* kind of a good life—for a particular individual is a morally horrendous life.⁷⁴ If there are individuals who cannot find tolerant, compassionate ways of life livable or who find themselves truly able to live in violent, cruel, hardened ways, then indeed it does seem that the latter way of life would be good for such persons.⁷⁵

Given Dewey's pragmatist underpinnings which I appeal to in developing my view, however, there needn't be anything worrying about admitting as much. After all,

⁷⁴ I should note again that I am primarily concerned in this chapter with the good. Even if it turns out that for a particular individual a *good* life is one of Nazism, surely it does not follow that the practices involved in Nazism are morally permissible or can be justly permitted by the state.

⁷⁵ Of course, it is a matter of empirical fact how often this is really the case individuals. I suspect that it is rare for individuals to truly be able to sustain a satisfactory existence in the ways described. Surely, though, some individuals—consider sociopaths—will be able to do so.

as Dewey insists, we learn about the good from trying out ways of life and seeing if they are satisfying. What else could a pragmatic kind of evidence for goodness be? On the sort of pragmatist-inspired view I am offering, the ultimate *ethical* authority can be no one and nothing but our own experiences of trying to live.

Chapter 3: Dynamic Deliberation of Ends—A Case Study

The main goal of my dissertation is to offer a view of how we account for radical transitions in our values as both rational and progressive. In chapter 2 I take up an understanding of ethical inquiry in terms of problem-solving as suggested by John Dewey. There, I offer an account according to which ethical progress is understood in terms of resolving problems and introduce the idea of *being able to live with* our values as a kind of evidence for such radical transitions. In that vein, I recounted the story of Tim Zaal, a former neo-Nazi who now works as a tolerance-educator and suggested that we can see Zaal's radical transition in values as an instance of problem-resolving. Zaal, I claimed, *learned* something about his ends by taking into account a kind of evidence he came upon through living with different sorts of values.

In this chapter, I want to continue to examine radical transitions in values by both explicating and further complicating the picture of deliberation and the notion of “being able to live with” our values. In particular, I want to take up the question of how we can rationally deliberate about values that are (at least seemingly) incommensurable. The major philosophical issues of this chapter, then, connect up to two (related) strands of philosophical literature—the first having to do with incommensurability (or incomparability) and the second having to do with whether and how deliberation can be *of ends*.

As Charles Taylor (170) describes it, incommensurability can typically be seen in cases of value conflict in which the values appear to be so different that we are unable to weigh them against one another in deliberation. Taylor takes Williams' famous "Jim and the Indians" case—a case of integrity versus concern for the best consequences—as an example of incommensurability.⁷⁶ Joseph Raz (1986, 322), Elijah Millgram (151), and Elizabeth Anderson (90) understand incommensurability not in terms of being unable to weigh ends or values against one another, but in terms of the importance of the ends or values at issue; incommensurability, they claim, involves ends or values (or sets of ends or values) such that they are not of equal importance nor is one value/end more or less important than the other(s).⁷⁷

Ruth Chang (2) offers a more precise definition of incommensurability in an effort to disambiguate the notion of incommensurability from what she takes to be the more significant notion of incomparability. According to Chang, incommensurability involves "items [that] cannot be precisely measured by some common scale of value" while "incomparability" refers to "items that cannot be compared."⁷⁸ Chang's (2) thought here is that even if items cannot be precisely ranked on a common scale, there might still be room for comparison. In this vein, James Griffin suggests that typically in discussions of practical reasoning, philosophers who refer to the "incommensurability" of values are in fact referring to the "incomparability" of values—"that there are values that

⁷⁶ Taylor, Charles. "Leading a Life," in *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*, ed. Ruth Chang, 170-183. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

⁷⁷ Raz, Joseph. *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. Millgram, Elijah. "Incommensurability and Practical Reasoning," in *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*, ed. Ruth Chang, 151-169. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. Anderson, Elizabeth. "Practical Reason and Incommensurable Goods," in *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*, ed. Ruth Chang, 90-109. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

⁷⁸ Chang, Ruth. "Introduction," in *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*, ed. Ruth Chang, 1-39. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

cannot be got on *any* scale, that they cannot even be compared as to ‘greater’, ‘less’, or ‘equal.’”⁷⁹ The importance of the incommensurability or incomparability of value can be seen by considering the presumed result should values turn out to be incommensurable in the sense of incomparability.⁸⁰ Chang, for instance, suggests that if items cannot be compared, then cost/benefit trade-offs seem impossible.⁸¹ Taylor’s way of characterizing incommensurability as described above also seems to point to this problem of being unable to “trade-off,” though Taylor puts this in terms of weighing. The worry that incommensurability makes trade-offs or weighing of values against one another impossible is particularly relevant from my point of view, as I will suggest in the following that some cases of value-conflict require a process of deliberation that goes beyond weighing or trading-off.

The second strand of literature which this chapter connects up with has to do with the nature of deliberation—is deliberation a process by which we merely find the best means given a fixed set of ends, or do we change our ends within the process of deliberation? The former sort of view is typically referred to as “instrumentalism”—it states, according to Elijah Milgram (2), that “all practical reasoning is means-end reasoning” and thus that “you can think about how to get what you want, [but] you can’t think about what to want in the first place.”⁸² Maurice Allais (70)—as quoted by Henry Richardson (9)—explicitly endorses this consequence of instrumentalism: “It cannot be too strongly emphasized *that there are no criteria for the rationality of ends as such*

⁷⁹ Griffin, James. “Incommensurability: What’s the Problem?” in *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*, ed. by Ruth Chang, 35-51. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

⁸⁰ I will, from this point on, use “incommensurable” in the sense that Raz, Millgram, and Anderson define it.

⁸¹ Chang 2.

⁸² Millgram, Elijah. *Practical Induction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

other than the condition of consistency. Ends are completely arbitrary.”⁸³ But if practical ends generally are arbitrary because we cannot reason or deliberate about them, then it follows that ethical ends in particular are also arbitrary and cannot be rationally revised. But this seems quite worrisome in the context of the project I have been pursuing—how, after all, could the sort of ethical progress I described in chapter 2 be possible if ethical ends are arbitrary?

In answer to this question, I describe “dynamic deliberation”—a type of deliberation that goes beyond mere means-end reasoning in allowing deliberators to *learn* about ends and to *rationally revise* values. My strategy for motivating and arguing for dynamic deliberation in this chapter is to take up an extended case study and to reconstruct the sort of rational deliberation that could lead to a rational revision of an individual’s ends in that case.

The case I will be concerned with here involves values related to health and longevity on one hand, and gendered ideals of honor or masculinity on the other hand. I believe that health is a particularly helpful case to take up as an example for the sort of deliberation we undertake about ethical values. Dewey looks to a health case in making a point about how progress is possible, and in earlier parts of this dissertation I have also leaned heavily on health-analogies in order to illuminate the difficulty in demarcating problems from one another.⁸⁴ In addition, health is also fitting here because it illuminates the ways in which problems and solutions are dependent both upon how the world is and upon our own values. Our conceptions of health, of course, are in part

⁸³ Allais, Maurice. “The Foundation of a Positive Theory of Choice Involving Risk and a Criticism of the Postulates and Axioms of the American School.” in *Expected Utility Hypothesis and the Allais Paradox*, ed. Maurice Allis and Ole Hagen, 27-145. 1979. Richardson, Henry. *Practical Reasoning about Final Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997.

⁸⁴ See chapter 2 on ethical progress. Dewey 1939, 46.

socially constructed, but they are also informed by the empirical realities of what it is like to live as a certain kind of biological being with a certain type of anatomy, physiology, and psychology. That empirical basis makes it clear that there is a distinction between thinking we are healthy and actually being healthy. I wish to keep in place an analogous distinction in the ethical realm—that is, one important constraint on what such values can be like if they are to be in any sense objective is that thinking something good is not the same as something actually being good.⁸⁵

In what follows, I want to take up the question of how deliberation about values can be rational through the lens of the particular empirical case of masculinity and men's health. In section *I*, I present a short summary of some empirical work on the topic of men's health and gender norms—in particular, the relationship between traditional masculinity and comparatively worse health outcomes in men. I then explore in section *II* the ways that men might deliberate about their values in the face of both empirical evidence about the negative health consequences of certain traditionally masculine behaviors or attitudes and in the face of other values. In section *III*, I suggest that in some cases of value-conflict, we need to engage in a type of deliberation that goes beyond instrumental reasoning and argue that “dynamic deliberation” is the sort of deliberation which can fill this role. Finally, in section *IV* I conclude with some thoughts about the social and emotional role that masculinity plays in many men's lives and how the sort of change in values I am describing might be brought about on a larger scale for the benefit of men (as well as women).

⁸⁵ This is just a different way of stating Allan Gibbard's (1955) slogan that “validity is independent of acceptance.” Gibbard, Allan. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

I. A Problem: Men's Health and Masculinity

I have stated already that the overall picture of ethical inquiry I wish to put forth is a Deweyan picture according to which what we are doing in inquiring about ethical values is attempting to solve problems. So fittingly, I will begin this chapter by laying out in some detail a real-life problem—the apparent negative health consequences of living in accord with ideals of traditional masculinity.

I.1 The Evidence

First let me say a bit about the significant health disparities that have been documented between U.S. men and women.⁸⁶ Men die five and a half years younger than women and have a 43% greater age-adjusted death rate.⁸⁷ 75% of those under age 65 who die from heart attacks are men, and heart disease deaths in general are twice as high for men as for women.⁸⁸ Men fare almost no better with regard to cancer—they have a 50% lifetime risk of developing cancer compared to women's 33.3% chance, and they die of cancer at 1.5 times the rate that women do.⁸⁹ These sex differences also go beyond conditions like cancer and heart disease, which disproportionately affect older people, extending also to injuries and accidents amongst teenagers and college-aged individuals. For example, 75% of deaths of among young people (aged 15-24 years)

⁸⁶ Similar sex-differences in health outcomes and longevity have also been noted in the United Kingdom. See Galdas, Paul, Francine Cheater, and Paul Marshall. "Men and Health Help-seeking Behaviour: Literature Review." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 49, no.6 (2005): 616-623.

⁸⁷ Mahalik, James, Shaun Burns, and Matthew Syzdek. "Masculinity and Perceived Normative Health Behaviors as Predictors of Men's Health Behaviors." *Social Science & Medicine* 64 (2007): 2201-2209.

⁸⁸ Mahalik, Burns, and Syzdek 2201. Courtenay, Will. "College Men's Health: An Overview and a Call to Action." *Journal of American College Health* 46 (May 1998): 279-290.

⁸⁹ Mahalik, Burns, and Syzdek 2201. Courtenay 1998, 279-80.

occur among males.⁹⁰ Males of that age are 3.5 times more likely to die in a car crash than their female counterparts.⁹¹ Adjusting for similar rates of bicycle use, men have a 5.5 times greater risk of death while riding a bike; and 85-90% of people who die riding a bike are male.⁹²

What accounts for such differences between men and women?⁹³ Many scholars of men's health have concluded that one important cause of the sex differences in outcomes are gender differences in health behaviors.⁹⁴ The behaviors in question include smoking, drinking and driving, using safety belts, getting health screenings, and being aware of medical conditions.⁹⁵ For instance, according to Addis and Mahalik, men have higher levels of substance abuse than women and are more likely to experience psychological or social problems resulting from their substance use.⁹⁶ Young men are less likely to use sunscreen than women, use lower SPFs when they do use sunscreen, and take far more driving-related risks.⁹⁷ Based on self-reported sexual behaviors, 2.5

⁹⁰ Courtenay 1998, 279.

⁹¹ Courtenay 1998, 280.

⁹² Courtenay 1998, 284.

⁹³ We should note, of course, as Courtenay (2000, 1386) does that sex is not the only demographic factor which correlates with significant differences in health outcomes; economic status, ethnicity, and access to health care are known variables according to which rates of illness and longevity vary. But, according to Courtenay, none of these differences can explain the differences in sex; when comparing men and women of the same economic status, ethnicity, and with the same access to health care, women inevitably fair better. Courtenay, Will. "Constructions of Masculinity and their Influence on Men's Well-being: a Theory of Gender and Health." *Social Science & Medicine* 50 (2000): 1385-1401.

⁹⁴ Courtenay 2000, 1386.

⁹⁵ Courtenay 2000, 1386. Lonquist, Lynne, Gregory Weiss, and Daniel Larsen. "Health Value and Gender in Predicting Health Protective Behavior." *Women & Health* 19, no.2-3 (1992): 69-85.

⁹⁶ Addis, Michael and Mahalik, James. "Men, Masculinity, and the Contexts of Help Seeking." *American Psychologist* 58, no. 1 (2003): 5-14. Merikangas, Kathleen, Hagop Akiskal, Jules Angst, Paul Greenberg, Robert Hirschfeld, Maria Petukhova, Ronald Kessler. "Lifetime and 12-month Prevalence of *DSM-III-R* Psychiatric Disorders in the United States: Results from the National Comorbidity Survey." *Archives of General Psychiatry* 51 (1994): 8-19. Robins, Lee and Darrel Reigier. *Psychiatric Disorders in America: The Epidemiological Catchment Area Study*. New York: Free Press, 1991. Robbins, Cynthia. "Sex Differences in Psychosocial Consequences of Alcohol and Drug Abuse." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 30 (1989): 117-30.

⁹⁷ Courtenay 1998, 280.

times as many young men are at medium to high risk for STDs than are similarly aged women.⁹⁸

In addition to differences in actual health behaviors, men and women also differ significantly in terms of health-related knowledge and perception of health risks. Studies find that men know less than women about STDs, heart disease, and cancer—which can translate into delaying seeking medical help for such illnesses—and have less accurate conceptions of their risks for health problems than women have.⁹⁹ A large body of research also indicates that men and women have significantly different help seeking behaviors in the realm of health. Addis and Mahalik (5) report on a number of studies that find that men are less likely than women to seek out help from health professionals for problems such as depression, substance abuse, physical disability, and stressful life events.¹⁰⁰

If gender differences in health outcomes/longevity are a result of gender differences in health behaviors and attitudes, another question becomes urgent—*why* do men engage in riskier health behaviors, have less health-related knowledge, and perceive

⁹⁸ Courtenay 1998, 282. There is reason here to wonder about a possible interaction between sexual orientation and gender here. After all, if all of the risky behavior at issue in these reports were taken part in during heterosexual interactions, then we would likely expect that teenage girls and young women were having just as risky sex as teenage boys and young men; assuming only heterosexual activity, each risky sex act that a male engages in would also be a risky sex act engaged in by a female. (Also complicating things is what sorts of practices are taken to be risky.) Alternatively, the difference in reported male and female risky behaviors might be a matter of reporting inaccuracies. If (heterosexual) men overestimate their number of partners or sexual encounters and (heterosexual) women underestimate these numbers, this could explain part of the difference we see in the reports.

⁹⁹ Courtenay 1998, 281-2.

¹⁰⁰ Addis and Mahalik, 5. Husaini, Baqar, Stephen Moore, and Vain Cain. "Psychiatric Symptoms and Help-seeking Behavior Among the Elderly: An Analysis of Racial and Gender Differences." *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 21, no. 3-4 (1994): 177-93. McKay, James, Megan Rutherford, John Cacciola, and Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay. "Gender Differences in the Relapse Experiences of Cocaine Patients." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 184, no. 10 (1996): 616-22. Padesky, Christine and Constance Hammen. "Sex Differences in Depressive Symptom Expression and Help-Seeking among College Students." *Sex Roles* 7, no. 3 (1981): 309-20. Thom, Betsy. "Sex Differences in Help-seeking for Alcohol Problems: 1. The Barriers to Help-seeking." *British Journal of Addiction* 81, no. 6 (1986): 777-88. Weissman, Myrna and Gerald Klerman. "Sex Differences and the Epidemiology of Depression." *Archives of General Psychiatry* 34, no. 1 (1977): 98-111.

less risk to their health when they are in fact often at greater risk? One important explanation of these differences draws attention to gender ideals and men and women's (respective) attempts to live up to masculinity or femininity norms.¹⁰¹ By taking up a social constructionist view of gender—according to which gender is something we perform and which we can, thus, “do” differently in different contexts—scholars have opened up room for thinking about how gender ideals might be different, and so how gendered health behaviors might change.¹⁰²

Indeed, research indicates that “men and boys experience comparatively greater social pressure than women and girls to endorse gendered societal prescriptions” which include norms regarding male independence, self-reliance, strength, and toughness.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Courtenay 2000, 1387-1390.. Addis and Mahalik, 2003. Galdas, Cheater, and Marshall, 2005. Mahalik, Burns, and Syzdek, 2007. See also: Sabo, Donald and David Gordon. *Men's Health and Illness: Gender, Power, and the Body*. London: Sage, 1995.

¹⁰² As Courtenay puts it, “Gender is not two static categories, but rather ‘a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people’s actions.’” Thus, gender is something we are both greatly influenced by and which we actively help to construct. But given that it is constructed, it need not be viewed as a static or a given; inasmuch as we help to create it we can also change it. Courtenay 2000, 1387. See also: West, Candace and Don Zimmerman. “Doing Gender.” *Gender and Society* 1, no.2 (1987): 125-151. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. One helpful way to illuminate the performativity of gender is offered by Janis Bohan who suggests looking to a parallel with a trait such as friendliness and the difference between a friendly person and a friendly conversation. Friendliness need not be a trait inherent in a person and the same person may be friendly or unfriendly in different situations depending upon the social expectations and pressures inherent in the context. Bohan, Janis. “Regarding Gender: Essentialism, Constructionism, and Feminist Psychology.” *Toward a New Psychology of Gender: A Reader*. ed. Mary Gergen and Sara Davis, 31-48. Routledge: New York 1997. Addiss and Mahalik 9. It is important here to note, however, that a social constructionist view of gender needn’t imply that gender is nothing more than a sort of personae that one can put on and take off at will. It is true, of course, that individuals can shape and form their own gender ideals and can resist dominant gender norms, but they do so always within a gendered context which they cannot on their own choose or control and may face significant costs for their failure to live up to dominant gender norms. In addition, for many individuals gender norms may be significantly bound up in their identity, inasmuch as the dominant gender ideology in the U.S. casts certain gendered practices—especially those having to do with appearance, sexuality, and reproduction—to be thoroughly “natural”; one might easily, then, internalize the idea that the only way to be a genuine man or woman is to live up to traditional gender norms.

¹⁰³ Courtenay 2000, 1387. Singleton (43) notes that in Australia traditional masculine traits like “physical strength, stoicism, endurance, courage, and practicality” are “remarkably enduring and represent a powerful cultural ideal” which Australian men are expected to live up to. Singleton, Andrew. “‘It’s Because of the Invincibility Thing’: Young Men, Masculinity, and Testicular Cancer.” *International Journal of Men’s Health* 7, no.1 (Spring 2008): 40-58. Similarly in the U.S. the dominant idea of masculinity has been summed up in terms of four imperatives: No Sissy Stuff! (reject the feminine), Be a Big Wheel (be

Anger and violence is encouraged and expected amongst males as opposed to females and accordingly men report using violence to prove their manhood.¹⁰⁴ As a result, boys and young men perpetrate violent crime and are victimized by it significantly more often than girls or young women.¹⁰⁵ This includes deadly violence aimed at themselves—men are much likely to take their own lives.¹⁰⁶ Finally, beginning in infancy boys are taught to be tough and not to ask for help, which may lead males to be less likely to seek out medical help.¹⁰⁷

Far from being passive recipients of gendered-messages, however, men also help to strengthen and reaffirm the ideals in living up to them.¹⁰⁸ For instance, a man's refusal to seek medical attention for an injury may be a way of enacting the masculine ideals of not displaying weakness and maintaining emotional and physical control; but in enacting the masculine ideals in this way, a man is likely also strengthening the ideals—for now any male acquaintance of his who does seek medical attention may see himself as (and be seen as) not tough enough. Ideals, then, are sustained, made tangible, and confirmed as appropriate by those who live in accord with them.

successful in terms of power, wealth, and prestige), Be a Sturdy Oak (i.e. be reliable, show no emotion, and never cry), Give 'em Hell (i.e. be aggressive and daring). Kimmel, Michael. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman. London: Sage, 1994. Brannon, Robert. "The Male Sex Role—and What It's Done for Us Lately." In *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*, ed. Robert Brannon and Deborah David, 1-40. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1976. According to Courtenay (1998, 283-4) these gendered expectations often are transmitted to boys and men in ways that relate to health. For instance, alcohol and tobacco advertising is disproportionately aimed at young men and often draws connections between alcohol or tobacco use and manliness.

¹⁰⁴ Courtenay, Will. "Youth Violence? Let's Call It What It Is." *Journal of American College Health* 48 (Nov. 1999): 141-2.

¹⁰⁵ Males commit 95% of all violent crimes in the U.S. 85% of people aged 5-24 who are murdered each year are male as are 94% of known juvenile killers. 10% of boys carry a gun to school compared to less than 2% of girls. In 80% of teen homicides involving firearms the victim is male. 6 out of 7 suicides among children or young adults occur among males. Courtenay 1999, 141-2.

¹⁰⁶ Again, many scholars have explicitly attributed this gender-gap to masculinity norms. Moller-Leimkuhler, Anne. "The Gender Gap in Suicide and Premature Death or: Why are Men so Vulnerable?" *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*. 253, no.1 (Feb. 2003): 1-8.

¹⁰⁷ Courtenay 1998, 283.

¹⁰⁸ Courtenay 2000, 1388.

Indeed, Singleton (49) has found that young men report not paying attention to health—as well as being encouraged not to do so—and thinking they are invincible.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, after interviewing men and women about health and their own health practices, Robin Saltonstall concluded that “[d]ecisions about what actions to take to be healthy or ‘health doings’ were colored by ideas about appropriate masculine and feminine behavior....[T]his suggests that the doing of health is a form of doing gender...”¹¹⁰ Additional research confirms that men’s particular health behaviors are influenced by their perceptions of what normal behavior among men is.¹¹¹ It is no surprise, then, that men with “traditional sex-role orientation” have lower levels of perceived health than similarly aged men with an “androgynous orientation.”¹¹² Similarly, Springer and Mouzon report that they “find strong evidence that endorsement of hegemonic masculinity ideals is one core cause of men’s poorer health—at least as indicated by reduced compliance with preventative health services.”¹¹³

In considering the relation between masculinity and poor health outcomes, however, it is important to recognize that men are not a monolithic group, that there is more than one way to conceive of and live up to masculinity ideals, and so men’s

¹⁰⁹ Singleton 2008.

¹¹⁰ Saltonstall, Robin. “Healthy Bodies, Social Bodies: Men’s and Women’s Concepts and Practices of Health in Everyday Life.” *Social Science Medicine* 36, no.1 (1993): 7-14.

¹¹¹ The frequency of health-promoting behaviors amongst men is higher when a man himself has less conformity to traditional masculine norms and when a man “perceive[s] that other men engage...in health-promoting behaviors.” Mahalik, Burns, and Syzdek 2207.

¹¹² Downey, Ann. “The Relationship of Sex-Role Orientation to Self-Perceived Health Status in Middle-Aged Males.” *Sex Roles* 11, no. 3-4 (1984): 211-225.

