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Moral Faith and Moral Reason

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In ‘Moral Faith’, Robert Adams discusses some interesting phenomena regarding moral commitment. Adams thinks that often our moral commitment outstrips what we are epistemically entitled to believe; unlike Hume’s famous wise person, we do not proportion our belief to our evidence. For instance, Adams claims that ‘if I factor into my practical deliberations “a 10% chance that morality is a delusion” . . . then I have stepped outside the moral life’ (Adams 1995: 90–1). Adams seems to identify a genuine phenomenon: moral commitment seems to demand that we behave as if there were no room for general doubts about morality or even about some more specific moral claims. For Adams, moral commitment requires ‘faith’; namely, ‘believing something that a rational person might be seriously tempted to doubt, or even not to believe’ (Adams 1995: 75), or at least to believe or have a degree of confidence¹ that is not ‘proportionate to the strength of the evidence or arguments supporting them’ (Adams 1995: 91). But is it correct that this phenomenon is best explained in terms of ‘faith’ as Adams understands it? I argue that it is not; rather, at least in some cases we should conclude that our moral knowledge is certain. The appearance that there can be no certainty here is the result of certain dubious views about second-order or indirect doubts.

Nonetheless, discussing the phenomena that lead Adams to postulate moral faith brings to light the nature of the epistemic warrant that can justify various kinds of moral commitments. This suggests a different role for moral theory to play in relation to moral intuitions. Moral theory is often thought to justify (a subset of) our moral intuitions by systematizing them and showing how they flow from relatively few plausible principles. I argue instead that moral theory can play an essential role in explaining the nature of our epistemic warrant for certain

¹ Adams has some misgivings about using the word ‘confidence’ in this context (Adams 1995: 95), but since they are not relevant for our discussion, I’ll ignore them here.

intuitive moral judgements, especially the nature of the kind of demanding epistemic warrant that we must presuppose in order to regard the moral commitment of the virtuous agent as justified. I argue that a Kantian theory is particularly well placed to play this role.

1 Adams on Moral Faith

According to Adams, faith ‘is, or involves, believing something that a rational person might be seriously tempted to doubt’ (Adams 1995: 75). It only counts as faith, of course, if the believer is aware of these rational pressures on the belief. If, for instance, I am fully convinced that God spoke directly to me and told me that the principle of utility is undoubtedly true, my confidence is based on a delusion, not on faith.

Here I’ll just focus on some of the aspects of ‘moral faith’ that Adams describes and discuss some closely related phenomena that Adams does not discuss. Let us start with looking at our attitudes regarding moral scepticism. All of us have seen many arguments for moral scepticism; some of them doubtless very plausible arguments.² None of us think that all these arguments are sound, and many of us think that none of them are. However, it appears that there is much to be said for the view that morality is false or fraudulent, or at least that it does not have the kind of claim on our will that we ordinarily think it does. Perhaps, as Nietzsche says, ‘as surely as the wicked enjoy a hundred kinds of happiness of which the virtuous have no inkling, so too they possess a hundred kinds of beauty’ (Nietzsche 1997: 195), and acting morally is just a way of missing out on all this great stuff.

The existence of such apparently plausible arguments and positions seems to be enough to put some doubt in the minds of rational agents regarding the validity of the claims of morality. Even if we align ourselves with the side of the non-sceptics, it seems that we are not epistemically warranted to much more than a claim of the form: ‘It is likely that morality makes legitimate demands on me.’ Yet, a virtuous agent’s commitment to morality seems to far outstrip what would be warranted by this kind of epistemic attitude. Morality can demand immense sacrifices, and it is hard to see how such sacrifices could be justified by anything short of certainty.

Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, what Adams describes as ‘moral faith’ is not limited to very general doubts about the nature of morality; also

² Annette Baier has raised suspicions that analytic ethics and its particular brand of theorizing may ‘corrupt the young’ (Baier 1985a; see also Baier 1985b) exactly because it breeds scepticism and confusion. I hope that the arguments here constitute a partial response to Baier’s concern.

our commitment to specific moral positions seems to outstrip our evidence. As Adams points out, sometimes willingness to entertain an opposing view is itself a failure to show commitment to morality. This seems correct; it would show moral vice, rather than epistemic virtue, if one were to say: 'It's unlikely that I'll be convinced by your argument that one can torture children for pecuniary gain, but let's hear it out; who knows what you'll come up with.' Someone jeered by an audience as she is about to propose a novel argument to show that racism is justified is not entitled to complain that her audience showed a lack of open-mindedness. One could argue that our attitude to act-utilitarianism, for instance, falls into the same category. Most of us seem to give no weight to the possibility that various forms of political assassination, selling grades for a charitable cause, and so on might be the acts that are right because they maximize utility. Of course, act-utilitarians might argue that their views do not have this consequence, but, it seems that many people's commitment to this kind of rejection of these options does not depend on appreciating the alleged compelling success of such arguments.

Let me just go over a few possible ways in which one could try to explain away the phenomena. First, we might want to say that this is not very different from how one would react if someone proposed that the earth were flat or that the sun revolves around the moon. Were someone to tell us that they were afraid to travel far, because they now had really good evidence that the earth was flat and that they could fall off its edge, we would not take him seriously. Certainly we would not treat him with the same outrage that we would treat someone who tried to convince us that she should be allowed to torture little children, but the flatness of the earth is not a moral matter. But, in both cases, in refusing to hear the sceptics, we are simply displaying a healthy dose of dogmatism.

Whatever we think of the appropriateness of this kind of dogmatism in science, we must also note that the situations are not parallel, or at least not obviously so. The evidence that my flat-earth believer friend adduces is necessarily poor compared to the evidence I have that the earth is not flat. No matter how persuasive she is, I know that I am no expert on this issue, and that I should trust the verdict of the scientific community more than I trust my judgement. Moreover, I know that it is rather rare that untrained amateurs make discoveries that have escaped the scientific community. So the fact that the scientific community has not been convinced by my friend's evidence greatly undermines the evidence she presents. But in the case of morality, I do not have the same reason to defer to a community of experts. Moreover, whatever one wants to say about the status of my confidence in a specific moral matter, it is not clear that the same confidence is warranted in the case of moral scepticism; after all, arguments for moral scepticism, as opposed to arguments for the flatness

of the earth, still make their way into respected journals. In sum, with respect to moral scepticism, we cannot point to a set of experts³ who have (nearly) unanimously rejected this scepticism, and thus cannot have the same basis for undermining an argument for scepticism. With respect to more specific moral beliefs, to the extent that there is such a set of experts, I am one of them.

The second possible source of opposition is that there is no lack of fit between the evidence and the attitude, since the relevant attitude is not one of belief.⁴ One could say that we form a certain moral belief in light of evidence, but the kind of commitment that is warranted is not based on the quality of the evidence, but on the moral issue itself. Thus, we might say that whatever evidence we have about the immorality of cruelty, the commitment against cruelty is based on its moral importance, not on how certain one is that this is the correct position.

