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The That[1]

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ἀρχὴ γὰρ τὸ ὅτι, καὶ εἰ τοῦτο φαίνοιτο ἀρκούντως, οὐδὲν προσδεήσει τοῦ διότι.

For the starting point is the that and if this is sufficiently apparent there is no need for the because.[2]

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Exhibit A. Hare.

In his famous paper 'Nothing Matters' R. M. Hare tells a story of how he was able to successfully provide philosophical therapy to a young Swiss lodger who had been impressed by a reading of Camus' *L'Étranger* with a vivid and paralysing sense that nothing matters. After giving the problem some thought, Hare explained to the young man that talk of mattering was simply a way in which we express concern, typically, absent any signal to the contrary, that of the speaker and that while there might be people who find themselves lacking any deep concern about anything, he – Hare's lodger – was not such a person.

> He was not in the position of the prisoner [i.e. the character in the novel whose words 'rien n'a d'importance' had made such an impression] but in the position of most of us; he was concerned not about nothing but about many things. His problem was not to find something to be concerned about – something that mattered – but to reduce to some sort of order those things that were matters of concern to him; to decide which mattered most; which he thought worth pursuing even at the expense of some of the other - in short to decide what he really wanted.[3]

Exhibit B. Mackie and Blackburn

'Morality', write J. L. Mackie, 'is not to be discovered but to be made; we have to decide what views to adopt, what moral stands to take.'[4] This sentence, given its context of Mackie's embrace of moral error theory, puzzles Simon Blackburn. Would we really 'choose to fall into error'? How might this work? Suppose you believe in the reality of moral facts on some relatively metaphysically robust understanding of what moral facts are. But then you read Mackie and come to be persuaded that here are no such facts. Morality, you come to believe, is all false and you decide to stop concerning yourself with it. But still, you find, you cannot help but continue to care a great deal about a great many things, about what you do, how you live, what kind of person you are to be, what kind of society your society is be, what laws and codes of behaviour will be in force there. You care about these things even though you no longer believe there are any robust moral facts. After all just caring about things doesn't seem to presuppose the reality of any such things. So you find yourself reflecting on how to go about living your life in the light of these concerns you have. And you find yourself talking to other people about how to organize your society in the light of your and their concerns, a conversation making no reference to moral facts as a robust realism understands them

[1] I am grateful for comments and discussion to Stephen Ingram, Anneli Jefferson Valerie Tiberius and Jack Woods

[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b.

[3] Hare 1972/2010, p. 47.

[4] Mackie 1977, p. 106.

but only to 'lesser, purged commitments' immune to any charge of queerness. Blackburn, in his lovely discussion of error theory, proposes a name for this activity. He calls it *shmoralizing*. We can give up moralizing but, unless we are to simply stop caring about many of the things presently most important to us, it is hard to see how we might give up shmoralizing. We now need some suitable language in which to shmoralize, a vocabulary suitable for expressing the thoughts the shmoralizer might want to communicate and share. Happily we have something readily to hand that looks just about perfect for the job, namely the old, familiar, language of morals. Can't we shmoralise with that.But no sooner does this occur to us that we cannot but start wondering if perhaps we were doing so all along.[5] This is a beautifully telling thought experiment, intended to embarrass the error theorist, as indeed it should.: if we ask what we would do if the error theorist persuaded us that morality was all false, answering to nothing in the furniture of the universe, the answer seems plausibly be that we would discard it, if at all, only to immediately reinvent it, a project that would make the most abundant sense without any need for some metaphysical ratification from any sort of queer furnishings.

Exhibit C. Korsgaard and Tiberius

Blackburn's shmoraliser, at least as I reconstruct him above, like Hare's recovering nihilist, finds his way into normative and evaluative thought by recognizing and being guided by the passions of his soul. Some baulk at this kind of voluntaristic sentimentalism. Christine Korsgaard, for example. in an influential paper identifies a position she characterises as that of the 'heroic existentialist'. For this character the authority of reason rests on a source 'as thin and insubstantial as the agent's arbitrary will, his raw and unmotivated decision that he will take a certain end to be normative for himself, for no other reason than that he wiils it so.'[6] Of this view Korsgaard writes that 'it is hard to see how a self-conscious being who must talk to herself about her actions could live with that solution.'[7]

Valerie Tiberius in her magisterial paper 'Humean Heroism: Value Commitments and the Source of Normativity'[8] argues persuasively in response to Korsgaard that we can make this a bit less hard if we restrict the range of willings we take to have serious purchase in the constitution of normativity. We should restrict these, Tiberius argues, to value commitments, commitments with which we stably identify and which are important enough to us to structure our thinking about how to plan and assess our lives. They are commitments that are robust under critical reflection and the agent herself is reflectively disposed to value. This is the basis for a Humean take on practical reason which recognizes no external standard for evaluating our commitments standing outside them and independent of them but that escapes any charge of arbitrariness by allowing that they can certainly be, one by one if not all at once, the subject of reflective scrutiny. Justification here is coherentist, Neurathian in spirit but the passions in our soul remain primary and without them there is nothing for normative thought to be. Tiberius here accepts something a bit like heroic existentialism but with a crucial qualification:

> Contrary to true existentialism, however, choice is not enough: to have normative force, these attitudes and choices must form a pattern that constitutes our taking ourselves to have

[5]See Blackburn 1993, pp. 149-150.
[6]1997, p. 252.
[7] Ibid., p. 251.
[8] Tiberius 2000.

reasons for these attitudes and choices.[9]

Exhibit D. Murdoch

Korsgaard's paper was far from the first time talk of existentialism had been heard outside its usual context in continental European philosophy. Iris Murdoch in 'The Idea of Perfection' uses the term to cover 'both philosophers such as Sartre who claim the title and philosophers such as Hampshire, Hare, Ayer, who do not.' [10] 'Existentialism', she writes:

> is an attempt to solve the problem without really facing it: to solve it by attributing to the individual an empty, lonely freedom, a freedom, if he wishes, to 'fly in the fact of the facts'. What it pictures is indeed the fearful solitude of the individual marooned upon a tiny island in the middle of a sea of scientific facts, moraliity escaping from science only by a wild leap of will. But our situation is not like that.[11]

The latter claim is supported with the brilliant example of M and the evolution in her ideas about her daughter-in-law D.[12] At first M believes D to be 'while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement.' D she considers 'pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile'. Her son, she feels, 'has married beneath him'. Later however M thinks on D further and experiences a large change of heart. 'D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful'. In the course of this change of heart, M convicts herself of being 'old fashioned', 'conventional', 'prejudiced', 'narrow-minded', 'snobbish' and 'jealous'. For Murdoch the role of these 'secondary value words' (what we now call thick ethical concepts) is crucial. This conceptual repertoire not of M's making shapes and constrains her thought. The growth in moral understanding that we might attribute to M can be understood in terms of 'progress in understanding a scheme of concepts', something that 'often takes place as we listen to normative-descriptive talk in the presence of a common object'[13]. 'The moral life', she writes, 'is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices.'[14] Here Murdoch stresses two things that constrain our thought. The first is the world as we experience it in all its particularity to which we need to attend as M is attending to D. The second is the conceptual repertoire we bring with us to this exercise. '[I]f we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over'.[15] So the moral experience gained from 'the work of attention' shapes and is shaped by the shared evaluative conceptual scheme that 'grows up round about us' as that work goes on.

Exhibit E: Taylor

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[9] Tiberius 2000, p. 428. For a more recent take on Humean existentialism see Street 2008, pp. 237-8.
[10] 1971, p. 34
[11] Ibid., p. 26.
[12] Ibid., pp. 16-17.
[13] Ibid, p. 31.
[14] Ibid., p. 36.
[15] Ibid. p. 36.

The ghost of existentialism walks again in Charles Taylor's classic essay 'What is Human Agency?' when he writes:

> 'The Nietzschean term 'value', suggested by our 'evaluation', carries this idea that our 'values' are our creations, that they ultimately repose on our espousing them. But to say that they ultimately repose on our espousing them is to say they issue ultimately from a radical choice, that is, a choice that is not grounded in any reasons. '[16]

This view Taylor attributes to Sartre and 'an influential Anglo-Saxon school of moral philosophers'. This picture of radical choice represents, he argues, all that human agency can be for what he calls the 'simple weigher', pushed around by whatever desires and impulses happen to be strongest and contrasts with the 'strong evaluator' who is able to employ a 'vocabulary of worth', a 'language of contrastive characterization' ('the language of higher and lower, noble and base, courageous and cowardly, integrated and fragmented, and so on')[17]. Partly this is a matter of reflective, higher order desires as emphasised in the work of Harry Frankfurt. But more is involved. Strong evaluation has a wider time horizon than mere appetitive desire. It is 'about the quality of life, the kind of beings we are or want to be.'[18] The space of value constituted by the strong evaluative concepts and convictions that shape my agency is at the core of who I am. Without it, 'I would no longer be a subject capable of knowing who I was'.[19] It is a bit unclear just what Taylor's target here is. If it is the of roughly Humean strand in modern metaethics it is not clear if what he says will hit home very hard when confronted with a sophisticated Humean of more recent literature such as Tiberius. After all Taylor's strong evaluations look very like Tiberius' value commitments, stable, reflectively endorsed, concerned with large issues about our lives as a whole and yet eminently Humean friendly. But now I am getting ahead of myself. Before turning to discussion, there is one more exhibit.

Exhibit F. Hurley.