¹¹³ Springer, Kristen & Dawne Mouzon. 2009. “Masculinity and Healthcare Seeking among Midlife Men: Variation by Adult SES.” Presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA. August 2009. In particular, Springer and Mouzon report that men who scored higher on a hegemonic masculinity inventory were less likely than lower scoring men to have had a physical exam, prostate exam, or flu shot in the previous year. It should be noted that Springer and Mouzon recognize that certain groups of men—in particular non-white men, younger men, and men who have not completed a high school education—are not well-represented in the data from which they draw their conclusions.

masculine attitudes and practices often differ along with other social identities.¹¹⁴ For instance, Courtenay (2000, 1390) notes that skydiving, racing hot rods, and street fighting are different ways of enacting ideals of risk-taking, toughness, fearlessness, and invulnerability for men of different economic classes. He goes on to point out that working class masculinity often puts special emphasis on physical abilities and endurance, probably because many working class jobs for men involve physical labor in contrast to many middle class jobs which typically involve mostly mental labor.¹¹⁵ Similarly, many gay and bisexual men appear to take up the traditional connection between masculinity and sexual dominance but apply it in a homosexual context; hence amongst men who have sex with men, masculinity is often associated with sexual promiscuity and taking sexual risks.¹¹⁶ And finally, in inner-city African-American communities the aspects of traditional masculinity that emphasize invulnerability and aggression are taken to an extreme, as one earns the respect of peers through toughness, violence, and disregard for injury or death.¹¹⁷

Even putting aside the complications of race, sex, class, and sexual orientation, it can be difficult to sort out the various values—for instance, sexual prowess, honor, risk-taking, and providing for a family—that are subsumed under different conceptions of masculinity. For instance, Springer and Mouzon’s (13) study on masculinity and the use of preventative health services employs a hegemonic masculinity measure which includes eight items having to do with: male use of violence, male size and strength, attractiveness to women and sexual needs, repudiation of the feminine, traditional gender roles

¹¹⁴ Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995: 76-81, 154-63; Courtenay 2000, 1390.

¹¹⁵ Courtenay 2000, 1391.

¹¹⁶ Courtenay 1391.

¹¹⁷ Courtenay 1391.

regarding work and decision-making power, and not allowing oneself to be seen as weak or lacking confidence. But certainly men can and do conceive of masculinity differently than this “hegemonic” conception. Consider Sand et al’s (586) report on the results from their survey of over 27000 adult men in North American, Western European, and Latin American countries in which men identified as important being a man of honor and having the respect of friends much more often than success with women, having an active sex life, or being physically attractive.¹¹⁸ And we should notice that in Springer and Mouzon’s study, men had quite variable scores on the hegemonic masculinity inventory with the mean score being a 22.43 out of a possible 40 points, the mean amongst the top 25% of scorers (“masculinity idealists”) being 26.74, and the mean amongst the bottom 75% of scorers (“masculinity moderates”) being 20.66.¹¹⁹

I take the already existing diversity in conceptions of masculinity to be quite important for the purposes of the rest of this chapter. As I will suggest, in order for masculinity ideals which lead to negative health outcomes to be revised on a grand-scale, satisfactory alternatives must be available. The first step in seeing and creating these alternatives is recognizing the varied conceptions of masculinity which are already at work amongst different groups of men in the U.S.

¹¹⁸ Sand, Michael, William Fisher, Raymond Rosen, Julia Heiman, and Ian Eardley. “Erectile Dysfunction and Constructs of Masculinity and Quality of Life in the Multinational Men’s Attitudes to Life Events (MALES) Study.” *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 5 (2008): 583-94. A complication here to keep in mind is that we do not know what notions of honor and respect-worthiness are at work here. Some norms of honor seem quite tied up in masculinity norms, as in the case of the conception of honor—purportedly held by southern white men—described in Nisbett and Cohen’s *Culture of Honor*. The authors there report that southern white men exhibited significantly more intense emotional and physiological reactions to various forms of insult than do northern white men. Notably, a majority of the insult tests consisted of insults aimed at the sexuality of women to whom the men were related—e.g. fiancée, mother, sister, daughter—though the authors remark little upon this fact. Given the ways that insult for these men was tied up with gender and sexuality, it seems quite plausible to think that, in their view, honor has something important to do with masculinity. Nisbett, Richard and Cohen, Dov. *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.

¹¹⁹ 38.

II. *Deliberating about Masculinity and Men's Health: Some First Steps*

II.1 The Obvious Argument

An obvious argument seems implicit in the public health and gender studies literature I have been discussing. The main premise of this simple modus ponens can be stated as follows: If ideals of traditional masculinity lead to significantly more illness and injury, as well as earlier death for men, then these ideals are to be rejected. Public health and masculinity scholars have long made the conclusion that follows given that masculinity does seem to lead to more illness and injury and earlier death. Canavan and Haskell (212), writing in 1977, discuss the cost-benefit ratio of pursuing the “great American male stereotype” and suggest that most men “do not assess this ratio and their respective life-styles until they are confronted by some crisis in their lives,” and so implicitly affirm the “obvious argument.”¹²⁰ Similarly, Harrison (83), writing in 1978 suggests that it is “time for men to begin to comprehend [that] the price paid for belief in the male role is shorter life expectancy” and that less traditionally masculine ways of living are generally less hazardous to one’s health.¹²¹

The first-pass reasoning I have described thus far is tempting, but it is subject to a devastating objection. We can see this objection by considering two related points about our typical deliberation about health and longevity. First, we must note that we all accept

¹²⁰ Canavan, P., Haskell, J. “The Great American Male Stereotype.” *Exploring Contemporary Male/Female Roles: A Facilitator’s Guide*, ed. C. Garney and S. McMahon. LaJolla, Calif.: University Associates, 1977. Downey, Ann. “The Relationship of Sex-Role Orientation to Self-Perceived Health Status in Middle-Aged Males.” *Sex Roles* 11, no.3-4 (1984): 211-225.

¹²¹ Harrison, James. “Warning: The Male Sex Role May be Dangerous to Your Health.” *Journal of Social Issues* 34, no. 1 (1978): 65-85. Downey 1984, 213.

that *some* health risks are worth taking.¹²² So “the obvious argument”—if it is to be sound—cannot appeal merely to recognizing the costs of masculinity; the argument must have something to say about why masculinity is not *worth* the cost.

Indeed, our intuitions and deliberations about health risks make this clear. Consider our judgments about a typical woman with health risks choosing to become pregnant (an understandable risk, most of us think) versus a young man who goes BASE jumping (a foolish choice, many of us think).¹²³ Our different reactions to these choices have less to do with the degree of risk, than with our judgment of the worth of the end for which the risk is taken.¹²⁴ The kinds of values associated with a desire or decision to have a child we understand as being of utmost importance. In contrast, we are likely to think of the kinds of the values associated with BASE jumping—desire to prove one’s courage or the pleasure of taking part in an extreme sport—as trivial. Thus the question seems to be not merely the degree of risk a particular choice brings with it, but rather, a more complicated weighing of risk in relation to the value of opposing ends.¹²⁵

¹²² Consider the extent to which typical choices and behaviors involve risk. Vast numbers of American women deliberately become pregnant each year despite knowing that pregnancy and childbirth can involve serious health risks even for otherwise healthy young women. Most of us drive cars or ride in them as passengers. Many of us go skiing and have sex without condoms with partners whom they trust. All of these activities involve risk and, generally, we do not perceive these risks as unreasonable or particularly criticizable.

¹²³ BASE jumping is similar to skydiving, but typically involves jumping off of an object at a much lower altitude than is involved in jumping from an aircraft. Because of the proximity to the object from which one jumps as well as the significantly lower altitude (leaving much less time to open a parachute), BASE jumping is very dangerous. One study of BASE jumping fatalities estimates an annual risk of 1 fatality per 60 jumpers. Westerman, Rosen and Bjornstig Berggren. “Parachuting from Fixed Objects: Descriptive Study of 106 Fatal Events in BASE Jumping 1981-2006.” *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. 42, no.6 (June 2008): 431-6.

¹²⁴ Depending on the hypothetical woman’s risk-factors, her pregnancy may involve a higher risk of significant health problems and death than her male counterpart’s BASE jumping would. And yet, I think many of us are likely still to judge a higher-risk pregnancy as an acceptable or understandable risk, while criticizing BASE-jumping as pure foolishness.

¹²⁵ Of course, degree of risk needn’t fall out of the picture completely. At some point the risks involved in pregnancy and childbirth are high enough such that becoming pregnant may also begin to seem like a foolish choice.

Might there, however, be cases in which weighing or cost/benefit analysis does not capture what we are up to in deliberating about certain values? Consider a case of the ideal of courage being weighed against the significant health and longevity risks that can often be associated with acting courageously. Courage on the battlefield obviously can be particularly bad for one's health. Moral courage, as well, can involve significant risk such as in the case of Holocaust rescuers who quite literally risked their lives to save others. But do courageous agents deliberating about what to do in a particular situation use a weighing mechanism in deciding how to act? Surely the courageous agent is not reckless or foolhardy—she or he does consider risk because taking on too much risk can limit the extent to which one can accomplish the valuable actions at stake in the situation.¹²⁶

Still, I think there is an important sense in which a courageous person does not merely weigh the risks and benefits of acting courageously. Instead, some values, like courage seem to play an altogether different role in deliberation. These values function not as weights that are measured against an opposing weight such as risk, but as a sort of condition or constraint on deliberation. It is not that sometimes concern for one's own well-being outweighs the value of courage in a given situation, but rather that in some cases a particular course of action is so risky that it no longer counts as being a courageous action, but is rather a foolhardy one.

When we consider these sorts of complications involved both in typical deliberations about everyday risk-taking as well as in extraordinary deliberations about

¹²⁶ For instance, publicly announcing one's aiding of Jews in the face of Nazi policy would have incurred significantly more risk than actual Holocaust rescuing involved. But given what Holocaust rescuers were trying to accomplish—and given that such an announcement would have led to one being imprisoned and hence preventing one from contributing further to rescuing victims or otherwise resisting Nazism—this would have been a foolhardy action, not a courageous one.

remarkable risk-taking, we see the problem with “the obvious” argument. That argument assumes that it is clear and uncontroversial that any reasonable man, when confronted with the evidence of the health costs of masculinity, will conclude that masculinity is not worth the costs. But this, we should now see, is not so. What we see here is that merely showing the cost of pursuing an end does not, in itself, show that the end is not *worth* pursuing. Something stronger than the simple cost-benefit reasoning I have so far offered is necessary to capture what is going on in the case of men’s health and masculinity. Without something more sophisticated we are left with little reason to think that rational deliberation about men’s health and masculinity ought to go in the direction of concluding that masculinity should be rejected as an ideal, as opposed to the opposite direction.¹²⁷

II.2 A More Sophisticated Picture: Strong Evaluation

Suppose that a man who is confronted with the empirical evidence discussed above reasons in a way parallel to the courageous person. Suppose the hypothetical man responds to the evidence in the following way: “Well of course there is a lot of risk involved in being a real man. But so what? That’s the point. I would much rather lose a fight than walk away from one. At least then I showed I was man to stand up for myself.” Just as the courageous person will not see risks to his or her well-being as mere

¹²⁷ Why we should think that rational deliberation will conclude in one direction rather than another is a very important question. My answer to it will become evident as the chapter unfolds, but I will concede upfront that I cannot offer any guarantee that men could not rationally conclude that it is more important to live up to traditional masculinity ideals than to protect their own health and longevity. Whether these judgments are rational or not, I will argue, is a matter of what they can live with—that is, a matter of what it is like *for them* to live in different ways. Of course, the admission that it is possible that men could rationally conclude that traditional masculinity ideals are worth meeting does not mean that men in the actual world are reasonable when they come to such a conclusion. Nor does the admission mean that we cannot criticize that conclusion—and/or the background values that lead to it.

weights that count against taking the brave or morally right action, so the traditionally masculine man will probably not deliberate by weighing the health risks involved in behaving in traditionally masculine ways against concerns about his own well-being.

In these sorts of deliberations, courage and masculinity seem to play a special sort of role which can be better understood in terms of Charles Taylor's distinction between strong and weak evaluation in deliberation. According to Taylor (16) weak evaluation refers to cases in which we weigh the two alternatives and we pick the object to which we are most pulled.¹²⁸ Taylor (24) offers the example of choosing a treat from the dessert tray or deciding on a vacation destination; in these cases we can say why one treat or vacation spot may have appeared more attractive to us by offering more or less sophisticated sorts of reasons including "I simply feel like an éclair" as well as "the northern wilderness is tremendously beautiful." Yet he (24-5) insists that in the case of the vacation or the dessert tray we cannot say why our choice was "superior" to the other option in an important sense. In particular, when undertaking strong evaluation we understand one of our options as base, dishonorable, trivial, superficial, or ignoble. Thus, it is not merely that we happen to prefer one option over another or even that one option happens as a contingent matter to conflict with another goal we have chosen; rather we find that one option is incompatible with the ideals we uphold such that choosing it would be stupid, cruel, vain, cowardly, etc.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Taylor, Charles. "What is Human Agency?" *Philosophical Papers: Volume 1, Human Agency and Language*, 15-44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

¹²⁹ Taylor 1985, 18-19. So, for instance, a person committed to a certain vision of religious chastity, but who is tempted by lustful felt desires will reject acting on those desires not because he or she simply prefers chastity, but rather because he or she is committed to ideals according to which sexual activity (in their circumstances at least) is base or dishonorable. Though, at the time of their decision, a lustful chaste person may in fact be more strongly attracted to the option of having sex rather than abstaining, she or he does not take this stronger pull to have weight; being committed to an ideal of chastity, after all, seems to

This distinction helps to explain why a simple argument of the form “Masculinity has significant health costs. Therefore, masculinity is to be rejected” won’t do. Ideals of masculinity are likely to be strongly evaluated by many men. To be committed to an ideal of traditional masculinity may involve a commitment to the idea that one’s own welfare is not to be weighed against considerations of masculine honor as embodied in the “real men don’t walk away from a fight” way of thinking. Thus, a man who walks away from a fight to avoid injury or pain is likely to be seen as cowardly, weak, or contemptible.

We should note here that in cases of strong evaluation it is not merely the object of one’s choice that is being evaluated, but also one’s own character. Thus, a traditionally masculine man may not want to be the *sort* of man—a cowardly, feminine-seeming man—who places much concern on his health when masculine honor is at stake. And so, a man might, in the face of all of the evidence discussed earlier, still insist that masculinity is “worth it.”

Recognizing the role of strong evaluation in deliberation about certain sorts of values significantly complicates the question of how one might rationally deliberate about those values. A worry now arises—if strongly evaluated values cannot be treated as mere weights in our deliberation such that the costs could outweigh the benefits, and if masculine ideas are often held on the basis of a strong evaluation, then how can a traditionally masculine man ever rethink his commitment to masculinity? Is there no hope at all that men may come to reject traditional masculinities that carry great health costs?

already involve a rejection of the idea that lustful desires should weigh in favor of one’s engaging in sexual activity.

I think there is hope, but the hope is different depending upon the kind of man we have in mind. I stressed in section *I* that there are different kinds of masculinity and hence that different men “do” different kinds of masculinity depending on other social factors. But it is also the case that even amongst a group of men of similar social identities, some men likely “do” masculinity differently than others. In particular, we need to distinguish 1) those men who *accept* traditional masculinity norms, 2) those men who may be merely *in the grip* of masculinity norms, and finally 3) those men who neither accept masculinity norms nor are in their grip, but who may, for instrumental reasons, live in accord with them anyway.¹³⁰

Only individuals of type 1 are engaged in strong evaluation when they deliberate about masculinity, so in trying to give an account of dynamic change in ends, individuals of type 2 and 3 do not present any particular difficulty.¹³¹ Since these individuals are only concerned with trade-offs between preferences or desires, fundamental ends or ideals to live by are not at stake in their deliberations. The troubling case for my picture is the individual of type 1—the person who sees option A as dishonorable or base and who then chooses option B without giving weight to the significant costs of option B—because to weigh the costs would itself be base or dishonorable. Thus, the men of concern in the public health literature—those who accept and act in accord with

¹³⁰ Gibbard 68-75. To accept a norm involves avowing that norm and being responsive to demands of consistency. Being in the grip of a norm, on the other hand, will not involve avowals of the norm and might involve inconsistent actions, as seems to be the case in Gibbard’s example of the Milgram experiment.

¹³¹ Only a person of type 1 is making a strong evaluation regarding a given norm, because only individuals of this type actually accept the norm (i.e. endorse the norm in reasoning). An individual of type 2 does, of course, share the same kinds of emotional reactions as an individual of type 1 does and so will follow the prescriptions of the norm in just the same way as a type 1 individual. Yet I take it that a type 2 individual is not strongly evaluating the relevant norm in because s/he does not endorse the norm in reasoning—and may, in fact, not reason about the norm at all. Thus, if we wanted to convince an individual of type 2 to abandon his or her adherence to the norm in question, our task would not be to engage with her strong evaluation about the norm, but rather to prompt him or her to start reasoning about the norm in hopes that s/he will recognize his/her unwillingness to avow it.

traditional masculine norms to the detriment of their health—appear to be individuals of type 1. For such a man, the health costs of masculinity simply can't count against the masculine norm because he weakly evaluates the costs, but strongly evaluates the masculine norms. The question my picture of dynamic deliberation about ends must answer is: how could a man like this come to reason himself into changing his acceptance of masculine ideas?

III. Dynamic Deliberation

Before I can offer an answer as to how a man of type 1 can reason himself into rejecting traditional masculine norms, however, I need to do more to set the stage in terms of the picture of reasoning I have in mind. Recall at the outset of this chapter I referred to “dynamic deliberation”—a way of deliberating about conflicts in our values that contrasts with a typical instrumentalist or merely means-end picture of how we reason about such conflicts.

In chapter 2, I appealed to the example of Tim Zaal's transformation from neo-Nazi to tolerance educator as an example of the sort of deliberation I have in mind in which we come upon a trouble or “problem” in our course of living and offer a conception of the problem that points us in a particular direction as we search for potential solutions. We then try out the solution we settle on; if we find that a solution does not in fact solve the problem, this may lead us to reconceive the problem in light of our experience trying to live out the proposed solution. Often, our experience of trying to live with our values and overcoming troubles will lead to surprises. Consider Tim Zaal's experience of coming to find a conflict between the values associated with neo-Nazism

and the values associated with family and fatherhood. Such a conflict was likely not anticipated by Zaal at earlier points in his life as he became involved with the neo-Nazi organization or as he began a family and developed a loving parental relationship with his son.

I suggested that we could understand Zaal's radical transition in values—his eventual rejection of neo-Nazism and embrace of tolerance—as an instance of problem-resolving in which Zaal appealed to his experience as a father and a neo-Nazi as evidence of how he could satisfactorily live. I mean for this view to contrast with a picture in which Zaal simply “discovered” facts about his preference ranking or his values of which he was not previously aware—e.g. that he *actually* had valued his relationship with his son more than his commitment to neo-Nazism all along. It is not clear to me what allows us to read the “all along” back into Zaal's previous preference-ranking or values. Rather, if Zaal had never previously considered the possibility of these two values coming into conflict or considered this possibility from the armchair—without actually looking at his beloved child and realizing that his neo-Nazi commitments advised killing the child—then it is not at all obvious that he in fact had a preference or values in regard to these questions/states of affairs.

I have not yet said, however, why we should think that dynamic reasoning offers a better picture of what we do (or what we ought to do) when we make decisions about how to live. I want to argue that dynamic deliberation improves upon means-end reasoning in five ways. I should note that I don't mean to imply that dynamic deliberation is in competition with instrumental reasoning. Rather, as will become clear throughout section *III*, dynamic deliberation incorporates instrumental reasoning, but also

involves a kind of learning process that goes beyond *mere* means-end reasoning. In other words, I am suggesting that dynamic deliberation offers a more satisfactory picture of practical reasoning—and in particular, ethical deliberation—than does a purely instrumental understanding of deliberation.

How does the broader dynamic deliberation add to and improve upon the narrower instrumental reasoning? First, means-end reasoning seems vulnerable to a kind of dogmatism about ends that is not apparent in dynamic deliberation. Second, dynamic deliberation allows for a type of learning about ends that is unaccounted for on the means-end picture. Third, in contrast to the means-end picture, the dynamic picture allows *resolving* of problems (which, on my view, is a vital component of moral progress). Fourth, the dynamic model coheres better with our phenomenological experience of making certain kinds of decisions about how to live. And finally, dynamic deliberation makes room for the role of “experiments in living” in helping us to learn which ends are worth pursuing.

III.1 Dogmatism and Learning about Ends

How does instrumental reasoning—taken as a complete picture of practical reasoning—involve dogmatism? Let me emphasize here that I am not suggesting that individuals engaging in pure means-end reasoning about how to resolve ethical problems necessarily hold their ends dogmatically. Rather, my objection is that this sort of reasoning offers no satisfactory resistance to dogmatism in ethical deliberation.

A typical picture of an individual who relies only on instrumental reasoning during practical reasoning casts the deliberator as bringing a particular preference ranking

or set of ends to deliberation. She then attempts to maximize utility given that set of ends or preference ranking. We can see how dogmatism might arise when we consider whether and how the individual's ends or preference ranking might change in between problem-situations.

Nothing in the instrumental picture of practical reasoning I have been describing rules out an agent's changing her preferences or adjusting her ends. However, nothing in the instrumental picture encourages such changes either. Whether changes in one's preference ranking or fundamental ends ought to occur is not a question that instrumental reasoning attempts to or is capable of answering. Dogmatism about values, then, is quite compatible with a form of practical reasoning that relies solely on means-end deliberation. There is nothing rationally problematic, according to this picture, about dogmatically clinging to any particular value judgments. It would only be irrational, of course, to retain ends but refuse to take up the required means to those ends; but means-end coherence is indifferent as to whether we change our ends or change our means in response to such a conflict. So long as one avoids means-end incoherence, one can be rational and dogmatic on the instrumentalist view.

One might wonder here why we should take *allowing* dogmatism to count against instrumentalism. This, after all, is quite different than the claim that instrumentalism *entails* dogmatism. The instrumentalist picture does not commit us to endorsing dogmatism—one can perfectly well avoid dogmatism if one likes and instrumentalism simply has nothing to say about whether one should be a dogmatist or not.

The trouble, I think, can be best seen by considering two points. First, we should notice that less radically than stubbornly clinging to particular ends come what may, one

might instead hold the same unchanging ends out of a lack of reflection. This may at first seem even less worrying than dogmatism, but I think both dogmatism and unreflective complacency are problematic for the same reasons. If deliberation places no pressure on us to ever reflect upon our ends—or if the only reflection we undertake has to do with dropping the least important end when the means to different ends conflict in order to maintain means-end coherence—then a certain kind of learning is forestalled. We cannot, on instrumentalism, *learn* about what ends are valuable and worth pursuing. It is this sort of learning about ends which instrumentalism rules out that I am interested in offering an account of.

One might wonder here what the importance of *learning* about ends is and why it is not enough that we can change or revise our ends in ways that do not count as learning. This brings us to the second point to notice in seeing what is worrisome about allowing dogmatism (and unreflective complacency)—that the only alternative to these ways of maintaining the same ends is to revise ends in an arational manner. We can see this by comparing practical deliberation and theoretical inquiry; on the purely instrumentalist picture, values contrast starkly with theoretical beliefs. Our methods of reasoning in the theoretical case involve an expectation that our beliefs will change *in relation to evidence*. In contrast, on the means-end picture of deliberation, ends or preferences either remain permanently static (in which case deliberators maintain ends dogmatically or unreflectively) or deliberators change their ends or preferences *outside* of the bounds of decision-problems (such that the changes are not part of any rational learning process).