But there are serious obstacles to the idea that once we form a commitment based on outright belief, the commitment is independent of both the quality of our evidence and of our level of confidence. Moral commitment in this case implies a willingness to act as dictated by our moral beliefs. But the idea that our willingness to act should not be sensitive to our degree of confidence in these beliefs seems to conflict with some plausible principles of practical rationality. After all, I might believe that I locked my car but whether it makes sense for me to continue in my path or whether I should go back and check might depend on how confident I am. The same holds for non-normative facts with regard to an important moral decision. If you are considering, for instance, demolishing a building but are concerned that there might be people inside the building, you will be willing to consider any kind of evidence that might confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis that there are people inside the building. Your willingness to demolish the building will be inversely proportionate to the strength of your evidence that there are people inside, and you'll be more than willing to give a fair hearing to those who claim to have evidence that the building is not empty.⁵ Of course

³ I am not endorsing here a general prohibition on deferring to moral experts (although I am sympathetic to some versions of the view, and some forms of reliance on moral expertise will turn out to be problematic by the end of the chapter). For arguments against this prohibition, see, for instance, Jones (1999) and Enoch (manuscript). All that I need for my argument is that there are no recognized community of experts, or no set of experts, such that, given what my epistemic situation is likely to be in the near future, I cannot foresee any kind of evidence that will outweigh the testimony of those experts. This is fully compatible with accepting that one might, or even must, defer to experts in various circumstances.

⁴ Adams addresses a similar worry, but he only focuses on an opponent who does not think that there is *any* belief involved.

⁵ There are further complications with respect to whether in cases in which you check again, it is still true that, while you check, you have an outright belief, but such complications do not affect our main point.

one can say that the relation between moral commitment and moral beliefs is in some way special, and cannot be modelled in terms of how our willingness to act is sensitive to confidence in other contexts, or even in moral contexts in which the relevant question is about a non-moral belief. However, this is exactly what we are trying to explain: why we are entitled to this kind of moral commitment in this special case of apparently uncertain belief.

2 Rejecting Faith

It is important to note that Adams is not arguing that those who already accept religious faith should extend this attitude to the moral realm. Adams argues that an attitude of moral faith is an essential aspect of moral life and that our ordinary understanding of a virtuous agent implies that such an agent displays moral faith. I will take as my starting point that Adams has identified the underlying phenomena correctly; that is, I agree that our commitment to morality should not diminish, and we should not make room for ‘backup’ plans, in the face of these various doubts. But does this imply that we should accept that morality involves something like what Adams describes as faith? Does it imply that morality requires belief or commitment that is not warranted or proportionate to the evidence? I’ll be defending a negative answer to these questions, but before I do this, I want to raise the stakes. Adams tries to show that there is nothing untoward about the possibility that morality requires this kind of faith. But this, I hope to show, is not true; we cannot just take in our stride the idea that moral commitment requires faith. After all, it is hard to see how this kind of faith is any different from self-deception or wishful thinking; perhaps moral faith is a particularly noble version of fooling yourself, but it’s a case of fooling yourself nonetheless. The idea of moral faith implies that we ought to have a high degree of belief, or least an attitude that seems a lot like high confidence, in certain propositions that are not warranted by the evidence. But how could morality make demands so clearly at odds with the demands of theoretical rationality? Wouldn’t morality lose something important if the search for the *summum bonum* makes us incompetent in the search for the truth?

Adams tries to argue that moral faith might be compatible with full rationality from the theoretical side.⁶ Adams agrees that there is an obvious legitimate concern when our beliefs are influenced by our desires, but he thinks that in the moral case, this is not an issue. Typically, being influenced by certain motives can

⁶ I think this is one way to understand his view, but this is not how he formulates it.

lead us astray, but in the case of morality, disinterested inquiry is not necessarily the best path to the truth:

In ethics, however, it does not seem that we have truth-finding faculties independent of our desires. Whatever may be the nature of ethical truth, it is not plausible to suppose that those whose hearts are in the wrong place are as likely to find as those whose hearts are in the right place ... To suppose that our thinking in such matters would be more reliable if we did not care which conclusion we come to, so long as it is the correct one is to propose an implausibly cold-hearted conception of what would constitute reliable thinking in ethics.

(Adams 1995: 92)

But this seems to invert the order of explanation for a cognitivist, and thus for someone who is willing to talk about 'truth-finding faculties' in ethics.⁷ After all, the cognitivist holds that we have the desires we have because we understand or know the importance of certain moral ends, rather than that we know their importance due to our volitional commitment to these ends. Indeed, the attraction of cognitivism is exactly that such volitional commitment is not wrought out of nothing, but rather it is the effect of the recognition of a certain rational requirement or a moral truth. Of course the idea that 'we do not care which conclusion we come to' sounds odd and cold-hearted because this is thinking about *what to care about*; the search for truth here should motivate at least the virtuous person. But the virtuous person does not approach moral inquiry with an *independent* motivational stake in the matter. Insofar as our inquiry is influenced by motivation that is separable from our motivation to act morally,⁸ what we arrive at at the end of inquiry is not at an especially warm moral opinion, but a biased and prejudiced one.

What we care about in such inquiries is not merely arriving at the truth about what to care about, but also, at least insofar as we are rational, about *what we have concluded that we ought to care about*.⁹ Similarly, if Larry is deciding whether, say, he is going to pursue a career as a professional footballer or whether he will be a stay-at-home Dad, it would be strange to say that he does not care which

⁷ Is there a similar issue for a non-cognitivist? Depending how and whether a non-cognitivist allows room for assessing moral judgements as true or false, some of the difficulties here in accounting for the phenomena will be shared by the non-cognitivist. At any rate, normative uncertainty is a notoriously difficult topic for a non-cognitivist, so I'll set aside discussion of how non-cognitivists would deal with such issues.

⁸ This does not imply that the motivation to act morally takes the form of a desire to do what is morally right, read *de dicto*. Michael Smith has argued that the virtuous person is *not* motivated by such a *de dicto* desire. I have doubts about Smith's argument on this issue (see Tenenbaum 2011), but the argument above does not depend on an any more specific view about the nature of moral motivation.

⁹ It is also odd to think that we are in suspense until we know what to care about.

conclusion he comes to. But the oddity is not due to his already being committed to something else; rather the oddity is due to the fact that whatever conclusion he comes to is one that he cares deeply about not just for the sake of believing the truth. But were Larry's reasoning influenced not just by the reasons to be a football player or to be a stay-at-home Dad, but also by, say, his independent motivation to please his mother,¹⁰ it would be a case of self-deception or poor reasoning like any other. Still, one might grant for a moment Adams's basic point: the assumption that motivated belief formation is problematic depends on the assumption that the motivation in question will conflict with the honest pursuit of truth. However, virtuous motivation in the pursuit of normative truths might not be like that; virtuous motivation might in fact be *conducive* to the aims of normative inquiry. But given how Adams's conception of moral faith has to understand the role of moral intuition or considered judgments in ethics,¹¹ we cannot maintain this position.

Many of what Adams classifies as instances of moral faith are intuitive judgements; in particular, intuitive moral judgements that we seem to be unwilling to give up in the face of (apparent) contrary evidence. For instance, the judgement that a certain moral requirement (say not to lie for profit) is a valid requirement is an intuitive judgement that we tend not to give up in the face of powerful arguments for moral scepticism. Those who think that such an intuitive judgement is a cognitive achievement would think of it as (at least in the good case) awareness of a moral truth, or of a moral or rational requirement, or at the very least awareness of some kind of evidence for moral truth. Now Adams's view seems to be incompatible with any version of such a view about the nature of intuitive judgements. After all, according to Adams, what characterizes moral faith is that it cannot be accounted for by the epistemically justified doxastic states of the agent; it is a commitment that is not based on evidence.

