The Necessity of Moral Judgments

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1. Introduction

The first chapter of Judith Thomson's splendid *The Realm of Rights* addresses something that she calls 'the no-reason thesis', namely: 'There is no reason to think of any moral judgment at all that it is true.'[1] Thomson sees this as a threat to the rest of the book, because if it is correct then 'the enterprise I am inviting you to engage in with me is pointless, and in two ways at that: on the one hand, the premises on which I rest my conclusions are judgments there is no reason to think true, and on the other hand the conclusions are themselves judgments of a kind that no premises could give reason for' (p. 5).

Someone who advances the no-reason thesis might have either of two things in mind. The point might be metaphysical: moral nonrealism is true; no moral judgment has a truth value, so none is true, so there is no (good) reason to think any is true (p. 7, first whole paragraph). Or it might be epistemological: skepticism is true; it may be that some moral judgments are true, but we have no reasonable way of deciding which these are (pp. 16 ff.). Many nonrealists reach their position via skepticism. Convinced that nothing could count as good evidence for the truth of any moral judgment, they conjecture that the epistemic problem is insoluble because it is inherently defective: moral judgments are not a kind of item that could be supported by evidence, because they do not have truth values.

Thomson opposes each of these, though she seems to have nonrealism more centrally in her sights than skepticism. Her opposition to each rests ultimately on the thesis that some moral judgments are absolutely necessary, and my main purpose here is to show that this premise does not really carry any weight against either of those two doctrines. Certain attempts to use the premise for that purpose are challenging, thought-provoking, and instructive, which makes it worthwhile to examine them with care. I think that each of them occurs in Thomson's first chapter, and I shall give evidence for that. But the main point is not that the attempts are hers; it is that they are plausible and that they fail.

My main concern is with nonrealism about morals. Insofar as Thomson opposes the no-reason thesis, she supports realism—the thesis that moral judgments have truth values. She is explicit about this: 'If "moral judgments" have no

[1] Judith Jarvis Thomson, *The Realm of Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Unadorned page numbers in the text of this article refer to pages in *The Realm of Rights*.

truth-value, then *a fortiori* nothing really is reason to think them true' (p. 7). (I presume that Thomson understands 'having a truth value' in terms of being answerable to an independent, freestanding realm of moral facts. She expresses no interest in coherentist accounts of truth, or in thin senses of 'true' in which, for instance, someone who says 'P is true' is merely longwindedly saying 'P'.) Her defense of realism fails, I shall argue, and it is not needed: the kind of moral theoretic inquiry to which Thomson's book is devoted is not rendered 'pointless' by nonrealism, and this is an important result to any nonrealist, like me, who admires Thomson's substantive work on rights and wants it to survive the falsity of realism.

To be open about it: I accept both of the main strands in the best recent nonrealist writing. **(1)** One is expressivism. A moral judgment typically serves to express some fact about the speaker's attitudes, or about what norms he accepts, or the like. It does not report or state this fact: the evidence of usage shows that moral judgments are not offered or received in a manner appropriate to self-descriptions, and the reason for that comes from the heart of them. What we most centrally care about in statements that have truth values is their truth. When someone affirms a moral judgment, on the other hand, our focus of concern is not on whether he has the attitude that he represents himself as having, but rather on the attitude (whether or not he has it). That is why, when I express an attitude of mine by saying 'It tends to be wrong to ϕ', and you express one of yours by saying 'There is hardly ever anything wrong with ϕing', what concerns us is not the consistency between your representation and mine but rather the conflict between the attitudes that are represented. So it is a deep feature of expressivism, not a superficial add-on, that it implies that moral judgments do not have truth values. **(2)** The other strand is injunctivism. A moral judgment often and centrally serves as a kind of injunction, spoken aloud or in one's heart, to others or to oneself, to behave or not to behave in a certain way. As such, it has no truth value; that is obvious, I think, and again it is deep rather than superficial.