The essay by Taylor just discussed is a conspicuous influence on Susan Hurley's 1989 book *Natural Reasons*. This tremendous *tour de force* is one of the great works of modern moral philosophy and, in my view, woefully under-discussed. It's greatest impact on the subject arises from the fact that it was in in a review of it that Frank Jackson, riffing on Hurley's ideas, comes up with an early formulation of so-called 'Canberra Plan' reductive naturalism about the normative. But to focus on that is to distract attention from Hurley's own view which is rich and distinctive version of *non-reductive* naturalism. On Hurley's view 'to say a certain alternative ought to be done is to say that it is favoured by the theory, whichever it may be , that gives the best account of the relationships among the specific values that apply to the alternatives in question.'[20] Moorean intuitions are neatly accommodated by allowing it to be conceptually an open question what theory that is. We look for a theory that imposes coherence on these specific values as embodied in the thick ethical concepts that shape and are shaped by our shared ethical practices. This is not reductionist in the way Jackson's moral functionalism aspires to be. With Jackson the reductionist aspiration is very questionably deliverable. The work there is done by a codification of the 'platitudes' comprising a 'mature folk psychology' and

[16]1985, p. 29.
[17]Ibod., p. 24.
[18] Ibid, p. 26.
[19]Ibid., p. 35
[20]Hurley 1989, p. 11.

the worry is that too much in the way of thick normative content will have to be built into the way we are to understand the word 'mature'.[21] Hurley's nonreductive conception of theory, in contrast, is comfortably and unapologetically saturated with normative content. Coherence, crucially, is not a master value:

> a coherent theory about the relationship between conflicting *pro tanto* values does not subsume their reason-giving force or eliminate the conflict; unkindness, for example, is no more cancelled out by considerations of coherence than by those of justice. Considerations of coherence may give us reason to do the just thing rather than the kind thing, but they cannot themselves give us reason to act on considerations of coherence rather than on the *pro tanto* reason with which they conflict. Their role is not to eliminate conflict between other reasons and they are no more insulated from conflict with other reasons than other reasons are from conflict with one another. [22]

So this is not a formalist account where coherence is everything. Such accounts are readily objected to on the grounds that all manner of awful and repellent normative sensibilies can readily enough be cooked up that are beautifully consistent and coherent. For Hurley this doesn't get to happen. Moral theorising is not morally neutral but is moralised through and through. Theorising is responsible not only to coherence but to the other values expressed in our ethical practice. (Her metaethical position is thus distinctively constructivist in offering an account of normative concepts where normative concepts feature on the right as well as the left hand side of any defining boconditional, in the *analysans* as well as the *analysandum*.[23]) Hurley's primary target is what she calls *subjectivism* which takes preferences to be conceptually prior to values so that our philosophical understanding of the latter is taken to depend centrally and asymmetrically on a prior understanding of the former. Rather for Hurley the two are interdependent, arriving in the world together. [24] Indeed, and an argument to this effect is at the heart of her book, our values shape and constrain our very understanding of what our preferences are.

She ends up with an understanding of deliberation as interpretation of the self that draws explicit inspiration from Taylor.

> Deliberation about conflicting ends involves a search for coherence as a kind of self-interpretation-and-determination. It is in deliberating about ends that an agent exercises his or her autonomy; the value of autonomy emerges immediately from the need for deliberation and the search for coherence.[25]

> [D]eliberation is a kind of self-interpretation and as such is constrained in various ways We are constrained to seek to understand ourselves and others as coherent agents in relation to various specific values; neither the search for coherence nor the values in terms of which it is carried out are optional for persons. [26]

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[21] Cf. Yablo 2000.
[22] Ibid., p. 318.
[23] Cf. Lenman 2012.
[24] Op. cit., p. 27.
[25] Ibid., p. 318.
[26] Ibid., p. 319.

> Though autonomy has a special role in relation to other values, and indeed in making human beings distinctive among animals as self-interpreting animals, or persons, it is still one value among others, which may conflict with it.[27]

> Persons are self-interpreting animals, but they are animals, and stands in constitutive relationships to a natural and social world; indeed, their personhood is itself a natural fact, a product of the natural and social world, and stand in no tension with its own status as such. Personhood depends on the capacity for reflection on and evaluation of one's own attitudes, for self-interpretation and self-determination, not on self-postulation ex nihilo.[28]

Still drawing on Taylor, and also on Michael Sandel, she suggests the subjectivist position she opposes risks collapsing into a kind of nihilistic existentialism, where the self is shrunk to an 'extensionless point', prior to its ends, leaving the project of seeking self-understanding with nothing to be, in contrast to a richer and more credible picture of agency where 'the agent participates in the constitution of its own identity as a subject, in the lights of ends and goods already before it'.