But Adams's view seems also incompatible with the view that these intuitive judgements constitute awareness of certain moral facts and principles. For if they were such, there would be no question about our commitment outstripping our evidence as long as 'evidence' here simply means awareness (in the good case at

¹⁰ Of course, the fact that one of the choices pleases his mother is one more thing that can be said in favour of one of the options. But I leave this complication aside.

¹¹ I will be using mostly 'intuition' in what follows, but I must confess that I am sometimes troubled by this usage. Most of what we call 'moral intuition' is not simply prompted and incapable of being justified. Compare the celebrated 'intuition' that one should not push the fat guy into the oncoming train to save those tied to the tracks with the intuitive judgement that the person I see from a distance is my friend Mary or that the scribble I see in front of me is the letter 'a'. If I am asked to give explanations or justifications of the latter judgement, I'll have nothing to say. But this is not true of the celebrated intuition. I might have trouble giving a general principle immune to counterexamples, but I'll have *something* to say about why I think I should not push the fat guy.

least) of a certain fact or principle. However, this last step goes by rather quickly. For even if we are aware of a fact or a principle, we might be also aware of defeating evidence, and thus our commitment might be constituted in part by how we respond to defeating evidence. This is indeed probably the most promising way of understanding Adams's view. Moral faith is expressed in having an unwavering commitment in face of defeating or contrary evidence; we act as if the contrary evidence had not and should not shake our confidence. But once we put the point in this way we cannot maintain that virtuous motivation is not at odds with the aim of inquiry; if the virtuous motivation forces us to shut our ears to contrary evidence, then it is a serious obstacle in the pursuit of the truth.

Adams himself recognizes that this attitude of moral faith, or close-mindedness with respect to arguments for contrary positions is not always something to be recommended. One's unwillingness to give a hearing to arguments for vegetarianism or for more serious duties of aid than the ones we currently recognize is a sign of dogmatism rather than moral faith. Although Adams tries to cash out this in terms of difference between revising one's moral commitment and abandoning it, I am not sure that the notion of 'the moral' is so well shaped as to allow for this distinction. Someone who argues that whites have special duties to other whites, or that human flourishing in a social environment requires that we put forward all kinds of prohibition on homosexual behaviour, is making an unequivocal call on us to revise our moral outlook. But it is exactly the kind of moral revision to which the virtuous person should not give a 'fair' hearing.

One might think that it is trivial that moral commitment outstrips the evidence. After all, the moral commitment exhibited by the virtuous person is a commitment from inside the point of view of morality; it assumes the correctness of this point of view. Thus, full moral commitment must be the kind of commitment that ignores any evidence for the falsity of morality and someone who takes seriously, for instance, sceptical argument will thereby be less virtuous. There is therefore no reason to try to explain how the evidence could warrant this kind of moral commitment. The fact that it is what it is irrespective of the evidence for morality is what constitutes it as *full* commitment to morality. But two things must be noted about this response. First, it covers only one kind of case, the case that we will soon describe as 'general challenges to morality'. But, more importantly, this response skirts the main problem. Insofar as these doubts are well grounded, these responses will imply that the most fully rational person is necessarily not the most fully virtuous person. This implication is, I think, a very high cost to pay; in fact, I think the cost is the possibility of a clear-eyed ideal of virtue. This does not seem to be a price we should be willing to pay, at least not at the gate. However, I am not going to argue for this claim. Similarly, I'll make various

claims about which agents are virtuous and which are not, which actions are justified and which are not, and some of these claims are more controversial than others. I do not pretend that these are claims that are accepted by all. My hope is that these claims or similar ones are plausible enough to make the positive view that is supposed to account for them an attractive option.

How Moral Commitment Interacts with Various Grounds for Doubts

Before I move on and try to provide a positive account of the phenomenon, it's worth examining it a bit more carefully and distinguishing a few different ways in which a virtuous person might behave in the face of arguments against her position:

[GENERAL DOUBT] *GENERAL CHALLENGES TO MORALITY*

These include metaethical sceptical arguments, arguments for some kind of ethical egoism, or for an alternative system of values. As Adams points out, the virtuous person does not bring up her child on the supposition that there is a, say, 20 per cent chance that morality is an illusion. It would count as a moral failure, rather than the expression of rational risk-assessment, if someone were to refuse most bribes, but accept highly advantageous ones on account of the (admittedly slim) probability that ethical egoism is true. Virtuous agents do not agree that personal gain wrongly acquired can be justified in some occasions as 'insurance' for the possibility that morality is false.

[OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT] *SPECIFIC CHALLENGES THAT ARE (WIDELY ACCEPTED TO BE) MORALLY OBNOXIOUS*

In the case of well-entrenched specific beliefs, a virtuous person neither takes grounds for doubt into account in deliberating, nor does she seriously engage the arguments or remain open-minded about their possible cogency. She might engage with these arguments at a speculative level (she might, for instance try to disentangle the grounds of important partial duties to one's family, and perhaps to one's nation, from considerations that would vindicate a white supremacy group). But the success of these arguments is practically irrelevant; neither does she wait for the outcome of these arguments to make her decisions, nor does she weigh them in her deliberations. So, for instance, encountering someone who is openly racist does not call for an open-minded debate in which she might learn that a position that seemed so implausible at first might turn out to have much more to be said for it. Although one might have political reasons to engage in such debates, a virtuous agent does not leave open the possibility that her confidence on her positions will be undermined.

[DIFFICULT DECISIONS] *DIFFICULT DECISIONS FROM
A FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE*

Suppose I am weighing whether I should reveal to my friend that her partner has been unfaithful. I find it hard, for instance, to weigh how certain duties of non-interference (and perhaps of non-maleficence) balance against my duties of loyalty to my friend. Now suppose I come to the conclusion that I should reveal to my friend her partner's infidelity. But I am not confident that I weigh these reasons correctly. At the same time, others who are also close to my friend come to the opposite conclusion; they present arguments that I cannot convincingly refute, but that fail to persuade me. Here, it would certainly be a form of arrogance not to take their views into account, and presumably my confidence, my attitudes, and even my behaviour might have been different had my trusted friends completely agreed with my reasoning and found no merit in the contrary arguments. My failures to respond to those arguments or to bring my friends to my side are certainly not practically irrelevant. I should keep an open mind and it is perfectly possible and rationally desirable that I will move away from my original position if I come to the conclusion that the opposing arguments are superior. Moreover, we can expect that I'll be guided to some extent by this very uncertainty. I'll feel ambivalent and have (appropriate) feelings of guilt whatever I decide, and I might revise my actions at least to a certain extent. I might postpone acting in the hopes that the situation will 'resolve itself'; I might look for some kind of compromise (perhaps try to convince my friend's partner to confess or warn him about my intentions) that I'd not consider if I were more certain of my moral judgement in this case.¹²

[LIVE DEBATES] *LIVE DEBATES FROM A THIRD-PERSON PERSPECTIVE*

Suppose Larry's friend Mary is thinking about having an abortion. She is feeling awful about doing this, and she cannot afford to pay for the abortion (abortions are legal but not publicly funded where Mary lives). Larry offers to help Mary and, being well off, he offers to pay for the abortion. Let us say that Mary accepts the offer, and that Larry, in a show of support, accompanies her to the clinic, helps her

¹² Under certain views on normative uncertainty, I should be guided in more substantive ways by the uncertainty itself. On such views, I should see these answers as competing theories of moral rightness and find a way to determine the expected wrongness of my actions given my assessment of the likelihood that each such theory is correct. For theories that argue for the need of some kind of intertheoretic comparison in such situations, see Lockhart (2000) and Sepielli (2009). My suggestion that uncertainty might influence one's behavior in certain ways in such situations is a much weaker one; in fact, the changes in behaviour here are fully compatible with holding on to the outright belief that revealing the infidelity to my friend is the right thing to do.

with her groceries, and so on. Larry knows that many of his friends consider that he has been an accessory to murder, but he is completely unpersuaded. It would be naïve of him to think that his friends had simply made a logical mistake; if anything the disagreement is better characterized as a disagreement about some basic premises or starting points. Moreover, it might be the case that he respects his friends and finds them otherwise his moral and intellectual peers.¹³ However, it seems that it would be natural and correct for Larry not to feel any guilt, ambivalence, or any feeling that we would associate with the possibility of being an accessory to murder, even while acknowledging that those who oppose his views are not moral monsters or stupid, and even perhaps that they have at least seemingly plausible arguments on their side.