The important point is that in no case on the pure instrumentalist picture can a revision to a fundamental end be a rational transition. The reasoning process, here,

simply is not intended to (and cannot) offer reasons for changing one's fundamental ends. After all, if fundamental ends change this results in a new preference-ranking, which in turn presents a *new* decision-problem to be solved through instrumental-reasoning. The revision of fundamental ends, then, occurs outside of the only reasoning process that instrumentalism offers, and thus by necessity must be arational.

It follows, then, that on a purely instrumental picture there can be no learning about ends in the sense necessary for deliberation to be *of* ends. Of course, the purely means-end deliberator can learn some things about her ends; she can learn, for instance, which ends conflict and how to maximize preference satisfaction given her preference-ranking. But there is nothing on the purely instrumental picture for the deliberator to learn about her ends or preferences themselves; there does not seem to be any way for the means-end reasoner to learn that some of her ends aren't worthy or valuable after all.¹³²

But what would it be for deliberation to be *of* ends? How could we learn about what ends are worthwhile through a rational process? Aurel Kolnai, Henry Richardson, and Elijah Millgram offer helpful ways of thinking about alternatives to instrumentalism which should be considered here. Kolnai (44), for instance, takes up Aristotle's famous claim that "Deliberation is of means" and the example Aristotle offers to support this claim—the case of physicians who purportedly never question whether or not they will cure their patients, but rather only deliberate about the best means to accomplish that end.

¹³² One might want to say that on a purely instrumental picture a deliberator can learn that a particular end is not worth the cost. Perhaps the deliberator holds ends that conflict given her financial and time constraints. She could climb Mount Everest by age 60, but given the costs in terms of money and training-time, she would then be unable to achieve another goal of retiring by age 60. As it happens, retiring by age 60 ranks above climbing Mount Everest by age 60 in her preference ranking, and thus as the deliberator comes to see the conflict, we indeed might say that she learns that the end of climbing Mount Everest by age 60 is not worth the cost *given her own preference-ranking*. But note that in this case the preferences or ends are not themselves changing. The agent has not learned about whether the end in question is worthy (for she hasn't even asked this question). She has learned only that pursuing the end would be irrational given the goal of maximizing preference-satisfaction.

Kolnai (45) objects that if this were all a doctor was doing, his or her reasoning process would not be worthy of the term “deliberation” because this would involve only theoretical activities such as researching information about the patient’s disease, trying to recall relevant medical facts, and comparing the probable outcomes of different treatment options. But, claims Kolnai (45-6), in fact doctors do have much to deliberate about “because the *end* their decisions are ordained to, ‘the cure of the patient’...is largely ambiguous, admitting of different interpretations, and requiring to be more closely determined according to the peculiar features of the situation.” So typically a doctor will have to more precisely determine what the end of curing the patient involves and in doing so s/he will inevitably find that some ways of conceiving of that end conflict with other ends.¹³³

Henry Richardson (69) in *Practical Reasoning About Final Ends* takes up Kolnai’s notion of specifying an end in deliberation, which according to Richardson involves “spelling out the ways or circumstances in which it is to be pursued.”¹³⁴ Richardson (83-86) attempts to show that we can not only revise ends through deliberation, but that we can in fact create new final ends through the process of specification.¹³⁵

Finally Ellijah Millgram also seems to accept something like this picture in contrast to instrumentalism. Millgram (5) says of instrumentalism that, “if [it] is true,

¹³³ Kolnai, Aurel. *Ethics, Value and Reality*. London: Athlone Press, 1977. Thus, Kolnai (46) notes that “whether or not these [conflicting] ends can be regarded as ‘means’ to some higher ends and comparable with one another...they cannot be construed as means to the one fixed and unproblematic end of ‘curing the patient’...Deliberation, then, arises...in virtue of the multiplicity of *other ends* as affected by the envisaged use of means in the service of *one given end*.”

¹³⁴ Richardson, 1997.

¹³⁵ A final end, according to Richardson (82), is “an end that would be sought even if no other good resulted and that is reflectively accepted as appropriately self-regulating.”

experience cannot teach you what matters.”¹³⁶ But Millgram (161-3) believes, instead, that experience can teach us “what is important (and *how* it is important)” and suggests that it is this sort of discovering what one really cares about that renders incommensurable sorts of values commensurable within the process of deliberation.¹³⁷ He (88) goes on to argue further in *Practical Induction* that we must be able to learn about what matters from experience because novelty is a fundamental aspect of the world. An agent that failed to learn from experience in this way, claims Millgram (95-96), would—when faced with novel situations that are only tenuously related to interests or desires that the agent already has—find itself ceasing to be an agent at all since in that case “it does not really make a difference what the creature decides to do. And so...it will fail to decide, or decide badly, or decide in ways that fail to project coherent plans...into the world.”¹³⁸

Each of these ways of thinking about deliberation about ends echoes facets of my own view. For instance, the possibility of experience informing us about what is worthwhile is a central aspect of the sort of deliberation I have in mind. I refer here to “dynamic deliberation” as the contrast to instrumentalism; this sort of deliberation is dynamic in exactly the way Millgram notes that instrumentalism is not—our ends are in flux over time because we are learning about what ends are worthwhile in the process of trying to live.

Similarly, like Richardson and Kolnai, I take an important sort of change to our ends to be a sort of specification or clearing up of one’s own ends. One type of “getting clearer” involves specifying or more precisely conceiving of a particular value in a way

¹³⁶ Millgram *Practical Induction*, 5.

¹³⁷ Millgram “Incommensurability and Practical Reasoning.”

¹³⁸ Millgram *Practical Induction*.

that helps one overcome a seeming conflict.¹³⁹ Another sort—the sort Kolnai seems to have in mind—involves the necessary means to our pursuing one end conflicting with some other ends. An instrumentalist might have no disagreement with Kolnai if we understand him merely to be pointing out that often successfully pursuing one end rules out the possibility of successfully pursuing other ends and so we will have to make trade-offs amongst our ends based on our ranking of ends. But there is a more radical point lurking here—(previously discussed in chapter 2)—that has been made by John Dewey (1939, 40-1) and echoed by Richardson (1998 116-18)—that ends and means can inform one another.

It is in this vein that I posit “dynamic deliberation”—deliberation that can move us beyond the choice between dogmatism/complacency and arational transitions in preferences or ends. The point of dynamic deliberation is to subject our preferences or ends to a kind of critique in which ends are re-evaluated. Means-end reasoning offers only a very weak sort of critique in which we must consider whether we should pursue a particular end given our other ends; in other words, we have to ask whether pursuing a given end is compatible with maximizing our preference satisfaction. But in this case, the reflection on our ends is driven only from *within* our preference-ranking; some ends that we take to be more important can tell against the pursuit of other ends that we take to be less important. What is missing here is a notion of feedback, which we are familiar with from the domain of theoretical beliefs.

If we consider our system of empirical beliefs as a parallel to a purely instrumentalist system of preferences or ends, we will discover some significant

¹³⁹ Richardson, Henry. “Specifying Norms as a Way to Resolve Concrete Ethical Problems.” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19, no.4 (1990): 279-310.

similarities. We are likely to find in the practical case a ranking in which we hold some preferences more strongly than others and similarly we will find ourselves giving more credence to some beliefs over others. And in both systems, more important preferences or beliefs with higher credence will tell against the pursuit of less important preferences or belief in claims of lower credence. But note that only in the theoretical case is there any sort of feedback from outside of the system of beliefs or ends that can tell against or speak in favor of the beliefs or the ends. In the case of theoretical beliefs, the world can provide evidence that—in conjunction with other beliefs—tells against a belief which previously had extremely high credence. But it is unclear how the world can tell against important preferences or ends on a purely instrumentalist picture of practical reasoning. While evidence plays a very significant role in our system of theoretical beliefs, there is no analogous role for evidence to play, it seems, in the practical case—at least not if we understand the practical case in terms of pure instrumentalism.

Of course, even in the epistemic case there is reason to worry that traditional epistemologies are too conservative with regard to revising beliefs. Peter Railton and Laura Ruetsche have each made something like this point with regard to Bayesianism.¹⁴⁰ If priors are only minimally constrained—for instance, if they must only avoid being vulnerable to Dutch books—then it is quite possible in actual cases of inquiry for inquirers with very different priors to end up with radically different results, particularly given that we likely fail in typical inquiry to have a long enough run. Thus, if revision is

¹⁴⁰ Railton (77) notes that “comforting Bayesian thoughts about the influence of prior probabilities washing out in the long run require not only a very long run, but also a short run full of many more alternative hypotheses and much more active conditionalization than anything we actually see in scientific practice.” Ruetsche (93) states in the same vein: “beliefs to which rational Bayesian engines drive convergence are only as objective as our evidence and hypothesis sets are rich.” Ruetsche, Laura. “Virtue and Contingent History: Possibilities for Feminist Epistemology.” *Hypatia* 19, no.1 (2004): 73-101. Railton, Peter. “Truth, Reason, and the Regulation of Belief.” *Philosophical Issues* 5 (1994): 71-93.

slow-going because new information is always being taken in light of the existing theory, then we might expect that given real-world lengths of time the results of inquiry will continue to be heavily conditioned by the inputs.

This sort of worry, in the epistemic domain, might be taken to speak in favor of a process of updating that allows discontinuous changes. Or it might be seen—in the vein of feminist epistemology—as a consideration in favor of the diversity of inquirers and, presumably, therefore diversity in the priors with which inquirers begin. Too much discontinuity, however, is worrisome for other reasons. In the theoretical domain, we might see Kuhn’s account of science as offering plenty of discontinuity, with scientists taking up new priors after a paradigm change; but the cost of allowing so many opportunities for changing priors seems to be doubt about the possibility of continuous scientific progress.

Given these complications even in the epistemic realm, what does the analogous issue in the practical realm look like? Are preferences or ends like epistemic priors—assumptions with which we begin inquiry that can only be conservatively updated? In fact the instrumentalist picture of practical reasoning seems already to allow a sort of discontinuity that is not so usual in science. An agent can, after all, change her mind and so alter her preference-ranking at any time. But these changes will be arational. They will take place outside of the boundaries of a decision-problem and so this sort of change can never be the solution to a problem or the outcome of a decision-problem. Thus, in the same way that there are worries about the continuity of progress through paradigm changes on Kuhn’s view, we seem to be left with doubt about any sense of progress from one decision-problem to another in the realm of practical reasoning.

This is the heart of the difficulty with the instrumentalist picture. But what can the response to this problem be? How might practical deliberation involve a sense of learning that goes beyond the boundaries of a given decision-problem?

The basic insight is that we might appropriate the idea of feedback familiar in the realm of theoretical beliefs to do a similar sort of work in the realm of deliberation.¹⁴¹ I want to suggest that we can understand changes in values to be rational inasmuch as they are the result of a process that has the marks of learning. And it is here that we can productively bring to bear the notion of evidence from the theoretical realm. By looking to not just a given preference-ranking to tell against or speak in favor of a particular end, but also to one's experiences of trying to live with those preferences—trying to pursue those ends—a deliberator can bring the world, and her own experience of trying to live in it, to bear on her own preferences or ends. Instead of understanding the deliberator as deciding between two fixed ends as set by her prior preference-ranking, we can view her situation in dynamic terms—such that the ends are never fixed, but are in fact being specified and revised in the course of deliberation. The task for such a deliberator is not merely to maximize preference-satisfaction, but also to determine what preferences or ends are worthwhile.

But if a deliberator is to bring the world—or her experience of living in the world—to bear on her setting of ends in a rational way, then the boundaries of the decision-problem must be expanded. I mean this both in the temporal sense as well as in terms of the narrowness or broadness of the problem one takes oneself to have. Problems, as I characterized them in chapter 2, are conflicts between the world, our belief

¹⁴¹ See Railton, Peter. "Marx and the Objectivity of Science." *Philosophy of Science*, ed. R. Boyd, P. Grasper, & J.D. Trout, 763-774. Cambridge: MIT/Bradford Press, 1991. regarding this notion of feedback.

and value systems, and our attempts to live. But a problem-situation as characterized according to the instrumental model is a conflict within a preference-ranking and the solution is to maximize expected preference satisfaction.

For an actual deliberator to understand her situation in this narrow sense of a conflict in the preference-ranking she holds at a particular moment—the moment of deliberation—however, would be short-sighted. To see why, suppose the deliberator chooses course of action A—which maximizes expected utility given her preference-ranking at the time of deliberation—over course of action B. Suppose further that the deliberator finds herself quite discontented as she tries to pursue course of action A. Or perhaps in a slightly different case, she discovers that course of action A conflicts with the seemingly unrelated course of action C, and since she could not have known ahead of time that such a conflict might arise, she does not—at the time of the discovery—have a view about which she prefers.

Whether the deliberator finds herself unsatisfied with what it feels like to take course of action A or finds that she has a new conflict between ends for which she has not yet determined a preference rating, what needs to happen is clear—the deliberator must reopen deliberation in light of this new evidence. The new evidence in this case just is the experience of trying to live in a certain way. On an instrumentalist decision-procedure model, the deliberator has a new problem because her evidence (and possibly her preference-ranking) has changed. The fact that she has come upon a new version of an old problem does not reflect negatively upon her previous choice. Nor is there any reason to think, given her new evidence, that she will be in a better place to solve her

problem this time around—her problem, after all, is not the same as the earlier problem despite the superficial similarities.

The model of dynamic deliberation, on the other hand, needn't characterize the deliberator as having faced two distinct problems, because problems (on the dynamic model) are not individuated based on one's evidence and preference-ranking. Rather, problems are distinguished from one another in a more holistic, intuitive manner.¹⁴² In the case I have been describing, we might intuitively say that the deliberator faces the same problem a second time because she failed to sufficiently resolve it the first time. And, depending on the circumstances, we might say that the deliberator has *learned* from her failure to solve the problem; she may now have a grasp on what she can live with—and so what values are worthier than others—which she could not have had prior to actually trying out that particular way of living and experiencing it firsthand. All of this can be sensibly interpreted on the dynamic model given the expansion of the decision-problem boundaries. A deliberator can learn within a decision problem through trying out possible solutions, and this means that her eventual revision or rejection of some ends need not be arational or dogmatic.

III.2 Resolution, Phenomenology, and Ethical Experiments

¹⁴² See chapter 2 for more on how to individuate problems. One might have some important worries about abandoning the instrumentalist way of individuating decision-problems on the basis of one's preference-ranking and evidence. If an agent conceives of her own preferences as always up for reassessment, how would she ever be able to act? How could her decisions be robust enough for her to follow through with them over time? What we need, I think, is a realistic picture that captures both the sense in which agents' actual decisions are often partial, but which also acknowledges and makes room for the importance of constancy and resolution. One thing to note here is that even if our preferences are open to an infinite number of reassessments, there will also be pressure toward stability; after all, it is often the case that new evidence which will further inform our preferences is available only by committing to courses of action and trying to live with our decisions. On this point, see also Bratman's talk of framework reasons (chapter 13). Bratman, Michael. *Structures of Agency: Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

In emphasizing the aspect of my view that takes deliberation to be about problem solving, I have been hinting at the third difference between the means-end case and the dynamic reasoning case—the latter allows for the possibility of *resolving* problems while the former does not.¹⁴³ Take Anne, a workaholic who faces a conflict between the demands of her lucrative career as a financial executive and her commitments to family and home-life. Anne attempts to overcome this trouble by giving up on this particular career-path because the means to success in that sort of career prevent her from taking up the means to a rich and shared family life. Suppose that Anne experiences this decision in terms of sacrificing the career she really wants—taking up a different enjoyable, but less time-consuming, less lucrative, and less prestigious career path—in order to have the family-life she slightly prefers. At times she views her partner and children as obstacles and thinks, “If only they were not so demanding, I could have both the ideal career and the ideal family.” If Anne understands her conflict and her choice in this light, she is likely to grow to resent her partner and children over time. Certainly we would not say that Anne has “resolved” her conflict if the result of her choice is to resent her children and partner for getting in the way of her career.

In this example, Anne experiences a distinct sense of loss regarding an end which she takes to be of great value that she cannot pursue given other important ends. For Anne, not pursuing the particular career-path in question feels like quite a sacrifice; this is because even though she recognizes that given her own preference-ranking, giving up

¹⁴³ I say more about what it is to “resolve” versus merely “solve” or “overcome” a problem in chapter 2. Part of what I have in mind with this term is the usual connotation the term has when we say something like, “Mary has unresolved issues with her mother; she blames her mother’s affair for causing her parents to split up. The only way that the two of them can be in the same room together without fighting and crying is for them to ignore the past altogether.” The implication of “unresolved” here seems to be that Mary is not at peace or that her relationship with her mother is unsettled.

the particular career is the thing to do, Anne still places a significant value on that sort of career and so feels lingering regret. As I emphasized above, in pure instrumental reasoning such as Anne's, questions of whether the conflicting ends are valuable—or in what ways or contexts they are valuable—needn't arise; and should those questions arise, they cannot be answered within any sort of rational process of deliberation.

In contrast, dynamic deliberation does prompt us to reflect on our prioritization of ends in response to conflicts, allows for the potential that transitions with regard to those ends can be the result of a rational learning process, and, therefore, allows for the possibility of *resolving* conflicts like Anne's.¹⁴⁴ What if we imagine Anne's problem not in terms of how to respond to a conflict between the fixed value she places on career and family, but rather as a question of how to live—a question about how to value career and family-life, what it means to value these aspects of one's life, what features of career and family-life matter, and what the many different sorts of roles these goods might play in one's life. And what if we evaluate Anne's decision-making not on the basis of satisfying her preference-ranking, but in terms of her own ability to live? The version of Anne I described above—full of resentment and mourning for her previous career—does not fare well on this measure, even if it is the case that she has maximized her preference-ranking.

¹⁴⁴ Note here that I am not claiming that dynamic deliberation can *always* provide a resolution to a conflict. Some ways of overcoming problems, after all, will involve real losses. What I claim regarding dynamic deliberation is simply that at least in *some* cases it offers the *possibility* of resolution—a possibility that pure instrumental reasoning does not offer. Notice, for instance, that in the more realistic work-life conflicts which many women in the U.S. face, a full resolution to this sort of problem might not be possible without significant social changes in what work looks like. (Though even in the case where such social transformation is not likely to occur, there might still be room for a partial sort of resolution given that women still have to figure out how to live their lives in satisfactory ways within the constraints the natural and social world present to them, if those constraints cannot be transformed.)

A cynical observer might suggest that Anne needs an “attitude adjustment”—that she needs to “get over it.” Anne has a perfectly pleasant career that provides her with intellectual stimulation, room for growth, and a fine salary to support her family; a loving partner who asks only that Anne contribute more-or-less equally to their domestic and child-care duties and to the maintenance of their relationship; and children who simply request that she be there to read a bed-time story, attend a soccer game, and help with their homework. The observer, I think, makes a good point, though one that needs to be spelled out a bit. It may be in this case that it is Anne’s values themselves—and the attendant emotions—that are in need of revision in her situation. Anne might, for instance, upon enjoying reading a story to her children after dinner, begin to question why if she and her children both find great satisfaction in these activities, she still resents such activities as costing her a career-sacrifice. And upon sharing domestic duties equally for a week, Anne might come to see just how much of this burden she had previously unreflectively placed upon her partner and might wonder how that burden has affected her partner’s career.

These sorts of experiences can prompt Anne to reflect on her own beliefs and commitments as she becomes aware of her own significant incoherence. Anne might begin to wonder why she has until now felt entitled to pursue her own career-path in ways that inevitably damage her partner’s career. Does she really see her partner’s career as inherently less valuable than her own, as her actions seem to express? Does she really believe that their earlier arrangement regarding domestic and child-care duties was equitable, and if not, can she upon reflection endorse such unfair division of labor in the home? While Anne might at first be drawn to various ad hoc sorts of rationalizations to

justify the unfair arrangement—e.g. what Anne does “really makes a difference in the world” as opposed to her partner’s less influential career field, Anne makes more money, Anne is more dedicated, etc.— if she considers these justifications by the light of reason, she will likely find them wanting. And what can Anne then make of her situation?

We can imagine ourselves in this moment of recognition wondering, “Who am I? How did I become this person—someone who clings to weak rationalizations to convince herself that it is acceptable to treat her partner like hired-help and someone who begrudges her children the few minutes it takes to read them a bed-time story rather than treasuring such moments?” One might further reason, “If this is the sort of person/partner/mother that I have to be in order to succeed in my career-path, then maybe such a career path—at least as I have been conceiving of it—isn’t worth wanting in the first place.”¹⁴⁵ Anne might come to see her earlier attitude toward her career and family in terms of shallowness (e.g. her emphasis on the prestige and rigor of her career field in contrast to her partner’s “less important” field) and distance from her family (e.g. she is being led into a superficial relationship with her family because her fixation on ideals having to do with career success leave no room for appreciating other sorts of values).

After this sort of deliberative process, Anne can potentially *resolve* her problem by adjusting her ends to avoid her earlier shallowness and selfishness. Having adjusted her strong evaluations in this way, we can easily imagine Anne pursuing a different sort of career-path—whether this means taking up a different sort of attitude toward the career she has been developing or switching careers—that is more compatible with an equal

¹⁴⁵ That is, the career-path is not worth wanting *for Anne*. Anne has discovered that her previous career is not good *for her* (and her family) in these particular circumstances, given her particular values. It does not follow that such a career-path is inherently bad or would be bad for any person who took it up. We can imagine a person in very different circumstances than Anne’s doing quite well in such a demanding career-path.

relationship with her partner and a more involved parental role. And with this new outlook, we can imagine that Anne might pursue a career in this new way without any significant feelings of resentment or mournfulness about the loss of her previous career. After all, if her previous conception of a career isn't worth wanting (for Anne at least)—and if her previous valuing of it was based in shallowness—then there is nothing for Anne to feel resentful or mournful about.¹⁴⁶

The possibility of *resolving* a conflict as I have been characterizing it is importantly related my claim that the dynamic understanding of deliberation better fits our phenomenological experience of deliberation in cases like Anne's. Through a process of recognizing a conflict, reevaluating her ends, reconceiving a problem, and coming to see her previous valuations as shallow and selfish, Anne achieves a state of psychic satisfaction in changing careers whereas she previously experienced significant resentment and mourning at the thought of such a change. How could Anne have come to this contented state of mind regarding her family-career situation if she were engaging only in means-end reasoning and thus if she continued to value her previous career as an end, and so understood herself as *sacrificing* her career for another end given the constraints placed upon her by her overly-demanding family?