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Taylor and Hurley are of course far from alone in viewing normative inquiry as essentially an exercise in *interpretation*. Many others do. Dworkin in *Justice for Hedgehogs* argues that moral inquiry in essentially concerned with deepening and refining our understanding of such core normative concepts as justice and freedom.[29] Michael Walzer in *Interpretation and Social Criticism* compares what he calls the 'way of invention' and the 'way of discovery' (echoing of course the subtitle of Mackie's *Ethics*) unfavourably with what he calls the 'way of interpretation'.[30] Most famously perhaps, John Rawls, in *Political Liberalism*, understanding his own project as an articulation of ideas lying at the heart of the public political culture of modern western liberal democracies.[31]

The distinctive and central claim of Humean understandings of normativity is that we should see the passions in our souls as constituting, to echo Korsgaard, the source of normativity. Reason is the slave of the passions In order of explanation, preferences, the passions in our souls, precede values and are what our judgements of value, as differing camps within the Humean tradition variously have it, describe or express. If you want to recognize and respect the autonomy of the normative domain, the expressivist camp is the more promising. Like Hare, like Blackburn, like Tiberius, unlike Murdoch, unlike Taylor, unlike Hurley or Dworkin, I accept this picture, I affiliate to the Humean camp in metaethics, and yet I want simply to agree with much of what the friends of interpretation say and I hope here to persuade you that there is no tension. The radical voluntarism on offer in the sub-existentialist picture of human agency they repudiate is indeed a fantasy. That is not remotely what deliberation or moral inquiry is like. The point I want to make is that the Humean is not committed to suppose it is. We can accept the interpretative story offered by Taylor and others. Normative inquiry is an exercise in self-understanding of making sense of our shared values. But we may plausible insist that to count as normative inquiry interpretation must be that of an insider and not a dispassionate anthropologist. If you're not emotionally plugged in, you're really in the game. We can still persist in

[27] Ibid., p. 319.a
[28] Ibid., p. 322.
[29] Dworkin 2013.
[30] Walzer 1993.
[31] Rawls 1993

endorsing the core Humean idea that, as Stephen Finlay elegant statement has it: “Normativity is the shadow cast by our desires in the external world.”

Return to Blackburn’s thought experiment. I have, let’s pretend, always hitherto believed the robust realist picture of the normative domain. Then one day, persuaded by Mackie, perhaps, I stop believing this. But I still have desires. I want my day to be like this, not like that. I want my life to be like this, not like that. I want my community to be like this and not like that. Without my having to buy into any robust normative truths there is such a thing as intelligent thinking about how to go about my life, now and hereafter, in the light of these passions in my soul.[32] So I set about doing that thinking. I seek, we might say ‘to reduce to some sort of order those things that were matters of concern to me.’ And talking. For when it comes to the normative constitution of my community it is pretty futile to think about it on my own. I need to talk about this with others. I need to find out if my desires about how our community should be can be reconciled with theirs; or perhaps either their or mine may be modified and revised as discussion goes on. That discussion needs to happen and this is a project for us, not just for me. We need to codeliberate, to reduce to some sort of order those things that concern *us*. It is very natural to read a story like this as a kind of genealogy, a just so story setting out how, if ethical thought and normative concepts did not exist, we would have to invent them. And it is very natural to think that this steers us in the direction of the way of invention and makes us heroic existentialists.

A thought experiment like this, however admirable in bringing out the error in the error theory, might mislead us is in encouraging us to think of normative thought and conversation, of deliberation and codeliberation, as starting here, now, with me, with us. Which of course it does not and that is vitally important to understanding it. We do not arrive at this process at its beginning. Suppose we did. Suppose we now found ourselves a newly created species, *tabulae rasae*, all passions and no values, normative thought Day One. These imaginary circumstances are surely a historical fantasy. We likely had ethical practices in some rudimentary form before we had language.[33] But never mind. Imagine them anyway, if only for the purpose of philosophical reconstruction,. From such a departure point it would plausibly be tough, desperately tough, to make real or rapid progress. But perhaps we make slow and faltering progress. Perhaps we begin by cobbling together fragile *modus vivendi*[34] in the aid of mutual protection but our sensibilities evolve over time and the normative concepts that shape our social contract become absorbed into our identity as core aspects of what we stably want to be, become, at the level of individual psychology, something like evaluative commitments as Tiberius conceives them, while, at the level of community, the same repertoire of thick concepts might come to express shared normative understandings and stable shared practices.

So as the normative conversation of a community, we might suppose, makes progress, slow but real. Things are decided. Things are agreed. And, crucially, the things that are decided and agreed can be, as it were, *banked*. They stay that way, at least presumptively as normative fixed points that can then guide and constrain subsequent discussion. What do I mean when I say, *It is wrong to hit children*? Well, perhaps my community has yet to take a view on this. Me, however, I am pretty keen on the

[32] Lenman 2014.