If one is not convinced by Larry's case, it might be worth thinking about moral heroes of a certain stripe, those who fought racism, oppression, and other forms of injustice despite deep disagreement from most of their peers. Those who fought slavery, for instance, would not be more virtuous had they been hesitant or doubted the correctness of their commitments in face of widespread moral disagreement. In fact, if anything, it is a sign of moral courage and fortitude that someone shows no hesitation even when nearly everyone around them holds morally corrupt views.¹⁴

Making Room for Certainty

For our purposes, the main relevant difference is between [GENERAL DOUBT], [OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT], and [LIVE DEBATES] on one hand, and [DIFFICULT DECISIONS] on the other. For in [DIFFICULT DECISIONS] my grounds for doubting do seem to have some effect on my

¹³ Elga (2007) considers a similar case and comes to the conclusion that someone like Larry could not consider his pro-life friends epistemic peers, since he is likely to disagree on a host of other issues. Elga relies on a rather implausible picture of what other related views those on both sides of the debate must hold: '(let us suppose) Ann and Beth have discussed claims closely linked to the abortion claim. They have discussed, for example, whether human beings have souls, whether it is permissible to withhold treatment from certain terminally ill infants, and whether rights figure prominently in a correct ethical theory. By Ann's lights, Beth has reached wrong conclusions about most of these closely related questions' (Elga 2007). Despite not having done the relevant empirical research, I would hazard a guess that many people hold different views on abortion without disagreeing about most of these questions, and that some of these questions ('whether rights figure') do not track differences in the debate. However, Elga is correct that moral disagreements tend not to be as localized as, for instance, arithmetical disagreements. But it seems that they can be localized enough to raise doubts about whether any non-trivial notion of a peer will prevent Larry from seeing those who disagree with him as peers.

¹⁴ Some have argued that in such circumstances, ignorance of the morally correct view is often nonculpable: see Zimmerman (1997), Rosen (2004). Whatever one thinks about these arguments, we certainly think that it is praiseworthy to hold the correct views in these environments.

actions and on various other attitudes of mine. In cases like [DIFFICULT DECISIONS], it would be difficult to make the claim that our commitment exceeds our evidence, and thus that something like moral faith is required to explain the attitudes of a virtuous person in this situation. Of [GENERAL DOUBT], [OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT], and [LIVE DEBATES], [OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT] seems to be a somewhat 'easier' case. For in [OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT] I dismiss an argument that has been presented against a very entrenched view of mine, and that is widely accepted among my peers. As I argued above, these facts do not suffice to explain the full extent of one's unwillingness to contemplate the arguments presented against one's view. However, [OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT] is an easier case because, first, a satisfactory account of the relation of my epistemic position and my commitment in [GENERAL DOUBT] and [LIVE DEBATES] would probably apply to [OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT] as well, and, secondly, [OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT] is arguably not robust enough to justify on its own radical claims about the relation between our epistemic position and our moral commitment. So, I'll focus mostly on cases that fall under [GENERAL DOUBT] and [LIVE DEBATES], and use [DIFFICULT DECISIONS] as an important contrast case.

The first thing to note is that in [GENERAL DOUBT] and [LIVE DEBATES], unlike [DIFFICULT DECISIONS], the case for lowering confidence is based on higher-order evidence, or higher-order reasons. The sceptical arguments are, at least often,¹⁵ second-order doubts. The fact that, for instance, my moral faculties were selected not for their truth-tracking capacities but for some independent reason is not a reason to murder for profit or to refrain from doing so. It is reason to doubt that I can rely on my intuitive judgements about the truth of certain moral judgements and thus of certain intuitive judgements about what is a reason for what. Similarly, the fact that Peggy is pro-life is not a reason to refrain from supporting those who want to seek abortions.¹⁶

There is a great deal of debate about how we should respond to higher-order evidence¹⁷ and I feel modest enough not to try to settle it in the next few lines of this chapter. What I'll try to do is to motivate some relatively weak (though by no means uncontentious) claims that will set the stage for a view that denies that virtuous commitment outstrips epistemic justification.

¹⁵ I am leaving this qualification for now, but I hope it'll become clear that, for the purposes of my argument, we can classify all sceptical arguments as second-order grounds for doubt.

¹⁶ Perhaps it is a weak reason for this action, if we think that there is always a reason not to cause disappointment and sadness. I'll ignore this complication.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Christensen (2010) and Kelly (2010).

Let us start with an example from David Christensen. Christensen looks at a case in which I assign a probability of 0.97 to the proposition that a certain medical treatment for a patient of mine will work. In finding out that my colleague, who has the same evidence available to her, assigns a probability of 0.96 to this proposition, my confidence in my assessment that the treatment will work, according to Christensen, should go up rather than down (Christensen 2009). Now, if we assume, as Christensen does, that the doctors take into account their own fallibility, and if they know that there is no correlation between their mistakes in judging evidence, this is correct. But let us suppose that this is not the case; let us assume that their credences reflect just their confidence given their assessment of the first-order evidence, without, as it were, trying to second-guess their fallibility. Still there would be something right in what Christensen says: a reasonable doctor would, in many cases, take his colleague's report as confirmation of his opinion. But, strictly speaking in this case, the claim that my confidence needs to go up seems wrong. Suppose we are just studying for an exam; we are not about to operate on anyone. A friend of mine, in the meantime, is taking small bets on our answers to various possible questions and she'll run simulations of the various treatments on her flawless computer medical simulation program. My confidence is 0.97 that the treatment will work, so I am accepting pretty high odds that the treatment will work in the simulation. In hearing that my friend's confidence is 0.96 in the same proposition, it does not seem that I should be willing to bet on higher odds, but rather, if anything, on lower odds. However, something has changed; whatever one wants to say more specifically about this case, it seems that I am warranted in having more confidence if I am deciding whether to use the treatment; perhaps in this case I am now justified in proceeding with the treatment. This kind of case gives us reason to put forward the following WEAK claim:

(WEAK) at least in some contexts, first-order evidence or justification on the one hand and higher-order evidence and justification on the other hand interact differently with justification for action, in a way that cannot be accounted for solely in terms of how each kind of evidence impacts on the justified credence on a proposition.