But I take it that the original psychic state of resolution I described Anne as being in is not just possible, but is something that many of us actually experience when we make such momentous decisions about our own values. And I take it that at least some of

¹⁴⁶ I do not mean to suggest here that the fact that one cannot successfully pursue two different goals that those goals are not worth wanting. So of course it is not the case that anytime a career-family conflict arises at least one of those ends is not in fact worthy. Rather, I am suggesting that sometimes when a deliberator specifies what in particular is important about each of two conflicting ends or what the appropriate pursuit of those ends must look like, she or he will come to see that their particular specification of an end was foolish or superficial and that a better specification is available and avoids the conflict in question.

the time such a state of peacefulness is rational. That is, it is not just that we sometimes “get past” our legitimate resentment or mournfulness—by deciding for instance that it is better to forget the past wrong and push away those feelings—but rather that there really is nothing to be resentful or mournful about.

I am suggesting, thus, that the phenomenology of making these kinds of choices in our actual lives suggests that at least some of the time we are deliberating in accord with something like the dynamic reasoning model and not the means-end reasoning model. For if we only reasoned according to the means-end reasoning model, then how would it be possible to achieve a state of rational peacefulness—having learned that one was mistakenly understanding one’s ends in a foolish or superficial way—after settling a conflict between our pursuits of different ends? If all we have done is maximized expected utility based on our preference ranking, then there are likely to be real—perhaps even fundamental—values that have gone unfulfilled. Hence, there would likely be a loss to mourn and a lack of contentment.

One might worry here that the sort of resolution I am describing could easily justify cases of sour grapes or adaptive preferences of oppressed people. After all, if the goal of practical deliberation is rational peacefulness or contentment, then when we find ourselves significantly constrained (whether by nature, luck, social structure, or other people) with regard to what ends we can achieve, will we not have reason to adapt our preferences to match the status quo?

Imagine, for instance, an altered version of Anne—Anne*. Like Anne, Anne* seems to have a conflict between work and home-life, but some important details are different. Anne* has a satisfying forty-hour a week job in a field she enjoys. The job

pays well and her employer provides generous family-related benefits. The trouble, for Anne*, is that she finds herself taking responsibility for the vast majority of child-care and domestic labor at home and finds that she and her husband routinely place more importance on his career than her own. Anne* feels ambivalent about these aspects of her life, sometimes resenting that her husband's career always trumps her own, but at the same time feeling that as a mother, it is appropriate that she be the primary care-giver to the children. When Anne* has suggested changes to this division of labor, her husband has been dismissive and insists that it is naturally Anne's responsibility to take care of the home, and perhaps she should work less outside of the home in order to do so.

If contentment and peacefulness is the goal and her husband adamantly refuses to change the division of labor in the home, does it not seem that Anne* perhaps ought to adapt her preferences such that she becomes satisfied with the traditional gender division of labor in her home? Indeed, there is nothing in dynamic deliberation—or instrumental reasoning for that matter—to prevent Anne* from taking this course. I think, however, that the worry that dynamic deliberation encourages the adapting of preferences in these sorts of cases is overblown.

We should note first that it is a misrepresentation of dynamic deliberation to characterize the goal of practical reasoning as peacefulness or contentment. Understandably, one might take my talk of what “one can live with,” as implying that the meta-end of any deliberation is to arrive at some sort of stable condition of contentment or peacefulness. But as I intend the phrase, it comes apart from mere contentment or peacefulness.¹⁴⁷ The sort of contentment or peacefulness I am interested in must be such

¹⁴⁷ Perhaps there could be situations, after all, in which contentment/peacefulness itself would be something one couldn't live with? Suppose, fantastically, that one is in a situation in which she or he can choose

that this feeling is warranted or appropriate and perhaps that one has learned that this feeling is appropriate. So while it is certainly possible that Anne* might attempt to respond to her conflict by ignoring or discounting her own feelings in order to produce contentment, it does not follow that this would be a strategy Anne* could live with in the sense of being content for the right reasons.

What would it be for Anne* to learn that contentment is appropriate? This couldn't involve merely Anne*'s adapting her preferences *given* the constraints she faces, for that would allow Anne* to be a victim of false consciousness. Rather, it would have to be the case that the conflict Anne* faces prompts her to *reflect* upon her values and she comes to perceive things differently or finds new evidence she did not take into account previously.¹⁴⁸

Considerations of contentment, or at least appropriate contentment, point to a final contrast between means-end and dynamic reasoning. Only the latter appears to capture the importance of Millian “experiments in living.” We can find an appreciation for experiments in living in both Mill and Dewey, both of whom emphasize the need to test our values by living with them. Along these lines, Elizabeth Anderson argues that

whether to enter something like Nozick's (pg 42-44) experience machine which will provide a contented and peaceful mental and emotional state by preventing one's awareness of and reflection on the suffering and injustice experienced by oneself or others. Contentment/peacefulness that ignores suffering and injustice—considered from the perspective of the chooser prior to the choice—seems here to be something many of us could not live with. In this sort of case, I obviously mean by “could not live with” not that once in the state described the individual will lack peacefulness/contentment, for, by hypothesis this the very state the individual will be. Rather, I mean that we find through imagining what it would be like to live that way that it is not something we could live with. If we imagine a world full of pain and injustice, yet imagine ourselves unable to reflect on it, care about it, or attempt to change it, we find ourselves repelled; to choose to enter the machine, we feel, would be a base choice. Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

¹⁴⁸ In a similar vein, since mere contentment/peacefulness is not a meta-end of dynamic deliberation, my view allows plenty of room for “sadder but wiser” type cases—that is, cases in which deliberation leads to an individual's disrupting their feelings of contentment/peacefulness because they come to find such a state inappropriate (or something which they cannot live with).

Moral philosophy has been dogged by a model of justification, known as reflective equilibrium, in which moral opinions are checked only by other moral opinions, without any connection to the wider world....To get moral philosophy beyond [this] Scholastic method...we need to identify a body of evidence for value judgments that is based on experiments in living.¹⁴⁹

Again we can see an analogy to our system of non-normative beliefs. When we find a conflict in our empirical beliefs, one way to try to overcome the conflict is to consult the world—we search for evidence, or perform an experiment, redesign an old experiment, etc. We would not accept any method of searching for equilibrium in our scientific beliefs that did not involve some kind of testing of our beliefs against the world. Should we not, then, expect that our moral judgments also must be expected to pass such tests if we are to be justified in holding them?¹⁵⁰

But, the model of means-end reasoning in determining what to do—like the model of reflective equilibrium in determining what moral views to hold—does not allow for any testing of our values or preference ranking within a given decision problem. Rather, as I've argued above, the model locates the boundaries of decision problems in such a way that our preferences/values are already formed at the outset of any given decision problem. Thus, to make room for the role of experiments in living, we must reconceive the boundaries of decision-problems and the goal of solving such a problem.

IV. A Tentative Solution

IV.1 Strong Evaluation and Dynamic Deliberation

¹⁴⁹ Anderson 2006, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Recall the case of Tim Zaal.

In the last section, I've tried to show why we should prefer dynamic deliberation over means-end reasoning and to allay some worries about dynamic deliberation. But now we face a second question about reasoning. What is the relationship between the distinction Taylor offers—the strong/weak evaluation distinction—and the two sorts of deliberation I have been contrasting—means-end reasoning and dynamic deliberation?

Recall that according to Taylor there are two criteria that pick out weak evaluation from strong evaluation. First, in a case of strong evaluation “there is...a use of ‘good’ or some other evaluative term for which being desired is not sufficient; that is, in strong evaluation, some desires are themselves seen as bad (or base, trivial, dishonorable, etc.).”¹⁵¹ Second, in weak evaluation the grounds for putting aside one desired object is “its contingent incompatibility with a more desired alternative” while in strong evaluation “[s]ome desired consummation may be eschewed not because it is incompatible with another, or if incompatible this will not be contingent.”¹⁵²

Taylor's talk of contingency here refers to the nature of the incompatibility. In weak evaluation, one chooses one desired object over another because the latter object is incompatible with other desires the agent *happens to have* or other real-world constraints on the agent's choice.¹⁵³ Thus, Taylor appeals to examples of deciding between vacation destinations which each offer different sorts of valuable experiences when one can only afford one trip. In such a case, one must weigh the costs and benefits and accept a trade-off; for instance, the experience of hiking in the wilderness of the north-west might be worth the cost of being unable to enjoy the beaches of the southern east coast. Had one's

¹⁵¹ Taylor 1985, 18.

¹⁵² Taylor 1985, 19.

¹⁵³ I take it, then, that the two criteria are importantly interrelated—it is because there are reasons in play that are grounded in ways that go beyond one's own preferences that a non-contingent incompatibility exists in cases of strong evaluation.

preferences with regard to the values at stake in the two different sorts of vacations been otherwise one would have chosen the other vacation; and had one made additional income or earned more vacation days, one would have decided to take both vacations. A different choice given different preferences or a choice of both given different circumstances of the world would have been no worse a reflection on the agent.

Contrastingly, in the case of a strong evaluation, the incompatibility is not the result of my *happening to have* conflicting preferences or my circumstances being such that I cannot—for practical reasons—pursue two options and so am forced to choose. As Taylor puts it, in a case of strong evaluation, “I refrain from committing some...act” such as a cowardly act “...not because this act at the moment would make any other desired act impossible...but rather because it is base.”¹⁵⁴ And, importantly, this use of the evaluative term “base” does not mean merely that I have a preference (however strong) in favor of courageous actions or against cowardly ones. Rather, the sort of deliberation Taylor portrays seems to involve a commitment that goes beyond one’s preferences such that one thinks that even if she did prefer the cowardly act, that act would still be base (and, the chooser, therefore, would be of low character). That is, we treat certain values or norms associated with courage and cowardice as valid independent of our desires or our acceptance of those norms.

The connection between strong evaluation and dynamic deliberation I am interested in is as follows. As I have been characterizing cases of strong evaluation, it is hard to see how one could ever choose against the strongly evaluated value—at least when it is in conflict with a weakly evaluated value. The grounds of the reasons one takes oneself to have in cases of a conflict between one strongly-evaluated value and one

¹⁵⁴ Taylor 1985, 19.

a weakly-evaluated value will typically be such that the former value will “trump” the latter. For instance, won’t the importance of avoiding cowardly actions always seem to trump bare concerns for one’s own welfare?¹⁵⁵ At stake, after all, are evaluations both of one’s choice and oneself—as foolish, perverted, honorable, kind, courageous, base, etc. Thus, no matter how strong one’s preference in favor of protecting one’s own health and life, the soldier will still evaluate him or herself as acting cowardly should she or he avoid risk (for a worthy mission) *merely* in order to preserve his or her own well-being, without concern for the mission.

This contrasts with cases in which two weakly-evaluated values are at stake and one can simply choose by weighing the costs and benefits as in the case of choosing between potential vacations. The potential vacationer can simply consult his or her preference ranking to rationally decide which vacation option to choose. Whichever vacation will maximize the vacationer’s preference-satisfaction will be the rational choice.

As I suggested at the conclusion of section *II*, for many men masculinity ideals are strongly evaluated. But if, as I suggested above, strongly evaluated values always trump weakly evaluated ones—and if men weakly evaluate their masculinity ideals—then how could a man respond to the evidence discussed in section *I* by revising or rejecting his masculinity ideals? Perhaps even more problematically, how can an individual choose when two strongly evaluated values are in conflict? After all, we might question

¹⁵⁵ This is not to say, of course, that to act courageously involves giving no concern at all to one’s welfare. To the contrary, as pointed out earlier, courage contrasts with foolhardiness. For instance, a soldier might risk his or her life—and the safety of his or her unit—by pursuing a spontaneously planned mission to save a fellow soldier from capture by the enemy. But if this mission is not likely to be successful, or is likely to end with the soldier’s unit suffering more casualties or captures, or will diminish the likelihood of success in future rescue missions aimed at freeing larger numbers of captured soldiers, then it does not seem that going through with this mission would be courageous.

whether concerns for one's health can be mere weak evaluations, similar to valuing a vacation or a dessert. If health is actually also a strongly evaluated value, then the conflict will be between two strongly evaluated values.

Take Tom who finds himself with a conflict given his ideals of traditional masculinity and the newly discovered fact that his adult son is gay. Tom's ideals of traditional masculinity may cast homosexuality in men as feminine, base, contemptible, and thus as worthy of rejection, distancing, and perhaps even violence. But masculinity is not the only value that Tom holds dear. He also accepts and endorses norms of parental love for his children according to which it is cruel to reject or abandon one's child and detestable to endorse violence against them. Here Tom seems to have a conflict between two strongly evaluated values; for each of the values at stake, to violate them is base or contemptible, and yet Tom can't seem to live up to both.

What can Tom do but revise—or at least better specify—his ends? Given the ends as Tom currently understands them, no matter what course of action he takes with regard to his relationship with his son, he will fail to live up to one of his ideals. In so failing, then, he will evaluate himself as being either contemptible—should he accept his son's sexuality—or cruel—should he reject his son.¹⁵⁶

This is a situation that cannot be represented satisfactorily on a means-end picture. If Tom comes to means-end deliberation with the preference ranking as I have described it—a ranking in which he essentially has two “trumps”—he will be unable to choose any action at all. Means-end reasoning, then, cannot be of any use to him until he

¹⁵⁶ If fact, Tom's ideals might even be such as to find it contemptible or cruel even to consider the competing course of action. Take the ideal of parental love which Tom accepts. Wouldn't someone who accepts this ideal find it cruel, cold, or superficial that one might even *consider* one's masculine pride as weighing in favor of a course of action like rejecting one's child?

changes his preference ranking or at least determines what his preference ranking is, since he likely would not have a preference between these two ends having never anticipated this sort of conflict between them arising.¹⁵⁷ But changing the preference ranking—or determining what one’s preference ranking is—is not something that the means-end picture models; it has no advice about how Tom should go about changing his ends and it is unclear what it could mean for Tom to determine what his preferences are *within* a given decision-problem. Tom can, of course, experience a sort of conversion in which his ends change or in which he chooses one of the conflicting values as more important than the other; but this would not seem to involve any *learning* about ends and would be only an arational change according to instrumentalism.

How can dynamic deliberation help here? Dynamic deliberation conceives of Tom’s “problem” in a very broad sense. His problem is not simply that the means to being masculine and the means to having a certain kind of parental love for one’s children happen to conflict. Rather, his problem is something like how to live with his values in the world in a satisfactory way. A dynamic picture of reasoning will make clear that whatever Tom’s solution will be, it cannot count as a true solution unless it is sustainable and something that he can live with.

Suppose that Tom responds to his conflict by revising his commitment to his parenting ideal. He used to be committed to an ideal that found most cases of rejection or abandonment of his child to be cruel; but he is not sure, anymore, that this is so. Perhaps he thinks “a parent who truly loved their son could not watch him feminize himself in this manner” and so breaking off the relationship with the child—if the child won’t renounce his sexuality—is the thing to do.

¹⁵⁷ Millgram “Incommensurability and Practical Reasoning” 154.

Suppose, though, that a few years down the road Tom is having trouble living with his decision to cut off all contact with his son. Tom witnesses the father-son relationships amongst his male friends and family members and he realizes that part of his conception of being “a real man,” is being a good father. He notices that many other men in his social circle also struggle with not approving of their adult children’s values and lifestyle choices. And yet, these other fathers still manage to maintain their relationships with their children and proudly tote their new grandchildren around at social events. Perhaps in light of these realizations, Tom recognizes his discontent in living this way and so reopens deliberation about what to do.

Tom now finds that his earlier reasoning—the thought that a loving father would not watch his son act so contemptibly—holds much less sway than it did earlier. After all, he does not feel very much like a loving father; in fact, he wonders in what sense he is even a parent at all (let alone a loving one) given that he has no relationship with his son. And if Tom has actually been acting badly in his role of a father, or has given up that role completely, then to what extent is he living up to his ideals of masculinity?

Tom might also, upon noticing how he is failing to live up to his own masculinity ideals, be prompted to reevaluate those ideals. Why, he might wonder, does he feel that accepting his son’s sexual orientation would be a strike against his own masculinity? Perhaps at issue is Tom’s feeling that he has failed at turning his son into “a real man.” But if it is truly a masculine failing to raise a gay son, then Tom has failed in that way regardless of how he approaches his relationship with his adult son. Rejecting his son, then, looks less like what his conception of masculinity demands and more like a way of avoiding personal shame.

And so, before Tom can try to resolve his problem, he must reconceive of what his problem is. He previously saw his situation as being a conflict between his norms of parental love and his norms of masculinity. But now he sees that the situation is even more complicated—for these norms are not completely distinct. One aspect of masculinity, on Tom’s understanding, involves being a good father. So Tom cannot solve his problem merely by choosing one value over the other; he must rather specify what these values involve in the first place. What is it to be a good father? What sorts of disagreements over lifestyle or values between parents and children would a good father overlook or get past, and which are important enough to break off a relationship?

And further, failing to be a good father is not the only way Tom seems to be failing to be a real man according to his own standards. If producing a gay son is, according to Tom’s understanding of masculinity, then what is Tom accomplishing by rejecting his son? Isn’t he just unwilling to acknowledge his own failures by pretending that they do not exist? But is this the way to be masculine—to be unable even to acknowledge what he takes to be a failure?

At this point in his life, Tom also has evidence relevant to his choice that may not have been available to him at the time of his earlier decision. Tom now knows what it feels like to live in a way that privileges some aspects of masculinity over others and he did not find those values something he could live with. Tom has, in a sense, conducted his own experiment in living in which he tested a certain understanding of his values and found it unsustainable.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ One hopes, of course, that not every hesitant or conflicted parent of a glbtq child need *actually* perform the experiment, but rather that they can appeal to evidence provided by the experiments of others or through their own imaginative trying out of different courses of action.

How does Tom resolve this problem? It depends, of course, on the details. Perhaps, in light of his recognition that part of being a “real man” is being a good father, he finds a way to continue his relationship with his son despite their disagreement over certain other aspects of masculinity. Or perhaps Tom conducts another sort of experiment of trying to reestablish the relationship with his son and seeing how his own sense of masculinity is affected; Tom might find that he does not feel any less secure in his own manhood in being around his gay son. Or maybe Tom does continue to feel somewhat uncomfortable with his son’s sexuality, but finds that discomfort something he can live with just as he lives with other sorts of value disagreements in his relationships with other friends and family members. Alternatively, perhaps Tom in talking honestly with his son about his sexuality comes to realize that it has nothing to do with how Tom raised him, and thus that Tom would never have been able to control this aspect of his son’s identity; in that case, why should Tom take his son’s sexuality to reflect in any way on him?

There are a few important differences in the interpretation of the story I have just told depending upon whether one views Tom’s deliberation through a dynamic or an instrumental lens. On the means-end reasoning model Tom has faced two separate decision problems—each with a different preference-ranking held in the background. Each of them was an equally correct decision inasmuch as he chose a course of action that best maximized expected utility given his preference ranking at the time. The fact that he found his first decision unlivable and changed his preference-ranking in response to an experiment in living in no way impugns the first decision; nor does the fact that the

second decision turns out to be sustainable show that it is a better decision than the former.

Alternatively, the dynamic reasoning model views Tom's process of solving his conflict more broadly. And this change in the characterization of Tom's problem seems to make all the difference. It is only by considering the entire procedure—adjusting the ideals, making the first decision, trying to live with it, readjusting the ideals, and then making the second decision and living with it—that we can see Tom as having learned something about which ends are worth holding and hence as having made a revision that is rational and progressive. With this broader understanding of a decision problem comes a broader conception of what it is to resolve a problem. Correct decisions—those that maximize expected utility given a preference ranking—are not the same as successful decisions—decisions that we can live (well) with.¹⁵⁹

IV.2 Masculinity and Health: A Problem and Potential Solution

¹⁵⁹ One might worry here about a neurotic person. Given her personality, she may second-guess every decision and so might have trouble living well with any decision. It is the very need to make decisions that seems problematic for her. Would this person then always fail to make successful decisions as a result of her neurosis? Similarly, what about a person who sees the world through rose-colored glasses and makes the best of every decision, no matter the actual outcome? She is able to live well even with decisions that we would intuitively find extremely foolish by convincing herself that “everything happens for a reason” and thus that any seemingly bad decision is actually leading her down the correct path. Is it really the case that all of her decisions are successful? In response to these sorts of cases we can hearken back to the question of how to understand contentment or ability to live (well) with a value, belief, or decision. At issue here is not just whether the agent in question experiences satisfaction or contentment; rather, the point is to experience *warranted* satisfaction or to have *learned* that contentment is appropriate. In the rose-colored glasses case the agent's satisfaction is not warranted even if she does falsely believe that decisions with horrible consequences will eventually lead her to the right path, and even if she does experience a feeling of satisfaction; thus, her decisions are not successful ones even if she believes otherwise. The neurotic agent is more complicated. She continually questions whether she has made the best decision and on my view this sort of neuroticism will make her decisions fail to be successful. After all, if she continually second-guesses herself regardless of the actual consequences of her decisions, then she will be unable to feel warrantably contented—instead she feels unwarrantably discontented.

In terms of masculinity and men's health, the deliberative process I am envisioning is one in which the strong evaluation attached to traditional masculinity is most apt to be shaken by a conflicting strong evaluation—perhaps a conflict that arises from one's conception of masculinity itself. Where might this conflict arise?

Consider, the evidence discussed by Courtenay (2000, 1386) demonstrating that generally healthy men tend downplay many health issues and make health visits much less than women do. This gender difference can also be found amongst men and women “with health problems,” but the difference disappears when considering only populations of men and women suffering from *serious* health problems.¹⁶⁰ Why might men be willing to reject or put aside traditional masculine norms when faced with serious health problems? We might surmise that the cost of traditional masculinity is simply too high when a serious health problem is involved—at some level of threat to their health, men simply take their preference to remain healthy (and perhaps living) as more important than their commitment to masculinity.

But if this were the case, we would still have a weighing model at work. Men would reject one strong evaluation based on a second strong evaluation which they found to be more important or weightier. I think this picture of weighing strong evaluations against one another is likely mistaken. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, I am interested in investigating an alternative sort of model which is not based on the weighing metaphor.

I suspect what is occurring in these sorts of cases is that the ideal of masculinity itself prompts the conflict. Consider a working-class man who suffers a moderate hand injury while working on the car in the garage with a neighbor. He thinks the injury is not

¹⁶⁰ Courtenay 2000, 1386.

so bad—the pain is not unbearable and the bleeding seems persistent but has been mostly controlled with a towel. He suggests to the neighbor—“Let’s just secure the cloth onto the wound. It might need stitches, but I can suck and up and deal with it.” Perhaps the neighbor recounts his own story of taping up a wound rather than seeking medical treatment. A few minutes later the injured man’s wife comes out to the garage to see how the repairs are going. She asks about the towel taped to her husband’s hand and he explains. Her response contrasts importantly with the neighbor’s. Instead of praising or encouraging her husband’s “toughness,” her thoughts focus in on the question of what the consequences might be if the injury is left untreated and turns out to be worse than her husband assumes. What if the wound becomes infected? Or heals improperly without stitches? Or what if the cut is deeper than the husband thinks and has injured his muscle? These sorts of injuries could cause significant financial difficulty for a worker who depends on his ability to perform physical labor to make a living. Thus, the wife may insist that her husband seek treatment immediately. The neighbor perhaps will concur indicating that “we might be talking about your livelihood here.”