We need not choose between the two strands. Moral judgments have an essentially active use in which injunctivism gives most of the truth about them, and a self-revealing use in which expressivism captures more of the story. The two are not combined by brute force conjunction: there are reasons why a kind of utterance that commonly plays either of these roles will commonly play the other as well.[1]

2. The necessity of moral judgments

Thomson contends that some moral judgments are necessarily true—in the strong sense of being true at every possible world. I shall call this her 'necessary truth thesis'. If it is right, then nonrealism collapses immediately, for a reason that Thomson makes clear in her passing remark that 'many of our moral beliefs. . . are necessary truths and *a fortiori* are truths.[2] Let us look into her case for the necessary truth thesis.

The judgment 'It is wrong to torture babies to death for fun' is something we accept as necessary, Thomson says. We

[1] The expressivist strand in nonrealism is well presented in Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). The classical source for the injunctivist strand is R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (1952), *Freedom and Reason* (1963), and *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method and Point* (1981), all published at Oxford by the Oxford University Press.

[2] Thomson, p. 31. Thomson has at her disposal an even more economical argument. For some moral judgments to have truth values, she does not need there to be necessarily true fact-to-value conditionals; it suffices that there are true conditionals of that kind, whether necessary or not.

think that it could not possibly, under any circumstances however outré, be right to torture babies to death for fun. Because this judgment of ours is so strong it is, in a sense, easy to refute. That is, we would regard it as refuted if we became convinced that it *could* be all right to torture a baby to death for fun. We would not insist on counterexamples drawn from the actual world (pp. 20 ff.).

That is right. It seems to be deeply built into our approach to morality that we regard at least some moral principles as holding at all possible worlds. Thomson needs, however, the further premise that it is all right for us to treat some moral judgments in this way, and she does not explicitly address this. In one place she says (metaphorically?) that 'theorists aim at convincing the universe and therefore try to be sure that what they take as data would be accepted by all', to which she then adds: 'For preference, what could not have been false' (p. 32). This seems to presuppose some connection between 'It is necessary that P' and 'Everybody would agree that P', and this might be relevant to Thomson's view that some moral judgments *are* necessary, not merely treated as such. I can say no more about this, however, because I do not know how necessity is supposed to connect with unanimity.

Anyway, unanimity cannot sit alone at the heart of Thomson's thought about necessity. It might connect for her, somehow, with 'One ought not to torture babies to death for fun', but she goes on (pp. 21 ff.) to explain how 'some moral judgments are given a different status by different people', for example, the judgment that capital punishment is permissible. Some people, she says, accept this because they believe certain contingent matters of fact, for example, that capital punishment deters; for them it is a contingent truth. In contrast to them, she describes someone who 'neither is nor would be moved by any discovery of fact', from which she infers that 'he does give his moral belief that capital punishment is permissible the status of a necessary truth'.

This points to the best reason for holding that it is of the essence of morality that some moral judgments are treated as necessary: any non-necessary moral judgment comes from a more general moral judgment in conjunction with some matter of contingent nonmoral fact; this in turn may derive from something more general still, in conjunction with a further nonmoral fact; but ultimately this must stop, which it can do only at a moral judgment that owes nothing to any matter of contingent nonmoral fact, i.e. a moral judgment that is necessary. That implies that we have to treat some moral judgments as necessary, unless we reject morality altogether, an option I shan't consider.

That line of thought is open to question, because there seems to be a way in which a moral judgment can be contingent while also being basic, i.e. not derived from a contingent proposition and some more general moral judgment. That is what we have when a contingent belief frames the whole way of moral thinking and feeling which leads to the judgment in question, for example when the judgment is part of a consequentialist morality and requires that the morally relevant consequences of present behavior are finite.[1] When that frame is removed, a whole moral approach collapses, and the project of finding an acceptable moral system has to

