

RESCUING ETHICAL INTUITIONISM FROM DISAGREEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

In the present thesis my purpose is to investigate whether contemporary intuitionism can rebut recent criticism that builds on the phenomenon of moral disagreement. I argue that it can. In chapter one I specify in what sense do I use the terms ‘intuitionism’ and ‘intuition’. In chapter two I describe the intuitionist’s theories of how intuitions are justified. Having presented the intuitionist theory, I turn to the criticisms in chapter three and four. Firstly, I introduce Walter Sinnott-Armstrong’s challenge. He argues that since moral beliefs are often subjects to various defeaters, moral intuitions cannot enjoy the justification that intuitionists claim they do. I point out that Sinnott-Armstrong’s characterization of intuitionism is misleading. I argue that using a more appropriate characterization and the theories about justification that intuitionists put forward his challenge can be answered satisfactorily, and even without these since it cannot fulfil its own requirements. Secondly, I introduce Roger Crisp’s challenge. He argues that in case of peer disagreement regarding a moral belief the believer who does not suspend that particular belief is in error. I argue in the contrary and show that the one who does suspend belief can just as well be in error. In the concluding chapter I summarize the results of my investigations and point out what kind of significance they ascribe to moral disagreement.

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INTRODUCTION

The wheel has come full circle. The intuitionist moral philosophy that had its heyday in the beginning of the 20th century and later lost its appeal has now regained it for many contemporary thinkers a hundred years later. As the survey of *Fin de siècle* ethics that was completed by Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton in 1992 shows, at that point, intuitionism was not a live option. A lot of criticisms were leveled against the theory: that it is too dogmatic, too conservative, and too queer.¹ The revival is surely due to Robert Audi's influential work, he has been keen on rebutting all the charges.

During these years when intuitionism was regaining its fame, the epistemological literature on disagreement was also growing rapidly, quite independently of moral intuitionism. Some have concluded that since even the analytic philosophical tradition cannot produce considerable consensus among thinkers, one has to take a skeptical stance towards the whole of philosophy. Is there a connection between the attention to intuitionism and to disagreement? Are we more prone to become “dogmatic” intuitionists (in some fields, if not ethics) when we face massive disagreement, or are we more likely to disagree or notice the problems coming from disagreement when there is a significant insistence on intuitions, as there is in today's analytic philosophy? Instead of investigating the justification of these suspicions, my purpose here is to examine whether moral intuitionism can reply to the challenges that concern moral disagreement as these are put forward by the contemporary critics.

The reason behind this is that one of the most important objections against intuitionism – important because of the fact that it was quite widespread and relatively obvious – is that it cannot give a correct treatment to moral disagreement and debate. To a lot of critics it seemed, and it still seems, that this view either cannot accommodate and explain

¹ The last point was pressed notably by J.L. Mackie (1977: 38-42), trying to show that this disadvantage of intuitionism is present in all objectivist moral theories. I am going to return to this criticism in section 2.2.

the phenomenon of moral disagreement or cannot resolve any disputed issues, or cannot be a sustainable position because of other problems concerning disagreement. So Audi and his forerunners and those who are more or less his followers had to face these problems again and again. I argue that these questions can be answered in a satisfactory way that is comfortable for the intuitionists.

My thesis is organized in the following way. First I have to sort out in what sense do I use ‘intuition’ and who do I refer to with the label ‘intuitionist’. As I am going to show, there are several, sometimes overlapping, definitions of these terms. Then, since I identify intuitionism as a position in moral epistemology, I elaborate on its most important (epistemological) claim, that at least some of our moral intuitions are justified. My treatment here is going to be inclusive, I pay attention to many of the possible positions and juxtapose these.

After that part I introduce the problems put forward more recently. The charges include that if there is disagreement about intuitions, and especially if one explains this phenomena in the way the cited intuitionists do, then our intuitions cannot be justified in the way intuitionists claim they are, or we should just completely abandon our habit of believing them when there is peer disagreement concerning their truth.

Then I show how the first criticism (Sinnott-Armstrong’s challenge) could be rebutted using a more adequate characterization of intuitionism, the epistemological arsenal of the intuitionists, and even without reliance on the intuitionist’s accounts, proving the qualms to be requiring too much. The second criticism (Crisp’s challenge) is going to fall for a similar reason: it poses a requirement that is too stringent, thus it demands something inappropriate from moral believers.

It might seem at this point that conflicts of opinion are completely irrelevant in moral philosophy. Therefore, in the concluding chapter I explain my theoretical stance towards this

claim. I am going to show that the preceding inquiries revealed some important ways how disagreement can indeed be relevant in moral theorizing. I conclude that intuitionism is able to withstand the new attacks, yet I have to insert qualifications of my conclusion since I am not able to address all forms of disagreement in this thesis. I finish by pointing out what other dangers for intuitionism coming from a special kind of disagreement should be ruled out to relieve the position completely from any – or at least most – concerns about the lack of consensus.

CHAPTER 1: INTUITIONISMS, INTUITIONISTS, INTUITIONS

Both the label ‘intuitionist’ and the term ‘intuition’ have many meanings and uses. In this opening chapter I shed light on what are the characteristics of intuitionism and of intuitions, or at least – since some arbitrariness in defining them is unavoidable – what I mean when I use these terms. Let me start with intuitionism.

1.1 What is Intuitionism?

Throughout the last decades this label has been associated with many positions. It often refers to philosophers who claim existence to non-natural ethical properties, or believe in the unanalyzability and simplicity of moral properties, or commit themselves to pluralism, the position according to which moral values and principles are irreducibly many.² Sometimes those who think that ethics should proceed by the method of reflective equilibrium are also called intuitionists. Some seem to take Ross’s theory of *prima facie* duties to be the essential component of any views that deserve the name ‘intuitionism’.

How should we settle this plurality of uses? Let me approach this question by naming those who I take to be the paradigmatic intuitionists and the feature of their view that is affected by the problems to be tackled. In a footnote in his introduction of the volume *Ethical Intuitionism: Re-evaluations* Philip Stratton-Lake (2002: 23) lists the then contemporary thinkers who have been working within the intuitionist tradition. These are – apart from him – Robert Audi, Jonathan Dancy, John McDowell, David McNaughton, Derek Parfit, and David Wiggins. Since then Robert Audi and Michael Huemer both provided new, book-length explanations and defenses of the intuitionist view. In my thesis I take the latter two thinkers to be the paradigmatic intuitionists of the day and model my concept of intuitionism mostly on them. Huemer’s account is a clear statement of a kind of intuitionism, while Audi has

² Matthew S. Bedke (2010: 1070) states that ‘ethical intuitionism’, as it is traditionally conceived, includes the view that mid-level principles regard different features of actions by virtue of which they can be right or wrong. This, I think, is not a viable definition of ethical intuitionism since it would not entitle consequentialist-minded intuitionists, like G.E. Moore (2000) and Huemer (cf. 2005, 2008) to use the label (cf. Sinnott-Armstrong 2006: 185).

explored a range of possibilities that an intuitionist can take – nevertheless remaining to hold a version of intuitionism that is in many respects similar to Huemer's.³

Both Audi and Huemer are realists and non-naturalists (they think that morality is objective and not reducible to the natural domain), cognitivists (they hold that ethical propositions can be true or false), and rationalists (that is, they believe that intuitions are not originated in our sensual perceptions).⁴ And they both share the epistemological claim “from which their doctrine gets its name: that at least some moral truths are known [or are believed in a justified way] intuitively” (Huemer 2005: 6).⁵ Since it will make the discussion simpler, I am going to focus on being justified intuitively. As we are going to see, this is the claim that is called into question by many opponents who base their arguments on the phenomenon of moral disagreement: they say that if there is disagreement of this kind, we cannot believe justifiedly in moral claims in an intuitive way.

Intuitionists are committed to the view well-shared among moral philosophers, that we should build ethical theories by the *help* of our intuitions. Robert Audi (2004: 234, 2008: 476) distinguishes the *intuitivists* who are – roughly – those who treat our intuitions as important data and evidence for one theory or another in moral philosophy.⁶ Some intuitivists may treat some intuitions even as decisive or fundamental data that every moral theory should accommodate. But many times the exact role of intuitions in texts where they are appealed to is not made clear.⁷ Yet, the intuitionists claim clearly that this evidential role is played by intuitions because they possess a special kind of justification.

³ Bedke (2010) also uses their theory to introduce intuitionist moral epistemology. Despite the similarities, their views characterize two major strands concerning the epistemology of intuitions that I am going to elucidate in the next section.

⁴ The former claims are going to constitute the backdrop of my thesis; I am not going to argue against challenges regarding these.

⁵ Audi (2004: 22) writes that “epistemology is [...] fundamental in intuitionism”. Therefore what I take to be denoted by the term is the same what Bedke (2010: 1069) calls “epistemological ethical intuitionism”.

⁶ Audi uses this label *mainly* for those who use the case-based method (e.g. trolley-cases). Notable examples are Judith Jarvis Thomson and Frances Kamm (Audi 2004: 235).

⁷ As it is noted by Hallvard Lillehammer (2011: 175).

They would say that our intuitions give us a *prima facie* or presumptive (Lillehammer 2011: 175) justification in believing certain moral propositions that our intuitions seem to reveal to us as true.⁸ The justification in question is ‘initial’ in two senses. Firstly, it is not indefeasible. A particular belief of yours could be proven to you to be wrong even if you were initially *prima facie* justified in believing it, and even if that belief was true, the refutation might completely take away your justification. Secondly, since “justification comes in degrees” (Huemer 2005: 115), it can be enhanced. Using our reflection, holding coherent moral beliefs, examining our moral and factual commitments critically, employing narrow and wide Reflective Equilibrium – these closely related methods are all ways that an intuitionist could cite as ones that strengthen our justification.⁹

Since Reflective Equilibrium (henceforth: R/E) is an important methodological device not only for many contemporary thinkers but for intuitionists especially, it is worth discussing it with regard to how intuitionists use it. There are two forms of R/E: narrow and wide. Let me introduce these quite briefly. When narrow R/E is employed, one seeks to make her beliefs about moral matters (judgments about what one should do in different cases and what general principles of morality are the correct ones) to be coherent. Using wide R/E involves our beliefs about non-moral matters (on psychology, history, physics, etc.) too, and the one who engages in this process revises those beliefs of her that stand in the way of an acceptable coherence of her views. This method might be used to resolve intrapersonal moral disagreement (when one holds apparently contradictory views concerning ethics) and to

⁸ In the literature there is talk about the *prima facie* nature of moral reasons and the *prima facie* justification of our moral beliefs, where sometimes their *pro tanto* nature is also implied. Shelly Kagan (1989: 17) makes a helpful distinction between *prima facie* and *pro tanto*. A *pro tanto* reason or justification is one that can be outweighed but has enduring “genuine weight”. When something is a *prima facie* reason or is justified *prima facie*, this means that the reason or the justification may turn out to be only apparent, it can fully vanish. When I use the term, *prima facie*, mostly I do not imply their being *pro tanto* at the same time. Yet I also do not imply, as Sinnott-Armstrong does (who takes the terms from Kagan but seems to be departing from him in this respect) that a *prima facie* reason or justification is only illusory (cf. Sinnott-Armstrong 2002: 321-323). I rather suggest that this term signifies presumptiveness; when the justification or reason can be either strengthened or defeated.