The conflict in this story is between two aspects of masculinity ideals likely to be prized by working-class men—first a certain sort of “toughness” and second a commitment to being the (or at least *a*) breadwinner. If the hand-injury is understood as merely a matter of some pain or only as a cosmetic issue, then the breadwinner aspect of masculinity is not at stake; the “toughness” aspect of masculinity, then, may dominate as the only relevant strong-evaluated value. But once it is recognized that even moderate physical injuries can potentially threaten one’s working ability, the strongly-evaluated “support the family” aspect of masculinity will be relevant as well. And thus various

aspects of masculinity ideals are in conflict with each other. And concern about toughness, I think, begins to look silly when one's ability to make a living might be at stake. The injured man may imagine what it would be like if the worst possible consequences came about—losing one's job, possibly ending up unemployed, or at best being able to contribute significantly less financially and in terms of benefits to one's family. He might find that potential situation much more threatening to his conception of himself as a "real man" than the threat of appearing to be a bit of a wimp in running to the E.R. after an injury. Such an incident might lead the individual to more generally question his concerns about being "tough"; he could then come to see these concerns as trivial or superficial and ask himself how he could have potentially risked his ability to make a living just to look macho in front of a neighbor.¹⁶¹

Another sort of conflict might be one in which a man finds himself unable to live up to a particular conception of masculinity because of external circumstances. O'Brien, Hart, and Hunt, for instance, note that chronic illness in a man's life can be seen "as a period of 'intensity, severity, and uncertainty' that can pose fundamental challenges or 'dilemmas'" for a man's view of himself as masculine.¹⁶² This is likely because chronic health problems undermine men's ability to live up to traditional masculine norms and "this prompts men to reflect on taken-for-granted gendered beliefs and the practices of masculinity they engaged in prior to illness, as well as those affected subsequently."¹⁶³

Again what seems to occur in these cases is not that men reject their prior commitment to

¹⁶¹ My discussion here should not be taken as an all-out endorsement of this sort of "breadwinner" aspect of masculinity.

¹⁶² Courtenay (2000, 1389) points out that men with chronic illnesses often experience doubt about their own masculinity and sometimes hide their medical problems in order to preserve a sense of masculinity.

¹⁶³ O'Brien, Rosaleen, Graham Hart, and Kate Hunt. "Standing out from the Herd: Men Renegotiating Masculinity in Relation to Their Experience of Illness." *The International Journal of Men's Health* 6, no.3 (Fall 2007): 178-200.

a certain conception of masculinity merely because the costs are too high or because they are no longer able to meet that ideal. Instead, the idea is that the new situation a man faces may prompt his reflection on and reevaluation of prior ideals. He may—given the new evidence he experiences regarding what it is like to live with a certain sort of health problem—begin to see his earlier ideals as superficial, vain, or foolish.

We can see such reevaluations—in men’s own words—in qualitative research studies such as described in “Applications of Masculinity Theories in a Chronic Illness Context.” On this topic, scholar Lisa Gibbs notes that a number of the men she interviewed (all of whom were afflicted with chronic arthritis) seemed to have overtly recognized and rejected the role of traditional masculinity in their lives as a result of their illness. One man, Harry, was asked why he had waited so long to seek treatment for his condition. He responded (“with a smile and then a laugh”), “Because I’m a real guy—and there’s nothing wrong with me!” Gibbs notes that Harry is well aware of the extent to which his past behavior—behavior he now finds laughable—was influenced by his investment in traditional masculinity. In fact, he goes on to say that he found the emotional difficulties—presumably those which arose as a result of his inability to fulfill masculine ideals—more debilitating than the pain of the arthritis itself. In a similar vein, another interviewee, Kevin, says:

I have been profoundly affected by normal social expectations of men. We should be self reliant.... It took me years, it took decades, well for one decade at least, where I never told anyone I was affected by arthritis. I covered it up totally. Friends of mine, closest friends, didn’t know that I was profoundly affected. I would scarcely speak to my doctor about it, but it was when I got to the point where I couldn’t walk up a flight of stairs, I couldn’t continue working in the work that I love, I was broke, I couldn’t go out for dinner with friends, I couldn’t go on holidays, my life was just closing in on me, that I had to look carefully at the social expectations on me. I had to look carefully and think, well, what does our society expect of

men ... We're expected to find the answers ourselves, we're expected not to need support from others, we're expected to be a kind of rock of strength for others. And I've had women friends and women partners, basically been very clear with me that my role is to be supportive to them while somehow I'm meant to magically find these resources within myself. And I don't have them. They're not there.¹⁶⁴

We can see in these quotations men reevaluating their prior masculinity commitments and beginning to strongly evaluate the values involved in new ways. For instance, whereas before it would be contemptible to fail to be masculine, now Henry and Kevin seem to see traditional masculinity as unfair, unrealistic, and silly.

V. *A Concluding Complication*

V.1 **Emotional Investment and Social Meaning**

In the last section I focused on distinguishing different types of conflicts—both internal and external to men's conceptions of masculinity—that might lead to a reevaluation, revision, or rejection of some aspects of traditional masculine norms. In concluding, I want to note one subtle complication of this sort of deliberation and radical change—emotional investment and social meaning.

This complication arises specifically when we take up the question of what masculinity ideals ought to be like—if they ought to exist at all. The empirical evidence discussed above indicates that some aspects of masculinity lead to attitudes and behaviors with cause negative health consequences. But as I noted in section *II*, traditional masculinity ideals involve many norms governing attitudes and behaviors in many different aspects of life; not all of these norms are likely to lead to bad health

¹⁶⁴ Gibbs, Lisa. "Applications of Masculinity Theories in a Chronic Illness Context." *International Journal of Men's Health* 4, no.3 (Fall 2005): 2847-2300.

outcomes.¹⁶⁵ So one potential solution to this problem men face might be to endorse and widely disseminate radically different masculinity ideals.

But what might these revised masculinity ideals look like? Why think that masculinity ideals are needed at all? Wouldn't it be even better to eradicate gender ideals altogether? Indeed, I do think that there is something worrisome about masculinity ideals that goes beyond their negative effects on boys and men themselves: their negative effects on women and gender-non-conforming individuals as well as perverting structural and personal relations between men and women. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I have set aside these concerns about masculinity and imagine the deliberation one might take up in terms of the good only—that is, as a question about what ideals one will commit to—without considering what one owes to others. And I take it that for many men masculinity ideals have an important emotional meaning and are importantly connected to their self-understandings.

We would do well, then, to consider the emotional ramifications of revisions to masculinity norms and the resulting changes in behavior. Given the role emotion may play in many men's valuing of masculinity, we might worry about the ability of men to "reason" themselves in to rejecting or revising their gender ideals. Consider Jonathan Haidt's (814) social-intuitionist model of moral reasoning according to which moral judgments typically involve emotional judgments that we make prior to beginning any reasoning process; moral reasoning, then, for the most part occurs *ex post facto* such that

¹⁶⁵ One such norm is that of being a good father, which I described earlier as being one aspect of traditional masculinity. It seems unlikely that this aspect of masculinity is bad for men's health and intuitively, the ideal of parental love seems like quite a worthy value to have. (Of course, one worry might be what is packed into being a good "father," as opposed to a good parent, or a good mother.)

we are merely trying to rationalize the judgment we have already made instead of attempting to figure out how to judge in the first place.¹⁶⁶

If this is the correct picture of how our reasoning about values works, then it should be no surprise that rejecting or subverting masculine norms in order to improve one's health is not a live option for many men. Our gendered norms about how to live seem to be an instance in which the emotional dog makes the value-judgment in favor of masculine norms, and wags the rational tail only to justify the judgment to which it is already committed. Since the dog wags the tail and not vice-versa, no amount of rational argument on the part of the tail—say, weighing on the one hand the value of the gendered norms and on the other the value of health and an extended lifespan—is likely to convince the dog to change its judgment, because that argument will be aimed at rationalizing the already formed emotional judgment. If traditional gendered norms are simply a foregone conclusion, then it is unclear how dynamic deliberation about ends can even get going. Wouldn't that be asking the tail to wag the dog?¹⁶⁷

I do not think, however, that all hope is lost if this sort of social-intuitionist model accurately depicts our process of making moral judgments. Haidt notes, after all, that we are capable of reasoning about our moral judgments, and that such a reasoning process is most likely to be undertaken in instances when our intuitive emotional judgments conflict. I think the case of masculinity and health likely is just sort a case for many men.

¹⁶⁶ Haidt, Jonathan. "A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment." *Psychological Review* 108, no.4 (Oct 2001): 814-834. We should note, though, that Haidt is concerned with particular judgments here and not judgments about more general norms or principles.

¹⁶⁷ In this vein, we should take note of the un/subconscious nature of gender performativity. Since gender is pervasive, since many of the enactments of masculinity mentioned above involve habits, and since socialization encouraging performance of those habits occurs very early in life, it is likely the case that much of the time when we are "doing" gender we are not consciously thinking about or making choices about it. Thus, many of the performances of gender which we engage in everyday day are likely to be completely opaque to us.

So I do not think that the emotion involved in these sorts of judgments need make it impossible for men to deliberate in a rational manner about masculinity and health.

But is deliberation enough? Even if a man truly believes that his life will be improved by rejecting masculinity, it still might be very difficult for him to actually make that change. After all, refusing to enact masculinity means giving up both the emotional investment and the social meaning associated with masculinity. It is one thing for a man to recognize and even question the conflict between masculinity and health; it is another thing altogether for a man to undertake a momentous change to his life and to possibly make himself vulnerable to the charge of being “a girly man.”¹⁶⁸

While certainly it is the case that many individual men do subvert or reject some aspects of traditional masculinity, making the rejection of traditional masculinity a live option for the majority of men will require making available alternative ideals that fulfill a similar social and/or emotional role as do current ideals of masculinity. And the construction of the social meanings that might accompany alternative ideals is, of course, not something that any lone individual can create.

Here we need to recognize the need for role models and “norm entrepreneurs.” A role model might be a man who is willing to risk ridicule for failing to live up to socially accepted gender norms while modeling new norms and behaviors to other men. But

¹⁶⁸ I think this is one interesting point of disanalogy between the moral courage case and the masculinity case. Moral courage, it seems, is often treated as being largely a matter of supererogation. Surely, those who do show themselves to be of exemplary moral courage are, as a matter of *social* or *public* evaluation, to be praised. But those who fail to be morally courageous—so long as they are not themselves perpetrators of injustices, but perhaps only fail to whistleblow on those who do—tend to escape significant public condemnation. Likely our failure to see those with little moral courage as dishonorable is a result of our ability to empathize with their situation. But masculinity ideals are treated much differently in terms of social or public evaluation. Men who do not appropriately meet norms of traditional masculinity often face ridicule by members of their own social circle as well in dominate messages in popular culture. (Consider typical attitudes toward feminine-seeming gay men, young boys who play with Barbies, stay-at-home dads, teenage boys who aspire to be hairstylists, or men who take their wives’ last names upon marriage.)

where do these new norms come from? This is where a norm entrepreneur contributes not merely by modeling behavior, but also by experimenting in new ways of “being a man” and thus creating the new masculinity ideals to be modeled.

The need for norm entrepreneurship is particularly important to recognize, because in lacking a coherent alternative to traditional masculinities, a typical man (one who does not face the sorts of crises discussed earlier) might lack a real chance at significantly revising his gender ideals. Unfortunately, no such alternative is offered in the public health literature I discussed in section *I*. This, I suspect, is a result of the arm-chair nature of much of the theorizing in those works (and which I am also guilty of in this chapter.) It seems to me that men *themselves* are in the best position to develop a revised understanding of masculinity.¹⁶⁹

V.2 Summing Up

The story I have been trying to tell is one in which it seems that men’s problems could be *resolved* in the sense defined in chapter 2. The story is not one according to which men simply stop valuing masculinity for no particular reason. We could tell such a story on the means-end picture; but with no explanation of how or why the change in value was a result of learning about values and hence rational, this would not be a story about men resolving a problem, but merely a story about how things turned out fortunately for men.

¹⁶⁹ I think in many ways such changes are already afoot and have been for quite some time. Consider, for example, the way the appropriate role of fathers has changed in the past half century with fathers taking on more childrearing duties traditionally left to mothers such as being a stay-at-home-parent. Or take the recent metrosexual trend which has created more room for (straight) men to care about traditionally feminine concerns of appearance, grooming, and fashion. Finally, think of the recent popularity of so-called “Bromance” movies which portray emotionally rich platonic relationships amongst straight male friends.

My story is also not one in which men's problems are merely overcome, rather than resolved. The story could be that having recognized how problematic traditional masculinity is in terms of health, men choose not to live up to traditional masculine norms, yet they never waver in their judgment that those norms are to be endorsed and hence that one's inability to live up to them because of health costs involves unfulfilled value. This might be something like the story we would tell about the way that oppressive social relations or coercion affect individuals' lives; in such cases, there will be real losses as people determine how to survive in their situation.

Nor is the story about keeping one's ends the same, but prioritizing about which ends are most important to pursue given that pursuing some ends will lead to conflicts with pursuing other ends. For that story would have no use for the notion of strong-evaluation. Men, on that story, would not come to find aspects of traditional masculinity silly and superficial as they might on the story I have told.

Rather my story is one in which it is men's ends themselves that are changing and this change is brought about through a rational deliberative process. Men's revisions to their ends, then, are likely to count as progressive in the problem-resolving sense described in chapter 2.

As I stated at the outset, however, nothing in my story *guarantees* that these changes to men's masculinity norms would in fact be progressive. Since I conceive of progress as a matter of resolving problems, there is always the question of whether a particular way of conceiving a problem is the best way. There may be other possibilities, but it is unlikely that we can know whether we have conceived the problem correctly until we try to live with it. First, we have to do the imaginative work of figuring out how

to solve the problem as we can best conceive of it given what we currently know. Then, we have to do the experimental work of living with the solution we have come up with. Only then have we tested our problem-conception/solution set and only then can we determine if we need to try a different solution or a different conception of the problem.

But what if there are men who do find that they continue to strongly evaluate traditional masculinity ideals—health-costs be damned? If men can, in fact, live with those values, then is there anything left to be said against those values? First we should note, as I emphasized in the last section of chapter 2, that there are multiple avenues for criticism when it comes to our belief-value systems. An individual may find that he can live with glaring incoherence or inconsistency in his beliefs and values, but concerns for coherence and consistency are not rationally optional—rather they are constitutive of rationality. So a man—perhaps like Tom who is able to live with traditional masculinity values by refusing to acknowledge his own inability to live up to those values—would certainly be criticizable for his failure of rationality in the form of an incoherent belief-value system.

But what if a man were able to maintain a (generally) coherent belief-value system while strongly evaluating traditional masculinity norms? Accomplishing this sort of coherence is more difficult than it seems.¹⁷⁰ Even so, we can suppose hypothetically

¹⁷⁰ In the conclusion to chapter 2 regarding the Tim Zaal story, I suggested that it would be very difficult to maintain the sort of white/Aryan supremacist beliefs Zaal originally in a coherent way. After all, those moral beliefs would have to supervene on empirical differences between racial, ethnic, or religious groups. But what might these empirical differences—that are capable of upholding such stark moral differences—be? Since there is no sufficient evidence in favor of theories about radical or essential differences amongst racial, ethnic, or religious groups, one could not consistently accept such a theory while accepting typical epistemic commitments, such as trying to do justice to the evidence. Similarly, it's hard to see what could underlie traditional masculine ideals other than false beliefs about radical and essential gender differences. Thus, it seems that imagining a (generally) coherent belief-value system which incorporates a commitment to traditional masculinity requires some significant alteration to other sorts of beliefs or commitments, such as epistemic values.

that a man does have a coherent belief-value system that upholds traditional masculinity ideals and that he finds himself able to live very contentedly with it. What will my view say of him and his values? Does this life fail to be a good life for him even though he is perfectly satisfied with it? Or is there still some sense in which we can criticize those ideals as being foolish?

Here I think the answers to the last two questions come apart. We can certainly continue to criticize traditional masculinity ideals as being foolish even if this man is able to live well with them. We might simply hold radically different background values than the man in question does, and so we may have undertaken equally good problem-resolving which as led us to be even more convinced of the mistakenness of the values in question. I will argue in the next chapter that it is possible that both strands of inquiry are equally objective and equally well solve the problems we each have taken up since convergence is not a necessary feature of objective ethical inquiry. We should expect that pluralism will result from this sort of problem-resolving view. But an acceptance of pluralism does not rule out disagreeing with the values others' hold or endorse.

Things are a bit less clear with regard to the first question, about whether the sort of life in question—with which the hypothetical man is perfectly contented—is really a good life for him. Recall that earlier in this chapter mere satisfaction or contentment is not enough. Rather, for an individual to “be able to live with” certain values, it must be the case that the agent’s satisfaction or contentment is warranted. One way for the agent’s feeling of satisfaction or contentment to be warranted is for him or her to have come to re-endorse the value in question within the process of search for a problem-

solution and then to find that the proposed solution to in fact overcome the problem. It certainly is *possible* that a man could re-endorse traditional masculinity ideals in just this way; thus, my view cannot rule out from the arm chair the possibility that traditional masculinity does provide a good life for some men.

But this is just to repeat the conclusion offered to chapter 2. What can be a good life for us depends on our experiences of trying to live because we are the only authority on ethics that there can be.

Chapter 4: A Procedural Account of Ethical Objectivity

I have in the preceding two chapters laid out my account of ethical inquiry as problem-solving and tried to show what progress and deliberation look like on such an account. I now turn to an important related question—in what sense can the view I have been describing maintain a sense of objectivity for ethics?

I begin the chapter by asking first what we want to capture—or ought to want to capture—with a notion of objectivity. What does objectivity necessarily involve and, if there are competing conceptions, which should we have in mind? I approach this need to get clear on what aspects associated with objectivity we need to pay attention to and which we can do without by looking to the *point* of objectivity. How does objectivity typically function in our ethical inquiry or in our meta-concerns our practice of ethical inquiry? What would be missing in our inquiry if we gave up on objectivity?

In section *I*, I identify four “points” to objectivity which have to do with mistakenness, disagreement, appreciating the perspectives of others, and improvement or learning. In section *II*, I state my account of ethical objectivity in more formal terms by listing and describing four pillars of my view. In section *III*, I consider objectivist conceptions of objectivity—which emphasize a correspondence theory of truth, mind-independence, Really-reality, value-neutrality, lack of bias, emotional detachment, and convergence. I then ask what is attractive about these supposed aspects of objectivity and whether my view captures them. In section *IV*, I argue that these aspects of objectivity are

unnecessary because the procedural account of objectivity offers all the objectivity we need in ethics. Finally, I conclude the chapter in section V by foreshadowing some of the issues I take up in chapter 5 regarding objectivity in ethics vs. objectivity in morality.

I. What is the Point of (Ethical) Objectivity?

Why begin with the question titling this section? Why not begin by saying simply what objectivity is? The answer is that ‘objectivity’ refers to so many related but distinct ideas that defining objectivity is no simple matter. For instance, Marianne Janack (275) in surveying philosophical work has found uses of ‘objectivity’ meaning all of the following: value-neutrality, lack of bias (with bias meaning any of the following: personal attachment, political aims, ideological commitments, preferences, desires, interests, or emotion), scientific method, rationality, an attitude of psychological distance, world-directedness, impersonality, impartiality, having to do with the facts, having to do with things in themselves/universality, disinterestedness, commensurability, and intersubjective agreement.¹⁷¹

Given the multiplicity of meanings associated with the term ‘objectivity’ in the domain of science or epistemology—(ethics, we can assume, is likely to further complicate things)—we would do well to take a step back and ask the question titling this section. What does objectivity—on any of the understandings discussed above do for us? Which of those meanings are worth maintaining and clarifying, and which might be given up without any problematic result? In this vein, I want to explore a number of potential

¹⁷¹ Janack, Marianne. “Dilemmas of Objectivity.” *Social Epistemology* 16, no.3 (July 2002): 267-281. Janack draws these meanings from a variety of philosophers including: Samuel Scheffler, Richard Rorty, Susan Bordo, Evelyn Fox Keller, Helen Longino, Paul Moser, Nicholas Rescher, Sandra Harding, Martha Nussbaum, and Susan Haack.

“points” to objectivity— that it makes good on our sense that mistakenness in ethics is possible, that it undergirds the possibility of genuine disagreement, that it provides an appropriate way for us to appreciate the perspective of, and that it provides for a sense of learning or improving within the domain in question.

First, one seemingly important function of objectivity is to make it possible for an individual to be mistaken in some belief or value. Mistakes, after all, are errors. What is it to make an error in one’s belief or value? We might cash this notion out in terms of truth and falsity, such that an error is having a false belief.¹⁷² Given the controversies over the question of whether ethical judgments are truth-apt, however, I want to avoid cashing out the idea of mistakenness in terms of true and false beliefs. Rather, we might generally characterize a mistaken belief, value, or judgment as a belief, value, or judgment not sufficiently in accord with how things are. We might put the point similarly to the sort of schema invoked to explicate a deflationary account of truth. We could say, for instance, that the judgment that traditional masculinity is valuable is mistaken if and only if it is not the case that traditional masculinity is valuable.

Whatever the precise manner in which we cash out the idea of mistakenness, in order to make good this notion in ethics, it must at minimum be the case that our ethical beliefs/judgments/values are not naïvely relativistic. That is, it cannot be the case that an agent’s or group’s believing x or speaking x is self-justifying; for in that case, an agent would always have true ethical beliefs or assertions. This is not to say, however, that sophisticated relativisms such as Harman’s or Wong’s moral relativism are also therefore automatically ruled out merely due to their membership in the relativist family; rather, I

¹⁷² Could we not also make an error in according too much credence in a belief which, as it turns out is true, when we do not have sufficient reason to place that much credence in the belief? In that case, though, it wouldn’t be the belief which is mistaken, but rather our degree of credence in it.

leave it as an open question whether these views can buttress a deep sense of ethical mistakeness and have no quarrel with them if they can do so.

Another potential “point” to objectivity is to undergird the possibility of genuine disagreement in ethics. I take a genuine disagreement to be a situation in which one individual accepts or endorses *x* and another accepts or endorses some inconsistent claim and only one of the individuals can be right (or at least one individual can be “more right”—be more warranted or have better reasons—than the other individual). Here we see that simple subjectivism and emotivism are ruled out. After all, a subjectivism that conceives of ethical judgments as merely reporting our own preferences would allow room for genuine disagreement—but only about the subject of whether our reports of our preferences/emotions are accurate. Similarly, emotivism would undermine the sense that anyone could be “right” or even “better justified” in their ethical judgments—thus disagreements might exist, but they would not be genuine.¹⁷³

A third aspect of objectivity which we would miss were we to give up on objectivity is a particular way of taking seriously the perspectives of others. If naïve relativism, simple subjectivism, or Ayer-style emotivism is true, then it appears that we have no epistemic reasons to consult others in thinking about ethics. We could not, after all, improve our inquiry by engaging with, debating, or receiving constructive criticism from others. On these views, it simply wouldn’t be possible for others to have better access to ethical truth, to have more warranted ethical views, or even to have reasons which we are compelled (by our own epistemic commitments) to take seriously.

¹⁷³ This constraint thus rules out Ayer-style emotivism. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, though my account does rule out some metaethical views, in general I will not be taking up any particular metaethical position.

