

Mind and Value

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(Draft only. Do not quote)

1 Introduction

What connections are there between the concepts of mind and value? One way of linking them is found in the claim that some psychological concepts are themselves normative or evaluative. Kripke's claim that meaning is a normative notion sparked interest in this line of thought.¹ Later discussion has diversified into consideration of a variety of claims about the normative nature of content and of particular contentful acts and attitudes. These issues have interested both philosophers of mind and language and also those concerned with reasons, ethics and moral psychology.² This link is controversial and in some versions is thought to generate metaphysical difficulties for naturalism - that is for the view that facts are value-free, that there are no objective norms or values.

Another link is found in the thought that minded creatures are the kind of beings who go in for valuing things. Things matter to them and in consequence events in the world can turn out well or ill from their point of view, according as what matters does or does not occur. This second link is usually to be taken to be uncontroversial and to be something which philosophers of all metaphysical outlooks can readily acknowledge.

In this paper I shall help myself to some concepts which can be defined in terms of the second link in order to clarify the claim proposed by the first link. And I shall suggest that, so understood, the threat to naturalism from the supposed normative nature of psychological concepts can be resisted. My own suspicion is that the second, supposedly uncontroversial, mind-value link is a more likely source of metaphysical puzzlement, and of need to rethink naturalism, than the first. But that is not a suspicion which I am able to substantiate here.

Section 2 will consider the notion of a normative concept and what seem to be the large scale options for relating the psychological, the normative and the natural. Section 3 examines the

¹ Kripke Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982) p.37.

² A small selection from a very extensive literature:

P. Boghossian 'The Normativity of Content' in Philosophical Issues: A Supplement to Nous 13, 31-45

R. Brandom Making it Explicit (Boston: Harvard University Press 1994)

J Broome, 'Normative Requirements', Ratio 12 (1999) pp 398-419.

F. Dretske 'Norms, History, and the Constitution of the Mental' in Perception, Knowledge and Belief (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp 242-258.

C Korsgaard, 'The Normativity of Instrumental Reason' in Ethics and Practical Reason eds G Cullity and B Gaut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp 215-254

A Miller and C Wright (eds) Rule-Following and Meaning (Chesham: Acumen, 2002)

D Papineau, 'Normativity and Judgement' Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 1999

P Railton, 'On the Hypothetical and Non-Hypothetical in Reasoning about Belief and Action', in Ethics and Practical Reason eds G Cullity and B Gaut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp 53-80 and 'Facts and Values' Philosophical Topics XIV, 1996. 'Normative Force and Normative Freedom; Hume and Kant, but not Hume Versus Kant' Ratio XII 1999 (All of these are reprinted in his Facts, Values and Norms (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003))

D Velleman, 'The Guise of the Good', The Possibility of Practical Reason (Oxford, 2000) pp 99-122; 'On the Aim of Belief' The Possibility of Practical Reason (Oxford, 2000) pp 244-281.

second mind-value link and how it sustains a certain use of 'ought' on which a person cannot shrug off an ought claim. Section 4 asks how intellectual sophistication and concept possession may affect what matters to a being. Section 5 digresses to consider the 'bootstrapping' objection to some of the proposed normative principles about thinking, arguing that it can be defused. Section 6 returns to the status of the claimed normative links of psychological concepts.

2 'Normative concepts'

Let us start by asking what it means to say that a concept is normative. Perhaps it means that assertions made using it imply 'ought' claims.³ If so, the idea that belief and intention are normative notions might unpack into claims of this shape:

(1) If a person believes that p then she ought to believe what follows from p.⁴

Or perhaps the idea that a concept is normative is better taken in a slightly more general way, to mean that grasping the concept requires one to assent to some 'ought' claims involving it.⁵ Then the idea might be unpacked by, for example, (2), which offers one way of spelling out the idea that 'belief is subject to the norm of truth'.

(2) A person ought to ensure that (she believes that p only if p).

In what follows we shall take the idea that a concept is normative in this second more general way, which subsumes the first as a special case.

What options are available when thinking about the relations between this kind of claim and naturalism? The potential problem for naturalism stems from its unease about the metaphysical status of supposed objective value. The favoured naturalist strategy to account for its apparent existence, for our talking in ways which suggest our belief in it, is to explain these things as the outcome of construction or projection. It is psychological states or occurrences, for example shared feelings or valuings (themselves conceived as natural and metaphysically unproblematic), which underpin talk of value. But if the psychological, e.g. belief, is itself a value or norm-infused phenomenon then it turns out to be in the realm of the constructs or projections. That is an unwelcome result. And worse threatens if the psychological concepts which are normative include those of the psychological states or activities which provide the base for the construction or projection. In that case the constructing or projecting apparatus is not metaphysically unproblematic. And then the naturalist strategy for demystifying the appearance of norms and values threatens to unravel.