[1] 'There is a logical objection to [utilitarianism's] requirements of calculation which [Mill] does not raise. This is that the consequences of an action extend indefinitely into the future and, therefore, that an evaluation of its total consequences is logically impossible.' (Anthony Quinton, *Utilitarian Ethics* [La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1988, p. 52). The point is developed at length in Mark T. Nelson, 'Utilitarian Eschatology', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1991): 339–46.

be started again from scratch. If a consequentialist became convinced that the morally relevant future is infinite, he would have to give up the idea of the overall value of the consequences of behavior, and it is not clear what his next move could be. He would not be able to fall back on some more general moral view which, when conjoined with 'The future is finite', entails consequentialism. There may for all I know be similar contingent 'frames' for other kinds of moral theory as well, but I cannot think of any; and in any case I am disinclined to press this point against Thomson's thesis that some moral judgments are absolutely necessary.

That is not to grant, though, that any are necessarily true. In any area where realism holds sway, i.e. where truth values prevail, necessity is necessary truth, but moral judgments could be necessary without being necessarily true. Here is how.

When I judge that it would be wrong to ϕ, I am (in part) expressing a certain attitude of mine to ϕing. When ϕing is testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, this attitude depends on contingent facts: I am hostile to ϕing in the world as I believe it to be, and in others suitably like it, but not in every possible world. But when ϕing is torturing a baby for fun, the attitude I express is unconditioned, absolute, adopted toward anyone's ϕing, no matter what the circumstances; so I accept that moral judgment as necessary. In making such a judgment I also think or express an injunction; when ϕing is testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, I am saying, 'Don't do it!' to everyone at the actual world and at many though not all others; when ϕing is torturing a baby for fun, I am saying 'Don't do it!' to everyone at every possible world.

Within the nonrealist framework, then, there is plenty of room for a solid necessary/contingent distinction that does not involve truth. This is the same concept of necessity that is involved in necessary truth, and it intersects with the propositional 'attitudes' in the same way. When I believe that necessarily P, my doxastic 'attitude' to P is not conditional on any of my beliefs about the actual world; when I morally judge that necessarily P, my practical attitude is similarly unconditional. The 'attitudes' are different, but there is no difference in how they intersect with the concept of necessity.

This is not to say that the nonrealist conception of necessity is right—merely that it is possible. Some fairly plain facts about moral thought and talk make it reasonable for us to infer that some moral judgments are necessary. That any are necessarily true, however, is a much stronger claim for which the support is accordingly weaker. To reach the stronger conclusion we need to add realism to the fairly plain facts. So there is no argument here from a secure premise to moral realism as a conclusion.

3. The falsity of the fact-value thesis

Thomson seems not to put much weight on the short, sharp argument from the necessary truth thesis to realism; I do not know why. I have discussed the argument at length because it is philosophically significant: a premise that might win almost universal acceptance if people did not distinguish necessity from necessary truth leads immediately to realism. As a nonrealist, I have wanted to point out that the premise is ambiguous, having a meaning in which it is hardly controversial and a stronger meaning in which it supports realism.

Most of Thomson's handling of the necessary truth thesis is in arguments that are lengthier and usually harder to follow. A good deal of this material is focused on the use of the necessary truth thesis in refuting a doctrine of Hume's which Thomson calls the 'fact-value thesis'. It says that no moral conclusion is entailed by—or follows with absolute

necessity from—premises in which moral concepts do not occur. I shall come to the bearing of this on the no-reason thesis in a moment.

Thomson is right in maintaining that if some moral judgments are necessary, then the fact-value thesis is false. If necessarily it would always be wrong to torture a baby to death for fun, then the premise 'John tortured a baby to death for fun' leads with necessity to the conclusion that John did something morally wrong; the premise states a nonmoral matter of fact, while the conclusion is a moral judgment.[1] Hume said that such a conclusion can never 'be a deduction from' such a premise, but the deduction has just been carried out successfully, so Hume is wrong.