[33] See e.g. de Waal 2015.

[34] Cf. Walzer 1993, lecture 1.

not-hitting of children. *Let's*, I want to say at today's meeting, *have a Not Hitting Children rule.* I really don't think, I tell my peers, that it would be OK for us to be without one. This, my lack of willingness to accept a set of community norms that tolerates child-hitting, is a plausible first take at what is meant when I say 'It is wrong to hit children.'[35] But only a first take. At the meeting my view prevails. The anti-child-hitting faction win, Our view is accepted and becomes part of the moral fabric of our community. It goes in the bank. Now when I tell you 'It is wrong to hit children' I mean rather more than that. I mean something like what we might naturally express in the familiar idiom of parental norm enforcement: *In this house we do not hit children*. Telling you this I tell you what our community norm now is. But this is, at least in central cases, not something I merely report. My words also, in ordinary circumstances, endorse the norm and command compliance with it. I have shifted from the expression if an evaluative commitment of mine to an evaluative commitment of *ours*. To this extent we would improve upon Stevensonian emotivism by moving from an analysis of 'X is good' as 'I approve of this, do so as well.' to something more like the less individualistic 'We approve of this. Do so as well.' But I remain, at least ordinarily, emotionally plugged in. Were I merely dispassionately reporting that these were the roles round here that would be a quite different kind of utterance, more anthropological; than normative.

My normative thought does not begin now. I have been at it for years. And all those years of deliberation have given me a large range of, to echo Tiberius, evaluative commitments which I arrived at long since and, as it were, banked. Of course any one of these commitments might come up for re-examination at any time but that cannot be the status of all of them all the time or my ability to flourish in a framework of projects and relationships would be paralysed by constant, badly overdone reflection. Tiberius emphasizes, in her book *The Reflective Life*, that evaluative commitments must be 'appropriately stable' where we are to understand this as 'a disposition not to reconsider our commitments that is sustained by confidence in the value of the ends to which we are committed.'[36] We find a similar idea in Gibbard. For normative thought to be possible I must be able to trust my past selves. 'one must normally trust past conclusions without reviewing all one's grounds. In effect, then, one accords authority to one's past self.'[37] But this point about intrapersonal extends to the interpersonal case also. 'The influence of others has pervaded our thinking since before we could talk.'[38] Rejecting the influence of others in the past is not a serious option for us. We are too deeply the creatures of our culture and our history for that to be a genuine possibility. An awful lot was already banked before I ever opened my personal account.

Sometimes it might seem we start from scratch. Someone like Hare's lodger who has become disaffected and alienated might conceivably be amenable to the sort of philosophical therapy Hare describes where he is led to think himself back, gradually and painfully, to a healthier condition. This might seem, at least in its early stages, an individualistic affair. I care about this. I love this. I hate that. But it won't stay that way. If the cure is to be completed a point has to be reached where 'I' gives way to 'we' as he works his way back into a sense of membership in a normative community. A community moreover from which his exile was never complete as even the first faltering steps cannot but be framed in an inherited conceptual repertoire not of his own making.

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[35] Cf. Lenman 2007.
[36] Tiberius 2008, 27.
[37] Gibbard 1990, 178.
[38] Ibid., 179.

Tiberius is right. Pattern is everything. Normativity is grounded in desire, not in individual desires considered one by one but in a Big Web of desire that, viewed, as it were, from within, takes on the character of a space of reasons. We escape the charge of arbitrariness because of the horizontal connections that furnish unity and coherence to the web as a whole. And the pattern is not just intrapersonal but, of necessity, interpersonal. We are social creatures who cannot, if we are to have any hope of flourishing, make our normative lives in isolation from each other. The space of our reasons and values is social and so, of necessity, historical. A normative world shared by thousands, or by millions, of people takes generations to take shape and is way too complex and unwieldy a beast to be turned round in undue haste or reconstituted from scratch.

It is a fantasy, then, that one might embark *ex nihilo* on normative thought beginning only with one's 'arbitrary will' in all its thinness and lack of substance, with a 'raw' decision to take some ends as normative for oneself. Because the normative conversation of mankind does not begin here and now. It has been underway already for many thousands of years. It supplies us with the normative culture in which we live and think, with the very conceptual repertoire with which, even as we think at our most critically about our traditions and institutions, even as we dissent from them, we cannot help operating. We might call this fantasy the 'Existentialist Fallacy', that the process of our normative self-constitution is something to be undertaken ex nihilo, right now, from a standing start. I wish, first, to acknowledge that it is indeed a fallacy. It isn't like that and it can't be. Murdoch is right. Our situation is not like that. The project of making our normative world is a project we inherit and pass on. I wish, second, to urge that I can quite coherently and credibly join philosophers such as Blackburn and Tiberius on the Humean side of metaethical controversy without committing it. The picture of the Humean as committed to this extreme and arbitrary voluntarism is one that badly needs to be debunked.