⁹ Or, in fact, sometimes defeating it. As Audi notes, not being able to reach equilibrium after a considerable try might reduce or defeat our justification (Audi 2004: 66).

resolve interpersonal disagreement (when two persons disagree on moral matters, they might reach agreement employing this method).

John Rawls (1971) was the one who made this method popular. He himself conceives it as implying coherentism, yet this conception of R/E is debated. If it did imply coherentism, the contemporary intuitionists who I am referring to, would not be entitled to use it, since their view is a foundationalist one. Some philosophers agree with Rawls, some hold that R/E must fall back on foundationalism or it needs to start with initially and inherently justified beliefs (that have a high degree of initial rational credibility) to function properly. The latter view, as far as I can see, is gaining popularity. Kelly and McGrath (2010) argue for this and the intuitionists – who happily use this method – agree.¹⁰

It is also important to note that the foundationalism that the intuitionists I am considering are committed to is of a quite moderate kind. What does this mean? Foundationalists think that the edifice of our knowledge has two parts, the foundation and the superstructure. The foundational beliefs of ours have a basic and immediate justification, while the beliefs that are part of the superstructure gain their justification from their special relation to the immediately justified beliefs. Yet foundationalists disagree about what kind of basic justification the foundational beliefs have and what kind of special relationship is needed between them and the superstructure to make the latter justified (McGrew 1999: 224-225). A strong classical foundationalist holds that the basic beliefs have to be certain and infallible. This requirement is given up by moderate foundationalists. Audi regards intuitions to be foundational, yet, they think that even intuitions can be fallible (Audi 2004: 78, 198). Huemer, again, seems to share Audi's opinion. He writes that he is very close to what Susan

¹⁰ See Audi 2004: 111, 224; Huemer 2005: 117, 269; Hooker 2009: 9-16. To summarize briefly the arguments of Kelly and McGrath, they say that it seems that the proponents of R/E who they consider do not gain knowledge at the end of the day. That is only achievable if one enters R/E with justified beliefs. A method, they claim, cannot be good enough if it may leave with unreasonable views and there is a method that would not. But according to the traditional conception of R/E, one does not have to bring only his justified beliefs into the R/E: many times one is entitled to bring in some justified beliefs and one has to leave some others. Now if this is true, the method cannot give us justification in itself, only if we start it with all and only our justified beliefs.

Haack dubs ‘foundherentism’ (Huemer 2008: 273). He believes that a foundational belief might be fallible, although he does not assume that all foundational beliefs are such.¹¹ He also adds that they are not incorrigible.¹² His foundationalism also leaves space for coherence (or reflective equilibrium) to raise the justification of our beliefs.

1.2 What are the Intuitions?

Before proceeding, let me summarize that I use ‘intuitionism’ in the following way: according to intuitionist moral philosophers some of the moral truths are believed in a justified way intuitively. But what is this intuitive way? What are these intuitions in question? There are a lot of concepts of intuitions in play in the contemporary literature. For example in psychology, intuitions are often meant to be “fast and frugal” operations of our cognitive system (understood widely), the operations of which are not accessible to our consciousness, they are apparently non-inferential.¹³ We have to delineate the intuitions of philosophers by an appeal to what role they play in their practices.

They are taken to have a foundational justification, as I have described it. This means that their justification is not necessarily mediated by other beliefs that are parts of the superstructure or even the foundation, they do not need to stand in an *inferential* relation to those to have an ‘independent credibility’ (cf. Hooker 2009: 13). Therefore intuitions *may* grant access to truths that cannot be proved, demonstrated or derived from other propositions or evidence.

¹¹ Indeed, his principle of Phenomenological Conservatism, which I am going to introduce in the second chapter, seems to be infallible, at least according to Huemer’s opinion.

¹² See Huemer 2008: 107, 143, 146.

¹³ These can be important when it comes to the challenges regarding the sources of our intuitions, which challenges I am going to tackle in a subsequent chapter. On the possible connection between ethical and psychological (moral) intuitions see Musschenga (2010) 118-120 – cf. Berker 2009: 300, 318.

For the rationalist intuitionists, the source of the intuition is intellectual.¹⁴ It means, in other words, that the intuitions do not come from our senses, our memory, our introspection, or from testimony (cf. Huemer 2005: 100; Sosa 2007). This is not meant to imply that a proposition *p* which can be known intuitively, cannot be known in any other ways. I may remember *p* or may have a justified belief that *p* on the basis of testimony. Yet the *sui generis* intuitive premise-independent justification is in order if it is based on the content of the intuition (cf. Audi 2008: 477).

This does not mean that we cannot believe an intuitively knowable proposition in a justified way on the grounds of other propositions. You might be able to infer them somehow, but then, if you come to see that they hold premise-independently, your belief has both intuitive and inferential justification,¹⁵ and if you do not cognize them that way, then your beliefs are only inferentially and not intuitively justified.

What must be pointed out here is that while one can make inferences about the *belief* and its epistemic status (it is known, or is believed in a justified/unjustified way, comes from intuition, etc.) these inferences do not make the belief inferential. It would be inferential only if these inferences would regard solely the *truth* of the proposition believed and not also the epistemic features of the belief in question. We can see the reason behind this if we take for example a belief that is based on our perception (let's say: the cat is on the mat). This kind of belief is usually interpreted as non-inferential, and even if we make inferences about our belief (say: our senses are in perfect shape, therefore we are justified in believing that the cat

¹⁴ Therefore it might be worth to emphasize that intuitionists do not use 'intuition' in the way that is often used in everyday speech and sometimes in philosophy too (cf. Lillehammer 2011): they do not refer simply to 'gut feelings' or 'gut reactions', or to 'obvious truths'. More on the latter topic later.

¹⁵ This is a case of epistemic overdetermination (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003: 248, Audi 2008: 477, Ballantyne and Thurow 2013: 418). It might be worth emphasizing that epistemic overdetermination happens when one and the same person knows (or is justified in believing) one particular thing in more than one way (e.g. intuitively and inferentially, or through memory and testimony, etc).

is on the mat), its source is still our perception and not our inferential ability, or, in other words, this belief is still perceptual and not inferential. The same goes for intuitions as well.¹⁶

Apart from this partial definition the nature of intuitions and the way how exactly do they do the job of justification is a matter of debate. There is an ongoing debate for example on whether intuitions are themselves beliefs or belong rather to a distinct kind of mental states, intellectual seemings. On the first interpretation ‘I intuit *p*’ would entail ‘I believe *p*’, on the second, it would not. Audi took the former position (Audi 2004: 33), Huemer took the latter (Huemer 2005: 267). Yet in a more recent paper Audi (2008: 477-478) tried to accommodate the latter view. He made a distinction between doxastic intuitions (that are beliefs) and non-doxastic ones (that are intellectual seemings). He writes that “An intuitive seeming *p* can be an evidential ground for believing *p*. Intuitionists have typically presupposed this” (Audi 2008: 478). On this basis I take the accounts of Audi and Huemer to be compatible.¹⁷ It remains to be the task of the next chapter to introduce their views on how the intuitions do their justificatory work.

¹⁶ This is quite important when it comes to Sinnott-Armstrong’s case against intuitionism. He uses non-inferentiality in question mistakenly, as regarding all kinds of inferences. See section 3.1 below.

¹⁷ In point of fact, Huemer also seems to be subscribed to the view that some moral principles – such as “suffering is bad” – are self-evident (Huemer 2005: 231) as Audi suggests.

CHAPTER 2: HOW ARE INTUITIONS JUSTIFIED?

In the present chapter I am going to show how the intuitionists understand and explain the direct justification which the intuitions have. Intuitions, as I have mentioned, were understood in two different, yet compatible ways. On the first account, they are basic beliefs with a credibility that is independent of other beliefs. Philosophers who took this road (e.g. Audi, Russ Shafer-Landau, Philip Stratton-Lake) regard intuitive moral principles to be self-evident. I am going to expound their view in the first section of this chapter. On the second account, intuitions are not beliefs, but belong to a peculiar kind of cognitive attitudes; they are intellectual seemings. (Philosophers who took this road include Michael Huemer, George Bealer, and William Tolhurst.) Their justificatory work is explained by a principle, Phenomenal Conservatism, which advises us to be faithful to our seemings. I am going to explicate this principle in the second section. A closely related conception, which gets its justification from Phenomenal Conservatism, is the ‘Moorean argument’, that is going to be the topic of the second half of the same section. The fourth section is going to explain how the idea of ‘justification by faith’ or ‘justification by conviction’ can play a role in the justification of our most firm intuitions.

2.1 Self-Evidence and Reflection

Intuitionists have traditionally understood intuitions to be self-evident (Bedke 2010: 1070). This means that solely an *adequate* understanding of the proposition that is self-evident makes us justified in believing it (*if* we do believe it). It is important to note that an inadequate understanding is not enough for the justification to obtain, and also, even an adequate understanding might be insufficient for believing the proposition. To evidence the first possibility, Audi gives the following example: ‘First cousins share a pair of grandparents’ (Audi 2008: 488). You might be able to understand this without being able to see its truth, yet, if you understand it enough, you can see that this is true just on the basis of its content. (It is

also a good example to show that sometimes you might need reasoning to grasp an intuitively true proposition.) The second possibility, when someone understands a self-evident proposition but does not believe it, takes place when one is a hardened skeptic or when someone trusts a person quite blindly and that person tells us not to believe that proposition (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003: 247). Also, the self-evident nature of a proposition does not have to be apprehended when someone understands it correctly. Audi explains this by appealing to the fact that believing that a proposition is self-evident needs one to possess “conceptual sophistication” or “certain technical concepts” (2004: 42-43). This improvement of Ross’s theory is often viewed to be a major step for intuitionism.

A belief like that does not have to be obvious at all, therefore, coming to ‘see’ them might take a long time. Meanwhile we might use inferences to understand the proposition, but not necessarily. There is a form of thinking, called reflection by the intuitionists, which can lead us to the understanding without any inferences. Audi often uses the example when one has to decide whether the wording of a poem is artificial or not. Oftentimes we will not have propositional evidence concerning some words or line of the poem we read. Be that as it may, we can sense that it is artificial, if we apprehend the poem as a whole, globally (Audi 2008: 45.) This might be similar to a case where someone reads about the terrible deeds of an SS officer in great details and intuitively that his acts were immoral and might even come to believe principles like “avoid hurting others” on this basis. As Audi writes: “There are cases in which an intuition with quite abstract content, like a concrete one with a global content, is grounded in part on a conception of a single concrete illustrative case” (Audi 2004: 46). These would be, in his terms, “conclusions of reflection”, as opposed to “conclusions of inference”.

Now we can make a distinction between intuitions about actual or hypothetical cases (like the ones that figure in thought-experiments), about mid-level general rules (like “other things being equal, keep your promises”), and about abstract, highest-level principles (like the categorical imperative or the principle of utility). Audi regards the true mid-level rules to be

self-evident, and leaves open the possibility that the categorical imperative is such too. He says that it could be the case that the categorical imperative is self-evident, and then, by proper amount of adequate reflection one could come to hold it true directly, justified in a way that does not require any premises (Audi 1998: 23).¹⁸ Yet he does not regard intuitions about particular cases to be self-evident.