It might be said that the fact-value thesis is not troubled by anything that Thomson has shown, because what is needed for it to be refuted is the necessary truth thesis: we cannot validly infer Q from P unless 'If P, then Q' is necessarily true, but Thomson has not given any evidence that any moral judgments are necessarily true, as distinct from merely being necessary. I am disinclined to press that point, however, because it rests on a suspect view about deducibility. If in my value system it is necessary that ϕing is wrong, then I can validly deduce 'He did something wrong' from the premise 'He ϕed', moving from one item to another with which I connect it necessarily; and this has not required that 'He did something wrong' has a truth value.

Thomson's valid argument from a popular premise to an unpopular conclusion jolted me into thinking some more, for which I am grateful to her. But I do not think that this failure of the fact-value thesis has much bearing on the no-reason thesis. Thomson thinks that the fact-value thesis offers a plausible appearance of support to each of the doctrines that could lead to the no-reason thesis, skepticism and nonrealism, so that each of these loses something through the discovery that the fact-value thesis is false. Let us see.

4. The epistemic challenge

The fact-value thesis has been thought to count in favor of skepticism and/or nonrealism; Thomson is right about that. That is because its friends understood it to be saying that you cannot get from factual premises to moral conclusions purely on the strength of conceptual connections or what Hume called 'relations of ideas.' These and empirical observation are our only sources of knowledge, they held, so that if something is not known through such relations, and not known empirically, we can have no coherent answer to the question 'How do you know that?' or even to 'What makes it reasonable for you to believe that?'

This line of thought rests on the assumption that the only sources of knowledge are empirical observation and 'relations of ideas.' Thomson is right that there are necessary judgments that do not depend on Humean 'relations of ideas' or on any updated improvement on them, so that the empiricist line of thought that I have outlined rests on a false basis.[2] But its challenge to moral confidence and moral realism still stands. The question 'How does anyone get in touch with any moral facts?' is a good question, which

[1] We have strong moral convictions about torture; but agreement on what constitutes torture does not require agreement in moral judgment. That is the sense in which the premise states something 'nonmoral'.

[2] Thomson implies that the empiricist line of thought goes wrong because it assumes that all necessary truths are knowable *a priori* (p. 20, n. 14). But I think she would agree that this does not get to the heart of the matter; we all think that basic necessary moral judgments are reached *a priori*. I would also remark that the necessity (or necessary truth) of Thomson's favorite example hardly justifies the implication that 'He tortured a baby for fun' is not consistent (p. 8) or compatible (p. 9) with 'He did nothing wrong'. Those two terms seem to belong to the realm of relations of ideas.

awaits an answer.

Thomson raises several epistemic questions: How can we engage one another in rational moral argument? How can we make discoveries in morality? How can we tell whether a given change in someone's moral code is a bit of progress? She answers them all in the same way, starting with some agreed, entrenched moral judgments, and then working on their logical ties to one another and to various facts, and also on relevant factual questions. This is the usual procedure, described by Thomson with unusual openness and clarity; but she would presumably agree that it does not answer the basic question about how we get any handhold on moral truth. Any realist would have to agree that my friends' sharing my opinion that P does not help to answer 'How do I know P to be true?' though it may lead them not to ask me; and that my being unshakably confident that P does not help either, though it may lead me not to ask myself.

Objection: 'We don't have an agreed, grounded account of how mathematical truths are known, either. Do you regard that as support for nonrealism about mathematics?' It is not anywhere near as good support as there is for nonrealism about morality. For one thing, we have some grasp of how some mathematical truths are known: when one of them is proved—as some can be—from definitionally true premises by elementary logic, we have a grasp of what is going on. Also, realism about mathematics is not challenged, as realism about morality is, by the existence of developed nonrealist theories. Some accounts of mathematics are called 'nonrealist', but I know of none that is relevant to the present topic—none, that is, which offers to dissolve the problem of mathematical knowledge by abolishing the concept of mathematical truth.

5. Skepticism and necessity

Thomson is sharply aware of the epistemic difficulty and says several things that are evidently intended to keep it at bay—all involving the thesis that some moral judgments are necessarily true.