For this threat to become real we need more than the correctness of some claims made in the words of (1) or (2). This is because there are two ways of acknowledging such claims which remove their immediate danger for naturalism.

³ Sometimes this way of explaining 'normative concept' is explicitly set out e.g. by Boghossian and Dretske, and sometimes it seems implicit in the way the discussion is framed e.g. by Korsgaard and Brandom.

⁴ Korsgaard seems to have claims of these shapes in mind. op cit pp 221-2, 248-9. Brandom is also naturally read as suggesting something of this sort, op cit pp 16-17.

⁵ Papineau's reading perhaps - op cit p 17.

The first is to take the 'ought' to be what I shall call a 'shruggable' ought, that is an 'ought' for which no version of internalism holds. Consider a case where it is intelligible that a person acknowledge the truth of 'You ought to \emptyset ' and also just shrug it off, saying 'Sure, I ought to \emptyset . But what's that to me?' Then, we shall say, the 'ought' is shruggable. Suppose, by contrast, that a person cannot intelligibly acknowledge the 'ought' and also shrug it off, then we shall call such an ought 'unshruggable'. The unshruggability of an 'ought' does not require that the agent who acknowledges it act on it; she may have more pressing concerns. Nor is it required that she feel any phenomenological urgency about the matter; perhaps she is seriously depressed or otherwise ill. The point is rather that combining acceptance of the 'ought' claim with denying it any relevance to the direction of one's future endeavours leaves us baffled.

The metaphysical difficulties of value, from the naturalist's point of view, come in with the idea of 'to-be-pursuedness' being built into some states of affairs. The naturalist wants to protect the idea of a difference between, on the one hand, those psychological states which register independent facts in the world but cannot motivate because all those facts are norm-free, and, on the other, those psychological states which are, or are tinged with, our affective and motivational responses. So if an 'ought' turns out not to connect with motivation then it is not in the class of judgement which presents a prima facie challenge to naturalism.

And there are plenty of 'oughts' of this kind. There are many forms of activity where we agree that there is a 'norm', viz. some generally acknowledged standard, by which performances may be sorted into those which do and those which do not meet the standard. For example there is generally acknowledged standard by which funeral attire is proper if and only if it is sombre. We might express it thus:

(3) A person ought to take care that (if she goes to a funeral she wears sombre attire).

But someone may acknowledge this ('Well - in a way perhaps I ought to wear black') but not be moved at all to put on a dark coat even though she is going to a funeral. For one reason or another she does not respect the standard institution of the funeral ('But to be honest, I don't care - I think it's all a bit silly'). or she thinks that in this case the standard is irrelevant ('Old Tim would have preferred us to look cheerful.')

Kripke's original suggestion of the 'normativity of meaning' has fragmented into many different questions, depending on whether we are thinking about language or about thought and depending also on whether we are thinking about particular attitudes or about the representational content common to many attitudes. In connection with some of these more finely focused questions, the above sort of move looks very plausible. For example, indicative utterances may be sorted into the true or false - and there is then an easy slide from 'true' to 'correct' to 'ought to be uttered'. But uttering false indicative sentences is something all of us do frequently (e.g. when telling fairy tales, acting, joking) and about which (rightly) we have no qualms. So even if there is some sense in which false indicatives are 'incorrect' or 'ought not to be uttered', it is not a sense which poses any direct challenge to naturalism. Of course there remains the problem of giving a naturalistic account of what it is to be meaningful and indicative. But at least mysterious objective value is not on the scene.⁶ So perhaps we can

⁶ Similarly some of the early debate on Kripke's claim focused on the objectivity of truth. The sceptical threat of his ideas was seen, crudely, in the line of thought: 'Meaning is normative; the normative is non-factual; so meaning is non-factual; so there is no such thing as making claims with objective content.' But this sceptical line loses much of its force if the 'normativity' of sorting utterances into the 'correct' and 'incorrect' - or more

remove the pressures on naturalism by reading our normative claims about the psychological in terms of some shruggable 'ought'.

But even if that is not plausible and the 'ought' is one which we are inclined to be moved by, there is another way of evading difficulty. This is to see these claims as analogous to

(4) A person ought to take care that (if she handles a sharp object, the sharp edge does not press hard against her skin).

Perhaps we find this compelling. Perhaps I am myself anxious to conform to this injunction and think it unlikely that anyone else will want to shrug it off either. But that does not suggest that 'sharp object' is a normative concept. Rather it is explained by the fact that, as it happens, sharp objects cut human bodies and I do not want to be cut. But this is a desire which I have only contingently (and not on all occasions). Were our bodies different then we would not care about being cut.