It is not until 2008 when Audi tries to give an explanation about how exactly intuitions can fulfill the epistemic role ascribed to them with regard to general rules and singular cases. He explains the first kind of intuition by an appeal to containment relations. He argues that the concept of moral reason contains the Rossian mid-level principles (like “avoid causing pain”). Contrasted to analytic statements, for example ‘All vixens are female’, where the thought of a vixen always includes that of a female, a thought about a moral reason does not necessarily include that of avoidance of causing pain to others. As Bedke (2010: 1072) notes, the “crucial point for Audi is that certain non-moral facts ground the applicability of moral concepts” (cf. Audi 2008: 479). With regard to cases, Audi thinks that we recognize fittingness relations. If we have adequate ability to discriminate and conceptualize the situations, we can apprehend the fittingness and unfittingness-relations for example the fittingness between an act of promising and an act of promise-breaking (Audi 2008: 482-483).

This account remains controversial (cf. Bedke 2010: 1071-1075), nevertheless, most intuitionists who regarded intuitions to be self-evident did not give any similar explanations.¹⁹ They appealed to the fact that propositions, like that one’s moderate pleasure cannot make it right to hurt others, seems hardly to be revisable and in fact a final reason to not do some harmful, yet moderately enjoyable acts (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003: 249). Since the complement

¹⁸ After all, as Audi points out, Kant regarded it as *a priori*. Later Audi argued that bringing singular moral beliefs (about cases), beliefs about rules, and principles like the categorical imperative enhances the justification of our theory – e.g. since the categorical imperative can adequately ground and complete Rossian *prima facie* duties (cf. Audi 2004: 111).

¹⁹ But see a similar approach in Huemer 2005: 122-127.

to the intuitionism of Audi introduced in the previous paragraph is not central for the criticisms tackled in my thesis, I remain mostly neutral towards it.

2.2 Phenomenal Conservatism and Moorean Arguments

Let us turn now to Huemer's conception of the justification of intuitions. He uses the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism (for short: PC) to explain that. According to PC, one is justified in believing things are so as they seem to be (Cf. Huemer 2005: 99; Huemer 2007: 30; Shafer-Landau 2003: 243-244). These seemings include perceptual, introspective, mnemonic, and intellectual ones – and also intellectual seemings about the matters of ethics which are the moral intuitions proper, whose appearing so and so is not dependent on other beliefs (cf. Huemer 2005: 102).²⁰ As Huemer writes “PC holds that it is by virtue of having an appearance with a given content that one has justification for believing that content” (Huemer 2007: 30).

The defenders of PC argue that the denial of this principle is self-refuting, it indeed rests on the principle itself. As Bedke summarizes: “One interesting thing about such a view is that it might bootstrap the epistemic principle, rendering it justified in the very way the principle describes. Why? Well, note that an attempt to reject it *because it seems false* would be self-defeating” (Bedke 2010: 1075).

PC applies to appearances that confirm something and also to appearances that disconfirm, therefore it does not lead to uncritical endorsement of our earlier beliefs. When someone believes that she has strong evidence against one thing, she is only justified if things really seem to her that way (all seemings considered). Appearances include the relative strength of our evidence too. For example we are often inclined to say that it seems more sure or more obvious that I am sitting in a chair than that tomorrow is going to rain, or it is more

²⁰ In some central passages he refers to intuitions as being “pre-theoretical” and appearances “prior to reasoning” (cf. Huemer 2005: 101). Unfortunately, these characterizations are misleading. As we are going to see with regards to Moorean arguments, we still have intuitions about a matter that we are arguing about. A more adequate definition would be that they are theory- and premise-independent.

clear that $2+3=5$ than that I hear the voice of breaking glass. So when it comes to contradictory seemings, a person has to give up the one that is less obvious to her – that is the way we can be faithful to our seemings (cf. Huemer 2005: 100).

The so-called Moorean arguments come directly from the epistemological principle introduced above. As we have seen, if there are conflicting seemings, it is more rational to give up the ones that seem comparatively less strong. Then if I am presented with the claim that “Torturing babies for fun is OK” I can judge that the claim that “Torturing babies for fun is evil” seems to be much stronger. Furthermore, whenever someone fabricates an argument that concludes with the first claim, I may still judge that the proposition that I believe seems to be true more firmly than the soundness of the argument in question.

So when a nihilist argues that “B; If B then torturing babies for fun is OK; Torturing babies for fun is OK” I can devise a Moorean argument. In these kinds of arguments the conclusion of the argument – say, the nihilist’s or the skeptic’s conclusion – is directly denied, the following way: “Torturing babies for fun is evil; If torturing babies for fun is evil, then not-B; Not-B”. So, for example, Huemer illustrates this using John Mackie’s argument from queerness as his target. Mackie argued that for something to be objectively good, this thing should be intrinsically action-guiding or motivating, some property like to-be-persuadedness has to be built into it – but this would be utterly weird and we should not accept such weird claims in our theories (Mackie 1977: 38-42, 49). Huemer (2005: 116) argues against this the following way:

1. A nuclear war would be bad.
2. Enjoyment is sometimes (if not always) better than excruciating pain.
3. Therefore, good and bad do exist.
4. Therefore, either
 - a. Good and bad need not be intrinsically motivating, or
 - b. It is possible for something to be intrinsically motivating.

It is a natural reaction to this argument that it begs the question.²¹ Nevertheless the contrary argument of course begs the question the same way. For those who find that a nuclear war would indeed be bad seems to be very strongly true, Huemer's argument is going to appeal, it would indeed be more rational for them to accept it, and therefore they do not have to counter the nihilist's reasoning in a less "question-begging" way according to PC; their justification remains the same. What we have here are cases where the direct appeal or the immediate plausibility of the premises is the factor which decides which one of the opposing arguments are justified.

2.4 Justification by Faith and Convictionist Considerations

Before moving on to the questions of disagreement, let me consider another strategy, sometimes employed by intuitionists against the skeptics. Philip Stratton-Lake, under the title "In Defence of Naivety" (Stratton-Lake 2002: 25-28) argues that the epistemology of moral intuitionism (of the kind he labels "Dogmatic Intuitionism") is the closest possible to everyday thinking. Intuitionists often appeal to the fact that most of the times we accept reasons like "I did this to avoid causing pain" or "I did this because otherwise I would have been disrespectful" to be bedrock reasons, which do not have to be evidenced further, and even if we are asked further, we feel that there is nothing else that has to be said, we reached a ground-level in giving reasons.²²

Stratton-Lake notes that it would be the hardest thing to give up our considerations about this kind of *pro tanto* duties. "The only way of establishing moral truth – he writes harnessing the talk about reflection and Moorean arguments – is by reflection on what we really think..." (Stratton-Lake 2002: 27) Contrasting accounts of morality like the Nietzschean thought that it comes from the will to power and common-sense intuitionist

²¹ Compare Huemer 2005: 116; Dworkin 1996: 119; Shafer-Landau 2003: 238; Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a: 68, 191.

²² One might construct deeper reasons when pressed, but the intuitionists point out that we usually do not seek further reasons and we are not pushed if we give this kind of reasons as the reasons of our action.

approaches, he illustrates that we can appeal to what I am going to call the Jamesian idea of “justification by faith”. William James (1912) argued that oftentimes we believe, disbelieve or suspend judgment about issues because we are inclined to do so, our passions and dispositions make us to do that.²³ So when we *cannot prove* something and someone disbelieves it, someone else believes it and still another person suspends her judgment about it, we share the same amount of justification, and we are not required to choose any of these three options. The skeptic’s fear of becoming a dupe that leads her to suspend judgment or disbelieve could be turned against this fear itself, and that would neutralize the demand of abandoning our belief (cf. Stratton-Lake2002: 27-28). What entitles us to believe what we believe seems to be the very conviction of ours.

This approach brings us close to a strand of philosophy that I would like to call *convictionism*. Conviction is a term that is often used interchangeably with intuition (cf. Hooker 2009), thus this view can be seen as a member of the broader intuitionist family (whose members include for example the intuitivists too), but some convictionists deny that they understand this notion the same way as they think the intuitionists do. Nevertheless, intuitionists can be convictionists at the same time.

The main point in convictionism is that even in the face of arguments and whole coherent systems of morality (or philosophy) or in the face of sophisticated skeptical considerations, many times we retain moral convictions that run in the face of the theory, that are independent of it, seem to be unmovable, and, in turn, these convictions that we cannot give up, thwart the full justification of the theory and should be considered *as justified*. Let me illustrate this point with what Nagel writes, calling these convictions intuitions:²⁴

²³ Sometimes James relies on the concept of doxastic voluntarism, that we can change our beliefs by will. (For example he writes that “The question of having moral beliefs at all or not having them is decided by our will” James 1912: 23.) But this is not at all central to the line of thought that I am referring to: even if we already believe something, and we cannot give it up by the change of our will, his considerations can be valid, maybe even more so. (I am going to return to the question of doxastic voluntarism in chapter 4.)

²⁴ And sometimes he calls them “intuitive convictions” (Nagel 2012: 195).

I believe one should trust [...] intuition over arguments [...] Given a knockdown argument for an intuitively unacceptable conclusion, one should assume there is probably something wrong with the argument that one cannot detect — though it is also possible that the source of the intuition has been misidentified. (Nagel 1979: x)²⁵

It is high time to make some distinctions here. As I wrote, convictionists are not necessarily intuitionists. Ronald Dworkin, another philosopher who can be interpreted as a convictionist, explicitly denies that he is intuitionist. For example instead of any kind of foundationalism, he endorses coherentism and even allows circularity in our justification (cf. Dworkin 2011: 100, 116-117). Yet in his paper “Objectivity and Truth” he considers a hypothetical case where he has to choose between (a quite robust version of) intuitionism and the view that some apparently immoral things like genocide are permissible. He chooses the first option, writing: “we can do no better for any claim, including the most sophisticated skeptical argument or thesis, than to see whether, after the best thought we find appropriate, we think it so” (1996: 118). Dworkin does not really accept that a conviction of ours gives us full justification, he says we need further reasons to be justified, but at least we are not completely unjustified in holding true our convictions, and we are more justified in this than in believing the skeptic options. What seems to be the crucial similarity between Dworkin’s thought and intuitionism is that he thinks that acting out of conviction would be to act fully responsibly (Dworkin 2011: 101). I interpret Dworkin as using “responsibly” instead of “justifiedly”, which is as confusing as it is apt: he seems to think that *in the moral domain* not only the truth (or accuracy) of our beliefs count but also the way how we arrive at those beliefs (e.g. by reflection cf. Dworkin 2011: 101). So acting upon our convictions can be justified or responsible, even if not fully so.

A second distinction has to be made between the justification that the intuitionists mostly have in mind and between the justification James refers to. What his concept of

²⁵ The last point made by Nagel seems to resemble the idea of intuitionists that intuitions can be distorted and fallible.

justification amounts to is the epistemic permissibility of holding a belief when it is unclear whether one should believe, disbelieve, or suspend belief. Whereas what intuitionists have in mind in comparison to this idea is more of a positive epistemic obligation to believe something (cf. Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a: 65-67, 218).

Hence Jamesian considerations can be called for when some opponent denies that we have a right to hold our beliefs in some situation where she thinks that giving up the opinion would be the correct response yet this is not at all clear. While convictionists refer to cases where one just cannot get rid of a conviction (and Dworkin also makes a distinction between the moral and the non-moral domain in this respect) so their considerations can be called for when the justification of our convictions (especially in moral issues) are called into question.²⁶

²⁶ Our paradigm convictionists (Nagel and Dworkin) also use Moorean arguments, therefore I am going to refer to them later in this respect too.