However, treating others' perspectives on ethical issues as in principle irrelevant to the quality of our own ethical inquiry flies in the face of everyday ethical experience. Typically when we consider ethical issues we do attribute a certain degree of epistemic authority to others. We think that these other perspectives matter beyond the sense that we must be respectful of others and allow them to hold and voice dissenting opinions. Rather, the perspectives of others matter, we think, because they may be providing reasons that speak against our beliefs and values, and as such the considerations or objections others bring up must be contemplated and replied to. So, it seems that usual practices of discussion and debate about values depend upon there being some degree of objectivity for ethics.

Finally, some sense of objectivity about a domain seems necessary if we are to be able to make sense of *learning* or *improving* within that domain. To make an improvement in one's beliefs about, for example, the age of the planet requires that some beliefs on the topic be better or more worthy than others. This, again, will rule out naïve relativism, simple subjectivism, and emotivism and reinforces the point discussed in the last paragraph—that we must make room for reasons or evidence to play a role in justifying ethical judgments.

With these four worthwhile “points” or functions of objectivity in mind, we can now move on to more productively ask what sort of notion of objectivity we want in the ethical domain.

II. Objectivity on the Problem-Solving View

The conception of objectivity I will be arguing for is closely tied up with the more general account of inquiry as problem-resolving that I have offered in chapters 2 and 3. The cases of problem-solving that I discussed in those earlier chapters demonstrate concern for all four of the “points” to objectivity discussed in section *I*: undergirding a sense of mistakenness, allowing for genuine disagreement, making it possible that the appreciation of the viewpoints of others can improve our own inquiry, and making room for a sense of learning.

For example, I characterized Tim Zaal as coming to find that his earlier values were erroneous based on his inability to live with them; in searching for and finding a more satisfying, more coherent way to live, Zaal thus learned about what a good life was for him. Similarly, Anne in chapter 2 can be seen as having had a genuine disagreement with her partner about values governing their responsibilities in the home and the importance of their respective careers. And we might think that in (eventually) taking seriously her partner’s point of view, Anne was able to improve her own ethical inquiry—for it was only after putting herself in her partner’s shoes, that Anne came to recognize the unfair burden of domestic and childcare duties that Anne had allowed to fall to her partner.

II.1 Four Pillars

I want now to set out in more formal terms what my view comes to in terms of the following four pillars:

- (1) ethical objectivity is process-based
- (2) our inquiry is constrained by the world

- (3) objective (ethical) inquiry can be undertaken by an individual or a community
- (4) ethical epistemology is naturalized

As stated in (1), the view I am offering conceives of objectivity in terms of a process of inquiry or what might be referred to as “internalism,” meaning that the standards according to which a particular belief or judgment counts as objective are internal to our inquiry itself. Thus, I reject conceptions of objectivity that tie the objectivity of a belief or judgment to the way the world—understood as existing apart from our inquiry about it—*really* is.

Given a procedural account of objectivity, the bearers of objectivity are the transitions, revisions, reaffirmations, and problem-resolutions that occur within our system of ethical inquiry as problem-solving. Particular beliefs or values are objective derivatively—inasmuch as they are the result of objective transitions, revisions, and reaffirmations. The intuition I appeal to here is that we want a process that can provide us with intelligibility for each epistemic revision or change that we make. The process can then make a claim to a certain sense of objectivity inasmuch as we can give reasons for each of those steps. It does not follow, however, from the fact that we can give reasons for each individual transition that we can tell an overarching story about how we got to where we are given where we were many transitions earlier.¹⁷⁴

We should note here an important first pass worry—that a procedural view will allow us to abandon the idea of trying to get the world right and thus will lead us down the path to an unacceptable sort of relativism. In fact, a procedural account needn’t give

¹⁷⁴ In other words, any particular transition—say from *x* to *y*—must be explained by reasons that make intelligible why *y* is better than *x*. But suppose that decades ago *p* was a popular belief and now after many thousands of transitions, we believe *q*. There need not be an explanation of a transition *directly* from *p* to *q* which makes clear *q*’s superiority.

up on the goal of trying to get the world right. Rather, the claim I reject is that whether a belief or judgment is objective depends on whether that belief or judgment accurately represents some “really” existing object of the world. There are two aspects of this rejected claim that are problematic from my point of view: first, that this claim characterizes objectivity in overly metaphysical terms (with reference to the “really real”), and second, that the claim locates objectivity as being primarily a matter of how the world is, and not as a matter of how we come to our beliefs.

But the rejection of these two claims does not entail “giving up on the world.” The second pillar of my view just is (2)—that the world properly plays a role in constraining what beliefs we can objectively hold. But this is not because the standard of objectivity is a matter of matching our beliefs to the way the world is apart from us, but rather because an objective process of inquiry will make room for feedback from the world. The objectivity, then, on my view will derive from the fact that inquiry has been undertaken in a certain way—not because the result of inquiry corresponds to the world.¹⁷⁵

What sort of feedback do I have in mind here? It is helpful here to keep in mind another procedural account of objectivity from Helen Longino—though in this case Longino is concerned with science rather than ethics. For Longino (1990, 76-79), the degree of objectivity of a community depends upon the extent to which the community fulfills her four requirements for a maximally objective community and scientific process. Her four requirements are: 1) there must be publicly recognized forums for criticism, 2) the body of belief accepted by the community must change over time (in

¹⁷⁵ It follows, then, that on my view a maximally objective procedure at a given time might lead to a result which—we will eventually discover—is mistaken.

response to evidence and reasoning embodied by criticisms of community members made in accordance with recognized standards), 3) there must be recognized standards of evidence, and 4) the community must be cognitively democratic.¹⁷⁶

Notice that Longino's view specifically requires recognized standards of evidence with regard to evaluating scientific hypotheses. In this way, a concern for getting the world right is built into the process a community would need to undertake in order to produce objective beliefs. So the worry stated above that a process-based view of objectivity will inevitably devolve into an "anything goes" relativism misfires. In an analogous way, ethical objectivity understood in terms of problem-resolving builds in room for the world to inform our inquiry.

One might point out here, however, that Longino's account offers a view about *scientific* objectivity and it surely is easier to see how a procedural account of objectivity can incorporate feedback from the world in the realm of science than in the realm of ethics. This can be easily seen by considering a typical procedural account of moral objectivity which we can find in Rawls' contractualism. For Rawls the objectivity of the principles governing the basic structure of society appears to depend upon the shape of the original position; in particular, it seems that (hypothetical) convergence amongst rational decision-makers in an intuitively equal and fair starting point does the work of providing objectivity.¹⁷⁷ However, there does not seem to be a clear analogy in Rawls' theory to Longino's requirement of public standards of evidence that would require

¹⁷⁶ Longino 1990.

¹⁷⁷ Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971. See especially pages 17-21. Rawls discusses the work the original position does in terms of "justification," but I think much of the concern about objectivity is also implicitly at issue in the discussion.

inquirers (or individuals in the original position) to consult the way the world is as part of the process of inquiry.

This contrast between Rawls and Longino might be taken to show that a process-based view in ethics is vulnerable to worries about a lack of independence from our own opinions in a way that process-based views in science need not be. There is a grain of truth in this worry inasmuch as it is simply more complicated to talk about and account for “the world” in the realm of ethics. However, I have argued in chapters 2 and 3 that the world does condition and inform our ethical inquiry on the problem-solving view.

For instance, consider again the problem of the comparatively high rate of teenage pregnancy in the U.S. I suggested there that both background values and the world determine what sorts of potential solutions can count as true solutions. Recall that a problem is a conflict between our empirical beliefs, our values, the world, and our experience of living in it. A course of action or policy—say, abstinence-only sex-ed—that fails to live up to the world fails as a solution even if it does live up to our values. If we find ourselves unable to change the world in the way we wish given the values we hold, then we must reevaluate both our values and our conception of the problem. Given general pressure toward coherence, the world can in this way tell in favor of or against values. So the seeming divergence between science and ethics with regard to the role of the world is a difference in degree, not a difference in kind.

Further, the fact that Rawls does not seem to make much room for the world to constrain our views should not be surprising.¹⁷⁸ Rawls, after all, is not aiming to provide

¹⁷⁸ I think it would be misleading, though, to say that there is no role which evidence has to play in Rawls’ contractualism—after all, the parties in the original position are assumed to know facts about political affairs, economics, and human psychology or as Rawls puts it “whatever general facts affect the choice of the principles of justice” (137).

an account of what is good nor an account of how we improve our beliefs or practices regarding the good. He is concerned only with a narrow aspect of morality—in particular, what justice looks like in a democratic society. I will suggest in chapter 5 that in order to capture issues of the right or the just on a problem-solving account, we will need to introduce a kind of contractualism. Thus, for my purposes, *A Theory of Justice* does not offer a precise parallel in the ethical domain to Longino’s view of objectivity in science. Rather, I am suggesting that a procedural account of *ethical* progress might be modeled in a similar way to Longino’s view, while a satisfactory account of *moral* objectivity will necessarily diverge more significantly.

The third pillar of my view is that objective ethical inquiry can be conducted both by a community and by individuals. This is important to note given that I have appealed in this chapter to both Longino’s and Rawls’s views in attempting to explicate my own procedural account of objectivity. However, for both Longino and Rawls objectivity is primarily a community-level pursuit, while I intend to capture a sense of objectivity that applies equally to the community or individual case.

I think much transformative moral revision has come (and in the future will come) as a result of community-wide debate and deliberation, and so I do wish to emphasize the importance of community in producing objective ethical inquiry and, in particular, in providing important kinds of evidence about what is worth valuing.¹⁷⁹ However, at the same time, it seems clear to me that much ethical inquiry occurs at the individual level as an agent tries to solve problems having to do with her own personal commitments or ideals of excellence; in these cases the question is “what is a good life *for me*?” Thus it

¹⁷⁹ The role of a community will be of even more importance when it comes to *moral* objectivity—that is, objectivity in the deontic domain, regarding issues of rights and obligations. See chapter 5.

seems to me that a satisfactory account of ethical inquiry cannot take community-level inquiry as the primary bearer of objectivity.

Finally, the fourth pillar of my view is the naturalizing of ethical epistemology. According to Richmond Campbell and Bruce Hunter (3), naturalized ethical epistemology involves “explain[ing] how [ethical] knowledge is possible (or why it is not) by appealing to an empirically based understanding of the natural world and our place within it.”¹⁸⁰ In interpreting feminist epistemology as a branch of naturalized (social) epistemology, Anderson (1995, 54) characterizes the naturalization of epistemology as involving an understanding of “knowledge production as an activity in which inquirers are subject to the same causal forces that affect their objects of study.”¹⁸¹ This means that inquiry itself can be an object of study that allows us to investigate which sorts of epistemological practices, what sort of experimental design, what sort of organization of inquirers, etc. are best given our knowledge-producing aims. For example, Anderson points to the model of placebo-controlled, double-blind, multi-center trials for drug testing as a success of naturalized epistemology, as each of these aspects was instituted in order to improve inquiry based on the recognition of failures in prior inquiry.¹⁸²

This is a case of naturalized epistemology in science, but what might naturalized ethical epistemology look like? How do we learn about how to conduct ethical inquiry by conducting that inquiry? One important avenue is to pay attention to the many ways

¹⁸⁰ Campbell, Richmond and Bruce Hunter. “Introduction.” *Moral Epistemology Naturalized*, ed. Richmond Campbell and Bruce Hunter. (*Canadian Journal of Philosophy* supp. vol. 26) Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 2001.

¹⁸¹ Anderson 1995, 54 citing Quine, W.V.O. “Epistemology Naturalized.” *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969..

¹⁸² 1995, 55.

in which we have been wrong about fundamentally held values in the past and how the psychological and social facts about how we think, feel, value, deliberate, and conduct inquiry might explain those mistakes.¹⁸³

For example, consider Susan Fisk's and Jonathan Haidt's work in psychology. Fisk's (2007, 158) work demonstrates that research subjects looking at pictures of homeless people typically do not react to the photos as if they are seeing actual individual persons. But this effect is significantly altered when subjects are asked to consider a question from the perspective of the homeless person in the photo; forcing the subjects to attribute agency to those in the photograph and to think about their perspective has a significant effect on cognitive reactions to the photographs.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, based on his experiments involving moral dumbfounding, Haidt (2001, 829) speculates that humans tend to engage in reasoning about morality only when we cannot respond to a moral issue with the more typical intuitive emotional response supported by ex post facto reasons; according to Haidt, when we have strong intuitive emotional judgments in two directions—for instance, when both parties to a moral dispute are empathy-inducing (e.g. Haidt's example of pregnant women and fetuses)—we resort to reasoning about how the dispute should be solved instead of relying only on our emotional reactions.¹⁸⁵

We might take these results of psychological inquiry to demonstrate a need to cultivate an approach to ethical inquiry in which the dignity of all parties is emphasized, in which we appropriately empathize with the interested parties, and perhaps in which we

¹⁸³ In this vein, Dewey suggests that “[m]istakes are...[not] mere unavoidable accidents to be mourned or moral sins to be expiated and forgiven. They are lessons in wrong methods...They are indications of the need of revision, development, readjustment. Ends grow, standards of judgment are improved.” *Reconstruction in Philosophy* 175.

¹⁸⁴ Fiske, Susan. “On Prejudice and the Brain.” *Daedalus* 136, no.1 (Winter 2007): 156-159.

¹⁸⁵ Haidt 2001.

simulate what it is like to be in their situations. Here we see room for many of the points about diversity in the community of inquirers and situated knowledge which feminists have stressed. It may be that some people or some community arrangements are better at producing these types of relations toward the parties of a moral dispute than others.¹⁸⁶

The results of bringing empirical work to bear on our ethical inquiry will likely lead us either to reaffirm the fundamental values we hold—and be even more assured of their warrant given that they still speak to us even under the improved conditions of testing—or lead us to reject or revise fundamental values because under improved testing or upon reflection we cannot continue to endorse them.¹⁸⁷ One might wonder what could shake us of some of our most deeply held values? Sometimes empirical facts can—after all, many instances of historical prejudice and oppression which we now condemn were in part justified by empirical beliefs which we now know were both false and pernicious.¹⁸⁸ In other cases it may be a sort of simulation—imagining what it is like to live differently or be in another’s position—that leads to transformative change in our values. And importantly, sometimes such insights come not from simulation alone, but from actually trying to live a certain way; we can learn through our actual experience that

¹⁸⁶ Of course, which arrangements are better than others at producing those sorts of relations is itself an empirical question to be determined by further inquiry.

¹⁸⁷ In the case of Fisk’s work, it is not values themselves which might directly be revised. Presumably few of the subjects whose brains fail to react to pictures of seemingly homeless people as though they are not persons would actually assert such a belief or endorse such a claim; so the problem might not be values which we come to find we cannot reflectively endorse, but the influence of subtle biases and the misfiring of certain sorts of cognitive processes which are relevant to our value judgments. But once we become aware of our tendency to react in such a way we might better be able to recognize instances of such reactions in our own lives or in public policy debates.

¹⁸⁸ Consider, for instance, scientific racism. See Clough, Sharyn and William Loges. “Racist Value Judgments as Objectively False Beliefs: A Philosophical and Social-Psychological Analysis.” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 39, no.1 (Spring 2008): 77-95. for a view about the moral failing involved in contemporary scientific hypotheses positing inherent racial differences in the face of devastating empirical problems with such hypotheses.

we are moving in the wrong direction, and this knowledge may demonstrate the need for a radical change in the other direction.¹⁸⁹

II.2 How the 4 Pillars Capture the 4 Points of Objectivity

How does the problem-solving account of objectivity with the four pillars described above capture the four points to objectivity—undergirding mistakenness, genuine disagreement, appreciation of others' points of view, and learning—I identified at the outset of this chapter?

Objectivity understood in terms of the four pillars allows plenty of room for mistakenness which is emphasized in the second pillar—that our inquiry is constrained by the world. Since the view I am offering is one according to which evidence from the world must inform our ethical views, it is always possible that in light of new evidence we will find that our previous ethical views were flawed. We can see this in the controversy over how best to approach the problem of teenage pregnancy in the U.S. Those who espouse traditional sexual values may assume that it is possible to lower rates of teenage pregnancy through means that are consistent with the values of purity, chastity, and monogamy. But this is an empirical claim about the world and empirical evidence might show it to be false.

Suppose it turns out that even the best designed abstinence-only sex education programs cannot convince teenagers to put off sex for any significant amount of time. And suppose also that some approach to comprehensive sex-education—perhaps along with increased access to reproductive healthcare—is found to be successful in leading teenagers to more consistently and successfully use contraceptives when having

¹⁸⁹ Consider again the story of Tim Zaal.

intercourse, thus decreasing the rate of unwanted pregnancy amongst teenagers. If it turns out that this is the way the world is, then traditionalists face a value conflict they had not anticipated. And presumably, for many—though certainly not all—traditionalists, the recognition that the cost of traditional values is a high teenage pregnancy rate might prompt them to revise those values.¹⁹⁰ After such a revision, they will see their past values as mistaken—after all, those values did not stand up to the world.

The ability of the problem-based account of objectivity to undergird a sense of mistakenness is importantly connected to the other three “points” to objectivity mentioned above—genuine disagreement, appreciation of others viewpoints, and learning. For example, a genuine disagreement is one in which two or more individuals espouse contradictory beliefs or values and both individuals cannot be correct (or at least, one individual’s view is better than the others). In order for such a situation to occur, we must have a way to distinguish better and worse beliefs or values. The view I have offered provides exactly that inasmuch as the world constrains our beliefs and values.

Similarly, the sort of appreciation of the viewpoints of others I have in mind is that giving serious consideration to others’ beliefs or values—and, importantly, their reasons for these beliefs or values—can improve an individual’s or community’s inquiry.

¹⁹⁰ Certainly not all traditionalists will be convinced by such data. Some religious institutions in particular can be expected, in the face of such evidence, to dogmatically insist on their traditional values come what may. But I suspect for many lay persons—assuming these facts about the world could be vividly demonstrated in a convincing manner—it would be difficult to live with these consequences of traditional values. To do so, after all, would mean understanding all of the ills associated with teenagers becoming parents or making choices about adoption or abortion as less concerning than the impurity associated with extra-marital sex itself. To see how unlikely such a view would be, we should note the way the current debate over sex-education occurs—both sides of the debate insist that their favored type of sex-education is the only or at least the best way to prevent teenage pregnancy on the large scale. But if the sexual values in question were held completely dogmatically and if it were obvious to sexual traditionalists that sexual purity is more important than any other sorts of values associated with preventing teenage pregnancy, then why would they bother with any claims about the efficacy of abstinence-only sex-ed?

But how could my own inquiry improve by taking up the views of others unless it is possible that their view better captures something about the world than does mine? The naturalization of ethical epistemology also contributes significantly here, as one of the things we might learn as we reflect on our own practices of inquiry is that different social relations or different make-ups of epistemic communities may make for better or worse inquiry.¹⁹¹

Finally, learning in the realm of ethics is possible on my view inasmuch as we can distinguish better and worse views and can make sensible revisions to our own views on the basis of evidence from the world and from our experience of living taken along with general epistemic values. Thus, I characterized Zaal's transition from neo-Nazism to tolerance-educator as an instance of learning because this transition overcame a significant incoherence in his system of beliefs and values after he came to see that he could not live with neo-Nazism given his commitment to being a good parent.

III. Against Objectivist Objectivity in Ethics

Thus far I have been describing a procedural account of objectivity that flows naturally out of the more general account of ethical inquiry as problem-resolution I developed in chapters 2 and 3. But why should we prefer this conception to more traditional conceptions? In the following section I want to lay out what objectivism is, why its various aspects might be attractive to us, and how my account is thoroughly anti-objectivist.

III.1 The Attraction to Objectivism

¹⁹¹ This is essentially the very claim that much feminist work in epistemology and philosophy of science has made. See, for instance, Anderson, Elizabeth. "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and Defense" and Laura Ruetsche's "Virtue and Contingent History: Possibilities for Feminist Epistemology."

We can begin here by considering what might be understood as the traditional or dominant understanding of objectivity, typically referred to as “objectivism.” Objectivist conceptions of objectivity typically share most or all of the following characteristics: a correspondence view of truth; a strong sense of independence (often stated in terms of “mind-independence”); a presumption about the connection between particular methods of inquiry and the ability of inquiry to get at what is Really real about the world; a requirement of value-neutrality, lack of bias, and emotional detachment in inquirers; and an assumption that—at least once all the evidence is in—rational inquirers will come to convergence. Such a view is sometimes alternatively referred to in the literature as “totalizing objectivity,” “the view from nowhere,” “the no eye view,” and “ontological tyranny.”

Hilary Putnam (49) offers a representative characterization of such a view—which he refers to as the “no-eye” view—with particular emphasis on the correspondence view of truth, mind-independence, and Really-reality: “On this perspective, the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’. Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.”¹⁹² As the term “no-eye” implies, this conception understands objectivity to

¹⁹² Putnam, Hilary. *Reason, Truth, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Putnam actually refers to this point of view as “The God’s Eye View” in most of *Reason, Truth, and History*. Technically, however, the metaphor of the God’s eye view is misleading, since it refers to just one more perspective on the world (albeit, a Godly one). Externalism or metaphysical realism (Putnam seems to use these terms interchangeably to refer to the enemy position), however, is interested in a conception of the world which is wholly non-perspectival and which is unconditioned by any subjective standpoint. Putnam sometimes (50) uses the more accurate phrase “No Eye View” for exactly this reason.

involve a lack of perspective with the implication that seeing the world from the perspective of an “eye” would be subjective and thus would lack objectivity.¹⁹³

Similarly, Peter Railton (76-77) takes the traditional “orthodox logical empiricist” view of objectivity to include value-neutrality and disinterestedness, the theory-neutrality of evidence, procedures that are public and intersubjective, and convergence amongst rational inquirers assuming complete evidence.¹⁹⁴

Finally, Elisabeth Lloyd (353-7) identifies a similar conception of objectivity in terms of: a) detachment or lack of bias, b) public accessibility, c) independent existence with relation to knowers, and d) really real existence.¹⁹⁵ She also further notes a presumed connection between the methods or procedures of inquirers and the objects of inquiry such that “‘objective reality’—the reality converged upon through the application of objective methods—equals all of the Really Real.”¹⁹⁶

Why might one think that objectivism as thus described offers the best conception of objectivity? Why might the various aspects of objectivism—the correspondence view of truth, really-reality, mind-independence, value-neutrality, lack of bias, emotional detachment, and convergence—seem attractive to us?

The attractiveness of the correspondence theory of truth, really-reality, and mind-independence can be understood as importantly related. In particular, each of these aspects seems to involve an assumption that a significant aspect of objectivity has to do with the ontological status of the objects about which we are inquiring. Peter Railton puts the worry in terms of “having the evolution of our beliefs controlled by uncorrected-

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Railton 1994, 76-77.

¹⁹⁵ Lloyd, Elisabeth. “Objectivity and the Double Standard for Feminist Epistemologies.” *Synthese* 104, no.3 (1995): 351-381.