But what if the normative claims about the psychological cannot be made out to be like either (3) or (4)? What if there is (for example) a requirement on all of us to seek what we call 'truth in belief', a requirement which is both unshruggable and not explicable as derivative from some other goal or taste? To agree this would be to say that what we call 'truth in belief' is a thing which presents itself to us as having 'to-be-pursuedness' built into it. And to agree that would be uncongenial in the naturalist framework.

So the questions we should look at are these. What 'ought' claims are plausible in connection with notions like belief and intention? Are they unshruggable? And to the extent that this is so, can it be accounted for in ways congenial to naturalism, e.g. on analogy with (4), as stemming from some optional personal goals?

In thinking about these questions it would help if we could identify and clarify a sense of 'ought' in which it is guaranteed to be unshruggable. If we understand more clearly what is required for an ought to be unshruggable then we will see better what it is we are enquiring into when we ask of the putative normative claims about the psychological whether they are true in that sense. And the second link of mind and value may help us to identify the concept we need. So it is to that that we now turn.

3 An Unshruggable 'Ought'

Minded creatures are the kinds of creatures who go in for valuing, in a broad sense. What other ideas come along with this? In considering the question, let us for the moment push to the background elements of mindedness which have to do with intellectual sophistication, language, culture, explicit reasoning and the like. We shall return in Section 3 to consider

generally sorting representational items into those with 'true' and 'false' contents is not automatically connected into sorting them into those which there is motivational pressure to do or avoid. Some responses to Kripke on behalf of naturalism have pursued this line.

what difference they make. What comes into focus when we cease to concentrate on them is what other animals and ourselves have in common. We are beings each of whom has a stance to the world, a way of living in and relating to the world. This stance, this point of view, fixes that things go well under certain conditions and not well under others. Let us say that some item - object, property, event, state, or process - matters to a creature if its existence or occurrence is needed to make things go well from that creature's point of view. (For stylistic variation, I shall also speak of things in which the creature has an interest.)

A minded being may need different items at different times in order for things to go well from its point of view at those times. And a minded being may have a repertoire of kinds of behaviour which it can engage in. Sometimes there will be just one piece of behaviour in a being's repertoire which stands out as particularly effective in promoting what matters to it. For example there may be only one thing it could do by which it could promote any state of affairs which would make things go well in any respect from its point of view. Or there may be one thing it can do which promotes much more of what matters to it than anything else it can do. When this is so, then the being ought to produce that piece of behaviour at that time. This is a 'from its point of view, all things considered "ought"' or 'from its point of view, ought tout court'.

With any being which is at all complicated, there may be several different possible states of affairs it could bring about which would, in different ways, make things go well from its point of view. It may also be the case that these things are mutually exclusive. (Nothing in the set of ideas we are exploring builds in that what matters to a being is simple or that its elements must be, either empirically or conceptually, compatible.) Also there may be several different things which a being could do to promote a state of affairs which matters to it. For these reasons, sometimes there will be no one piece of behaviour which stands out as uniquely called for from its point of view.

So when appraising ways of behaving from a being's point of view we shall very often need a vocabulary richer than 'ought' and 'ought not' tout court. We shall want to say 'from the point of view of interest A, the being ought to \emptyset , but from the point of view of interest B, the being ought not to \emptyset '. And when coming to overall appraisals of acts we shall need terms like 'all right', 'better than so and so', 'best on balance but not required' and the like as well as 'ought' tout court.

If I am right that the set of notions schematised above is one context in which we use 'ought' then what we have located is an unshuggable sense of 'ought'. If a being is sophisticated enough to have concepts, including the concepts of what matters to it and what it ought to do (in the above sense) then it cannot intelligibly both agree 'I ought to \emptyset ' and shrug. To agree 'I ought' is to acknowledge that something which matters to one is at stake, to shrug or to say 'So what?' is to express a stance of detachment which is incompatible with acknowledging that. What matters to one is, by definition, that to which, when recognised as such, one does not take a detached attitude.

The notion of things going well from a being's point of view is, however, very thin and non-committal. As already remarked, it does not build in a requirement that elements of what matters to a being be either compatible or commensurable. And another thing it does not build in is any metaphysical views about what determines what matters to an individual. It is important to have this clear, since it might seem that in agreeing to the idea that beings have

an individual stance to the world we had already bought into something non-objectivist. But this is not so. It could be that what an individual contributes to what matters to it is a distinctively shaped or limited capacity for responding to the objectively valuable. On this view there are two determinants of what matters to an individual, the nature of objective value and the extent of the being's capacity for responding to it. The schema, however, is also consistent with robust subjectivism, on which a being's interests are fixed by only one thing namely, possibly idiosyncratic, features of its own character and tastes.

