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Values and Beliefs: A pragmatist critique of moral nihilism

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Abstract

Moral nihilism maintains that value judgments cannot be justified. In this paper I argue against two prominent nihilistic theories: error theory and expressivism. First I present a *meta-valuation thesis*, which holds that it would be more valuable if at least some value judgments were justified. Second I argue for a *value-justification thesis,* which holds that the greater value of value-justifying theories warrants a rejection of nihilistic theories. This latter thesis requires a pragmatist premise: justified beliefs are the most valuable of possible beliefs. With this premise and a critique of meta-ethical theory choice, I argue that meta-ethical justification proceeds via an atypical form of the method of reflective equilibrium. Since this particular method cannot produce a justification for error theory or expressivism, I conclude that these two forms of moral nihilism should be rejected in favor of more valuable meta-ethical theories.

Acknowledgments

Contents

Exhaustion can be acquired or inherited—

in any case it changes the aspect of things, the *value of things*.

-Friedrich Nietzsche, 1888

Values and Beliefs: A pragmatist critique of moral nihilism

<u>Introduction</u>

The goal of this thesis is to undermine moral nihilism. By moral nihilism, I mean one of two positions in meta-ethics. First is the view that value judgments are systemically false. The most notable proponent of this view is J.L. Mackie, whose "error theory" maintains that value judgments systemically fail to refer to objective values because objective values do not exist. The second nihilistic view denies that value judgments have cognitive validity. The most notable proponent of this view is A.J. Ayer, whose "expressivism" maintains that value judgments fail to describe aspects of the world and, as such, cannot be true or false. On both these views, value judgments and value systems cannot be justified.[1]

I seek to undermine error theory and expressivism by arguing that, 1) it would be more valuable if at least some value judgments were justified, and 2) the greater value of value-justifying theories warrants a rejection of nihilistic theories. I refer to (1) as a *meta-valuation thesis* and (2) as a *value-justification thesis*. Part 1 of this thesis argues for the meta-valuation thesis and Part 2 argues for the value-justification thesis.

In regards to the meta-valuation thesis, I maintain that it would be more valuable to evaluate, and moreover to evaluate *well*. Nihilistic theories need not argue that, given their conclusions, we should no longer evaluate; but what these positions cannot do is propose standards of evaluation. In saying that it would be more valuable to evaluate well, I mean that it would be more valuable to have standards of evaluation; in other

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[1] It is important to note that not all non-cognitivist views are nihilistic: R.M. Hare's universal prescriptivism holds that value judgments can be justified. Further, not all irrealist views are nihilistic: many irrealist views are constructivist. This means that nihilistic views do not necessarily fall on either side of cognitivist/non-cognitivist or realist/irrealist debate.

words, it would be better to adopt some criteria for the justification of value judgments rather than reject the validity of any criteria whatsoever. The claim here is not that we should adopt any *specific* criteria of evaluation, but just that it would be more valuable to adopt *some* criteria of evaluation rather than none.

One challenge for my meta-valuation thesis is to show that it actually would be more valuable to have criteria for the justification of value judgments. Part 1 addresses this by arguing that evaluation is itself valuable and, moreover, that evaluation is a *foundational* value. This claim has two components. First, all other values are based on the value of evaluation: because evaluation is the means to any values whatsoever, evaluation must valuable for anything else to be valuable. Second, we are directly justified in valuing evaluation: a value judgment attributing value to evaluation is justified without appeal to any other values. The conceptions of value and evaluation necessary for these conclusions are brought out in Chapter 1, titled "the value of evaluation", which analyzes John Dewey's value theory. Chapter 2, called "the structure of evaluation", proposes an axiological foundationalism in which evaluation is a foundational value.

The implication of Part 1 is that, if we are directly justified in valuing evaluation, we are also directly justified in endorsing some criteria of evaluation. Importantly, the only criteria of evaluation a meta-ethical theory *must* accept in rejecting nihilism is that single criterion that demands standards of evaluation! Thus my argument can endorse this meta-evaluative claim without needing to endorse any specific and substantive criteria of evaluation. Chapter 3, on "the value of value", considers the ontological status of this *meta-value* through the value theory of Robert Nozick.