(i) Acknowledging that there may be moral disagreements that cannot be resolved, Thomson goes on: 'But that does not for a moment show there is something suspect about morality. In particular, it does not lend support to the No-Reason Thesis or even to the Fact-Value Thesis. That there are [several] equally well supported moral codes (if there are) does not show that there is no reason to believe about any given moral judgment that it is true. For some moral judgments could not have been false; and others flow from them in complex ways that we learn of' (p. 29). This passage apparently purports to use the necessity of moral judgments against skepticism. How could it work to allay the doubts of the skeptic? The least radical skeptic should be the easiest to appease; he is the one who holds that some moral judgments are true, and indeed that some are necessarily true. His problem is that he does not know which are true or, therefore, which are necessary, and he does not think we can find out. Neither the defensible thesis that some moral judgments are necessary nor the more perilous thesis that some are necessarily true has anything helpful to say to this skeptic about morality or, therefore, to any other.

If I have misunderstood the passage, and its real target is nonrealism rather than skepticism, then I do not know how it is meant to work unless it is the short, sharp argument discussed in Section 2 above.

(ii) Thomson has a footnote concerning the fact that in much moral theorizing, including hers, we try to devise highly general moral theories that imply as many as possible of the specific judgments that we intuitively accept; and we

sometimes smooth our path by moving some judgments from the accepted to the rejected category. Thomson is willing to do this; hers is not the kind of moral philosophy that takes as sacrosanct every moral intuition that the writer started out with. But she does take some of her pre-theoretic judgments to be axiomatic (perhaps more than most of us, but that is not my present point), and she comments on this: 'On Rawls's account of the matter, everything is provisional, everything is open to revision, whereas I am suggesting that some moral judgments are plausibly viewed as necessary truths and hence not open to revision' (p. 32n.). Even if some moral judgments are necessarily true, the argument signaled by 'hence' is not valid. P is open to revision for me if I am not perfectly sure that P is true. It can therefore be open to revision for me even if it is necessarily true, or I think it is, or both. All of my mathematical opinions are, if true, necessary; but some are open to revision so far as I am concerned.

Thomson might say that the statement 'P is open to revision', in her meaning of it, does not report a psychological relation between P and a person, but rather attributes an objective, monadic property to P. She could add that a necessary proposition is not open to revision in this objective way, whatever anybody thinks about it. But no *true* proposition is open to revision in that objective way:

> The sun is shining in Oxford at 3 P.M. on April 20, 1991

—this proposition is closed off against revision simply by being true, contingently true. Necessity has nothing to do with it.

(iii) 'Skepticism about morality', Thomson writes, 'issues from a worry about whether morality can be thought to mesh with the world at all' (p. 16). If some moral judgments are necessary, she continues, that worry can be allayed: cases where a moral conclusion follows with absolute necessity from a premise about a matter of fact are 'places where facts mesh directly with. . . moral judgments' (p. 18). This is hard to deal with, because it is not clear what the trouble about 'meshing' is supposed to be. As a skeptic's trouble, one would think that its real theme is the thought that our beliefs about morality do not mesh with the world, but then to counter that we would need more than the thesis that some moral judgments are necessarily true. Specifically, we would need reason to think that we are equipped to tell which ones these are.

The 'meshing' worry does not fare very well, either, as an underlay for nonrealism. If it were a fact that someone had tortured a baby to death for fun, I (a nonrealist with certain moral attitudes) would judge that he had behaved wrongly; so a fact about his behavior would 'mesh directly' with a moral judgment that I passed upon it. What more is needed?

Thomson might say that she is talking about a meshing that is objective, interpersonal, not merely for-a-person. Well, nonrealism can go some distance toward that too, though not as far as Thomson would want.[1] But if complete objectivity is what is wanted, this is not a demand that anyone might make and that only realism can satisfy. Rather, it is a demand that only a realist will make; it cannot be part of an argument for realism.