Another thing which the schema does not build in is egoistic assumptions (which is why I have used the form of words 'from its point of view' rather than 'for it'). Certainly egoistic concerns provide one way of giving substance to our outline concepts. Animals are beings for whom things can go well or ill from their point of view. And as far as my cat is concerned, such things as her being well fed, healthy and having somewhere warm to lie when she wants to sleep contribute substantially to things going well from her point of view. These are states of the animal itself, narrowly conceived. So things going well from the animal's point of view amounts, in these kinds of case, to things going well for the animal. For some creatures states like bodily suffering and comfort, may be all that contribute to things going well or ill from their point of view. And such states may be, necessarily, parts of what make things go well or ill for all minded beings with bodies, including ourselves.⁷ But our schematic notions say only that things go well for a being in virtue of the conjunction of its point of view, which contributes to defining what matters to it, and the facts of the world. And what matters to it, its interests, need not be confined to monadic states of itself. For example, in the case of a social animal, its existing in relations with others conspecifics such as parents, siblings and offspring, who themselves flourish, is, plausibly, one of things which makes things go well from its point of view.

The schema also allows for fillings which do not call on either monadic or relational properties of the being with the interests. Perhaps there are some interests of some beings where the state of affairs which satisfies the interest need not involve the being itself at all. For example, a reflective human being can perhaps have some relation ('greatly valuing') to justice, or beauty, or knowledge or the biosphere, such that these things existing is part of what makes things go well from her point of view. And for such a being it might make sense to sacrifice self-involving states such as health, comfort, peace of mind and reputation to secure these things. If what she values is secured, then things go well from her point of view, even if, perhaps, she herself does not know that what she values exists.⁸ Nothing so far said shows whether or not this wonderfully high-minded sketch identifies a real possibility, but the schema does not rule it out.

⁷ I am inclined to think that this is so. Attempts to imagine an embodied being to which things matter but which has no concern for its body, seem to end up with imagining an item which is an organ of some other being rather than a minded subject in its own right. But we are here considering such speculative questions, and with such protean concepts, that it would be rash to be dogmatic.

⁸ One might say 'existing in a world in which p' is a property of any being in a world where p and so defines a state of that being. Hence having an interest which does not involve a state of oneself, in this thin formal sense, is impossible. Perhaps so. But this kind of manoeuvre will not serve to establish egoism in any interesting sense. Indeed it is not clear how one identifies in the class of things which matter from being's point of view, that class which are things which matter for it. The notion of an egoistic interest is one which has certain central instances but on which we may soon lose grip. For example, is thinking in terms of what is good for us (this family, tribe, country . . .), a sort of egoistic thinking?

The intelligibility of the unshuggable 'ought' linked with these schematic notions provides, perhaps, part of an explanation for the grip on us of ideas like 'we ought to take the means to our ends'. If we identify 'our ends' with securing what matters to us and identify 'taking the means to them' with producing the appropriate behaviour, then the schema we have been considering is this familiar thought in another guise. But it is important to see that we are as yet nowhere near any normative principles about intention ('If a person intends an end then practical reason requires that she ought to intend to take the means to that end') because the package outlined so far says nothing about intending. So our next move must be to look at what happens to the notions of the schema when we return to centre stage the notions - conceptual richness, intellectual sophistication, language, culture, explicit reasoning - which we backgrounded at the start of this section.

4 Concepts and interests

Consider some intellectually sophisticated beings who possess concepts and deploy them in the course of acquiring beliefs and forming intentions. They reason explicitly in arriving at these beliefs and intentions. They can, and sometimes do, make efforts to collect and attend to evidence when forming beliefs so as to form true beliefs. They can, and sometimes do, take pains to think about what goals they should set themselves and to choose effective means to those goals. Let us call such beings 'agents' and this package - grasp of the notions of truth, belief and intention, awareness of relations of entailment, ability to reason explicitly - 'agency'. And now let us ask how being an agent bears upon what matters to a creature.

One thing to note is that there is no reason to suppose that agents are infallible in discerning what matters to them. We should not identify what matters to an agent with what she herself thinks to matter or with what she consciously sets herself as a goal. There is, of course, a sense in which what one takes to matter is what matters to one - viz. where 'what matters to one' means what one is conceptually and emotionally preoccupied with. But such conceptually mediated engagement with a state of affairs is neither necessary nor sufficient for its actually contributing to things going well. It is not necessary since there may be things which matter to an agent which he or she has never thought about and a fortiori does not take to matter or set as a goal. (For example, it might be that a person's life goes well only because of the support and goodwill of someone else, where that goodwill and support are entirely taken for granted and never reflected on at all.) Conversely, a conceptually mediated relation to a state of affairs (judging it to matter or taking it as a goal) is not sufficient for its mattering, since we can be much preoccupied with getting something which when achieved turns out not to make things go well at all. (One might set one's heart on being a musician and then discover that one is bored by the endless round of rehearsals and concerts.)