We begin with the passions in our souls. But we begin here at the level of philosophical reconstruction and only there. Such a reconstruction tells a story of how these passions conflict and conflict engenders reflection, sets of a process off, as Blackburn calls it, 'emotional ascent'[39] whereby I decide which of my desires I welcome and endorse the influence of, which I would be happier without or for some other reason reject. This process embraces not just local desires for this or that to happen now but more global desires about my life as a whole or the life of my community. So that my reflective desires are not just about what I want the structure of my motivations to be right now but how I want it to be with my longstanding character and with the characters of those among whom I live. And because I live among others, reflection becomes conversation, deliberation codelberation. From reflection there evolve, to echo Tiberius, evaluative commitments, desires about how I should live that shape my life as a whole that I find myself stably disposed to endorse in ways that are robust under reflective scrutiny. And notice how closely these Hume-friendly evaluative commitments are to Taylor's strong evaluations. The Tiberian reflective evaluator is no Taylorian simple weigher even before we complete that still too individualistic picture with a story of how codeliberation sustained over generations creates a space of shared commitments and normative understanding that then shapes and constrains our thinking within it.

[39] Blackburn 1998, 8-14.

When all this happen not just to me but to us, we end up with the minimal basis of moral community, a set of shared normative understandings, shared conception of which characteristics of things and actions make them desirable or undesirable, shared values, a common currency of normative concepts. But, again I must emphasise, we don't take our places in this narrative at its fanciful beginning. Quite possibly, as noted above, nobody did. Whether values and preferences originally entered the world together back when they and the world were new is a question in human, possibly pre-human, prehistory about which it would be idle to speculate. But they certainly enter our lives, your life and mine, together. In this way, Hurley is right and her 'subjectivist' dialectical target is wrong. I am born into a space of values and reasons that shapes my, and our, reflective thought, my, and our, understanding of myself and ourselves, from our beginnings. Yet that space was, and is, woven from the passions in our souls and without them there would be nothing for normative thought to be. Recognising this we can still say all the wise and sensible things that Hurley wants to say. The self is not an extensionless point, not something we postulate ex nihilo, we do indeed stand in constitutive relationships with our natural and social environments. Deliberation is interpretation where we search for coherence among the substantive values embedded in a conceptual repertoire that our social environment has, over many years before we ourselves arrived on the scene, fashioned and our natural environment has shaped. On Hurley's realist view, however, it remains somewhat mysterious what she supposes these values are meant to be. By taking desire, preference, evaluative commitment, the passions in our soul as prior to them not in their role in the shaping of human life but in the order of philosophical explanation and reconstruction, that mystery is tamed.

In my normative thinking I am never alone. Even when it looks very much as if I am. Even the disaffected adolescent sitting in his bedroom thinking about how much he hates the values of his teachers and parents is plugged into the Big Web no less than is the most fervent adherent of the gods of the copybook headings. It shapes his values. If Hurley is right it even shapes his understanding of his desires. The conceptual repertoire with which he operates, that guides and constrains his thought is not of his making but was formed by the shared normative life of his culture over many generations. And indeed he is inescapably a child of his very particular cultural setting however much he may dislike it or rebel against it. It is no more open to someone living in Bronze Age Greece to be a disaffected teenager than it is to today's disaffected teenager to be a bronze age warrior.[40] It is no more an option for Agamemnon to be Jim Stark than it is for Jim Stark to be Agamemnon. His possibilities are limited by the social and institutional environment he inhabits and this includes the very conceptual water in which he swims.

This may sound like conventionalism where that is both a metaethical doctrine whereby the truth of a normative claim is fixed by the norms that prevail round here, wherever one happens to be and its normative corollary that one ought to defer to the norms that prevail round here, whatever they happen to be. And conventionalism looks like a pretty unappealing doctrine, one that would appear to instruct inhabitants of the *Ante-Bellum* South to approve of slavery, citizens of Nazi Germany to be good Nazis, etc. But really no. The constraining power of convention is weaker than that and is wholly consistent with very significant levels of disagreement, pluralism and criticism of the status

[40] I here echo a well-known observation of Bernard Williams. See his 1985, p. 161. Compare what Stuart Hampshire calls the 'no-shopping principle' in his essay "Morality and Conflict", (Hampshire 1983, pp. 148-9, 167.)

quo. Walzer and Martha Mussbaum, among others, have made this case well.[41] Here is Janet Radcliffe Richards:

> So the arguments through which traditional feminism reached its first conclusions involved no departure from familiar standards of evidence and argument in ethics, epistemology, and science, but actually presupposed them. It was by appeal to these standards that the position of women was first claimed to be wrong. And notice that all arguments of this kind also depend on absolutely ordinary logic. It is because the traditional conclusions do not follow from the traditional premises, or because traditional beliefs are incompatible with traditional standards of assessment, that the challenge to the received view in its own terms is possible. Here, then, are the beginnings. Although feminism, as a critical movement, necessarily challenges parts of the status quo, it typically does so, at the outset, by appealing to other, more fundamental parts that it holds constant. Feminism as a movement started with the broad standards of moral and empirical investigation and argument that most other people accepted at the time, and the recognition that these could not support familiar, supposedly commonsensical, ideas about women and their position.[42]

What does begin to make much less sense is the idea of a radical ruputure with the past, a thoroughgoing determination to break with all tradition and begin completely anew;; The dream, back in the day, of revolutionary thinkers Tom Paine to 'begin the world over again'[43]: it has its more modern adherents:

> The Proletarian Cultural Revolution is aimed not only at demolishing all the old ideology and culture and all the old customs and habits, which, fostered by the exploiting classes, have poisoned the minds of the people for thousands of years, but also at creating and fostering among the masses an entirely new ideology and culture and entirely new customs and habits — those of the proletariat. This great task of transforming customs and habits is without any precedent in human history. As for all the heritage, customs and habits of the feudal and bourgeois classes, the proletarian world outlook must be used to subject them to thoroughgoing criticism.[44]

We know the story. It didn't go well. This way, we can now be pretty confident, madness lies: we know that anyone who might aspire to inaugurate a kind of normative Year Zero, to radically

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[41] Walzer 1993, Nussbaum 2001, chapter 8.

[42] Radcliffe Richards 1995, 371. Compare Nussbaum 2001, p. 258:

> For example, a feminist opponent of Aristotle's conservative view about the social role of women could try to show Aristotle that a progressive position actually preserves certain deep human beliefs about the equal humanity of other human beings better than his own political theory does. If Aristotle agreed about the conflict, and agreed that these other beliefs were deeper (i.e. that the cost of giving them up would be greater, or one we are less inclined to pay), then we would expect him to change his view. The method does not make new discoveries, radical departures, or sharp changes of position impossible, either in science or in ethics.

[43] Paine 1776, Appendix.

[44] Boda 1966. This was one of the core texts that launched the Cultural Revolution in China.

reconstruct the normative world de novo and ex nihilo is in the grip of a foolish and dangerous fantasy. The aspiration to wipe the slate clean and start anew has often proved beguiling but we know well enough how easily that leads to a nightmare of murderous nihilism. The point in a way is no more complicated than the First Principle of Neurathian Boat Repair. If you try to rebuilt it all at once, in one go, while remaining at sea, you sink. In the very act of criticising the traditional moral order, we depend on and are sustained by it.

Here metaethical concerns shade into more substantive normative issues. Consistent with the rules of Neurathian boat repairm there are genuine choices to be made. Some may err on the side of deference to the inherited normative web. For others it is a focus of some suspicion and scorn. After all, they may say, the norms and values we inherit are shaped unduly by the powerful and in consequence leave much to be desired from the standpoint of justice. But of course – and this is the point Radcliffe Richards makes so very well – any ideal of justice in play here is itself part of what we have inherited. [45]Plausibly virtue here lies in a mean. Both the overly deferential and the unduly iconoclastic attitude to our inherited normative world are things that can readily be overdone.

Certainly we need to distinguish between an emphasis on diachronic normative stability as something a measure of which is essential if normative thought is to get, and remain, off the ground at all, and am emphasis on it as a kind of virtue, something that is a desideratum of normative life well lived. We can make this distinction both when we consider intrapersonal stability[46] on an individual level and when we consider the wider kind of stability that is both interpersonal and intergenerational. On both narrow and broad diachronic stability as a good, Stuart Hampshire writes well:

> Many of the moral claims that persons recognise are changed or modified as time passes; but their dispositions and moral beliefs ought to be reasonably consistent over time; and they would be ashamed if there were too many abrupt moral conversions, with their own past repudiated. They recognize moral claims that arise from the requirement that their lives, or some considerable part of their lives, should exhibit some consistency of aim and some coherent character. And explanation of their moral claims would have to be, partly at least, historical, referring to their past and their consciousness of their past. As for persons, so for institutions; they also need some continuity, if their individuality as distinct entities is to be preserved; their history ideally has to make sense as the story of something that had a well-defined character, while it existed, a character of its own.[47]

Summing up, there is something deeply right in the interpretation-view of normative epistemology. We cannot move the normative conversation forward without getting clear about where it has arrived so far. It isn't a question of according some kind of brute authority to any part of the Big Web of our inherited moral consciousness. On the contrary. To interpret is to make sense, to fit a given normative thought into the space of reasons surrounding it, or perhaps sometimes to discard it as