Perhaps the nonrealist's kind of meshing will be said to involve the wrong kind of tie between fact and value, the wrong account of how fact meshes with value.[2] In that case, what is the right kind of tie? Thomson's thesis that some moral judgments are necessarily true yields no answer to this. In response to 'How do facts mesh with values?' her only

[1] See Gibbard, chap. 8.

[2] This is not the 'How?' question that Thomson mentions on p. 17, which is answered by saying which moral judgments are true.

answer is 'Necessarily!', which is no answer at all. If she were assuming that all necessary truths come from connections between concepts (or, with Hume, 'relations of ideas'), that answer would characterize the tie; but Thomson is rightly assuming no such thing, so that when she says 'They mesh necessarily' she is saying only 'They mesh at every possible world.' This says nothing about how they mesh.

In three ways, then, the supposed necessary truth of some moral judgments is adduced as a bulwark against skepticism. In no instance does it clearly succeed. The fundamental epistemic problem concerns not only judgments of the form 'Anyone who ϕs acts wrongly' but also ones of the form 'Necessarily, anyone who ϕs acts wrongly.'

6. Necessity and the fact-value thesis

If any of the arguments discussed in Section 5 were successful against skepticism, they would also count against nonrealism, at least in the minds of nonrealists who reached their position using skepticism as a stepping stone. Another way in which Thomson seeks to use her necessary truth thesis against nonrealism is the short, sharp argument discussed in Section 2 above. There is a third possible line of argument, which Thomson puts like this:

> [i] How is one to get from the Fact-Value Thesis to the No-Reason Thesis? One popular route (more popular some years ago than it is nowadays) passes through a certain diagnosis of the source of the Fact-Value Thesis. You begin with the [alleged] fact that you have already shown that the Fact-Value Thesis is true. (How did you show this? By appeal to Hume, by pointing in one or another way to the fact that, as Hume put it, a moral concept 'expresses some new relation or affirmation'.) Then what you do is to ask why the Fact-Value Thesis is true—what explains its being a truth. And you offer the following answer: having a moral belief is merely having an attitude, and making an assertion is merely displaying that attitude (as a smile is a display of an attitude); moral 'judgments' therefore have no truth-value (as smiles have no truth-value). . . [ii] If that is why the Fact-Value Thesis is true, then the No-Reason Thesis is also true, for if moral 'judgments' have no truth-value then *a fortiori* nothing really is a reason to think them true. [pp. 6 ff]

Thomson seeks to undermine this by arguing that the fact-value thesis is false. It is worth noting that the argument would be weak even if its premise were true. The part I have labeled [ii] brings up the issue about 'necessary' versus 'necessarily true', but I shan't go into that again here. My present point is a different one.

The part of the argument labeled [i] would be a cogent way to 'get from' the fact-value premise to the no-truth-value conclusion only if we were under some pressure to explain the premise in that way. That is, the argument is nothing if it is not a plausible inference to the best explanation. It is not. There are adherents for many claims that have, as does the fact-value thesis, the form:

> No premises of kind K_1 entail the truth of any conclusions of kind K_2,

where K_1/K_2 may be physical/mental, mental/physical, about-the-past/about-the-future, necessary/contingent, fact/value, and so on. Each 'no entailment' claim could be explained by the corresponding thesis that items of kind K_2 have no truth values (assuming that entailment is only a relation amongst items that are true or false). For example, the thesis that no premise purely about material bodies entails the truth of any conclusions about minds follows from, and so might be explained by, the thesis that 'propositions'

about minds are really not propositions and do not have truth values. But what a terrible explanation that would be! Similarly with each of the 'no entailment' theses. In each case, a much more plausible explanation is that between K_1 and K_2 there are none of the relations (whatever they may be) that generate necessary links between propositions, i.e. between items that do have truth values. Thomson mentions the claim that 'a moral concept "expresses some new relation or affirmation"' as a possible basis for believing the fact-value thesis; but that would also be the most plausible explanation or 'diagnosis' of its truth (if it were true). So the truth of the fact-value thesis would exert little pressure in favor of nonrealism; and its falsity is therefore not a significant loss to nonrealism.