It is overwhelmingly plausible to suppose that acquiring concepts opens up possibilities of new things which might matter to a creature. A non-conceptual being is limited in its concerns. What cannot impinge on a being in any way whatsoever cannot contribute to things going well from its point of view.⁹ But an agent can think about temporally and structurally complex items – such as musical compositions, poems, proofs, plays, football matches,

⁹ What counts as 'impinging on a being in some way'? This is a complicated matter. But however exactly we spell it out, given the causal structure of the universe and my cat's capacities, things which happen on Alpha Centauri cannot contribute to things going well or ill from her point of view.

families, marriages, feasts, countries, elections, etc., etc. An agent may become aware of some items of this kind as potential ingredients of things going well for her, may respond to that possibility in a positive way by judging them worthwhile and moving to promote them. Perhaps some of these responses embody misjudgements. But most of us would find it unbelievable to say that all such responses were mistakes. Most of us would agree that family life, engagement with music, the excitements of intellectual insight, the achievements of public office etc. are indeed the kind of thing which do make things go well for some of us.

But interests in music, mathematics, sport, family life or politics seem optional. They matter to some of us but not to others. Are there interests which come inescapably with agency? Are there unshuggable 'oughts' for agents and, if there are, can they be grounded or explained in a way congenial to naturalists? This is where the proposed normative links of psychological concepts reappear.

Among the candidates we should consider (1) and (2) which we repeat here:

(1) If a person believes that p then she ought to believe what follows from p.

(2) A person ought to ensure that (she believes that p only if p).

Another we should consider is

(5) A person ought to ensure that (if she believes that p then she believes what follows from p).

And interesting candidates connected with intention are

(6) If a person intends that p then she ought to intend the means necessary to bring about that p.

(7) A person ought to ensure that (if she intends that p then she intends the means necessary to bring about that p).

Some of these are not tenable as they stand. For example (1) is seriously implausible.¹⁰ Our minds are finite. We are not capable of working out all the logical consequences of our beliefs both through lack of logical acumen and through lack of time. And for many of those which are accessible, the time and effort of reaching them would be better spent on something else, since they are entirely trivial and boring. Perhaps a modified version will do better?

(8) If a person believes that p and is interested in whether q and is aware that p entails q then she ought to believe that q.

This also will not do. A person may have further evidence relevant to whether q, which point strongly to its not being the case. But (8) has nothing to say about that, and seems to recommend proceeding to believe that q, whatever that evidence. In some cases, however, the right thing to do might be to give that evidence weight, believe that not q and then abandon the belief that p. So to we need another modification:

¹⁰ Harman. G., 1999, Reasoning, Meaning and Mind, (Oxford: Clarendon Press)

(9) If a person believes that p and is interested in whether q and is aware that p entails that q and has no further evidence bearing on whether q then she ought to believe that q .

The kind of adjustment needed for (1) is plausibly needed also for (5), (6) and (7). I will not pursue through these complications. Let us enquire rather whether there is unifying idea behind the proposals.

And when we take the group of claims as a whole, the thought which leaps to mind is that what is being recommended is agency itself. So if we now take the 'ought' in the unshuggable sense of Section 2 what the recommendations say is, in effect, is 'Being an agent matters to a person. If she continues to be an agent - i.e. seeks to ensure truth for her beliefs, forms them in the light of the evidence and with a view to preserving consistency, does not let her intentions drift - then things go well with her, in at least some important respect.'

And very likely, when it is put thus baldly, most of us will put up our hands and agree. For sure, ceasing to be able to tell truth from fantasy, falling into contradictory muddles, not having the drive or organisation to work out how to carry projects through - are all (in general) bad news for a person. But what sort of a truth is this? Is it something unwelcome to the naturalist? Before we turn to that, I shall digress to consider some difficulties which have been raised for principles of the form of (6) and (9), as opposed to (5) and (7).

5 Bootstrapping and Agency

Principles of the form of (6) and (9) say: If you are in such and such a psychological state (or combination of states) then this is what you ought to do. By contrast principles of the form (5) and (7) say: You should try to maintain such and such patterns among your psychological states. In the first sort of principle the 'ought' has narrow scope and governs the consequent of the conditional. Hence, given the truth of the antecedent, we can detach the consequent 'ought' claim. On the second sort, the 'ought' has wide scope and the truth of the antecedent of the embedded conditional does not support detachment.