CHAPTER 3: SINNOTT-ARMSTRONG'S CHALLENGE

In an influential series of articles, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong has put forward an apparently serious challenge for intuitionism.²⁷ In these papers he conceives intuitionism as an epistemological position and, as it is, a reply to the skeptical challenge of the regress argument. The regress argument of skeptics makes use of the reiteration of the question: “How do you know this?” Every time an answer is given, the skeptic asks this again. Intuitionists would claim that at least in some of the moral issues there are final answers to this question, like self-evident principles that are in no need of further justification – even if they could be further justified, according to contemporary intuitionists.

To be fair, Sinnott-Armstrong tries to capture a definition of intuitionism that applies to all of its representatives and to form the position in a way that would be really good enough to stop the skeptical regress. Sinnott-Armstrong states that to do this, intuitionists have to claim that “some people are [adequately] epistemically justified in holding some moral beliefs independently of whether those people are able to infer those moral beliefs from any other beliefs” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006b: 341).²⁸ He elaborates this definition further by saying that it means that believers could be justified even if they lacked *any inferential abilities* to infer in a justified way that proposition which is the content of their beliefs. And even if some “self-styled” intuitionists say that only *actual* inferences should figure here,²⁹ that would not be an answer to the skeptical regress since then the premises of the *possible* inference should be available to the believer as beliefs and this way the skeptic could challenge us by asking: “How is she justified in believing them?” Many (even if not all) of Sinnott-Armstrong’s

²⁷ The series includes but is not limited to Sinnott-Armstrong 2002, 2006a: 184-219, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b. As Ballantyne and Thurow (2013: 419) note, these papers have been cited in more than hundred other articles.

²⁸ It might be noted that while for example Huemer talks about justification as a matter of degrees, Sinnott-Armstrong talks about justification as an all-or-nothing issue. This is because he talks about our epistemic obligation to believe something, and while it might be permissible to believe *p* where we do not have sufficient evidence for either *p* or not-*p*, the epistemic duty to believe *p* only arises if our evidence is in favour of *p* in an adequate degree.

²⁹ He calls their position “weak intuitionism” and although he does not identify its representatives, he makes it clear that coherentists and naturalists do not deny weak moral intuitionism (Sinnott-Armstrong 2002: 309-310). It might be worth to point out that he uses the term ‘intuition’ in a similarly weak sense when he writes that “A moral intuition might be justified inferentially. What makes it a moral intuition is that it is not actually based on an *actual* inference” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2008: 49).

intuitionistic critics have agreed that this is a plausible way to characterize moral intuitionism. Yet they disagree with Sinnott-Armstrong about whether believers in making moral judgments are, due to the conjunction of various epistemic principles and mostly empirical grounds,³⁰ are always in the need of an ability of inferential confirmation to be justified.

Let me illustrate Sinnott-Armstrong's points with the example of disagreement. He uses a situation where two persons are adding up a column of figures. At the end, they get different sums. Yet these people are justified in believing that the other is their epistemic peer. In this case, they need confirmation to be justified in their belief about the correctness of their calculations.³¹ Hence we can generalize a principle: "confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when people disagree with no independent reason to prefer one belief or believer to the other" (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006: 344).

The next step is to point out that this applies to ethical beliefs. One can use lots of examples here: polygamy, capital punishment, abortion, and also hypothetical cases where every detail is stipulated. For example people disagree about whether we are permitted to push a fat man from a footbridge to make a trolley stop that would otherwise kill five others. Sinnott-Armstrong grants that in many moral questions there might be no disagreement. But even then, to become justified in a belief concerning that case we have to *be able to infer* from the premise that there is no disagreement about it, that our belief that goes with the consensus can be trusted, or at least that it is not a subject of the above given principle – so we should be able to execute an inference about its reliability. "If we know – he contends – that many moral intuitions are unreliable because others hold conflicting intuitions, then we are not justified in trusting a particular moral intuition without some reason to believe that it is one of the reliable ones" (2006b: 350).

³⁰ Despite his constant insistence on "recent research in psychology and brain science" (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006b: 340), some of Sinnott-Armstrong's evidence is not even empirical. He admits this with regards to the argument from unreliable sources (cf. *ibid.* 357).

³¹ Though this confirmation need not be an actual inference in general. Yet the *ability* to make an inference arises if one is confirmed (cf. Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a: 212-213).

Other lines of similar arguments by Sinnott-Armstrong regard not disagreement, but also imply that confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when her belief is likely to be (a) formed partially or (b) when the emotions cloud one's judgments, (c) a subject to illusions (including framing effects)³² or (d) possibly has unreliable sources. He argues that moral beliefs are quite likely to have all these characteristics.³³

There are various ways to criticize this line of argument and the empirical grounds and epistemological principles that are invoked in it and are outlined in the articles in question. Here, I am going to focus on the (mostly epistemological) claims that concern moral disagreement. My focus seems to be reasonable since the evidence that regards this topic sticks out from Sinnott-Armstrong's list.³⁴ At least two other elements appear to be reducible or at least connected to the phenomenon of *dissensus*. Sinnott-Armstrong judges the evidence concerning illusions and framing effects in the following way:

Anyone who has been exposed to moral disagreements and to the ways in which people argue for their moral positions has had experiences that, if considered carefully, would support the premise that moral intuitions are subject to framing effects in many circumstances. (Sinnott-Armstrong 2008a: 67)

The evidence which comes from the unreliability of the sources of moral beliefs comes down to another kind of disagreement, this time about the origins of morality in general. The author particularly refers to Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Gilbert Harman, who have all developed accounts of the genealogy of morals according to which morality has disreputable sources. After referring to their works Sinnott-Armstrong adds that he does not need to prove the truth of these accounts; he claims only "that these undermining accounts are live possibilities. They seem plausible to many people and have not been

³² Framing effects are in play when the wording of a text or other irrelevant features of the context influence one's moral judgments. Sinnott-Armstrong has dedicated a whole paper to these (see his 2008a).

³³ Since intuitionism was earlier criticized because the theory seemed unable to accommodate disagreement, both Audi and Huemer partly refer to the possibility of our moral intuitions and beliefs being coloured or influenced by biases, prejudices and partiality (cf. Audi 2004: 66; Huemer 2005: 132-141). But this leads exactly to the criticism put forward by Sinnott-Armstrong.

³⁴ Also, the relatively less cited first paper in the series of articles (Sinnott-Armstrong 2002) is dedicated entirely to the phenomenon of disagreement.

refuted” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006: 357).³⁵ This implies that one has to have an answer to disregard the disagreeing many and that can only happen through a confirmation; therefore, the justification of moral beliefs can be only an inferential one – one that makes someone able to make an inference to his belief.

I believe that Sinnott-Armstrong’s case has quite a few flaws. First of all, it seems to be based on some misunderstandings of intuitionism. A “state of the art” counterargument – that I am going to compose using three defender’s replies in section 1 – sheds light on some of the misunderstandings. But, to my mind, even this “state of the art” answer cannot rebut all the problems raised implicitly or explicitly by Sinnott-Armstrong. This is because these answers are based on the possibility that the defeaters of our intuitive judgments (our partiality, unreliable sources, disagreement about the beliefs in question, etc.) are themselves defeated (i.e. ruled out) – for example, that we can show that an intuition of ours is widely accepted or is not just an outcome of cultural indoctrination, or is formed in a reliable way. Now what if we cannot show this in the vast majority of, or in many crucial cases? Then intuitionism would remain as hopeless as without giving any fancy arguments about defeaters of defeaters.³⁶

Because of this, as the next step, in section 2, I will show that using the intuitionist’s equipment, introduced in chapter 2, we could fully withstand the challenge of Sinnott-Armstrong, without the need of the so-called defeater-defeaters. And then, to finish it off, I am going to argue in section 3 that, as far as I can see, the skeptic’s case implies requirements such that even itself cannot fulfill – therefore it falls completely.

³⁵ Smith (2010: 86) wondered what a “live option” was meant to be according to Sinnott-Armstrong. Probably Sinnott-Armstrong’s use of the term comes from James (1912), and in that case, it means a hypothesis “which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed” (James 1912: 2). Nevertheless, if this is its true origin, it is not used correctly. Since by “options” James means decisions between two hypotheses, and furthermore, Sinnott-Armstrong cannot deny that for many people the hypotheses in question does not “appeal as a real possibility” and therefore there is no live option for them concerning these dilemmas.

³⁶ A defeater is roughly a reason to give up our belief – and that ruins our justification. A defeater of a defeater (a defeater-defeater, for short) is a reason to believe that a defeater is not around – and that can restore our justification if we earlier had a reason to believe that the defeater in question is in fact around.

3.1 How A State of the Art Reply Goes

Michael Huemer, in his paper “Revisionary Intuitionism” (2008b), counters four empirical challenges that endanger the reliability of our intuitions, including Sinnott-Armstrong’s case. Huemer’s approach is an “integrationist” one. Just like Hallvard Lillehammer who coined the name of this category (2011: 178), Huemer believes that intuitionism can integrate findings like the ones cited by Sinnott-Armstrong about our beliefs being subjects to emotional influences that often cloud our judgments, and, for example, our beliefs being programmed by evolution without any respect to objective moral truths. Thereby, according to Huemer, intuitionist ethics could be improved. He thinks that we can sort out the problematic intuitions and then, freed ourselves from the charge of unreliability, we can go on to trust the intuitions that have not been discarded by this test.

He argues for example that moral intuitions at the most abstract level like “If x is better than y and y is better than z , then x is better than z ” and “If it is permissible to do x , and it is permissible to do y given that one does x , then it is permissible to do both x and y ” (Huemer 2008: 386) cannot be affected by evolution and we do not have distorting emotions about them.³⁷ For a good reason to back this up he points out that “evolution is unlikely to have endowed us with biases toward embracing very abstract principles, since our biological ancestors probably engaged in little abstract reasoning” (Huemer 2008: 384). These are of course not the most substantive moral propositions that we can imagine and which one would like to save from various problems,³⁸ nevertheless they might help us as constraints of our ethical theories: in case a theory contradicts them, we should be suspicious about the theory. So with a use of a method that is much akin to the wide version of R/E, we could put together a non-suspicious ethical system.

³⁷ Nevertheless, other problems might show up. More on this later.

³⁸ Huemer calls these “formal ethical intuitions” (Huemer 2008: 386). In his vocabulary “an ethical intuition is an intuition whose content is an evaluative proposition” (Huemer 2005: 102). Though it might seem that for example the formal intuition that “If x is better than y and y is better than z , then x is better than z ” is not a genuine ethical one but only an application of a more general transitivity principle concerning comparative phrases like ‘taller than’, ‘happier than’, etc. More on this principle in a subsequent footnote.

What should be evident now, after the introduction of the main argument of his paper, is that Huemer did not face the wider, epistemological challenge of Sinnott-Armstrong. As far as I can see, Huemer did not say a word about it. But the process of making sure that a moral belief of ours is not a contaminated one in the way Huemer describes it, apparently implies making inferences about them, and certainly makes us able to make arguments regarding their epistemic status. Yet, after all, this was Sinnott-Armstrong's main problem, and Huemer did not address it. This is quite strange, but was he justified in omitting a reply?