For in the above case my (rational) betting behaviour is at least in part explained by the lower credence I now assign, and my (rational) 'medical' behaviour is in part explained by my *higher* confidence. That is, even though the report from my colleague lowers my credence on (or the probability I assign to) the event (or at best leaves it unchanged) and thus perhaps justifies more cautious betting behaviour (in relation to the effectiveness of the treatment), it *improves* my justification

for acting on the information that the drug will help.¹⁸ This variance might be explained by certain views according to which there are certain norms connecting knowledge and action, such as a norm that says that you should ‘treat the proposition that *p* as a reason for acting only if you know that *p*’.¹⁹ One might think that irrespective of the credences, if I need to operate on someone, it is only after consulting my colleague that I *know* that the medicine will work, or that it is very likely that the medicine will work, or that I know that the medicine will (very probably) work. But in the case of betting behaviour the relevant knowledge is different; I must know in this case that the likelihood that the medicine will work is *X* or that it is very likely that the likelihood is *X*. I have much sympathy for this view. But there might be other ways to explain and motivate the WEAK claim. All that I want here is to take a first step to establish that the virtuous person is not out of sync with the norms of rationality. If we do not need to treat higher-order doubts the same way as we treat first-order doubts, then it might be possible to say that the virtuous agent is right to act in a way that seems to be capable of being justified only if she is certain about the truth of her (first-order) moral beliefs or the correctness of her (first-order) moral principles. But this is obviously just a first step; the next section tries to move us further forward.

Moral Judgement as the Exercise of a Rational Faculty

What kind of evidence should we think our intuitions provide if we want to claim that the moral commitment of the virtuous person is warranted by her evidence? Adams talks about how inappropriate it is to factor into my practical deliberations a ‘10 per cent chance that morality is a delusion’ or ‘30 to 50 per cent chance that my children will be better off if they subordinate morality to self-interest’. This seems indeed correct; if I think that the odds that morality is a sham are not good enough to justify my betraying your trust for a small financial gain, but are good enough to justify sending an innocent person to the gallows for much larger rewards, I fail to have a proper moral commitment. And the problem is obviously not that the percentages are too high, but that we have entered the possibility of error into our calculation at all. But since entering the possibility of error is inadequate, the only way in which our intuitions could justify our moral views is if

¹⁸ One could say that the difference is not one of credence, but of resilience (Skyrms 1980), or not of the balance but the weight of the evidence (Kelly 2008). However, simply appealing to resilience (or weight) does not fully explain the difference. After all, one’s views are more resilient only *in relation to second-order evidence* in this case. Were a new piece of first-order evidence not known previously to you or your friend to come up, the fact that my colleague came to the same conclusion as I did in examining the previous evidence would have very little impact on how I should now revise my credences.

¹⁹ This is the rule proposed by (Hawthorne and Stanley 2008).

they guaranteed it; that is, if our evidence for our moral beliefs makes at least some of our moral knowledge certain. As Kant says, we are aware of the moral law as ‘apodictically certain’.²⁰ And this is indeed I think the correct view; the commitment is fully warranted by the evidence in question; or, in other words, your moral commitment is based on certain grounds, as it is simply the exercise of a purely rational capacity to act.

Now I think this last claim is multiply ambiguous, so we should first clarify how it should be understood. Suppose I derive a theorem by means of what is in fact a sound but complex proof. Insofar as there is nothing wrong with the proof, we can say that, I recognize, through the proof, that the premises guarantee the truth of the conclusion. Of course, I could be mistaken in my reasoning. But, in the mathematical case, if I am not, and there is nothing wrong with my mental states, my acceptance of the conclusion is, at least in part, based on my recognition of the entailment of the conclusion by the premises. Of course, given human fallibility, we can always have indirect doubts not about particular steps in the proof, but, in general, about whether we are not confused or committing an error in reasoning. And the more complex the mathematical reasoning is, the more compelling those doubts tend to be. It would be unwarranted to feel confident, as soon as you finish your 1,000 page-proof of a theorem, that your proof contains no mistakes. However, the existence of such doubts does not affect the quality of the mathematical reasoning, and does not affect the fact that I correctly recognize that the premises entail the conclusion. A similar thing could be said about a self-evident principle. The fact that other people seem not to think of the principle as self-evident, or that you remember that other things that you thought were self-evident turned out to be false, might lead to doubt whether your regarding the principle as self-evident is not just a major confusion. However, even if you are warranted in having such doubts, it is still true that, if you got it right, the content of your mental state is a self-evident proposition or principle and you accept it because it is a self-evident proposition or principle.

In both these cases, I will say that a certain proposition or principle is accepted on certain grounds, *even if higher-order evidence or facts about our reasoning gives us reason to doubt the accuracy of our reasoning*. Thus, the claim is that moral principles and moral knowledge on which our commitments are based enjoy certainty, when ‘certainty’ is understood this way. Thus, to the extent that this idea captures a proper notion of certainty, we can say that a theory, such as Kant’s, that claims

²⁰ References to Kant also include the pagination for the relevant volume of the standard *Akademie* edition. I use the following abbreviations: G for *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*; CPrR for *Critique of Practical Reason*; MM for *Metaphysics of Morals*.

that the moral law is known with apodictic certainty, (Kant 1996: 177 (CPrR 47)), is compatible with the grounds for doubt that Adams raises. And, if we accept the WEAK claim that second order doubts need to be treated differently in some circumstances, we have now room to say that the commitment is warranted by the certainty of the moral attitude. To the extent that there is still room for higher-order doubts, these doubts might call for various sorts of behaviour; perhaps, for instance, we should try to understand better the grounds of our commitment, or, in an appropriate moment for speculation, re-examine our commitments and make sure that we haven't been led astray by bias and prejudice. Before examining Kant's view further, we should consider more carefully whether we can really segregate here first and higher-order grounds for doubt. The WEAK claim does not establish that this specific instance of segregation is justified; in particular, we need to establish that the kind of defeating evidence available to the virtuous agent does not force her to treat her moral judgement as less than certain.

Now before I move on it might be worth putting a concern aside that often comes up when trying to make the case for segregating higher-order doubts. Betting behaviour is brought as a test case about whether those doubts do or do not affect your confidence, and thus they can be seen as test cases for whether you should respond differently, at least as far as action is concerned, to first and higher-order doubts. If in betting behaviour second-order doubts ought to affect your confidence in the same way as first-order doubts should, shouldn't we conclude that a wise person, in proportioning her belief to the evidence, treats all grounds for doubts equally? Suppose I am certain of the truth of the Skolem-Löwenheim theorem in the sense above. Even if I am unable to find fault with the proof of the Skolem-Löwenheim theorem, if asked to bet on it, I would not take the bet warranted by a 1.0 credence (I would not, for instance, take a (\$1; eternal damnation to my whole family) bet). And this is probably because some higher-order doubts (such as 'so many times in the past, when people were convinced of the truth of something they turned out to be wrong') cripple my confidence and thus lead me to behaviour that would not be warranted if I were really certain of the truth of Skolem-Löwenheim.²¹

But even for the greatest fans of abstract speculation, it is hard to make sense of what's going on in this bet. Suppose, for instance, that my next-door neighbour does offer me the Skolem-Löwenheim bet; how are we supposed to settle who won the bet?²² Given that the Skolem-Löwenheim theorem will not simply imprint

²¹ It is worth pointing out that betting behaviour is famously risk-averse especially when presented in such extraordinary choice contexts.