A serious reason for being uneasy about principles of the first shape is found in what we may call the Bootstrapping Problem. Let us suppose a person is debating whether p or not p . Let us suppose further that she ought to believe not p (perhaps because the truth is that not p). Nevertheless, unfortunately, she comes to believe that p . Next the question that q presents itself to her as interesting. Moreover she is aware that p entails that q and that she has no other evidence bearing on the matter. Ought she now to believe that q ? (9) says that she ought. But when we have firmly in mind the fact that her belief that p is not the belief she ought to have, we might well think that there is something unhappy in saying this. And the unhappiness is brought into full focus by the consideration that nothing is more obviously a logical consequence of p than p . So suppose as before that she wrongly forms the belief that p - and remains interested in whether p and is aware that p entails that p and has no more evidence against p than she has already considered. Now, it seems (9) transforms the belief she ought not to have into a belief she ought to have.

And the same difficulty confronts (6). Suppose a person is debating whether or not to make it the case that p . Suppose that the intention she ought to have is the intention that not p . And suppose that, unfortunately, she forms the wrong intention. Now for any intention, say that p , there is one sure-fire necessary way to bring it about that p , namely bringing it about that p . So if (6) were correct it would, it seems, guarantee that any intention I have is one I ought to have.

Broome has urged such bootstrapping problems with considerable ingenuity.¹¹ His own response to them is to suggest that our attraction to principles like (6) and (9) is the result of a muddle. The nearest available truths are principles like (5) and (7). So perhaps, being aware of them, we have fallen into some version of the 'modal operator misplacement' trap.¹²

But is this bootstrapping objection really fatal? We are working with the following schematic thought: facts together with a being's stance to the world fix what at a given time would make things go well from that being's point of view. Nothing in this thought requires that the facts may not include ones about mistakes which the being has made in the past. Suppose I plan a long hike in the hills and stupidly set out in my new walking boots. Soon I have a nasty blister and am in an awkward situation. Had I worn the old boots, as I ought to have, I would not be in this trouble. But I did not wear the old boots and am now in a possible world which is less than ideal from my point of view.

But that does not mean that the question 'What ought I to do now?' has no answer. It does not help only to hark back to the past, saying 'Well - you ought to have taken the other boots.' My wrong decision has been made. I cannot reverse it and am now in a new situation with new options. As things stand one of those options (call a cab on my mobile, struggle on to the shop where I can buy some plasters, walk barefoot for a while, etc.) may clearly be the one I ought to take.

The importance of this sort of case is that it brings to our attention the need to specify carefully what situation and what set of options we are considering. There is the situation before the mistake has been made and the situation afterwards. This applies, formally speaking, as much to the wrong belief case as to the wrong boots case. (And it applies also to the wrong intention case, about which the same moves as below can be made, mutatis mutandis.)

Before I form the wrong belief the situation is S_1 . It obtains just before t_1 and in it my options are to initiate at t_1 a state of believing that p or initiate at t_1 a state of believing that not p . What I ought to do is initiate a state of believing that not p . However, unfortunately, I initiate instead a state of believing that p . After I have made the mistake the situation is S_2 . It obtains at t_2 which is later than t_1 . It is crucially different from S_1 , since the fact that at t_1 I came to believe that p is an element in it. My options in S_2 are different from those in S_1 . In S_2 they are to stick with believing that p or to reconsider and (perhaps) change my mind.

¹¹ Op cit fnmt 1.

¹² The trap operates as follows. Suppose that O is some modal operator, such as 'necessarily' or 'it ought to be that'. Colloquially we may express our awareness that O (if p then q) by saying 'If p then, O , q '. And then, in further dealings with the thought, we may attend too much to the surface form of its expression. This results in our getting into a thoroughly confused state where we fail to distinguish the thought where O has narrow scope from that where it has wide scope.

What this distinction of the situations and options shows is that the bootstrapping objection need not provide a direct reductio ad absurdum of principles like (9), if we are clear that (9) offers a judgement on my options after I have made the mistake. Perhaps the fact that I have come to the wrong belief makes a difference. But how does it do so?

Someone might argue that we should not assimilate the case of the wrong belief or intention to the case of the wrong boots. With the boots, I have acted and cannot now wipe out that act and its consequences. I am in the middle of the countryside, I have the blister. But with belief or intention I can wipe out the mistake. Just by changing my mind, right now, I can put myself back on track in a better world. And if so, surely that is what I ought to do.