Some later defenders of intuitionism argue that Huemer was not making a mistake (cf. Ballantyne and Thurow 2013: 420). Let me start with Elizabeth Tropman's defense. Unlike others who replied to Sinnott-Armstrong sharing intuitionist sympathies and accepted his definition of the view,³⁹ Tropman argued that Sinnott-Armstrong misrepresented intuitionism. While in his writings Sinnott-Armstrong supposed that even a minimal confirmation or ability to infer a belief's reliability would be enough to make the belief justified (Sinnott-Armstrong 2008b: 101), this made his claims look suspicious. For if an agent had *no ability at all* to make a justificatory inference of some minimal kind about one of her beliefs, then she probably would not understand her belief in question. To see why, one should only realize that this clause would imply many kinds of mere rationalizations that we are all able to make (like "Sally is a very moral person, and she keeps her promises, so promise-keeping is the moral thing to do" – Tropman 2011: 361). And if intuitionism implied a statement like this, it would be a very implausible idea, and also, the anti-intuitionist position would render mere products of wishful thinking to be confirmed.

Though it must be pointed out that – contrary to what Tropman claims – Sinnott-Armstrong implied more than just an ability to infer a belief: he meant an ability to confirm the belief in a justified way (Sinnott-Armstrong 2002: 309) and mere posterior

³⁹ For example Tolhurst (2008), Shafer-Landau (2008), and Smith (2010).

rationalizations do not satisfy this requirement. Nevertheless his characterization of intuitionism is still misguided. Because of his focus on moral beliefs that are not dependent on the believer's inferential ability, he often shifts the topic to beliefs that are simply non-inferable to a particular believer (cf. Tropman 2011: 359).

Therefore Tropman, departing from Sinnott-Armstrong's characterization, reformulates intuitionism in the following way: "Some people are justified in holding some moral beliefs that are not based upon reasons" (Tropman 2011: 363), where the basing relation is understood in the way that one's reason for holding a belief is the other belief (that is, its basis). But when one is able to confirm that there is no relevant disagreement about one's moral belief or that it was formed in a reliable way (e.g. when one was not thinking in a biased way), one does not necessarily hold the moral belief because these are the reasons for the belief. As Tropman writes: "it does not seem as though the reason for thinking that promise-breaking is wrong is that you have confirmed your belief's reliability. Rather, you have canceled or undermined a potential defeater to your moral belief" (Tropman 2011: 364).

This is in accordance with how I characterized intuitionism and intuitions earlier: some of our moral beliefs can be justified intuitively, where the intuitive way refers to the aspect that we believe the proposition to be true in a non-inferential way, not necessarily inferring the truth (as opposed to the epistemic status) of the proposition from any premises. This does not exclude that we are able make inferences about the truth of our judgment or about the epistemic status of our belief. The former is a case of epistemic overdetermination, the latter resembles the case where we see that the cat is on the mat and we infer that since our eyes are perfect, we are justified in believing that the cat is on the mat – this does not prevent the belief from being perceptual, a way of knowing that is understood most of the time as non-inferential.

A similar point is made by Ballantyne and Thurow (2013). They interpret Sinnott-Armstrong as saying that whoever can defeat a defeater of one of her beliefs, is also able to infer their beliefs from other beliefs. This would be the case when one manages to find out that she was not subject to framing effects when she formed the belief that X's killers must be punished, therefore – let's say – she could infer that her belief-forming process was not problematic and her belief is safe. But in these cases, they argue, it is not our belief what we infer from our premises, but only the fact that the defeater does not obtain. Ballantyne and Thurow argue that we do not infer that the belief was justified, only that the factors that would make it unjustified were not present.⁴⁰

But even if Tropman's characterization is very appealing, and Ballantyne and Thurow are correct, we still have not fully responded to some of the more general dangers coming from Sinnott-Armstrong's challenge. These considerations still do not make me or anyone *actually* justified in any (intuitive) moral beliefs. To become justified, we should be able to make some justified inferences first. In two forms, of which the first one looks like this:

JIR1. I hold that torturing babies for fun is wrong.

JIR2. I am a reliable agent in holding this belief.

JIR3. My belief that torturing babies for fun is wrong is probably true.

Now if Sinnott-Armstrong taught us something, then it was the fact that inferences like this are really hard to make in the light of all the distorting and problematic factors that he has cited (and not to forget evolution either). If we have no other access to moral truths than our own reasoning and intuitions, then how could we tell whether these are reliable or not? The second kind of inference would be like the following one:

⁴⁰ This is also the reason why Sinnott-Armstrong seems to be misleading when he writes that “any kind of inference can lead to sceptical regress, because it has premises that need to be justified, so moral intuitionists have to deny dependence on any kind of inference or ability to infer” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a: 213). Contrary to what Sinnott-Armstrong suggests, intuitionists often focus only on the foundational nature of intuitions (and the regress argument) *within* the moral domain (cf. Shafer-Landau 2004: 118-125). The misleadingness is probably due to the fact that Sinnott-Armstrong draws a clear line between intuitionism (as a foundationalist theory) and coherentism. While, as we have seen in chapter 1, contemporary intuitionists are a kind of foundherentists. They allow reasoning about foundational beliefs that backs them up (as soon as their status is established, they can fulfil their epistemic roles), and coherence can strengthen these foundational beliefs just as well as its absence might defeat them.

JID1. I hold that torturing babies for fun is wrong.

JID2. There is no relevant disagreement on whether torturing babies for fun is wrong.⁴¹

JID3. Hence, my belief is not subject to problems coming from disagreement.

But there indeed seems to be a relevant disagreement about these issues, and I do not think about serial killers who do these kinds of things obviously without having a guilty conscience about their deeds. I have in mind disagreements that seem to be taking place between epistemic peers (and even between me and people who I generally think of as being even cleverer than myself and many laypeople), renowned moral philosophers who chose to take nihilist or extremely skeptical positions.

Therefore, because of the difficulty of establishing JIR2 (the premise in the first justificatory inference that expresses my exceptional reliability) and JID2 (the premise in the second justificatory inference that expresses the fact of there being no defeating disagreement around) these inferences are not much of a help in justifying my belief that torturing babies for fun is wrong.

Let me turn back to Huemer's paper to substantiate my point here. Huemer, to fulfill the quest that Sinnott-Armstrong's papers give to intuitionists, would have to exclude for example relevant disagreement about the principles that he cites as unproblematic and not just problems coming from evolution or emotional distortions. An interesting fact is that Huemer does not cite the problems coming from disagreement elaborated by Sinnott-Armstrong at all. But, as he also pointed out, there is indeed disagreement even about a quite logical rule like "If x is better than y and y is better than z , then x is better than z " – some philosophers did in fact criticize this idea, the so-called transitivity principle (Huemer 2008: 386-387).⁴² Also, one

⁴¹ This premise implies the disagreement about the disreputable sources of morality.

⁴² Huemer only mentions Stuart Rachels (1998), yet the first philosopher who called this principle in question effectively was Larry S. Temkin. Though, unlike Rachels, Temkin now seems to be reluctant to give up this principle. He notes that it leads to paradoxes if we consider it together with other propositions widely held to be true (cf. Temkin 2012: 134-139) but he is not sure which of these highly plausible beliefs (including the principle) should we discard (cf. Temkin 2012: 9-10). Huemer also suggests that what we have in Rachel's articles is not a *counterexample* to the transitivity principle (as Rachels thinks), but a proof that it leads to *paradoxes* (Huemer 2008: 387). It should be added that some philosophers (particularly Sosa 2007)

cannot find in his paper a way to discredit the theories of such iconoclasts as Nietzsche, Foucault, and Harman. More than that, even the troublesome role of evolution in the development of our moral beliefs at every level has not been put aside in a way that would be wholly convincing. What can make us so sure about our belief that the very concept “good” and the connective “better than” are not themselves the products of evolution? Promoters of the arguments from evolutionary history for moral skepticism or subjectivism would indeed say things like this. Huemer dared to suggest that our consequentialist intuitions were most likely also not the products of natural selection, yet this is a quite brave statement. As Selim Berker writes, presumably “consequentialist intuitions are just as much a product of evolution – whether directly or indirectly – as deontological intuitions are, so an appeal to evolutionary history gives us no reason to privilege consequentialist intuitions over deontological ones” (Berker 2009: 319).⁴³ One cannot so simply rule out this possibility. Guy Kahane argues for example that utilitarianism is in the need of defining well-being, yet “many of our evaluative beliefs about well-being, including the beliefs that pleasure is good and pain is bad, are some of the most obvious candidates for evolutionary debunking” (Kahane 2011: 120).⁴⁴

Now how could we be justified in any beliefs about moral matters even if we would not base our intuitive beliefs upon any justificatory inferences? If there are such hard

suggest that we enjoy *prima facie* justification for our beliefs in every intuitively true proposition in a paradox. (It might be worth to point out that Temkin’s position is quite sympathetic to intuitionism – cf. Temkin 2012: 7.)

⁴³ If evolution is a problematic source of our moral beliefs, then there is no way out. Huemer follows Peter Singer in contending that discrediting our intuitions that have an evolutionary origin would favour utilitarianism. But Singer acknowledges that *all forms* of our morality are “the result of the usual evolutionary processes of natural selection” (Singer 2005: 337).

⁴⁴ It would take another thesis to address the problems connected to the relationship between evolution and ethics; nevertheless the following short consideration may further strengthen Berker’s and Kahane’s quite plausible arguments. The typical cases by which Singer illustrates the superiority of utilitarianism over deontology are the following (cf. Singer 2005, 2011: 191-198). In the first case, one has the choice to throw a switch that makes a trolley to run over one person instead of five. In the second case, one has the choice to push a fat stranger from a bridge to stop a trolley that would kill five. People tend to choose to throw the switch in the first case but not to push the stranger in the second case. Yet in these cases the results (in terms of lives of course!) would be the same only if they pushed the stranger. To explain these reactions, Singer speculates that this is because during an earlier stage of our evolutionary history the only way to harm was in an “up-close and personal way” and this factor simply cannot be morally relevant, therefore the judgments about the second case are erroneous. What should be noted is that these two cases should not suffice as his typical examples. The only way the utilitarian theory could gain support from these considerations would be to use cases where the way of harm is completely the same. So, probably they would have to replace the second situation and use a case where one can choose to throw a switch that would make the fat stranger fall on the tracks thereby stopping the trolley. By using this case the “personal” way of harming and the supposed distorting evolutionary influence in question would not at all affect people’s (perhaps deontological) reactions.

problems like the ones introduced here partially, our case seems to be in a quite bad shape. Would intuitionists be able to say any specific things that could strengthen our hopes? I am going to discuss this possibility in the next section.

3.2 How Justification Remains Intact

In the last section we have seen that there is reason to suppose that Sinnott-Armstrong has misunderstood the central claim of intuitionism. Nevertheless I granted that even if this is true, there are still considerations to cause trouble for intuitionists, who could save their non-inferentially justified intuitions, but only if they have removed such defeaters as the ones cited by Sinnott-Armstrong, such as the distorting influence of partiality, bias, prejudice, the disreputable sources of our moral beliefs, and relevant disagreement about these beliefs. I have granted also that these are things that we (ordinary believers, I mean) can hardly exclude. I purport to show it here that the intuitionist epistemology is capable of solving this remaining problem. Let me concentrate again on disagreement.