²² Pryor raises a similar concern in (Pryor, manuscript).

itself in our minds, I am betting probably on whether I'll be convinced by my neighbour that what I thought was the proof of the Skolem-Löwenheim theorem is somehow flawed, or something like that. But this is a bet on whether I might have made a mistake in my reasoning, and we should assess the odds accordingly, probably being ready to bet on worse odds for simpler proofs, for proofs that have been recognized by others, and so on.²³

Similarly, assuming we can make sense of those bets in the moral case, the virtuous agent might not take every bet in which she wins if morality is not an illusion. But other aspects of her behaviour show to what extremes of behaviour the virtuous agent is willing to go even in the face of arguably strong higher-order grounds to doubt: people have suffered all manner of pain for the sake of a moral ideal which few believed in (and which sometimes had decidedly modest chances of being achieved).

But, of course, we don't need to resort to betting behaviour to see how higher-order grounds for doubt can have a more direct influence in our behaviour. The literature on peer disagreement has many cases in which my confidence in a mathematical proposition seems to be lowered by peer disagreement. We both add two numbers and I come to the conclusion that the result is '2,865' and you that it's '2,965'. Suppose, for instance, that we were adding how much I owe to my landlord, and for some bizarre reason, I don't have time to redo our calculations, I just have time to write an '8' or an '9' on the cheque and then I have to leave (my cab driver is so impatient that she'll just leave if it takes me more than 15 seconds to go down the stairs, and then I'll miss my plane, lose my job, and so on). I now might conclude that I should go with your answer just in case, so that the landlord does not evict me. Or, suppose you made the calculations about a building that you are about to demolish and you came to the conclusion that nothing will happen to the building next door, which happens to be a nursery full of adorable little babies. Again, for some bizarre reason, you only have one chance to demolish the building (it's 11:58 a.m. now, your permit expires at noon and after that decisions about the future of the building will be at the sole discretion of the new mayor, your mortal enemy). As you are about to pull the trigger, a much less competent co-worker tells you that he has redone your calculations and that he is fairly certain that the building will collapse on top of the nursery and that all the adorable babies will die. It seems reasonable that you stop and don't take the risk.

²³ Sometimes people represent the bet as 'God will come and tell you...'. But this is not so simple; I need to recognize something as God, something else as God's wisdom, etc. Of course, the issue deserves much more attention than I can give it here; I just want to show here that the appeal to this kind of betting behaviour is problematic.

But then why would the reasoning against abortion rights be any different? And how can anyone eat chicken given the sheer quantity of seemingly plausible arguments that extend moral standing to the whole sentient world?²⁴

Yet, it is hard to shake the conviction that the abortion and animal rights cases are different. Philosophers often look at cases in which I have no time to rethink the question, discuss, and so forth. Obviously this is not bad methodology; it allows us to isolate a case in which your evidence or reasons are constant and to make an assessment on this basis. However, for our purposes, it is equally important to look at what happens in more typical cases. Typically, I can go back and check my arithmetic when I am writing a cheque to my landlord. Suppose I go back and check my arithmetic, but you still disagree with me after I have carefully looked at the arithmetic, showed it to you and you have proved unable to convince me that there was any fault in my calculation, and so on. If after all this care, you still disagree with me, it is not clear that this should have any impact in my decision to hand in the cheque for the lower amount to the landlord. In more typical cases the ideal response to higher-order doubts is, of course, try to check on the possible failures of one's cognitive capacities, reassess the evidence, talk with others who assess the same evidence or are asking the same question, and so on; in other words, in typical cases I try to settle on the belief that I have reasoned adequately.

Arguably, certain actions demand different levels of justification to settle on a belief. Famously, for instance, depending on how important it is for me to go to the bank, I'll need more or less evidence before I am justified in settling on the belief that the bank is open tomorrow.²⁵ Moreover, various 'backup' actions might be justified in proportion to your confidence in the belief you settled on. So I might be confident enough that I will be in Paris next month (and, I would say, even know that I will be in Paris next month), make all sorts of plans and promises that presuppose my being in Paris next month, and yet make all sorts of arrangements for the possible scenario that I am not there after all (so, for instance, I might give

²⁴ Ted Lockhart explicitly compares cases of normative and non-normative uncertainty in this way, though he tries to avoid the conclusion that there is as strong an argument not to have an abortion or to forbid abortions (I have, of course, ignored the distinction for rhetorical purposes) as there is not to run a small risk of killing a baby (see Lockhart 2000). It is important to note that I am not saying that normative uncertainty needs to be treated differently, but higher-order grounds for doubt (though often the examples given of normative uncertainty are based on such grounds for doubt).

²⁵ The original example is from DeRose (1992). For detailed discussion of pragmatic encroachment, see Stanley (2005). There are many ways to account for what's going on in these cases. My preferred account, and the one that I'll be relying on, is presented in Nagel (2008) and Nagel (2010). Although I will not try to make good on this claim here, what I say below can be made compatible with various ways of understanding pragmatic encroachment.

my friend my home number in Canada too, if it is a matter of life and death that she talks to me on the phone next month).

As I am settling on a belief, a number of grounds for higher-order doubts might become salient: I might realize I am drunk, that you disagree with me, that I often make mistakes when dealing with difficult calculations, and so on. And here I might again have different ‘backup’ plans that might be called on depending on how confident I am in my belief that those higher-order doubts have been settled (I might, for instance, be unwilling to take certain bets). And different possible actions and different sources of doubts call for different standards for settling on the belief (roughly) that nothing is going awry with my reasoning.²⁶ With these points in mind, we can propose the following ‘segregationist’ claim: in some situations, *ceteris paribus*, as long as you have appropriately settled on the relevant higher-order beliefs, what determines whether the actions you undertake are justified is the quality of your first-order evidence or grounds and the confidence they warrant for your first-order belief, even if your justified confidence in the relevant higher-order beliefs is lower.

Here is what the segregationist claim would imply for a modified version of our demolition example, assuming it falls under its scope. Suppose now that there is no imminent threat that a hostile mayor will be in power. I go back and check my calculations, and talk with my less competent colleague. I fail to convince him, but I come to the conclusion that he simply cannot see past a certain confusion. On the above understanding of certainty, I am certain of my first-order belief in the results of my calculation. The segregationist claim says now that whatever doubts are left at the higher-order level (‘there is a chance that I am the one who is under the spell of some kind of confusion’), it does not trickle down to justification of my actions based on these calculations. If I have appropriately settled on the belief that there is nothing wrong with my reasoning, then I can act on the certainty of my calculations.²⁷ The segregationist claim also explains why I can prescribe the treatment after consulting my colleague in the case above. It was my confidence about examining the evidence properly that led me to postpone my decision; once I can settle on the view that I did examine the evidence properly, my original assessment of the evidence as justifying treatment stands. This says nothing about whether I should be betting on higher or lower odds now.

²⁶ Or even for settling on it. Of course, in many situations we do not ask this question at all.

²⁷ Of course, my mathematical calculations will not be the only thing relevant in this decision; I am not claiming that my belief that the house will be demolished without harming the babies is certain in this case.

A modest form of externalism can be used to defend the segregationist claim. This is easier to see if we assume that certain actions could only be justified if our knowledge is certain (I have no backup plans for the case in which what I do turns out false; the decision is momentous, etc.); whether or not I have higher-order doubts about the quality of my reasoning, my reasoning does adequately show that the premise is certain given what I know.²⁸ We can say now that the agent is in possession of a justification of the proposition that establishes its certainty. Why wouldn't the possession of such a justification now suffice to justify the action? Of course, this is in no way a conclusive argument; after all, I haven't even argued for the modest form of externalism.