But this although plausible is not right. It is part of the kind of agency we possess (and possibly part of any realistically imaginable form of agency) that we are fallible in forming our beliefs and intentions. Given our awareness of that fallibility and our ability to reconsider, it is certainly correct that we should sometimes be willing to do so. But it does not follow that we ought to reconsider on every occasion. That is a recipe for endless dither. So on some occasions not reconsidering will be the right thing to do. And plausibly this is one of them.

What I have just argued about the propriety of not reconsidering may seem acceptable in a case where the fact is that not p but the balance of evidence suggests that p . Here two things which matter are at stake, believing the truth and conforming my belief to the evidence. Unfortunately they conflict. But one may agree that conforming belief to the evidence trumps truth, since it is what continuing to be an agent requires of me. Given that I have appreciated that the evidence favours p , it is only if there is a breakdown in my intellectual processes that I could end up believing that not p . Such breakdown is dangerous, would not make things go well from my point of view in the long run. So in coming to believe that p I did what I ought to have done, indeed what I ought to have done tout court.

But what if I ought to have formed the belief that not p , not just in the sense that the truth is not p but also in the sense that the balance of the evidence suggests not p ? Is it still true that, having made the mistake, what I ought now to do is stick with the belief that p ? What interest is served by my pushing on in this deluded way? But this rhetorical question has an answer. The interest which is served is that of having my agency get me anywhere in the onward flow of life.

We have already agreed that fallibility cannot mean constant reconsideration. So when should one reconsider? The answer being suggested by the objector is 'when one has got the reasoning wrong'. But from the agent's point of view mistakes in reasoning are as invisible as mistakes of fact - and mistakes of both kinds can be either easy or difficult to detect with further reflection or further evidence gathering. So a better answer to 'when should one reconsider?' is 'when some new stimulus prompts to it'. To say this is not to recommend dogmatism or forging ahead regardless. A certain tentativeness and humility are important intellectual virtues. But what they should prompt are policies of periodic review, and cultivation of sensitivity to clues that reconsideration is in order, rather than chronic inability to make up one's mind. In upshot, then, 'ought' remarks of the shape of (6) and (9) are in order. To the extent that preserving agency is important, (6) and (9) are as true of a creature as (5) and (7).

6 Agency and value

At the end of Section 4 we agreed that continuing to be an agent is important. Hence we agreed on the truth of claims like (2), (5), (6), (7) and (9), or suitably adjusted versions of them.

We should acknowledge that it is not plausible that continuing to be an agent is, at all times, what matters most to a person. We can envisage cases where it could be better from a person's point of view to cease, temporarily or permanently to be an agent, viz. cases where something else which matters immensely is only to be secured that way. But allowing this is consistent with the thought that continuing to be an agent matters greatly. And in many situations, if so continuing is in conflict with something else which matters, one ought to preserve one's agency at the expense of the other interest.

But why? One idea is that being an agent is inherently valuable, it has 'to be pursuedness' built in. Intellectual sophistication, one might say, makes us capable of appreciating what it is to be an agent - gives us the ideas of discerning truth, of determining what we do through our appreciation of reasons for it. And once we are aware of this possible way of being, we need must fall in love with it, for its own sake.

The alternative, naturalist, view should acknowledge that there may be people to whom agency is an end in itself. But naturalists will maintain that there may also be people who do not have agency as an end in itself, and to whom their agency matters only because it is a means to, or constituent of, other things which matter to them.¹³

Naturalists will agree that, as the world is and as our actual tastes and characters are, being an agent is an immensely useful capacity to have. Exercising it is the most effective and reliable way of getting things which matter such as food, bodily safety and the like. Lacking it we would be dependent for them (as we are in infancy and demented old age) on things over which we have no control, such as the goodwill of other human beings. Also naturalists will agree that exercising agency is a constituent of such distinctively human activities as taking part in sports, plays, family life, scientific enquiry, etc. etc. Anyone to whom these things matter needs to be able to reason and plan. So, as our tastes and the world actually are, it certainly seems that things going well from our point of view is pretty well inextricably bound up with our agency.

¹³ Dretske writes 'The only fault with fallacious reasoning, the only thing wrong or bad about mistaken judgements in that, generally speaking, we don't like them. They do not - most of the time - serve our purposes. This, though, leaves the normativity of false belief and fallacious reasoning in the same place as the normativity of foul weather and bad table manners - in the attitudes, purposes, and beliefs of the people who make judgements about the weather and table behaviour.' (op cit fnnt 1 p 248). Papineau says 'I shall contend that the most significant norms of judgement can be viewed as prescriptions to the effect that, in order to achieve the truth, you ought to judge in such-and-such ways. In my view, there is nothing constitutively normative about the end of truth itself. So I take the force of these prescriptions to derive from independent moral or personal reasons for attaching value to truth.' (op cit fnnt 1, pp 17-18.) (These remarks are focused on the suggested norms for belief. Dretske and Papineau are less inclined to an instrumental treatment of the suggested norms for intention. But naturalists should in consistency think of that instrumentally too, once the possibility of divergence between conscious intention and real interest is allowed. Cf the quotation from Railton given in fnnt 15 below.)