As I have already cited, Sinnott-Armstrong makes the point that “confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when people disagree with no independent reason to prefer one belief or believer to the other” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006: 344). He devises this principle by relying on the case where two persons, who hold each other to be epistemic peers concerning arithmetic, have different sums after adding a column of the same figures. In another case that supports this point, two persons who have no reason to believe that one of them has better perceptual abilities, disagree whether a person they see is or is not Tom Cruise.⁴⁵ According to the principle, none of the disagreeing persons are justified in their beliefs before they are able to confirm it.

⁴⁵ It might be worth to point out that in different articles Sinnott-Armstrong phrases the case different ways. In the earlier version of the case (Sinnott-Armstrong 2002: 311) the question is whether the person *is* Tom Cruise, and in the later versions (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a: 193, 2006b: 344), the question is whether the person we are looking at *looks like* Tom Cruise. The former is more akin to an ethical case if moral concepts are not vague and the latter resembles moral situations more if evaluative concepts are in fact vague. This seems to be true because ‘looks like’ is a quite vague concept; in some sense everybody looks like anybody else. The second analogy is therefore more apt for somebody who thinks for example that in

As Jonathan Smith (2010: 78-81) shows, this principle is probably false, or, to put it in friendlier terms, it is not as general as it is suggested by Sinnott-Armstrong. In some situations, the very fact that someone is disagreeing with us on a given matter can provide us with evidence about him not being as good as we are in deciding about the thing in question (cf. Elga 2007: 500). Smith's example involves two people disagreeing on whether $3+4=7$. One does not need to be a Ramanujan to see the truth of this proposition.⁴⁶ But this is enough to be justified in believing that anybody who disagrees is less good in mathematics than I am. In fact, I do not even have to know about any *dissensus* or consensus concerning this matter, my adequate understanding gives me an overriding justification that any *possible* disagreement can come only from the side of people who are not at my level in these matters. This simple addition which we may grasp immediately and without having to do any inferences is supposed to resemble the intuitions that are commonly referred to by intuitionists.⁴⁷ Like the above mentioned addition, these intuitions are likely to be accepted unanimously, yet the latter conjecture is not necessary for one to be justified in believing it.

Robert Audi (2007: 205; 2008: 489) makes very similar points, adding that in most of the cases it is hard to make it sure that the other is an epistemic peer. As he put it, the "breadth, complexity, and quantity of evidence needed about the other person are great, and error in assessing it is difficult to avoid" (Audi 2008: 489). One should be able to exclude that the other person is biased, partial or emotional in a way that distorts her judgment, committed to background theories that exclude the truth of the belief in question, etc. Audi argued also

some sense everything is good. If this was true, not much justification should be needed for the claim that some state of affairs is good. Although these are not more than cases by which Sinnott-Armstrong elicits his epistemic principles, significant differences could arise if he used cases which were fundamentally different from a moral problem.

⁴⁶ It might be asked whether this addition is synthetic or analytic, and whether it can be known intuitively or not. Smith assumes that what is relevant here is that in the case of this addition one does not have to go through inferences, it's validity can be accepted solely on the basis of its immediately seeming true (that is, it is so intuitively) and therefore it is a foundational belief (cf. Smith 2010: 79). See also the following footnote.

⁴⁷ It is disputed whether arithmetical knowledge comes from intuitions or not. However, Audi writes that "it is doubtful that we can account for knowledge of logic and pure mathematics without some notion of self-evidence (or at least a notion of the a priori that raises similar problems). I doubt that it can be shown that knowledge of pure mathematics is possible without reliance on substantive (as opposed to 'analytic') propositions, and in any case there seems to be such knowledge outside mathematics and logic" (Audi 2004: 150-151).

that every time one is trying to check appropriately the other's epistemic parity, her own belief's credulity by using her reflective capability, checking her own epistemic status, and also trying to make the other to see her point, one even strengthens her own justification by these sincere attempts.

Now, are there any moral propositions that are either likely to be accepted quite universally or if not, we are entitled to disregard their deniers as epistemic peers in the same way as in the aforementioned arithmetic case? Intuitionists have their plausible-looking candidates which I have collected and somewhat modified here.

Ceteris paribus, enjoyment is better than suffering. (Cf. Huemer 2005: 102)

If a trolley is about to kill 5 people but you can save them by pulling a switch and diverting it to a track where it would go free without hurting anyone, then, *prima facie*, you should do so. (Cf. Huemer 2005: 104)

The deliberate humiliation, rape, and torture of an infant, that causes nothing else but a rather finite pleasure of the one inflicting such a treatment, is immoral. (Cf. Shafer-Landau 2008: 83)

Even Sinnott-Armstrong provides us with a convincing candidate, when he writes in an apparently assenting way, addressing his opponent in a completely different debate (about the moral argument for God's existence):

[You] still might ask, "What's immoral about causing serious harms to other people without justification?" But now it seems natural to answer, "It simply is. Objectively. Don't you agree?" (Sinnott-Armstrong 2004: 34)

The above propositions might seem true to the reader yet nihilists disagree. Let me take the example of the philosophers who – unlike many of us – find it plausible that morality has incredibly dubious origins. To the list of Nietzsche, Foucault, and Harman, Sinnott-Armstrong adds those, making the case worse, who think that the source of morality is evolution and that evolution is also a problematic originator (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006b: 357). According to Sinnott-Armstrong, this creates need for confirmation; without that, we are not justified in holding our intuitions to be true, in other words, it is not the case that we ought to believe them. Yet this claim is not at all obvious. As Smith (2010: 87) has pointed out, many

of our moral beliefs can be strong enough to resist this challenge; in itself, there is no reason to prefer one interpretation of our moral beliefs in general to another, rival interpretation (cf. Smith 2010: 83).

Smith argues that if Sinnott-Armstrong thinks that speculations like the aforementioned ones can rob us of all of our justification in having substantial moral beliefs, than he probably thinks that they did not have too much justification in the first place. He illustrates this with skeptic speculations about whether our sensory experiences come from the Matrix or not (Smith 2010: 87). Does this possibility rob me of my justification in that you exist or that there is an external world? There are ways to illustrate that it does not. One of these ways is to use a Moorean argument. But before turning to those, let me preliminarily emphasize the role of PC here, since this is the notion which creates the basis of Moorean arguments.

According to the principle of PC, it is rational to suppose that the things are so as they appear. On this ground, if you consider two incompatible propositions that both seem to be true to you, and it strikes you that the first one is more obviously true than the other, it seems less “weak and wavering” (cf. Huemer 2005: 111), then you are justified in believing the first one. What if one critic can construct arguments for the second proposition? As long as it remains speculative enough, we can surely employ another argument, a symmetrical one, favoring the first proposition. This would be a Moorean technique.

As we have seen, Huemer used Moorean arguments to exclude moral nihilism. G.E. Moore, the philosopher who is the originator of these arguments, used this kind of dialectic to exclude the possibility that we do not have *knowledge* about the external world because of the skeptical or the nihilistic (by which I mean here the position that denies the existence of the external world) arguments. His arguments are often summarized in the following way (cf. Pritchard 2002: 283-284):

M1.I know that I have two hands.

M2.I know that if I have two hands then there must be an external world
(and that the skeptical hypothesis is false).

M3.I know that there is an external world (and that the skeptical
hypothesis is false).

Whereas the skeptic would argue in a way like this (cf. Pritchard 2002: 284-285):

S1.You can't know whether there is an external world
(because you can't know that the skeptical hypothesis is not true).

S2.If you can't know whether there is an external world, you can't know
that you have two hands.

S3.You can't know that you have two hands.

Which argument should we accept? As we have seen in section 2.3, it is natural to say that these clashing arguments both beg the question. Who has now the burden of proof? The Moorean or the skeptic? As Huemer explained, the justified argument is “the one whose premises are more initially plausible” (Huemer 2005: 117).

We can surely devise similar lines about our moral knowledge.

MK1. I know that raping babies for fun is wrong.

MK2. I know that if raping babies for fun is wrong then the skeptic's
speculations are false.

MK3. I know that the skeptic's speculations are false.

Let's see one possible skeptical consideration too.

MS1. You can't know that your morality has trustworthy origins.

MS2. If you can't know that your morality has trustworthy origins,
you can't know that raping babies for fun is wrong.

MS3. You can't know that raping babies for fun is wrong.

The question is, again, which of the first premises (MK1 or MS1) seem more plausible to the believer. I personally think that the claim that the deliberate torture and rape of a baby is wrong (MK1) is much more obvious and plausible than the supposition that I have hands or there is an external world (M1). Thus Moorean arguments seem to me to be even more applicable to the issues of morality than to the considerations about whether mind-independent physical bodies exist or whether we have knowledge about them as they are.

For the sake of simplicity and consistency with the original Moorean arguments, I have been talking about knowledge, and presupposed that it implies justification. But to talk

about *prima facie* justification is just as much in place. And intuitionists do suppose that beliefs can seem persistently justified, even if those beliefs do not cohere with our other beliefs (Hooker 2009: 14), and our beliefs about disagreement being a defeater can be among those other beliefs of ours.

Does this line of argument make me a dogmatist? After all, a similar argument could be produced even for example in the favor of those who believed (or still believe) that the Sun rotates around the Earth. Nowadays philosophical intuitions are sometimes compared to the beliefs of those who live(d) in a world with Earth in its center (cf. Metzinger 2009: vi). Their empirical observations, even though they thought that they favor their stance, were surely compatible with a non-Geo-centric world. But does *this* consideration ruin our conviction in our justified belief about the wrongness of torturing babies for fun? Let me turn to some convictionist considerations here for support.

Convictionism, as I have defined it, is the view that when some convictions of ours just do not change with the argument that we accept or which others offer, should be trusted. It thwarts our full justification if we cannot accommodate them and they should be conceived as justified. Ronald Dworkin, a philosopher who I interpret as a convictionist, argues that we have no other bases than our convictions. Michael Huemer, in a similar manner, argues that all that we can rely on are what he calls “appearances” – what seems to us to be true. They have both sought an integrated epistemology that accommodates our “intuitive convictions”, to use Nagel’s term. As Shafer-Landau suggested, we need a method “for testing our convictions, but we need our convictions to select our method” (Shafer-Landau 2003: 237).

Those who compare moral intuitions to the beliefs about Geo-centrism being true did not take their credibility seriously at the first place. Yet according to PC, we should construct an integrated epistemology by starting out what seems to be true at the beginning, and revise those beliefs which are contradicting the ones that seem more obviously true and are more in numbers. As Huemer stated this method is unlikely to ever lead to moral nihilism, let alone

moral skepticism, since these views are so far from what appears to be true (Huemer 2005: 117). In the case of the abandonment of Geo-centrism, this is not so. Natural science deals with the world of causes and the domain of the five senses, and they simply exclude the truth of Geo-centrism. And while it can inform our moral beliefs, the latter beliefs, as Dworkin points out “just in themselves, make no causal claims” (Dworkin 2011: 85).