It is important to keep in mind that my claim here so far is only that *in some instances* the segregationist claim would be correct. And we can say something about the instances it would be most plausible. It is obviously not particularly plausible when someone is in a situation in which they have to act fast on a proposition they had never considered before. So in the idealized cases we looked at above of rushed decisions in face of disagreement, there is not even a question of whether one is justified to disregard the uncertainty of putative higher-order beliefs as it is unlikely that it is appropriate to settle, for instance, on the second-order belief that one has reasoned correctly. But if I am given quite a bit of time to review my calculations, it might be then reasonable to disregard the higher-order doubts. Similarly, the easier the calculation is the less likely I am to take concerns about disagreement, my being tired, and so on seriously.

The segregation claim might also be more plausible in cases in which one has some 'debunking' explanation; that is, something that potentially explains why the higher-order reasons for doubt are misleading. So, for instance, the fact that I think that this kind of mathematical complexity is beyond my co-worker's skills would explain why he is getting different results. Similarly if I think my co-worker is drunk, has dubious motives, and so on. So we can say that the segregation claim is particularly plausible in situations of sufficient time, ease, and in which there are explanations for the source of doubt. With all this in mind, we are ready to explain why Kant's theory is particularly well placed to explain the virtuous person's unhesitating commitment to morality. However, I should make it clear that I am not claiming that Kant is the only one who can make sense of our moral commitment as fully justified by our doxastic states; perhaps a broad range of combinations of metaethical and normative views can mount similar justifications of moral commitment. But I want to show here that at least Kant's ethical theory can do it.

²⁸ The certainty in this case is what Stanley describes as 'epistemic certainty' in Stanley (2008).

3 Kant and Certainty

It is hardly news that Kant thought that morality is based on a single principle, the categorical imperative. The many formulations of the categorical imperative try to bring to light different aspects of the imperative, but there is an important sense in which none of them adds to our moral knowledge. That is, none of them adds to our *direct* moral knowledge; whatever the *Groundwork* accomplishes, it doesn't give any new instruction to ordinary reason. Kant takes as a compliment rather than a criticism, the complaints of a reviewer who upbraids the *Groundwork* for containing no 'new principle of morality' but only 'a new formula':

But who would even want to introduce a new principle of all morality and, as it were, first invent it. Just as if, before him, the world had been ignorant of what duty is or in thoroughgoing error about it.

(Kant 1996: 144 (CPrR 8n))

Later in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant makes even a stronger claim about what all human beings know. For we all know not only the basic principles but also how to apply them to particular cases:

The most common understanding can distinguish without instruction what form in a maxim makes it fit for a giving of universal law and what does not.

(Kant 1996: 161 (CPrR 26))

And in the *Groundwork* itself, Kant goes as far as to raise the suspicion that ordinary reason is better off left alone, and that philosophers can only take ordinary reason away from its unerring path:

Yet we cannot consider without admiration how great an advantage the practical faculty of appraising has over the theoretical in common human understanding . . . In practical matters, it is just when common understanding . . . first begins to show itself to advantage. It then becomes even subtle, whether in quibbling tricks with its own conscience or with other claims regarding what is to be called right, or in sincerely wanting to determine the worth of actions for its own instruction; and, what is most admirable, in the latter case it can even have as good a hope of hitting the mark as any philosopher can promise himself; indeed, it is almost more sure in this matter, because a philosopher, though he cannot have any other principle than that of common understanding, can easily confuse his judgement by a mass of considerations foreign and irrelevant to the matter and deflect it from the straight course.

(Kant 1996: 59 (GW 404))

Despite the advantages of leaving common understanding to its 'fortunate simplicity', and the dangers of exposing it to philosophical speculations, Kant does clearly think there is a practical role for his work to play. In fact, he says:

Now reason issues its precepts unremittingly, without thereby promising anything to the inclinations, and so, as it were, with disregard and contempt for those claims, which are so impetuous and besides so apparently equitable (and refuse to be neutralized by any command). But from this there arises a natural dialectic, that is, a propensity to rationalize against those strict laws of duty and to cast doubt upon their validity, or at least upon their purity and strictness, and, where possible, to make them better suited to our wishes and inclinations, that is, to corrupt them at their basis and to destroy all their dignity—something that even common practical reason cannot, in the end, call good.

(Kant 1996: 59–60 (GW 405)).

The seeming tension between the clarity and ease of moral knowledge and the possibility of being led astray by ‘the propensity to rationalize against those strict laws’ can be resolved by relying on some of the points we made above. Our moral knowledge is certain; my awareness of the moral law is just my awareness of its necessity and universality in determining the will insofar as one acts rationally.²⁹ The various formulations of the categorical imperative are not supposed to uncover something new about the content of the moral law, but rather to display in a formula what, in a sense, we all already know. But looking at these formulations one also realizes that what we know is not something tremendously complex, likely to be misunderstood; rather, it is a simple principle that in many cases is easily applied. The ease of application should not be exaggerated, however; there are a number of difficulties that can come up in the process of application. First, and most obviously, the application of the moral law requires that I make various empirical judgements, some of which will be extremely complex. Providing for a proper moral upbringing for my children is obviously one of my duties, but my limited knowledge of human nature makes me liable to make various mistakes in my attempts to fulfil this duty. Second, I have a duty to adopt various ends and, at various points, the realization of these ends will conflict. I must adopt my friends’ ends as if they were my own, and thus help them pursue their various ends. But, of course, my friends’ ends can conflict and it might be difficult to determine in a particular case what I am committed to doing. Moreover, determining what constitutes realizing a certain end can involve a very difficult judgement. This, I take it, is what happens in [DIFFICULT DECISIONS]. Although it is clear to me that I need to pursue my friend’s happiness or well-being, it is far from clear to me what counts as realizing this end on this particular occasion.³⁰

²⁹ The details of Kant’s understanding of our awareness are famously difficult; in particular, there is a great deal of controversy about how to interpret his well-known doctrine of the ‘fact of reason’. For my purposes, all that matters is that, for Kant, the moral law presents itself to me with apodictic certainty; that is, the same kind of warrant as self-evident principles in mathematics.

³⁰ I have tried to explain various important complexities in applying the categorical imperative in Tenenbaum (2005).

All of these factors can be grounds for first-order doubt about one's judgements. They certainly call for, whenever possible, care and reflection in making decisions. However, the existence of these difficulties in applying the categorical imperative does not speak against the existence of cases in which the application of the categorical imperative does not leave any room for doubt. I think that Kant takes his four cases to be like this, but what matters for our purposes is that there are some cases in which the application of the moral law is clear. Prohibitions on slavery, deception for profit, and the use of torture for minor ends are all like this. But even the abortion case might be one such case. The empirical issues here are arguably all properly understood,³¹ and we are asking whether a perfect duty applies to this case, not whether a certain end that I should in general pursue should be pursued on this particular occasion. In other words, arguably, in [LIVE DEBATES], the putative sources of doubt should be the disagreeing judgements of Larry's friends with respect to *fundamental moral principles*. But, as we said above, in Kant's view the fundamental moral principle is exactly what is known easily and with apodictic certainty.