But acknowledging all this does not show that agency is good in itself. To show that we would need to show that any life including agency is, just because of that inclusion, better from the point of its subject, than a life without, in at least some respect. But can't we begin to conceive of beings to whom agency would be an unmitigated disaster? What of beings living some harmonious life, full of rich sensory pleasures and undemanding companionship, who acquire concepts and ability to reason. Unfortunately their conceptual repertoire is limited and enables them to bring to conscious attention only the hitherto rather small part of their lives where they compete and consume. So the result of their agency is increased effectiveness of expression for the aggressive and greedy parts of their psychologies. What it precipitates them into is war and destruction of their environment. Overall things go less well from their point of view than they did before. (This is a familiar romantic view of our position. I am not presenting it as true. But its coherence as a story is enough to make the point.)

But is the disaster unmitigated? Perhaps one will suggest that that, even if on balance it has worked out badly for these beings, all the same agency has contributed something which makes things go well from their point of view in at least one respect. For example, one might say that *qua* agents they have some distinctive dignity or autonomy. But must we agree with this? The naturalist seems entitled to raise a sceptical eyebrow and to suggest that caring about such dignity or autonomy is a pretty optional matter.

There are other worries also which one might pursue about the value of agency. The drive of agency is in the direction of explicitness and control. But a life in which a person moves always, or even most of the time, through some exactly foreseen and planned sequence of happenings is one which some of us might not find to go well. Spontaneity, surprise, not always being in control, are elements in things going well from some beings' point of view - and these things are at risk from some developments of agency.¹⁴ All in all, the idea of agency as worthwhile in itself, independently of what it is focused on and leads to, seems to be very far from mandatory.¹⁵

The upshot is that the threat to naturalism from the supposed normativity of the psychological can be seen off. We have not found arguments which force the naturalist to admit that the 'oughts' we have considered are categorical. They can be presented as derivative, as identifying policies which, usually, will make things go well from a person's point of view,

¹⁴ See G Ainslie [Breakdown of Will](#) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) esp Part III for further thoughts on this.

¹⁵ Peter Railton writes insightfully on these topics in the paper cited in fnnt 1. He considers a questioning student, Gary, who asks whether rationality is worth it. Gary is aware that certain 'oughts' or requirements about thinking are being presented to him as categorical. But he is not content to accept them without probing. 'I want to know', says Gary of practical reasoning, 'whether subjectively patterning my thinking along means/ends lines would really be in objective conformity with realizing my ends - especially the end of living well.' Railton argues that in posing the question, and asking us to answer it by identifying good features of being an agent, Gary is operating as an agent, is himself taking for granted that means/ends reasoning is the way to tackle his question. We can point this out to Gary and point out also how difficult it is to make convincing the idea of living an attractive life on the other side, i.e. as non-agent. To that extent we can answer him. But Railton, if I understand him rightly, also wants to suggest that we do not end up here endorsing something the nature and value of which are entirely transparent. He writes '[Gary] can, without absurdity, be seen as trying to find a way of keeping us aware that no one really knows where reflective equilibrium and our evolving experience might take us. Each step in a reflective equilibrium process is linked by intelligible forms of reasoning to the step before, but this does not mean that we could not take steps which would, in sum, yield the result that our conception of reasoning itself has changed. Experience has held some interesting surprises for those who thought certain principles . . . were constitutive of the entire possible domain of thought and action.'

but which do so only because of the tastes most of us happen to have and the way the world happens to be set up. These 'oughts' do not establish an agreed bridgehead into a realm of objective value.

The value objectivist however need not throw in the towel yet. The genie of thinking in objectivist terms, once out of the bottle, is difficult to get back in again. Perhaps all we have shown so far is that our resources of cussedness and scepticism are extensive. Perhaps our ability to shrug at pretty well anything presented to us as valuable may show only our liability to be mistaken about what matters to us. Perhaps it bears witness to the centrality of an element of freedom in our responsiveness to reasons.¹⁶ Objective value is only thoroughly discredited as a concept if the naturalist can move on from pointing out how good we are at shrugging to filling in a detailed and wholly subjectivist account of what fixes what matters to a person, an account which calls only on naturalist materials. And whether that can be done, or indeed exactly what the project amounts to, is another matter.

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¹⁶ 'Normative Force and Normative Freedom; Hume and Kant, but not Hume Versus Kant' Ratio XII 1999