¹⁹⁶ Lloyd 356.

for and potentially arbitrary subjective factors rather than by the objects of inquiry themselves.”¹⁹⁷

The concern about subjective factors determining our beliefs is particularly acute if the objects of inquiry—in this case, ethical facts or properties—turn out not to be real and fundamental aspects of the world, but instead merely something like projections of our own desires and emotions. If this were so, how could ethical inquiry ever be objective in the way that theoretical inquiry is? Doesn’t ethical discourse then begin to look analogous to discourse about witches in that just as there are no witches—and so all claims assuming the existence of witches are false—there are no ethical properties or facts either? It might seem that if we want to avoid ethical discourse going the way of witch discourse, we need to show that ethical facts or properties do exist in a mind-independent, Really-real way perhaps as something like Dworkin’s notion of “morons”—moral properties that can causally impact humans just as other basic components of the physical universe can.¹⁹⁸

The requirements of value-neutrality, lack of bias, and emotional detachment can also be usefully grouped together in considering their appeal. At issue here, I think, is whether individuals’ preferences or desires will be allowed to inform their inquiry in ways that may lead them to less accurately characterize the way the world is. This concern connects up with the worry about correspondence, independence, and Really-reality. We think certain aspects of the world are as they are regardless of whether we believe or prefer things to be otherwise. The fear, then, is that individuals who bring their values, biases, or emotions into inquiry will be unable or unwilling to see the world

¹⁹⁷ Railton 1991, 767.

¹⁹⁸ Dworkin 104. Dworkin of course takes the notion of morons to be absurd.

for what it really is, and thus inquiry will be less successful in its aim at getting at truth.¹⁹⁹ And surely there is something to this worry—consider the manner in which left and right-leaning American news outlets can be found to present very different accounts and interpretations of news-worthy events, or the public’s (mis)understanding of the degree of consensus about global warming amongst climate scientists, or the state-mandated repeating of the dubious abortion-breast cancer link in medical contexts. Both sides of these issues tend to conceive of these conflicts as examples of how the values, biases, and emotional attachments *of their ideological opponents* undermine our ability to get at the truth and make it publicly accessible.

Finally let us consider convergence. Why should convergence be required for objectivity? We might suspect that if our most rational inquirers, employing our best methods, having access to our best evidence still fail to come to agreement, that we are failing to get at what the world is really like. Perhaps, in that case, the aspect of the world under inquiry, is not really-real or appropriately independent of us. This lack of really-realness or independence, then, could explain why convergence is impossible even in ideal conditions.

This issue of convergence is of particular concern in the ethical domain as it has been deployed often in the form of the argument for moral disagreement against ethical realism and/or ethical objectivity.²⁰⁰ This argument often proceeds by implicitly or

¹⁹⁹ Something like this worry seems to underlie the concerns voiced by Susan Haack regarding feminist epistemological work which argues that values can productively be brought into science and described and responded to by Elizabeth Anderson (32-36) in “Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology.” Haack, Susan. “Epistemological Reflections of an Old Feminist.” *Reason Papers* 18 (1993): 31-43. Haack, Susan. “Science as Social: Yes and No,” *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*, ed. by Lynn Hankinson Nelson and Jack Nelson, 79-94. Dordrecht, Holland: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996.

²⁰⁰ See for instance Loeb, Donald. “Moral Realism and the Argument from Disagreement.” *Philosophical Studies* 90, no.3 (1998): 281-303.

explicitly contrasting ethical inquiry with theoretical inquiry—the idea is that in the ideal conditions discussed above, rational inquirers could come to agreement about science, but not about ethics or morality. After all, we see plenty of examples in our actual lives in which otherwise reasonable people agree about all of the relevant empirical evidence—say with regard to abortion—yet still disagree as to whether first trimester elective abortion is morally permissible.

Still, even one who is sympathetic to this sort of worry about the lack of convergence in ethics might wish for a more fine-grained analysis of the likelihood of convergence in different value domains. For instance, Doris and Plakias suggest the possibility of a “patchy realism”—presumably bringing with it a “patchy” sense of ethical or moral objectivity.²⁰¹ The idea of patchy objectivity in ethics/morality is that some value-domains are more objective than others (or perhaps some value-domains are objective and others are not). What distinguishes the more and less objective domains is the degree of actual or hypothetical convergence in judgments about issues in those domains. For instance, it might be the case that there is significantly more agreement about when it is permissible to kill other normal adult human beings as compared with about sexual values. One might think, then, that inasmuch as convergence is possible in some moral domains, but not others, different moral domains will be more or less objective.²⁰² Here again, an underlying connection between convergence and objectivity is assumed.

²⁰¹ Doris, John and Plakias, Alexandra. “How to Argue about Disagreement: Evaluative Diversity and Moral Realism.” in *Moral Psychology Volume 2: The Cognitive Science of Morality: Intuition and Diversity*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, 303-332. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

²⁰² Thanks to Alex Plakias for pointing out this strain of thought to me.

III.2 The Problem-Resolving View as Anti-Objectivist

What does the problem-resolving account of objectivity with the four pillars I described in section *II* have to say about the aspects of objectivity assumed by objectivism? I've suggest above that many of the underlying concerns that make these aspects of objectivism attractive are important things to worry about. So how, if at all, will my account accommodate them?

Take first the correspondence view of truth, mind-independence, and Really-reality. Unsurprisingly, my pragmatism-inspired account of problem-solving does not lend itself to a correspondence account of truth according to which truth involves a one-to-one representation of the world. After all, my view emphasizes making progress through solving problems and I stated above that on my procedural account of objectivity, an objective outcome is merely one that follows certain epistemic norms.

It follows from this that our inquiry is path dependent—that is, that there needn't be one uniquely objective outcome in a given system of inquiry. At any given time, we may have reasons for making two different transitions, and whether the reasons in favor of one of those transitions are weightier than the reasons in favor of the other will depend upon our prioritization of various background values. Thus, there may not always be a clear answer about which transition is the way to go. Where we will end up depends upon where we begin—what values we hold as most fundamentally important, and in what order we take up problems to be solved.

One might worry here that the view I am describing seems to give up on the world. How can objective inquiry be unconcerned with getting things as they “really are”? What else could objectivity be if it did not involve getting things right? And if we

aren't concerned with what the world is really like, then won't we simply devolve into a sort of anything goes relativism?

Though the world will inform and constrain what sorts of potential-solutions can be actual solutions, in any particular case we will never be forced by empirical facts to accept any particular values. Just as in the theoretical case, underdetermination will mean that by revising background values we can, in principle, avoid accepting a particular value or fact if we desire. Given this sort of holism, there will not necessarily be only one objective story to be told about the world. It is possible that different individuals or groups could engage in equally good bouts of problem-solving inquiry yet come up with quite different solutions that do live up both to the world and to the values that are endorsed upon reevaluation. In this case, both stories about value and/or both practices will be objectively warranted.

This is not to say, though, that we cannot criticize another group's story which is objectively warranted in having been produced by the kind of inquiry I am describing or that we should not continually question our own story. We may think that another group has not fully appreciated all of the values at stake in a particular problem or all of the reasons in favor of one type of solution. Or, as we face new difficulties in trying to live, we may rightly question whether we have properly recognized all of the values and considered all the reasons.

Allowing for this sort of path-dependence of outcomes will obviously undermine a correspondence view of truth which insists that there is only one correct description of the world. Does it follow, then, that the conception of truth I am working with must be a pragmatic account, such that truth is just what works? Shannon Sullivan (220), for

instance, in developing a Deweyan feminist-pragmatism suggests that a “judgment or belief is true not if it matches the state of affairs it attempts to report, but rather if, when acted on, it produces the transformation of experience that was desired by those engaged in that experience.”²⁰³

However, such a pragmatic conception of truth is no more satisfying than a correspondence view of truth. Don’t we, after all, want to allow that it is possible that it for some sorts of beliefs to “work” in the sense of being instrumentally successful while still failing to live up to the world in terms of evidence? For instance, it might be the case that certain supernatural or religious beliefs work in the sense of having positive effects on the well-being of individuals or social cohesion of social groups. If this is the case, then it may very well be the case that acting on certain beliefs about the existence of a higher being does produce “the transformation of experience that was desired.” Thus, we needn’t consider whether there is *evidence* in favor of the claim that a higher being exists; rather, that claim is true in virtue of the consequences of acting on that claim.

But this way of conceiving of truth seems to fail to distinguish the (or at least one) reason we typically aim at truth in our inquiry and what it is for a claim to be true. There is much to be said for the idea that even in theoretical inquiry we (appropriately) have aims that go beyond mere truth.²⁰⁴ Thus, I think one charitable way to take Sullivan’s suggestion is that we aim at truth in theoretical inquiry because we have a higher-order

²⁰³ Sullivan, Shannon. “The Need for Truth: Toward a Pragmatist-Feminist Standpoint Theory.” in *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*, ed. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, 210-238. University Park, Pa: Penn State University Press, 2002.

²⁰⁴ Liz Anderson (1995, 37; 55), for instance, argues that mere truth is not enough since what we are looking for in inquiry is *significant* truth—a theory that does justice to the objects of inquiry. And Louis Loeb (208-9) has pointed out that even traditional epistemologists such as Descartes and Hume take one of our ultimate aims in believing to be contentment. According to Loeb, though for Descartes, Hume, Sextus, and Peirce truth is one objective at which our beliefs aim, we also have a higher order objective of inquiry which is characterized in purely psychological terms (209). Loeb, Louis. “Sextus, Descartes, Hume, and Peirce: On Securing Settled Doxastic States.” *Nous* 32, no.2 (June 1998): 205-230.

aim that involves something like finding ways to transform experience in satisfactory ways. But it does not seem plausible that what it is for a claim about the world to be true, is that acting on it produces the desired transformation. After all, this less charitable (but I think more accurate) interpretation of Sullivan would seem to displace the importance of evidence in justifying beliefs that aim toward truth and could potentially allow even that logically inconsistent claims—such as opposing claims about the existence of different higher beings—to simultaneously be true.

In contrast to both the correspondence view and the pragmatic view, I prefer a deflationary account of truth. Such an understanding of truth avoids the overly metaphysical flavor of the correspondence view while also preserving the link between evidence and the aim of belief.

What about Really-realness and mind-independence? What, on my account, guarantees that our inquiry will lead us to capture only what is “Really-real” about the ethical world? And relatedly, in what sense are the objects of inquiry—ethical properties or facts—independent of us on my view?

The first question about Really-realness can be answered most easily—in short, the answer is that nothing in my account guarantees that what we capture in our inquiry will be Really-real and this is because it is not obvious to me that the notion of Really-realness is performing any useful work in our thinking about objectivity. What is Really-realness after all? Lloyd (353) describes this aspect of objectivity as having to do with “really existing” or “the way things really are.” She (354) further points out that whereas concerns about ontological independence have to do with the relation between “reality and a knower” concerns about Really-realness have to do with “what *is*, regardless of its

relation to any knower.” Lloyd suggests that typical objectivist methods of inquiry—such as value-neutrality, lack of bias, and detachment—are often taken to be obviously necessary requirements of objectivity because it is assumed that the Really-real is “*completely independent of us.*”²⁰⁵ Thus, if Lloyd is correct, how we conceive of Really-realness will depend on what conception of independence is at work in our thinking about a particular domain.

It seems to me, then, that before saying anything about Really-realness, we should take up the question of independence. In fact, I want to suggest that once we give up on the strong sense of independence—for instance, mind-independence, there seems to be little reason to speak of Really-realness at all.

Thus I conceive of my view as aiming to offer all the independence that we need with regard to the truth or validity of ethical claims. The sort of independence I have in mind falls significantly short of mind-independence—for it leaves room for psychological, emotional, and social facts about humans to partially determine the validity of ethical claims. Therefore, ethical claims are not independent of human minds, emotions, or desires; however, such claims are independent of our beliefs or preferences *about those very claims*. That is, on my view, something may be the case whether or not we believe, feel, or hope it to be the case.²⁰⁶

This sort of independence seems to be quite enough to avoid an “anything goes” sort of relativism and to offer a response to the worry about subjectivism as characterized earlier by Railton in terms of “a worry about having the evolution of our beliefs controlled by uncorrected-for and potentially arbitrary subjective factors rather than by

²⁰⁵ Lloyd 1995, 353-7.

²⁰⁶ Here there is a significant similarity with the sort of independence Allan Gibbard means to capture in *Wise Choices Apt Feelings* (pg. 155).

the objects of inquiry themselves.”²⁰⁷ After all, my account builds in a concern about the world such that the world constrains and informs what sorts of belief or value transitions we can rationally undertake. So I do intend for there to be an important sense of correction at work in ethical inquiry as I understand it.

But how exactly does the world constrain and correct what otherwise might be merely our projections or subjective tastes on my view? How can I make this sort of claim without first positing an ethical ontology?

One picture of ethical ontology that might cohere with the sort of account of objectivity I have been describing is a secondary-property view. According to such a view—take Wiggins’s sensibility theory in “A Sensible Subjectivism?” as an example—moral or ethical properties can be analogized to color or humor properties.²⁰⁸ Color properties, we think, are not *really* in the world in the sense of being part of the basic physical structure of the universe, nor are they completely independent of human minds. Yet colors are *really* in the world from the perspective of (normal) human beings and they can make good on the sort of independence I have been claiming for ethics—that color-claims are true or false regardless of our believing or hoping a color-claim to be true. And thus, the fact that color is not a primary property does not undermine our color practices or the objectivity of our color-judgments. Wiggins (196) imagines a self-regulative system emerging in which we take up various considerations that lead to improvement—in the form of drawing new distinctions or refinements—in our color or humor-system.

²⁰⁷ Railton 1991, 767.

²⁰⁸ Wiggins 185-214.

Hilary Putnam in *Ethics without Ontology* goes even further—as the title of his fourth lecture, “Ontology: An Obituary,” makes clear—in suggesting that we can satisfactorily conceive of ethics in a way that avoids concerns about the ontology of value altogether. In doing so, he (67-73) draws an analogy between ethical judgments and methodological value judgments in the sciences—such as those having to do with simplicity and coherence—and compares the realm of ethics to logic and mathematics; the point of such parallels seems to be that philosophers hold a double standard in taking ontological worries to undermine ethical objectivity, but not objectivity in logic, math, or even epistemology and science.²⁰⁹ In contrast to metaphysically-heavy ways of conceiving of moral objects, Putnam posits “pragmatic pluralism” which holds that there is no one type of language which can satisfactorily describe all of reality, and so we have many different sorts of languages with different sorts of structures such that not every language requires there to be “mysterious and supersensible objects *behind*” that language.²¹⁰

Both of these ways of approaching questions of ethical ontology seem to cohere well with the account I have been offering. I want to emphasize—as sensibility theorists do—the sense in which (at least in some domains of value) our human sensibility will guide and constrain our value judgments. And like Wiggins, I also envision a sort of self-regulative feedback system arising within our practice of ethical inquiry.

However, I do not accept a sensibility theory wholesale for two reasons. First, I think the human sensibility plays a much more important role in the *ethical* domain than in the *moral* domain and thus that some important moral notions—rights, obligations,

²⁰⁹ Putnam, Hilary. *Ethics without Ontology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

²¹⁰ 21-22.

legitimate demands, what we owe to one another, etc—cannot be satisfactorily accounted for on a sensibility theory. Second, I understand this self-regulative system in a broader way than does Wiggins, since the improvements I have in mind are not merely the drawing of new distinctions or the refining of our responses, but also potentially the introduction of radically new ethical concepts and potentially the revising of our epistemic norms.

The first of these reservations might be put aside by applying a sharp distinction between the ethical and the moral and thus taking the second-property ontology to apply to only the ethical domain. The second concern might be dealt with by offering a revised understanding of Wiggins’s self-regulative system and the improvement test to allow for more radical changes of the sort I discuss in chapter 2.²¹¹ However, even given these caveats, it is not obvious to me that the account of objectivity I have been arguing for here requires a commitment to a particular ontology. The view could—with small adjustments—cohere with either the Wiggins-style or the Putnam-style approach to ontology. It seems to me, then, that it is a good idea to remain agnostic on this issue as the plausibility of the account does not seem to hang on any particular ontological account; rather, it seems to me that the sort of independence claimed earlier is all that need be said regarding ontology.

Next let us consider value-neutrality, emotional detachment, and lack of bias.

What does my account of objectivity have to say about these aspects of objectivism?

Given that my main concern here is objectivity in ethics, it’s hard to see how a

²¹¹ It is hard to see, however, how we might satisfactorily revise Wiggins’s view. For, allowing more radical changes will require giving up the rigidification to our sensibility here and now. But giving up that rigidification will then open up the view to the sorts of worries—such as “What if we happened to approve of cruelty?”—that Wiggins means to rule out with the rigidification.

satisfactory account could require value-neutrality. How could we avoid bringing values to bear in our attempts to confirm other values? Just as in science we must bring other theoretical beliefs to bear as background assumptions in confirming theories, so it seems analogously that we would have to bring other values to bear in our ethical confirmation.²¹²

Emotional detachment and bias are a bit more complicated; everything depends on what we mean by these terms. In the scientific case, emotional detachment seems to have to do with the relationship of the inquirer to the object of study. For instance, in “Empathy, Polyandry and the Myth of the Coy Female,” primatologists Sandra Hrdy suggests that primatologists often identify and empathize—in both subtle and overt ways—with the primates they study and that this sort of emotional attachment likely affects what sorts of questions a research asks and thus what sorts of theories are likely to dominate the field.²¹³

Understood in this way, emotional detachment seems still to be related to values—whether in the form of general sympathy for the situation of another living being or in the form of a sort of gender-politicized identification for beings of one’s own sex who face difficulties that parallel one’s own challenges. In the case of ethics, it might seem that detachment is even less possible. Ethics, after all, is about *us*—our lives, our desires, our emotions. This sort of attachment would likely meet with significant suspicion in science, but how could we avoid it in ethics given ethics’ content?²¹⁴

²¹² And this, of course, is exactly the Deweyan picture I described in chapter 2.

²¹³ Hrdy, Sandra Blaffer. “Empathy, Polyandry and the Myth of the Coy Female.” in *Feminist Approaches to Science*, ed. by Ruth Bleier, 119-146. Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, 1986.

²¹⁴ Thus we have Harman’s famous objection that we can always explain our moral observations—e.g. that lighting a cat on fire is wrong—by appeal only to psychological and emotional facts about humans. We do not need to posit any facts about the wrongness being part of the world as we do in the case of experiments in science. Harman, Gilbert. “Ethics and Observation.” in *Moral Discourse & Practice: Some*

Bias, like emotional detachment, might refer to many different things. On the face of it, one might think that bias has no more a place in ethics than in science, since typically we talk of bias only in a pejorative sense. And surely, if bias refers to something like radical subjectivism, or to some sort of favoritism based on personal preference, then bias would clearly be an obstacle to objectivity. However, if by “bias” we mean only the bringing of one’s background beliefs, or social position, or experience of the world to bear in one’s inquiry, then it looks much less threatening to objectivity. Bias then looks rather like an inevitable aspect of any inquiry undertaken by human beings—beings who are, of course, themselves objects of the world and who, therefore, are acted upon by social forces. To acknowledge the sense in which we inquirers are both subjects and objects of the world and hence that we must turn our inquiry to ourselves and our own processes of knowledge-production, is just to acknowledge the naturalization of epistemology—pillar 4 of the problem-solving account of objectivity.

Finally there is the question of whether my account requires convergence for objectivity. The view I have been developing throughout this dissertation can make no guarantees about convergence on ethical questions; thus as discussed above, it is entirely possible that more than one objective view of ethics will emerge from the sort of procedures I have been describing.

IV. Vindicating the Problem-Solving Account

Having shown how the view I've offered is thoroughly non-objectivist in its dispensing with concerns for the correspondence view of truth, Really-reality, mind-independence, value-neutrality, lack of bias, emotional detachment, and convergence, I want to offer a final word in terms of why we there is nothing significant to be lost in giving up on these aspects.

With regard to the first six elements, it seems the major reason to favor them is the thought that without them we will fall too deeply into relativism or subjectivism. To sum up what I've argued in the last section, the worry is that without some metaphysical view that involves correspondence, mind-independence, and really-reality in ethics, we can just make up whatever we like, but mistakenly think that we are discovering things that are already there. We fear we might end up, as Bertrand Russell put it (as quoted by Wiggins) having to say that all that is wrong with cruelty is that we don't like it.²¹⁵

But, as I suggested above, the concern about ending up with naive relativism, simple subjectivism, or emotivism if we give up on the metaphysically-heavy aspects of objectivity, is quite overblown. Putnam's pluralist pragmatism and the sensibility views, for instance, demonstrate that a significant sense of objectivity is possible without something like metaphysical realism to back it up.

We should note here in the face of worries that anything less than objectivism will lead to radical relativism, Donna Haraway's (584) insight that objectivism and relativism are merely different aspects of the same "God-trick"; the trick is "promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally."²¹⁶ The result of this trick, claims Haraway, is that inquirers are not held responsible for their point of view because transcendence is

²¹⁵ Wiggins 185.

²¹⁶ Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3 (Autumn 1988): 575-599.

assumed. I argue, instead, that we can have both independence and accountability by making room for the world to constrain our views while also naturalizing ethical epistemology.

What about the seventh element mentioned above—convergence? Here I think the attraction to convergence does not arise merely from the worry that if we fail to converge, we will likely be failing to get at something real about the world. There is also, I suspect, a general concern that our inquiry could lead to two or more equally well-supported ethical claims that are not compatible with one another. But we might think that two incompatible ethical claims cannot both be true and thus that something has gone wrong if in the long-run supposedly objective inquiry endorses inconsistent ethical beliefs or practices.

But in what sense will the ethical beliefs or practices that result from objective inquiry be inconsistent? Recall that throughout this dissertation, I have been conceiving of ethical inquiry and progress in terms of resolving problems. So to say that inconsistent beliefs or values might result from objective inquiry is just to say that there might be different ways of solving ethical problems that prove equally good solutions.

But why should this outcome be worrisome? I want to suggest, instead, that this is the more intuitively plausible outcome. We should expect this sort of pluralism about the good because there are likely to be a variety of solutions to the problems we face in living that live up to the world and live up to our values. We shouldn't expect, then, that there can be only one unique solution to each ethical problem we face anymore than we

would assume this to be the case when it comes to solving other sorts of problems such as a bad economy, a high crime rate, an unstable building, or an unhealthy lifestyle.²¹⁷

V. Conclusion

As I stated in the introduction to this dissertation and reiterated in chapters 2 and 3 with regard to progress, I have been concerned here only with *ethical* objectivity in contrast to *moral* objectivity. On the view I have been developing, the nature of objectivity differs in distinct domains. This claim seems obvious right when we compare the value domain with the scientific domain. After all, the relationship between facts and objects of the world from which we receive feedback in science is quite different from the relationship between facts and the objects of the world from which we receive feedback in ethics. After all, in the latter case the facts in question are normative and so there is a complex relationship of supervenience at work. Indeed, I think that much skepticism about the possibility of objectivity in domains of value has resulted from the assumption that only domains that are sufficiently like science can make good on a claim to objectivity.

To the contrary, I have suggested that one notion of objectivity may be appropriate in one domain but not another. This is also the position I take on the question of how the objectivity of inquiry about one's good translates to objectivity in inquiry about what we owe to one another. The right contrasts with the good in a number of significant ways; thus, it shouldn't be surprising that our notion of objectivity will differ in the former domain in contrast to the latter. In particular, I argued above with regard to

²¹⁷ And, of course, we also should not assume that problems can easily and neatly delineated in the way they would need to be in order for there to be only one unique solution to each problem.

ethical objectivity, that we do not need convergence for objectivity. However, when it comes to moral objectivity, I believe that convergence takes on a particular significance such that we cannot get along without it. Additionally, I believe that in contrast to the domain of the good, objective inquiry in the domain of the right must be a community-level—not an individual-level—pursuit.