Of course, one may ask how is it possible that this kind of disagreement exists if the fundamental moral principle is so easily known and certain. But Kant already provides the answer in one of the above quotations: the 'powerful counterweight of inclinations' (Kant 1996: 59 (G 405)) can give an incentive for self-deception, for presenting the claims of self-love (that is, our self-interest) as unconditional claims (that is, as moral claims). Of course, in many of these cases it would be strange to think that any of the parties of a moral dispute is moved by pecuniary gain, personal power, sexual pleasure, or any of the usual things that go under the heading of 'self-interest'. But under the label of 'self-interest' or 'self-love', Kant includes all non-moral incentives; among the inclinations that fall under this category, there'll be inclinations such as the inclinations of the sympathetic person, the desire for social acceptance and harmony, and so on.

At any rate, Kant's view does leave us open to the risk that, even in the apparently easy cases, what we take to be an edict of the moral law is simply a recommendation from self-love, usurping to itself the authority of morality. Therefore, a virtuous person is not complacent in her moral views; she constantly investigates her motives, the sources of her judgements, and the nature of her reasons for various actions, and these investigations might lead her to doubts about

³¹ I am assuming that, especially for the case of early abortions, the disagreement about whether the fetus (or the embryo) is a person is not a disagreement about some biological facts that can be settled by making new biological discoveries about the embryo.

her judgement.³² But, at least in the easy case, these are second-order doubts, and once she has appropriately settled on the (correct) view that her judgement is in fact a moral judgement, her judgement is warranted by the apodictic certainty of the moral law. Moreover, since any moral judgement can be in conflict with self-interest, the virtuous person always has available an explanation of the source of any disagreement about what she sees as the obvious certainty of her moral judgement: the same propensity to rationalize the claims of self-interest present in her is present in every human agent. If we take Larry in our case [LIVE DEBATES] to be the virtuous agent, then he is exactly in a situation in which the segregation claim is at its most plausible. This is a case in which Larry has sufficient time, the application of the moral law does not depend on complex moral judgement, and in which there are ‘debunking’ explanations for the source of doubt. [GENERAL DOUBT] is somewhat different, but does not change anything essential in the nature of the virtuous agent’s certainty. Philosophical arguments are complex and motivated by speculative ends that have hardly anything to do with the moral law.³³ Finding no conclusive way to respond to them might lead me to suspect that what I take to be rational commands are merely chimerical illusions of grandeur, or something like that. But again, the existence of such doubts does not change the quality of our first-order grounds. Thus, the moral commitment of the virtuous person is fully commensurate with her moral knowledge.

Finally, we can see how Kant’s theory can even explain why we regard the challenge in [OBNOXIOUS DISAGREEMENT] as obnoxious. Given the ease of knowing what morality commands in this case, I must attribute disagreement here to the forces of self-interest, and, in this case, of self-interest determined by particularly vicious desires. Engaging such arguments with an open mind, will, in many circumstances, amount to cooperation with, or at least complacency towards, evil inclinations.

In fact, the practical aim of Kant’s moral theory, the reason it finds not to leave common understanding alone basking in its ‘splendid innocence’ is, first, to present more clearly the source of moral judgements in one’s rational faculties. This presentation would hopefully make it more difficult to present the claims of self-love as having the status of genuine moral claims. Secondly, by explaining the possibility of our awareness of the moral law, and its compatibility with various aspects of our theoretical knowledge, the theory should also dislodge any concern

³² Kant’s discussion of conscience in the *Metaphysics of Morals* is especially important in this respect (see Kant 1996: 529–30 (MM, 400–1)).

³³ In fact, Kant thinks that the speculative end of finding an antecedent cause for every event is in tension with moral law’s need to assent to the judgement that we are free.

that the moral law is a chimera.³⁴ These are attacks on second-order doubts, but such attacks are important to prevent the erosion of full moral commitment.

It is common to think of the interaction between intuition and moral theory as mostly relevant in aiding us to determine *what* is morally right. One might be sympathetic to some kind of reflective equilibrium method or even to overriding certain intuitions in favour of more general theories. There have been numerous doubts about whether moral theory can contribute in this way, and I would certainly not want to take a stand on this issue here. But I do think that focusing on this kind of interaction might lead us to overlook other ways in which moral theory and intuitive judgements can complement each other. I have here tried to show how a moral theory like Kant's can explain the nature of the warrant of intuitive judgements (and their resilience to various sources of doubt) in a way that seems essential to understanding how such judgements can justify the moral commitment of the virtuous person. Unlike Adams's account of moral faith, Kant's theory can show how practical and theoretical excellence can be fully compatible.

I do not think that this is the only contribution that can be made by a Kantian explanation of the warrant of intuitive judgement. Some philosophers have defended wide-ranging scepticism about moral responsibility because they think much apparently immoral behaviour is the product of ignorance. But if the above points are correct, in most of these cases, the agent would turn out not only to be in a position to know what the morally right action was, but also to have failed to act on easily attained knowledge due to the culpable activity of their own self-interest. Moreover this account might raise suspicions about various claims that normative uncertainty should change one's deliberations or reasons. Since many of the compelling cases of doubts involve strictly second-order doubts, it is unclear how often normative uncertainty can make this kind of difference to rational decision. However, a full development of these points will have to be pursued on another occasion.

4 Coda on Friendship

One might think that all these efforts are in vain because the case of morality is not the only one in which practical commitments conflict with the demands of rationality. Various personal duties might require similar commitments; my duties to my friend might require that I believe that my friend³⁵ has behaved

³⁴ I present an account of how these two grounds for doubt may cooperate in undermining one's commitment to morality in Tenenbaum (2003).

³⁵ Stroud (2006).

appropriately even when evidence points in the contrary direction. Familial duties might demand that I refrain from judging that my child has committed a crime, even in the face of troubling evidence. If this is right, the case of moral commitment is just an instance of a much more general phenomenon, and efforts to try to defuse the conflict between practical and theoretical demands in one particular area would simply be wasted. Here I can only point in the direction of an answer to this concern.

It is true that a good friend ought to think well of her friends even in face of contrary evidence. It is less clear that there are compelling examples of cases in which, in examining the same evidence, someone ought to form a certain belief about her friend whereas a neutral stranger ought to form a contradictory belief. However, there is a strong case to be made for the possibility that sometimes a friend ought to *suspend judgement* on a body of evidence that would be sufficient for a stranger to form a belief. While a stranger can form the belief that my friend behaved badly in a party on the testimony of a few other partygoers, I cannot so casually settle on such a damning conclusion. But once we put it this way, we can see this as an instance of a phenomenon widely discussed in the literature in epistemology; namely, pragmatic encroachment.³⁶ Evidence that is sufficient for a mildly curious person to settle on the belief that the bank will open tomorrow, or for such a person to be said to know that the bank will be open tomorrow, may not be sufficient for someone whose financial well-being depends on making a deposit by tomorrow. Doubtless, the fact that my friendship is involved makes the 'stakes' different for me in judging my friend's behaviour than it is for someone who barely knows my friend. Pragmatic encroachment is a complicated phenomenon and it is not clearly understood what effect it has on epistemic norms. However, I expect that the correct account of this phenomenon will extend to the case of friendship; at least, we need to know why we should treat these phenomena differently. Again, I cannot do full justice here to the issues, but I hope to have done something to alleviate the concern that, no matter what we might say about moral commitment, sooner or later practical commitments and epistemic norms will have to clash.³⁷

³⁶ See, for instance, Stanley (2005). For a view that would be particularly congenial to the idea that the friend cannot settle on the relevant belief, see Nagel (2008).

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