Both Dworkin and Nagel have used Moorean arguments, to my mind, correctly. For example, Nagel writes this in his most recent book, *Mind and Cosmos*: “Although I find it impossible to take up this position [that is, moral anti-realism], I do not think it is unintelligible. The question is one of relative plausibility” (Nagel 2012: 235 cf. *ibid.* 194-195). In fact, he finds value anti-realism and ethical skepticism so remote options that he is willing to overthrow the present consensus concerning the truth of the Neo-Darwinian worldview that seems to him to rule out moral realism and our knowledge of moral facts. If not this willingness of Nagel, but at least his attitude is partly shared by his colleague, Ronald Dworkin who has used the Moorean argument to justify the need of integrated epistemology. Dworkin writes:

If the “best explanation” causal test is universally sound, therefore, no moral [...] belief is reliable. But we can reverse that judgment: if any moral belief is reliable, the “best explanation” test is not universally sound. Either direction of argument – taking either of the two hypotheses as axiomatic and using it to deny the other – begs the question in the same way. We must rather find our epistemology as part of an overall search for broad harmony – what John Rawls called, in a different context, reflective equilibrium – among our opinions as a whole, and none of these can be given an automatic or antecedent veto over the rest. (Dworkin 1996: 119)

The comparison of moral beliefs and the belief of Geo-centrism being true disrespects the distinctiveness of the moral domain given that moral beliefs are not in themselves about causal relations. Dworkin’s “integrated epistemology” excluded intuitionism since he supposed that this view implies “an ad hoc, made-for-the-occasion exception” with regards to the justification of our moral intuitions or convictions in our best epistemic account (Dworkin 2011: 86) and hypothesizes a distinct faculty of moral intuitions. As I showed earlier,

contemporary intuitionists are unlike Dworkin's targets. They do not talk about a specific moral faculty and both Huemer and Audi try to integrate and compare the justification of our ethical beliefs to beliefs in other domains e.g. mathematics. Furthermore, the epistemology of PC is an exceptionally comprehensive one (cf. Huemer 2007), basically it treats the same way all of our seemings, regardless where they come from (our intellect or perception, our memory or introspection, etc.) and what their content is and this integrated epistemology also gives place to Moorean arguments.

3.3 How Sinnott-Armstrong Shows that he is Unjustified

In the last two sections I purported to show two things. First, that Sinnott-Armstrong has misconceived intuitionism in his papers, therefore his anti-intuitionist arguments did not show that intuitionism is false. Yet I have granted that even if we can have independently credible intuitions, the difficulty of showing that all things (potential influence of biases, partiality, evolution, etc.) considered, our initial justification might be really hard to defend. In the previous section I tried to show that sometimes, in the case of our most firm convictions, these factors listed must be irrelevant. Even if I must be emotional in thinking that torturing babies for fun is wrong, and even if a slave, when being hit by his slave-holder is emotional in thinking that this is wrong, these factors do not stand in the way of our justification.⁴⁸ What is left to consider is whether Sinnott-Armstrong's project was entirely misguided or not. First, I am going to concentrate on his apparently moral claims supporting his case, then on his principle concerning disagreement.

What I would like to resist now is to reduce Sinnott-Armstrong's stance to a completely moral position and to show that way that it is resting on moral intuitions. Though, I think, this project might not be entirely hopeless. Yet he tries to keep his arguments fully

⁴⁸ Imagine a trial where a slave – after being freed by a third party – sues his slave-holder. In trials like this, I suppose, it is not that we want to justify one of the parties, but we would like to know, which one of them (the slave-holder or the former slave) was justified.

epistemological, to talk about positive, adequate, epistemological justification, and not about a kind of moral justification. But what should be apparent is that he still does mix moral claims with epistemological claims to strengthen his position rhetorically.

A good example is his phrasing of the problem of peer disagreement. If two are disagreeing when none seems to be better at the issue in question than the other, one needs to check again – “[w]e owe that much epistemic respect to each other” – he writes (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006: 344). It is rather irrelevant that he puts the word “epistemic” before “respect” – this implies that we should not look down on our peers; that would be wrong.

In another case, talking about the need of confirmation when one is or could be partial, he also brings up umpires, referees, judges, and jurors, and asserts that we do not want them to be partial or emotional, since that could easily influence their judgments (cf. Sinnott-Armstrong 2006b: 344). But in these cases and in similar circumstances we want our moral judgments to be correct. And I think we want them to be so for ethical reasons. Basing our moral decisions too easily on morally irrelevant factors would be itself morally wrong, just unfair. In these cases, the epistemological and the moral reasons collide. Yet Sinnott-Armstrong does not need to mix these topics, since his argument seems to work without that, as he showed it in his “Moral Relativity and Intuitionism” (2002), where he was not so much relying on this trick. Now what about his epistemic claims, how does he justify them?

He argues that to answer the question when confirmation is required in moral cases we cannot simply give an answer directly. Therefore he uses analogies which involve non-moral cases and by the help of these he induces principles that hold, according to him, generally. “This path is fraught with peril – he writes –, but it might be the only way to go” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006: 343). The problem is that this way he proves, if anything, too much.

We have seen already one of the cases that he uses: the one involving two persons adding up a column of figures. His other analogies are similar. It appears that Sinnott-

Armstrong uses good old armchair philosophy, thought-experiments with principles as outputs, principles, which are intuitive in nature. These intuitions might turn out to be dead wrong or at least less general than Sinnott-Armstrong conceives them, as we have seen this in the case of his principle regarding peer disagreement. And we can, with a method backed up by PC, always compare whether the epistemic or the moral intuitions seem to be more obviously correct. Could his epistemic principle concerning disagreement seem more apparently true than the conviction that torturing babies for fun is wrong? We have already seen some problems concerning the former, coming from Smith and Audi. Now I want to raise even more serious doubts that this epistemic principle disapproves of itself in the context of philosophy.

Shafer-Landau suggests that “philosophical and moral claims are supported in similar ways, and enjoy the same general status. If we are prepared to be skeptical about moral claims, we must be equally skeptical about all philosophical claims.” And he concludes that “this is surely too high a price for moral skeptics to pay, since they are affirming the warrant of at least one philosophical claim (namely, moral scepticism).” (Shafer-Landau 2003: 237 cf. Shafer-Landau 2004: 102-117) I think this applies to Sinnott-Armstrong’s epistemic principle concerning disagreement as well.⁴⁹

Let me quote this principle for the last time: “confirmation is needed for a believer to be justified when people disagree with no independent reason to prefer one belief or believer to the other” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006: 344). This not only applies to intuitive moral beliefs but any ordinary beliefs as well. And it surely applies to intuitive epistemic principles and also to intuitively sound arguments and to sophisticated philosophical arguments. But philosophy itself is a land of disagreement, it would be hard to deny this observation.

⁴⁹ On scepticism about philosophy see van Inwagen (1996) where it is compared to scepticism about religion, politics, and several questions of natural sciences.

Sinnott-Armstrong could defend himself by saying that if “my belief that a pen is in front of me is not subject to disagreement [...], then I might be justified in holding that non-moral belief without being able to support it with any inference. Thus, my argument against moral intuitionism does not assume or lead to general skepticism” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a: 216). Yet as soon as one starts to read journals devoted to skepticism, one finds out there is indeed significant disagreement whether there are any pens on any tables, and especially on whether any philosophical arguments work or not. This, according to the principle, creates the need for confirmation. But, as far as I can see, any confirmation is also bound to be disagreed in philosophy. To justify a belief we would need justified confirmations about which there is no disagreement, but in philosophy, this is hardly a need that one can satisfy.

One could argue – as Sarah McGrath (2008: 94-96) did against Shafer-Landau – that it is a mistake to refer to the position of skeptics with regard to claims like “my pen is on the table”. Skeptics, at least usually, do not deny that there are pens on tables, rather, they deny our knowledge about pens on tables. Nevertheless I think that it is sufficient for my purposes here if we see that skeptics usually deny our knowledge and justification regarding many of our judgments, and this should apply to philosophical claims and arguments too. But if this is the case, then one cannot hold moral skepticism to be true justifiedly (since, as we have seen, this is a philosophical theory), not even a theory of justification in a justified way.⁵⁰

Sinnott-Armstrong seems to have used a double-standard, excluding everything from the scope of the principle about which there is disagreement that we mostly accept as justified even if there is disagreement about them, like intuitively valid arguments. Therefore I conclude that Sinnott-Armstrong’s principle, *qua* a genuine philosophical one, is bound to be unjustified according to itself.

⁵⁰ Shafer-Landau concludes thusly: “if there were no philosophical knowledge, then we couldn’t justifiably assess any philosophical argument, including the [epistemic argument from disagreement]” (Shafer-Landau 2004: 141).

CHAPTER 4: CRISP'S CHALLENGE

Roger Crisp (2007) levels another criticism against intuitionism, particularly, against Robert Audi's version of this view. In a way, his challenge is even more devastating than Sinnott-Armstrong's. While Sinnott-Armstrong argues that in case of peer disagreement, our judgment cannot be justified without confirmation, yet he allowed that it might be (epistemically) permissible to hold it,⁵¹ Crisp goes further and emphasizes that it is not only unjustified, but we should suspend that particular judgment of ours. His argument comes from a passage from another intuitionist philosopher, Henry Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics*:

if I find any of my judgments . . . in direct conflict with a judgment of some other mind, there must be error somewhere: and if I have no more reason to suspect error in the other mind than in my own, reflective comparison between the two judgments necessarily reduces me temporarily to a state of neutrality. And though the total result in my mind is not exactly suspense of judgment, but an alternation and conflict between positive affirmation by one act of thought and the neutrality that is the result of another, it is obviously something very different from scientific certitude. (Sidgwick 1907: 342 quoted in Crisp 2007: 32)

Crisp suggests that this should be taken not as an autobiographical report, but a warning, and he claims that although Sidgwick wanted to avoid the talk of suspension of judgment, there is no other way that this double thought, the "alternation and conflict between affirmation and neutrality" could be understood or produced, just by suspension. He also presumes that this passage is clearly meant to imply that "someone who is not so reduced is in error" (Crisp 2007: 35), that is, if someone does not suspend her judgment in the face of peer disagreement, then she is at fault. He illustrates this by using an example, quite similar to Sinnott-Armstrong's example involving the person who might be Tom Cruise: "If two people who believe themselves to be in roughly the same epistemic circumstances are confronted by what one of them takes to be a redwing, the other a song thrush, they should suspend judgment on

⁵¹ Compare Sinnott-Armstrong 2006: 65-67.

which of the two the bird is. But the bird's appearance to each as one or the other may not change" (Crisp 2007: 33).

It is quite strange that while Sidgwick talked about certainty, Crisp shifts the topic to justification (cf. Crisp 2007: 32-33). Audi, in his response to Crisp, tries to clear this up by distinguishing these notions, noting that while certainty is a psychological notion, justification is an epistemological one, and they do not necessarily coincide (Audi 2007: 205).⁵² However, apart from this, and the question of how Sidgwick should be interpreted, the problem remains: should we suspend our judgments when peer disagreement arises? Are we in error if we do not do so?

It seems to be worth to point out that Crisp's view might be interpreted as involving doxastic voluntarism, that is, the claim that we are able to change our beliefs by will. This thought is quite controversial itself, and it is fairly obvious that it cannot stand in an unqualified way. (A typical example is that when we look at the wall in front of us that looks white we cannot simply make ourselves to believe that it is green.) Most defenders of a view like this take it that we have only a limited, non-basic and indirect way of controlling our own beliefs. It could be argued for example that the way how we control our beliefs is by controlling our belief-producing procedures (cf. Heil 1983), and also, that we presuppose the capacity of controlling our beliefs when we engage in an exchange of views with someone else or even ourselves in the form of an intrapersonal conversation (cf. Smith 1997: 294-301). Nevertheless, even if we do not have a control over our beliefs in any significant ways, Crisp's challenge could still hold.