I will return to these claims shortly in Chapter V where I offer the beginnings of an account objectivity and progress in the domain of the right.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks and Future Directions: Progress, Deliberation, Objectivity, and the Right

In the previous four chapters I have set forth a view about what we are up to in ethical inquiry and offered accounts of ethical progress, deliberation of ends in the realm of the good, and objectivity in ethics.

Ethical inquiry, I suggested, can best be conceived of in terms of an attempt at resolving the problems we come upon in trying to live. A problem, on my view, is an experience of trouble or a conflict that arises when there is a disharmony amongst our empirical beliefs, our values, and our actual experience of ourselves and the world. Problems often come to us not fully formed, but in need of further specification. The first step in solving a problem, then, will often be to fix on a characterization of the problem, and this characterization will naturally rule out some potential solutions and make others more apparent. To resolve a problem, I claimed, involves overcoming that problem in a way that gives all of the relevant values their due.

In chapter 3, I took up the task of showing what an individual's deliberation in this vein might look like by offering the empirical case of a conflict between some aspects of traditional masculinity norms and health concerns. The challenging philosophical question that arises from that case is how a man who strongly evaluates masculinity ideals but recognizes the health-costs of living up to those ideals might engage in rational deliberation that concludes in the revision or rejection of those ideals. I argued that we can satisfactorily capture the sort of thought process involved in

overcoming such a conflict only if rational deliberation consists in more than means-end reasoning; we need deliberation to be dynamic in the sense of allowing ends to be revised within the boundaries of a decision-problem.

Finally in chapter 4, I took up the question of whether and how the account offered in chapters 2 and 3 leaves room for objectivity in ethics. I suggested that instead of presupposing a particular conception of objectivity, we must first ask why we should care about ethical objectivity in the first place. My answer to this question is that objectivity undergirds a sense of mistakenness, genuine disagreement, appreciation of the viewpoints of others, and improvement or learning. After establishing these four considerations as the “point(s)” of objectivity in ethics, I then offered a procedural account of objectivity that makes good on all of them. According to this account, ethical objectivity is process-based, the world constrains our views by providing evidence, objective inquiry can be undertaken either by communities or by individuals, and ethical epistemology is naturalized.

In concluding, I would like to take up an issue that I have mentioned throughout the dissertation, without fully developing it—viz. the relation between the good and the right and more specifically, how the accounts of progress, deliberation, and objectivity that I have offered in the evaluative domain might be modified to apply to the deontic domain as well.

I. Morality vs. Ethics and The Right vs. The Good

I have at various points in the previous chapters offered caveats about the

particular areas of value-inquiry that I intend to capture in the accounts just described. Those accounts, I claimed, are aimed at the domain of the *ethical*, not the domain of the *moral*—where I take “ethical” to refer to the good (e.g. questions of what ideals to live by and what is a good life for an individual) and “moral” to refer to the right (e.g. questions of how to live together, what our obligations are to others, and what we can demand of one another). I put this contrast most starkly in chapter 3, in discussing the story of Tim Zaal, the former neo-Nazi turned tolerance-educator. Zaal’s story, I admitted, may have turned out quite differently had he found himself able to live with an ideology that characterized his son as potentially less than human and so possibly to be exterminated. And I said of the hypothetical case in which Zaal is truly able to live with this outcome, that there may be no grounds upon which Zaal could find that life less than a good way to live (at least for himself).²¹⁸

To admit that being a neo-Nazi—and possibly abandoning one’s son (or worse)—could be a *good life for Zaal*, however, is not yet to say anything about the *moral permissibility* of this way of living given the distinction I presume between the right and the good. I stated in chapter 3 that surely advocating or participating in the domination or extermination of a group of people based on their religion, ethnicity, race, or ancestry is a moral horror. And so, it is possible, in my view, for a good life for an individual to be a morally impermissible life—a life they have no right to lead and a life that the rest of us have an obligation to prevent them from leading.

²¹⁸ I did, however, note that there may be other grounds upon which we could criticize Zaal in that case. For instance, it is hard to see how he could hold the belief that Native American ancestry makes an individual less than fully human (in the moral sense) without being significantly incoherent in his belief/value system, and for that incoherence he would surely be susceptible to epistemic criticism. Also, we can surely continue to criticize Zaal’s background values as cruel, repulsive, or perverted.

But what conception of the deontic domain am I presupposing when I suggest that the practices involved in Zaal's previous neo-Nazism were immoral? We could take this as merely a plausible intuitive claim; indeed, what could be a clearer instance of moral wrong than the hatred, discrimination, and violence associated with white and Aryan supremacist movements of the past and present? In this vein, there would be nothing inconsistent with my putting forth the problem-resolving account in the domain of the good while remaining neutral about the domain of the right. I might suggest, for instance, that while the problem-solving account best captures our experience and the phenomenology of inquiry and practice in the domain of the good, an independent deontological or contractarian basis is the best account of moral obligations and rights.

In that case, however, it might be puzzling why we should think that accounting for objectivity and progress in the evaluative domain requires pragmatist insights and the use of the notion of problem-solving, while the deontic domain can be satisfactorily accounted for with reference to neither pragmatism nor problem-solving. The right and the good, we might all agree, are in some sense distinct—but how sharp is this distinction exactly? Such a stark contrast as would be implied by combining a primarily pragmatist account of the good with a purely contractarian or deontological account of the right might seem to draw too sharp a distinction between the two domains.

Indeed, I do not think that these domains can be so starkly distinguished. One difficulty in drawing the distinction between them likely is that in actually trying to live, conflicts that are wholly contained in one or the other of the domains are rare. We can see this even in the cases of the good that I have considered throughout this dissertation. In chapter 4, for example, I took pains to analyze the problem of masculinity and men's

health in terms of what makes a good life for an individual, and so I conceived of the problem in terms of conflicts between masculinity ideals and concern for one's own health and longevity. But surely there are other sorts of conflicts having to do with masculinity ideals that also involve questions of obligation, duty, rights, or legitimate demands.

Most obviously, given the discussion in that chapter, it is clear that some aspects of traditional conceptions of masculinity might be associated with violence as a way of “proving one's manhood” or “saving face.” But to the extent that traditional masculinity ideals endorse violence in this manner, they are in conflict with our general moral duties to others.²¹⁹ In addition, it appears that some aspects of traditional masculinity explicitly involve denigrating the feminine and upholding and enforcing constricting gender-roles and notions of normal sexuality.²²⁰ Surely then, in many cases in which an individual's masculinity ideals are in question, more than merely a conception of what a good life is for that individual will be at stake.

Another example of the trouble with sharply distinguishing the right and the good is one I discussed in chapter 4—the case of a father deliberating about how to deal with having a gay son given his commitment to masculinity as well as his understanding of male homosexuality as a sort of violation of masculinity norms. In analyzing that example in terms of dynamic deliberation, I considered the perspective of the father only in terms of what sort of relationship with his son and what sort of understanding of

²¹⁹ Consider again the endorsement of violence as a response to “insult” amongst young, white, Southern men in *Culture of Honor*.

²²⁰ Consider again the sorts of values measured in the hegemonic masculinity scale—male size and strength, sexual needs, repudiation of the feminine, and the importance of traditional gender roles in marriage according to which men should both be the sole provider for the family and should have veto decision-making power over wives. Springer and Mouzon 13. See also Kimmel 1994.

masculinity he could live with. But the father-son conflict here is not only a problem for the father, but also a problem for the son. Once the father has chosen to break off the relationship with his son, the son must decide how to react and how to make sense of the outcome. And prior to the father choosing that particular course of action, the father and son's actions and interactions are likely to affect the decisions the other makes. There is a sense, then, in which the question for the father and son is what *they* can live with *together*.

And certainly in this case the considerations at stake in the father and son's deliberations will be both ethical and moral values. At issue is not merely what sort of ideals the father and son as individuals can best live with, but also what sort of relationship they will have together; and this latter concern brings up questions of obligation and duty. Likely at stake here are both special obligations and duties that we owe to others on the basis of familial and chosen relationships, as well as general obligations and duties which we owe to all persons.

The sort of contrast among diverse sorts of moral concerns I have been discussing can also be found in a number of philosophers works—the most helpful of which for my purposes is T.M. Scanlon's contractualist account—which he fittingly refers to in terms of “what we owe to each other.”²²¹ Scanlon (171-2) notes that the term “morality” is

²²¹ See also Williams 1985, Raz 1986, 213-17. Others have recognized the fragmentation of morality, but have not necessarily conceived of this fragmentation in terms of the right and the good. Consider Thomas Nagel's (1979, 128-131) five fundamental types of value: specific obligations (those we owe toward family and friends), general rights, welfare considerations, perfectionist ends, and commitments to one's own projects. In addition, social psychologists Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham also posit five distinct moral domains (based on psychological studies)—harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Interestingly, Graham, Haidt, and Nosek find that liberals tend to emphasize only the first two domains, while conservatives are more likely to be concerned with all five. Nagel, Thomas. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979. Haidt, Jonathan and Jesse Graham. “When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals May Not Recognize.” *Social Justice Research* 20, no. 1 (2007): 98-116. Graham, Jesse, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian

often used in everyday language to rule out sorts of sexual activity that are taken to be impure, unnatural, or promiscuous; to refer to appropriate sorts of relations and attitudes toward friends and family; or to posit ideals of excellence to which to aspire. Yet, Scanlon notes that these uses of moral language don't fit easily into the "what we owe to each other" slogan of his contractualist picture. He takes these facts about our various uses of moral language and the different sorts of considerations and motivations that are inherent in those uses to show that morality is fragmented; contractualism, he claims, captures only one important part of morality—what he refers to as "narrow morality"—and this fragmentation is to be expected.²²²

Still, Scanlon acknowledges that there are other genuine sorts of value that matter in our lives and should be of concern to philosophers. He suggests that these other sorts of values—such as those having to do with familial relations, friendship, holding oneself to high standards or developing talents, and sexual values—are in fact importantly connected to the values at issue in narrow morality. He (175) notes, for instance, regarding sexual morality that, "[s]ince most sex...involves other people, its value cannot be understood apart from our duties to them. But these duties in turn are shaped by the special reasons we have to value specific goods, of which sexual relations are one example, and not every failure to understand these goods is simply a mistake about what we owe to others."²²³ Scanlon's view, thus, leaves room for an important interplay between what we owe to each other and values of excellence, friendship/family, or sexual

Nosek. "Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96, no.5 (2009): 1029-1046.

²²² Scanlon 171-176. He further suggests that one way to mark off the difference between the right and the good is in terms of values that do and do not "arise out of the ideal of justifiability to others." The difference, there, as Scanlon understands it, is about the motivational basis of the values in contrast to the good being the domain of goals and the right putting constraints on the pursuit of those goals (176 n27).

²²³ Scanlon 175.

morality, while still insisting that the two realms are quite distinct in terms of how they can be captured philosophically.

This, essentially, is the same sort of relation I have in mind regarding the distinctions of ethics/morality and the good/the right. Like Scanlon, I believe that we must attempt to separate these fragmented areas of morality in a broad and general way in order to make philosophical sense of them; yet, at the same time, I do not think any such separation can be complete since in living we will often face conflicts that involve both the right and the good.

II. Problem-Resolving in the Deontic Domain

I have been discussing the difficulty in sharply distinguishing the right and the good; despite this difficulty, however, it seems clear that some such distinction is appropriate, and so we have to ask what my view can say about objectivity, progress, and deliberation in the domain of the right (or the deontic domain). I have argued throughout this dissertation for understanding ethical inquiry in terms of solving problems, but what will problem-resolving about issues of the right look like?

I do not intend here to offer anything like a full exploration of the issues involved with satisfactorily capturing a sense of objectivity, progress, and deliberation in the deontic domain. Rather, I would like to offer some preliminary thoughts as to how I would go about approaching this question. My suspicion is that the problem-resolving account can be helpfully combined with a minimal contractualist view to produce a hybrid account—that is, a combination of a pragmatist outlook on ethics and an approach to morality that begins with the question of how we can live together in ways that are

justifiable to all of us. The upshot of such a view is twofold—first, it will ensure that the interests of all are taken seriously and given due consideration in our determining how to live together, and second, it will leave room for the contours of those interests to be determined, in part, through the sort of problem-resolving and deliberation I have been describing.

Why is the first aspect of the hybrid view important? How would the problem-resolution I have presented in chapters 2-4 allow individual interests to be given less than due consideration? One way to see the difficulty is in determining, for any problem, whose problem it is.²²⁴ Consider a slave society in which slaves routinely rise up against masters, and masters must resort to more violence and technological advances to put down and prevent these uprisings. The masters understand themselves to have a problem—that their slaves are insolent and difficult to control and that the current technological and organizational means of preventing and putting down revolts is not sufficient. The slaves, on the other hand, understand themselves to have a different sort of problem—their problem is that they are being treated as property rather than persons and that they do not have the power or technology to successfully end the practice of slavery.

Recall that in chapter 2 I characterized a problem in terms of a conflict in one's beliefs, values, and experience of the world. Given this definition, both the masters and slaves seem to be correct that they have a problem. But are they both accurately characterizing the nature of their problem? And if so, how can each side solve its problem, when one side's solution would simply exacerbate the problem the other side

²²⁴ Both Allan Gibbard and participants in the 2009 Central States Association have brought up this sort of worry.

faces? Of course, there is room here for me to point out that the masters—and the slaves as well—are significantly under-describing their problem. In actual historical slave societies, incoherent empirical beliefs and values can be expected to run rampant amongst slavery supporters.²²⁵ The hope offered by the problem-solving view, of course, is that the masters could come to see these incoherencies and would find themselves unable to live with the mental gymnastics or cognitive dissonance that are required for them to live with themselves, their actions, and their values. But in some sense, this is just a hope. There is nothing, in my view, inherent in the natural or social world that guarantees that people will find themselves unable to live with such incoherence. But it is absurd to think that it follows from the fact that masters can live with the dehumanization they perpetrate against slaves, that slavery is morally permissible. This would be allowing something like “might makes right”; notice, after all, that there is no room here for the consideration that the slaves surely *cannot* live with slavery and so even if the masters solve their problem of lacking the technology and force to fully prevent slave-revolts, the slaves’ problem persists.²²⁶

²²⁵ In the American context, of course, the justification of slavery depended upon a false and incoherent story about racial differences. Sociologist James Loewen (193-95) notes that the problems with this story came to a head during The Civil War as the Confederacy considered enlisting slaves as soldiers with the promise of freedom in return for their military service. But, as Loewen asks, “if servitude was the best condition for the slave...how could freedom be a reward?” Similarly, Howell Cobb, one of the founders of the Confederate States, recognized the glaring inconsistency in the idea of enlisting blacks as soldiers with freedom from slavery as a reward all in the name of maintaining the institution of slavery: “If slaves will make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong.” Loewen, James. *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. New York: Touchstone, 2007.

²²⁶ Also of particular absurdity here is what would follow, according to my account of progress, if the masters did overcome the problem of slaves revolting—that they would thereby be making ethical or moral progress! (Of course, my view does not merely say that just any “overcoming” of a problem is progressive. So there would still be room for me to argue here that the masters are still incoherent given the likely empirical beliefs that support their slavery-related values are quite obviously false. I might also insist that, therefore, the slaveholders are not really resolving a problem. Whether such an argument would be sound, however, seems beside the point. It simply is not at all plausible that whether increasing the level of force used against slaves is a moral improvement or not depends solely on the psychology, rationality, or satisfaction of the masters.)

How would a problem-resolving account with contractualist underpinnings handle this hypothetical slavery case? Consider Scanlon's (153) contractualism according to which, "an act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles...that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement." The individuals who would be confined to slavery can, of course, reasonably reject the principles establishing slavery, and thus slavery will not pass moral muster on Scanlon's contractualism.

But for all I have just said about the hybrid view's response to the slavery case, we now must ask what role the problem-solving aspect of the hybrid view is playing. Doesn't it seem that the slavery case can be fully handled by a purely contractualist view? It's true that Scanlon's contractualism does seem to demonstrate and justify our obligation to treat others in ways that rule out slavery. But such a pure contractualist account does not have much to say about how actual individuals living in a slave-society might, over time, come to question and reject slavery and develop new social institutions that they can better live with. This observation is not intended to be an objection to Scanlon's view. Rather, the point is merely that there are certain sorts of questions about how we do—and should—conduct ethical or moral inquiry that are not likely to be well addressed by traditional contractualist theories.

This, I think, is where the problem-resolving aspect of the hybrid view can be seen to be doing important work. My major concern throughout this dissertation has been how we make progress or improve in a non-utopian way. I have tried to show how the problem-resolving schema I described in chapter 2 realistically captures the experience and phenomenology of ethical or moral change. Thus, I have emphasized the

ways in which through living we can come to find conflicts involving important values we hold and practices we engage in. For instance, as noted above, the incoherence inherent in the racist ideology underlying slavery began to become more apparent as the Confederacy considered enlisting slaves as soldiers. As is clear from the actual history of racism in the U.S., one needn't have anything like a concern for mutual justification to others in an unforced agreement in order to come to see slavery as morally wrong.

This brings us to the second consequence of the hybrid view—that the contours of the interests of each of us that count in our deciding how to live together might be partially determined through the process of problem-resolving. Note for instance, that according to Scanlon's (153) contractualism, "an act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles...that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement." This way of cashing out moral impermissibility means that "deciding whether an action is right or wrong requires a substantive judgment...about whether certain objections to possible moral principles would be reasonable."²²⁷ Scanlon goes on to suggest that in order to make such a judgment, we need to consider the sort of burdens that would be imposed by the principle(s) in question on different parties with a background commitment to the idea of mutual justification to all in mind.²²⁸

Still, Scanlon largely leaves open the question of when rejection of principles will be reasonable. And it is here, I think, that the problem-solving way of conceiving of moral or ethical conflicts can helpfully enter into a general contractualist account. We

²²⁷ Scanlon 194.

²²⁸ Scanlon 192-96.

might look to concerns for coherence and the ability to live with one's values as a way of giving more substance to the notion of "reasonable rejection."²²⁹

III. Objectivity and Progress in the Deontic Domain

What does such a hybrid view have to say about objectivity? I suggested in the conclusion to chapter 4 that ethical objectivity is importantly different from moral objectivity. I began chapter 4 by questioning the point of ethical objectivity, and suggested that objectivity has the functions of providing a sense of mistakenness, making possible genuine ethical disagreement, allowing a certain kind of appreciation of the views of others, and undergirding a sense of ethical learning or improvement. Since my account of ethical objectivity flows out of consideration of the *point* of objectivity in that domain, we should not expect this particular account of objectivity to hold for other value domains. Rather, in thinking about moral objectivity, we would again do well to first consider why we should care about objectivity in this domain and what we would be missing if we were to give up on moral objectivity.

The four points of ethical objectivity above appear to apply equally to moral objectivity. However, it seems to me that there are still some important differences between objectivity in the domain of the good versus the right. In particular, in the latter case objectivity seems to also have to do with justification to others. In the ethical case, what is at stake is the question of what a good life for an individual is. But it is possible for other individuals to live their lives in radically different ways than what we think is good without needing to offer any justification to us. So long as the way of life in

²²⁹ One question I would like to take up here in the future is in regards to Scanlon's use of "reasonable" in comparison to my own concern throughout this dissertation with "rational" value-transitions and revisions of ends—what is at stake in this contrasting terminology?

question is generally only self-regarding, it needn't raise any conflicts that would lead us to intervene in that lifestyle or to demand justification for allowing it.

It is harder to see, though, how we could live in radically different ways when our way of life is strongly other-regarding such that the effects of our actions on others might raise issues of obligation or rights. In this case, disagreement about what we owe to one another is likely to lead to significant conflict. The way to overcome this conflict, we might think, is to ensure that the moral principles governing our society are in some sense justifiable to everyone. For instance, we do not think that it can be the case that "might makes right" and thus moral principles cannot merely be a matter of something like majority rule. Rather, justification requires that the principles governing society are in some sense beneficial to everyone and/or are something each person (at least under certain ideal circumstances) could agree to. The sense of objectivity that has to do with fairness, impartiality, or lack of bias—a sense that was not operative in the ethical case—seems to be important here.

Since moral objectivity seems to require a sense of fairness or justification to all, two other aspects of the account of ethical objectivity I put forth in chapter 4 will have to be adjusted. First, I suggested that convergence need not be part of a satisfactory notion of ethical objectivity. It seems to me that in the moral domain objectivity will be something that requires community level inquiry and objective moral inquiry will require convergence. This is because concerns about the right have to do with how to live with one another, what we owe each other, and what we can demand from others. There simply is not room for diversity about the moral in the same way there is room for diversity about the good since disagreements about the moral mean disagreements about

what others owe to us or vice-versa. For instance, if some of us think that each of us can legitimately demand that our spouse or partner refrain from violence against us (except in the case of self-defense) and others think, in contrast, that male spouses are entitled to resort to moderate violence against their wives, then we all have a significant problem. How can we live together in this way?

This is where the attractiveness of Rawlsian constructivist and Scanlonian contractualist views of morality becomes obvious. These views—by focusing respectively on a sort of hypothetical choice under certain constraints or on what principles can be reasonably rejected—produce a set of justified moral principles. The justification just is the fact that all would agree in the original position or we could not reject the principles in question without being unreasonable. This does not mean, of course, that we will *actually* converge on a set of moral principles within a real society; however, it does highlight the importance of a sense of hypothetical convergence in the realm of the right.

This concern for justification to all also explains why I argued that objective *ethical* inquiry can be undertaken either by an individual and or by a community, but have suggested that objective *moral* inquiry must be a community-based pursuit. If an important part of objectivity in morality involves justification to all, then we should expect that such inquiry will necessarily involve more than one person.²³⁰

IV. Conclusion

²³⁰ For instance, in Scanlon's contractualism since we are concerned with reasonable rejection of possible principles in the actual world, we have to consider the situations of others. And even in the case of Rawls' contractualism, the choice-situation Rawls describes appears to depend upon there being multiple decision-makers in the original position.

I have tried in the previous three sections to sketch out an approach to expanding my problem-resolving account of ethical inquiry to the domain of the moral as well. There is much here, however, still left to be worked out. For instance, one might wonder exactly what it means to say that the contours of our interests might be determined by something like problem-solving.

Or we might desire further clarification as to the precise nature of the hybrid of the problem-solving view and the contractualist view. On this view is it the case that some ways of relating to others are impermissible for reasons that derive from contractualism—e.g. that the principles permitting the action in question cannot be justified to all? Or are those actions or institutions wrong because they fail to resolve the problem in question?

In this chapter I have for the most part taken Scanlon's view in *What We Owe to Each Other* as a model for the sort of contractualism I have in mind. But is this the best model for the sort of hybrid view I would like to develop? Or might a different sort of contractualism—perhaps modeled on Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*—be better suited for my purposes?

Finally, what is the relation between the right and the political on the view I have been developing? Might the contractualist-problem solving hybrid be expanded to apply to the political domain as well as the moral domain, and what sorts of adjustments will be necessary for such an expansion?

These are questions I look forward to taking up and developing more fully in future projects.

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