[45] Compare Nussbaum on the concern that method of reflective equilibrium and its Aristotelian adumbration is unduly conservative in her 2001 chapter 8.
[46] I say a lot about intrapersonal stability in Lenman 2008 and Lenman 2011. See also Tiberius 2000, 2002 and 2008.
[47] Hampshire 1983, pp. 165-6.

mistaken having failed to do so. This is the very opposite of arbitrariness. The authority of *the whole thing* is another matter. In the last analysis, it's who we are, or, when critical reflection has done its work, it's the expression in normative thought of who we are that we are best able to reflectively endorse in living together in society lives that we hope will bear our survey. When our scrutiny comes to bear on the whole thing, something it ordinarily does only in moments of philosophical refection and not in the ebb and flow of ordinary normative life. In the last analysis, then, the passions in our soul remain the source of normativity. Horizontal rational conncet6ions across the Big Web protect us from arbitrariness and keep the day to day life of reason in business. Vertical connection between the web as a whole and the passions in our souls, our desire to live and flourish in the world informed by the values that inform it dispose us to engage with the normative life it informs. Dispose us to and also, in a way, justify us in, though even in saying that I speak from a perspective inside the web, not somehow from somewhere altogether outside it. That isn't existentialism, merely humanism. As Dworkin – yes, Dworkin - puts it 'We want to live well and to behave decently, we want our communities to be fair and good and our laws to be wise and just.'[48] Quite.

3.

Exhibit G. Aristotle

We start from the things known to us but us is not just anyone. These things can only be known with the eye of what Burnyeat calls 'educated perception' informed through 'knowing of specific actions that they are noble or just in specific circumstances'[49]. That is why Aristotle supposes the study of ethics is only for those of mature years who have been well brought up to virtuous habits (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a-b, 1179b-1180b). Such a person's emotions align naturally with what is good and right and this equips them to orient themself ethically without proofs and arguments. If you are well brought up you don't need these to see what is right. If you are not they won't help you (1179b-1180a). Once someone has attained such a state they can embark on the study of ethics where they seek to impose some systematic coherence on their educated ethical sensibility, reduce it to some sort of order, whereby they can locate particular judgements in a wider space of reasons. The starting points of our ethical thought are then found to support and be supported by other items in the normative landscape (thus we reason both *apo tōn archōn* and *epi tas archas* (1095a), from and to our starting points). So it comes that arriving in the ethics classroom equipped with *the that*, we may there acquire the skill of grasping *the because*.[50] We impose order on what the eye of educated perception sees. This process of education, of habituation into virtuous habits, is one of assimilating from an early age *the that*, the shared ethical understandings of one's society, not just discursively as propositional knowledge but actively as shaping our agency. If you're not emotionally plugged in you're not in the game. Aristotle's ideal student is both, loving virtue, having been raised to do so. 'We do base things for the sake of pleasure and abstain from noble things on account of pain. That is why we must be brought up right from our infancy, as Plato says, to delight in and be

[48] Dworkin 2011, p. 68.
[49] Burnyeat 1980, p. 72.
[50] See my epigraph above, It is worth noting that in the phrase "τὸ ὅτι" which I translate '"the that" the word "ὅτι" means "that" in its sense as a subordinating conjunction, not a demonstrative pronoun. Most translators don't leave it in this raw form. So e.g. Hardie (1980, p. 34) has 'the fact', Broadie and Rowe (2002, p. 97) 'that it is so' .

pained by the right things. That is what a good education is.' (1104b) To have been so educated is to be in possession of *the that*, to have absorbed and internalised the normative outlook of one's society leaving one ready and able to embark on the philosophical enterprise of grasping the because. It is to have acquired an affective character shaped by a normative conceptual repertoire absorbed from one's wider social world. Only when that is in place, for Aristotle, can serious ethical theoretical reflection begin. Far from being a blank slate or an extensionless point, the self at the outset of normative inquiry is already shaped the normative conceptual world of its forebears and peers.

Mackie is right. Sort of. Morality is not discovered but made. But the past participle is apt: *made*. It is not something we discover the way we discover the facts disclosed by physical science. It is a human thing but it is not a new one. It is something we shape but to shape it intelligently we must understand and appreciate the shape we find it with.

We can contrast two ways in which we might understand the enterprise of moral inquiry, the story of construction and the story of interpretation.[51] They seem to compete but really they do not. For no sooner is the process of constructivism is underway, no sooner does it become a thing with a direction and a history apt to shape and inform its future development than interpretation takes its place alongside construction as an essential part of the story. The normative world is a world of our making but the process of making it is a long and continuing one, one we come to rather late in the day.

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[51] Cf Lenman 2007. I stress there the story of construction but with an important qualification at p, 76 that adumbrates what I say here.

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