7. Why Thomson does not need realism

If no moral judgment has a truth value, then there is no (good) reason to think that any is true. So, if nonrealism is true, then the no-reason thesis is true. Thomson says further that if the no-reason thesis is true, then her project collapses. By transitivity, then, nonrealism poses a fatal threat to the moral theoretic project that Thomson is pursuing in her book. As a nonrealist, I am glad to see that this is all a mistake. The no-reason thesis that Thomson's work is threatened by is stronger than the one that is entailed by nonrealism. Her kind of moral philosophy involves giving reasons for moral judgments, but not giving reasons for their being true.

Thomson sometimes moves between 'reason for X' and 'reason to think that X is true', as though she did not distinguish them. For example: 'There are people who would. . . say, not that the judgments are false, but that there is no reason to believe them true. They would say, more generally, that there is no reason to think of any moral judgment that it is true. . . . If this thesis is correct, then. . . [my] conclusions are judgments of a kind that no premises could give a reason for' (p. 5). Again, commenting on a moral disagreement between two people, A and B, as viewed from the standpoint of the no-reason thesis, Thomson writes that according to the thesis, 'A thinks capital punishment impermissible, B thinks it permissible, but neither has any reason for thinking this, for, as the No-Reason Thesis says, there is no reason to think of any moral judgment that it is true' (pp. 8 ff.). Of course, we all know quite well that there are reasons for doing as well as for believing, so that there can be reasons for moral judgments on a nonrealist understanding of them—that is, reasons for adopting certain attitudes and endorsing certain imperatives. Thomson cannot mean to deny this. Presumably, then, she holds that the concept of truth is needed for the kind of deployment of reasons that is at the heart of moral theory. If that were so, it would follow that moral theory cannot be coherently done by nonrealists. My remaining task is to show that it is not so.

Much of the work in the building of moral theory, Thomson says, consists in 'connecting' or in remedying 'failures to connect', of which she distinguishes two species. One is 'failing to notice that propositions one knows one believes commit one to the truth of others' (pp. 25 ff.). This and its remedy are open to the nonrealist if, but only if, nonrealism can allow for inoperative entailment relations among moral judgments—i.e. can allow that someone might accept moral judgment P_1 and not accept P_2 even though P_1 entails P_2.

It is sometimes thought that only items with truth values can stand in entailment relations with one another. This is not so, however, as I shall show for the two kinds of item that nonrealists associate with moral judgments. Hare showed long ago that injunctions can entail and be entailed. We can represent the statement 'You will respect all people' as

Your respecting all people in the future: Yes;

and we can represent the injunction 'Respect all people!' by

Your respecting all people in the future: Please.

Now, 'You will respect all people' entails 'You will respect all Jewish people'; and it does so not because of 'Yes' but because of 'Your respecting all people in the future', which itself entails 'Your respecting all Jewish people in the future.' (It entails this because necessarily whatever satisfies the former satisfies the latter.) That entailing item is also present in the injunction, so that 'Respect all people!' entails 'Respect all Jewish people!' just as 'Shut the door!' entails 'Move something!'[1] Those entailments are obvious, but the logical point carries over to ones that are hard to see and might be inoperative.

Now let us consider the role of moral judgments as expressions of one's norms, desires, or attitudes. If we attend only to attitudes etc. in themselves, it seems that we can get no inoperative entailments. From the sheer fact that I have a certain attitude to all people, doesn't it follow that I have it to each individual person (or at least to each item that I take to be a person)? If so, then there can be no question of my having that attitude to all people yet turning out not to have it to all Jewish people. This line of thought, however, is wrong about what general attitudes are. My hostility to all forms of tobacco advertising is not a fact about how I have responded to past instances of tobacco advertising, nor about how I will respond to ones I meet in the future. Rather, it is a present attitude to a kind—the kind: tobacco advertising—and it involves a conceptual representation of the kind. So I could have the attitude to the kind, yet discover that I did not have it to some members of the kind; which is to say that general attitudes can have inoperative entailments.