One way to avoid implying doxastic voluntarism for Crisp is to rephrase his claim that in case of peer disagreement one "should suspend judgement", and say that in that case, the

⁵² It might help to invoke Shafer-Landau's distinction between the feeling of certainty and genuine certainty (Shafer-Landau 2004: 104). While the feeling of certainty is compatible with error, genuine certainty is not. The former claim is fairly obvious if we think of cases where two people feel to be strongly certain about incompatible beliefs. Sidgwick's warning seems to be about feeling certain, rather than being genuinely certain.

rational believer is the one who suspends belief, or that one should suspend belief if one can do that. One line of Sinnott-Armstrong's argument can also help Crisp's case here (Sinnott-Armstrong 2006a: 217-218). Sinnott-Armstrong makes the point that if we cannot simply give up some beliefs of ours, there still might be a point in saying that one should doubt it (or suspend it), since it is just like the case when one points out to someone who is addicted to gambling and cannot give up that addiction that gambling is stupid. Hence I interpret Crisp as saying that in case of peer disagreement we have sufficient reason to suspend belief. Now that I have saved Crisp's challenge from the charge of being committed to doxastic voluntarism, let me go on to criticize the problem raised by him for other reasons.

Of course, many considerations from the last chapter apply to this problem as well. It is quite hard to establish that the other is an epistemic peer, it is especially difficult to believe that she is if we seem to be disagreeing on a very basic thought (like $3+4=7$, or enjoyment is better than pain, etc.).⁵³ It may also seem that PC dictates that if our moral belief seems more obvious than the other person's one or her epistemic parity, then we are right in keeping our judgment. But there are other ways to approach this explicit accusation of error, which ways I would like to illustrate below.

I suggest that we are not always in error if we are not "reduced to neutrality". Giving up our certainty might be of course a humble and adequate reaction, as well as examining other's reasons. But why is suspension inadequate? It is not clear that suspension of judgment would not be an error after all. To see how it could be, turn to two ideas partly introduced in section 2.3. Ronald Dworkin and Alison Hills suggested that the proper epistemic norm in moral issues is not necessarily to seek truth, but to search it by following your conscience. And William James argued that belief, disbelief and suspension of belief are in many matters

⁵³ Also, as Shafer-Landau notes, many errors in moral reasoning are extremely hard to detect. "So – he writes –, in practice, just because another smart person morally disagrees with you, doesn't mean that his view is as well honed as yours. The disagreement itself isn't enough to force you to give up your beliefs" (Shafer-Landau 2004: 107-108).

all dependent on our passions. Therefore, calling any of these an error would be a mistake; we are not required by reason to choose any of these three options.

Hills defended the method of following your conscience since it is, according to her, essential for being in possession of virtues and acting in morally worthy ways. “A morally ideal agent, a virtuous agent, will not simply do the right action, or even reliably do the right action. Rather, in doing so, she will respond to the reasons why it is right, the morally relevant features of the situation, by making her own judgement” (Hills 2013: 423). She implies following intuitions too, when she talks about following one’s own conscience (cf. Hills 2013: 417).

I find Hills’s account compelling, yet it might not be easy to see why we would give up the endeavor to respond to the right reasons if we suspend our belief. An objector might ask: even if I suspend the belief in question I might just do accordingly and that way I have responded to the right reasons practically even if I did not hold them to be the right reasons. Now the problem is that if you give up your belief that stealing is wrong or that lying is impermissible you will have no reason to avoid stealing or lying (especially, but not only, when you think it benefits you). You might not go on to lie and to steal, but you could just as well do the opposite thing. You might act as if it was wrong, or as if it was not, or you might just toss a coin.⁵⁴

Since in forming moral judgment one should be responsive to moral reasons and not to external factors, like the clash of opinions, one’s giving up her belief would be a mistake because it would involve giving up the response to moral reasons as well. The reasons of our moral intuitions generally do not have to do with sheer agreement and disagreement. It is not the case that “one’s justification for believing such intuitions must stem from their widespread support” (Shafer-Landau 2008: 94). As Dworkin writes plausibly: “After all, we would not

⁵⁴ Similar points are made by van Inwagen (1999: 150) and Dworkin (2011: 100).

count the popularity of our moral opinions as evidence for their truth. Why should we count their controversiality as evidence against it?” (Dworkin 1996: 113) At least the first situation described by Dworkin often holds.

Let me now turn to the Jamesian idea of justification by faith. James seems to imply that suspension of judgment in case of disagreement is not the one and only rational solution. Disbelieving and believing are also just as rational, they all depend on one’s character. In many cases where we cannot prove our right to the disagreeing others, by suspending belief we may lose truth, while with suspending we gain nothing. It is our bet what option we choose, but there is no determinate answer to the question, which one we should do and which one is erroneous. The more skeptic person desires not to become a dupe and abandons her belief, but the one who seems to be the naïve counterpart of the skeptic keeps her belief and does so even if she knows that she may become a dupe that way. But the skeptic suspension may also lead to dupedery if she gave up a true belief: “Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear?” (James 1912: 27) And together with the distinctiveness of the moral domain James’s idea yields an answer to Crisp’s challenge: losing truth in ethics by suspension of judgment seems to be outstandingly risky.

The upshot is that the suspension of judgment in all the cases where peer disagreement arises need not be the best possible reaction, and even if this is less plausible in other domains of belief, with regard to moral issues the considerations of Crisp apply even less, since following our own consciousness seems to be an important norm in these matters.

CONCLUSION

In my thesis I tried to investigate whether the intuitionists' moral epistemology could be defended from some of the important challenges that have been put forward during recent years. I started out by defining intuitionism as the position according to which, to put it briefly, some of our moral beliefs are non-inferentially justified. I stated that these non-inferentially justified beliefs could also be justified inferentially and further justified by establishing coherence among our moral and non-moral beliefs.

I explained that non-inferential justification is granted in some cases by the self-evidence of moral propositions, which means that in the cases of these propositions, we gain justification in believing them just by adequately understanding them. I introduced the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, a self-evident rule, according to which we are justified in believing that things are so as they appear. I explained that Moorean arguments have their basis in this principle, and these arguments that look question-begging turn on the relative apparent obviousness of their premise compared to the symmetric argument's premise. I also showed how the Jamesian idea of justification by faith could be used by intuitionists, in cases where we believe without being able to prove or to convince others. I compared this stance to that of convictionism, which position I illustrated with the thoughts of Thomas Nagel and Ronald Dworkin, who appeared to think that our theory-independent convictions should be the justificatory grounds of our theories and, as Dworkin wrote, "there may be propositions that we find we cannot but believe, even after the most sustained reflection. Then we must not pretend not to believe them but must instead struggle to explain why we are justified, in spite of the difficulties, in believing what we do. We may not succeed, but the struggle is better than the pretense" (Dworkin 2011: 86).

Intuitionists accommodated moral disagreement in their theories partly by noting that intuitions can be colored by biases and partiality. Yet these very strategies seem to bear

problems for the intuitionists. How could it be that we are justified in believing something if we must be aware that it could be a mere appearance caused by, for example biases? The fact of disagreements call our attention to this possibility, as Sinnott-Armstrong argued. Replying to his criticism, I showed that his concept of intuitionism was at least partly misguided. He did not take it into account that even after defeating the defeaters coming from possible biases, disagreement, etc., our beliefs could be justified both inferentially and non-inferentially (the former would be a case of epistemic overdetermination). Though I granted that defeating these defeaters might be very difficult, if not impossible, when we are aware of the expert disagreement about moral issues, namely, the disagreeing philosophers in all kinds of moral questions. I cited here Robert Audi, who thinks that conscientiously reflecting again on our judgment and checking our epistemic position as well as other's epistemic parity (which is a very difficult task) we can gain even more justification if we retain our previous belief. I also noted the role of PC and Moorean arguments, which, by creating a kind of stand-offs, shed light on the need of integrated epistemology, that gives at least equal weight to our convictions, including many people's strong moral convictions. Lastly, I argued in connection with Sinnott-Armstrong's principle concerning disagreement that it does not seem to be able to stand its own test and it would lead to skepticism about philosophy in general.

After the discussion of Sinnott-Armstrong's view of intuitionism, I turned to Roger Crisp's challenge. He argued that in case of peer disagreement, the only non-erroneous reaction is to suspend our belief. I showed that this reaction might be just as irrational or faulty as keeping our belief, since by that we could follow our conscience and practice moral understanding and respond to the proper moral reasons. I also pointed to William James's argument, according to which the suspense of judgment is not genuinely rational in many cases, the possibilities in these situations depend on one's character.

Since at the end of my thesis it might seem that disagreement is totally irrelevant in ethics, it is high time to emphasize that my project is not to fully disregard any disagreements

possible. So let me shortly sum up what role disagreement may play in moral theory and what significance my previous considerations ascribe to it.

Just like people's intuitions, relevant disagreements are important data of moral philosophy. For example the fact of disagreement remains a powerful evidence against rather naïve subjectivist conceptions of morality. If the talk about morality would be nothing else but what we approve of and what we condemn, then there could be no disagreement in ethics. It seems to be the case that we oppose each other's moral opinion because it is not only about our subjective approval but something beyond that.

Oftentimes it seems to be morally right to pay attention to disagreement, and to what the disagreeing others say, and listen to them carefully. Not doing this would amount to being disrespectful, and not only "epistemically disrespectful". Furthermore, many of our moral beliefs do not enjoy the same level of obviousness as the belief that one should not abuse babies. In these cases (see section 3.2), one has to consult her reflective capacity, help the disagreeing others to see her point, to screen her biases and partialities and the dubious origins of her beliefs. I also accept that widespread disagreement should reduce our psychological certitude (chapter 4), should arouse our understanding towards those who do not see our point. As I hinted earlier (in section 3.3), in many situations we want our judgments to be correct for moral reasons, and this is just even more true in the case of our moral judgments. And this holds also about other people's moral beliefs: we would like them to be correct for moral reasons.

And if one thinks her moral beliefs to be correct and there is disagreement about them, then this creates a need (that is at least partly a moral need) to engage in discussion, not only to clarify each other's position but also to bring them to our side, if possible. Most of the times convincing the dissenters is a quite difficult task. Yet this is a struggle that seems to be necessary to engage in.

Now the main conclusion of my enterprise is that intuitionism can answer some of the most important challenges coming from disagreement and these answers do not disrespect the importance of disagreement in ethics. However, I acknowledge that there might be other arguments of the sort the considered challengers put forward. One of them is based on the historicity of our concepts. If we accept Audi's idea that the moral intuitions depend on concepts (and both Audi and Huemer are realists about concepts) then how could we accommodate the fact that our moral concepts changed so much over the history of humanity? And they have changed indeed, as Alasdair MacIntyre shows in his *After Virtue* (2007), especially with regard to our concept of obligation, good, virtue and several virtue-concepts. This could be compared to the influence of evolution on our moral thinking, yet this kind of change is more rapid, more noticeable and we have more influence on it. One might make the point that if we use different concepts then our evaluative claims are not really at odds with those of others living in the past (or in a different culture) so therefore this cannot be a case of substantial disagreement. Nevertheless there is indeed no agreement about which of the rival concepts is *relevant* in ethical discourses and dilemmas. And conceptual changes are likely ahead of us. There might be significant moral disagreement between us and the generations coming. Should we rule these disagreements out or accept them? The struggle remains.

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