Even if they could not, it would not matter. Pretend that the naive idea of general attitudes is correct: to have an attitude to all people is to have it to each person (or each item that you think to be a person). Such an attitude cannot have inoperative entailments, of course, but a moral judgment could still do so. The expressivist strand in nonrealism does not say that to accept a certain moral judgment is to have a certain attitude; rather, it treats a moral judgment as a propositional item whose role is to express, and thus to represent, one's having an attitude or one's acceptance of a norm. If I represent myself—even to myself—as having a certain attitude to all people, what I represent as being the case does entail that I have that same attitude to all Jewish people, but I may not have it all the same. That is enough to provide, on the basis of this sort of nonrealist view of moral judgments, for inoperative entailments and thus for moral change through reasoning, reasons, and rational debate.

8. The pursuit of greater generality

Thomson's other kind of 'failure to connect' is the failure to see that one's miscellaneous intuitive moral judgments have something significant in common which brings them under a single more general principle. Clearly, nonrealists can seek to identify and remedy such failures; but it may be less obvious why they would want to do so, and I shall discuss this.

Moral intuitions are usually about fairly specific kinds of case rather than particular cases: we judge items under partial descriptions of them, so we are judging classes rather than particulars. As long as the class is not defined in terms of a particular, that satisfies the formal requirement that moral judgments must be universalizable. We could leave it at that, having a moral 'theory' consisting of the

[1] For Hare's original work on this topic, see his *The Language of Morals*, chap. 2. I reviewed much of the subsequent literature in the *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 35 (1970): 314–18.

conjunction of all our low-level, universal, but not very general 'intuitions'. Why not? Don't say 'By examining how your intuitions hang together, you can locate inconsistencies among them'. There is almost no chance that there will be outright inconsistencies.[1] So why not leave it at that, retaining our moral intuitions and sparing ourselves the arduous search for unifying high-level theory? My nonrealist answer is twofold.

As a personal matter I want, if I can, to live my life under the guidance of rather general moral principles. This is a personal choice: I do not extract it from the concept of morality or from any insight into how morality meshes with reality. Rather, it reflects my wish to be whole and interconnected in my person, so that I can understand some of my attitudes as parts or upshots of others. It is because of this choice that I want to join in with Thomson's enterprise of bringing the most secure of my moral 'intuitions' under a theory that is as general as possible.

Furthermore, I need to bring more specific judgments under general principles if I am to explain differences in judgment. There are many kinds of situations where I think it would be right to act in a way that would save several people from death by bringing death to one. If I can find a principle underlying all those judgments, that may help me to understand why I think it would be wrong so to act in certain other cases. For example, I judge that it would be right to throw a switch if that would change the route of a runaway train so that it hit one person instead of five; I judge that it would be wrong to divert a runaway train from five people by lethally pushing onto the track a man whose body would derail it. If I am to continue to judge one way in one kind of case and differently in the other, I want to confront the difference between them, to stare at it head-on, asking myself whether I consent to letting that factual difference make that moral difference. The factual difference between the two kinds of situation has been effective, making me judge the two differently, but it is for me to decide whether to let it retain that power in my moral thinking. It pushed me around when I was not consciously focusing on it; until I test its power when I do have it under the spotlight, I am not properly in control of my own moral nature.

So the pursuit of high-level moral theory brings me two benefits–unity and control. Some will want to talk here about the 'demands of reason', but I see it as ultimately a matter of personal choice: I pursue this inquiry because of contingent facts about what I want for myself.

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[1] Even if there were, the preference for avoiding inconsistency is a substantive one, which does not go without saying. See Lynne McFall, 'Happiness, Rationality, and Individual Ideals', *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1983–84): 595–613.