In Part 2 I defend the value-justification thesis. My argument starts from a pragmatist premise about the nature of justified belief, taking up William James' argument that, "if there be any life that it is really better we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then it would be really *better for us* to believe that idea" (James 1907, 47). Chapter 4, titled the "the value of beliefs", considers how one belief can be 'better' than another and, more specifically, how one meta-ethical belief can be 'better' than another meta-ethical belief. It also heads off two nihilistic objections to my pragmatist premise: one which argues that meta-ethical beliefs cannot have value, and another which argues that any value a meta-ethical belief could have would merely be a function of its truth-value.

A challenge for the value-justification thesis is to show that my meta-valuation thesis, which holds that it would be more valuable to have criteria of evaluation, is relevant to theories that claim to be *about* value judgments and the status of evaluation. The very point of moral nihilism, it will be said, is to deny the validity of value judgment! To avoid this charge of circularity, Chapter 5 considers "meta-ethical theory choice". This chapter starts from a certain premise of nihilism, namely that there is a logical distinction between descriptive judgment and value judgment. Nevertheless, it argues that value theories and meta-ethical theories exhibit a form of "reciprocal justification". This implies that a meta-ethical theory cannot be purely formal or, in other words, completely non-evaluative. It also means that pragmatists need not blur the distinction between value and non-value judgment in critiquing nihilism.

While Chapter 5 stays on the defensive by rejecting the nihilist position that values do not play a role in justifying meta-ethical theories, Chapter 6 goes on the

offensive. First it argues that the positions defended in Chapter 5 entail that meta-ethical justification proceed via the "method of reflective equilibrium", such as that first articulated by John Rawls and later elaborated on by Norman Daniels. However, because of the foundationalist argument of Part 1, my version of the method of reflective equilibrium is atypical: instead of being entirely coherentist, it is quasi-coherentist. Within this quasi-coherentist picture, the method of reflective equilibrium cannot justify beliefs without the use of value judgments. This implies that nihilistic meta-ethical theories, which cannot make use of value judgments in justification whatsoever, are themselves unjustified.

This thesis is an attempt to refute nihilism by supplementing pragmatism with foundationalism. My ultimate claim is that we should adopt meta-ethical theories that offer criteria for the justification of value judgments. I conclude that belief in moral nihilism is not justified because it would be better for us to believe more valuable meta-ethical theories.

Part 1: The meta-valuation thesis

<u>Introduction</u>

Part 1 defends a 'meta-valuation thesis', which holds that it would be more valuable if at least some value judgments were justified. It has three chapters. Chapter 1 maintains that evaluation has a unique value that sets it apart from other values. Chapter 2 then argues that evaluation is a foundational value, and in this sense proposes a form of axiological foundationalism. Through components of Robert Nozick's value theory, Chapter 3 considers the "value of value" and the ontological status of this as a *meta-value*.

In regards to the argument of Chapter 1, section 1.A. explores Dewey's value theory and draws out some key distinctions between value and evaluation. I consider a particular proposition of Dewey's value theory: that "reflection is a unique intrinsic good" (Dewey 1981, 334). I interpret this as the claim that, because evaluative processes create and shape values, evaluation itself has unique value. Then, by articulating and defending the pragmatist rejection of ends-in-themselves, I motivate a view of ethics as focused on means-ends relations. I argue, with Dewey, that the proper concern of value theory is not with what is valuable in-itself, but with what gives rise to the things that we value. But there is an important problem with this account of ethics: on its face, a rejection of pre-given ends seems to rob value judgment of moral authority. Section 1.B. considers such critiques from J.P. Diggins and J.L. Mackie. In response 1.C. argues that, if we value our capacity to experience a thing as good or bad and then to later re-evaluate it, we must regard immediate values as unjustified values and values constructed through reflection as justified values. With this view that value judgments

are justified only *after* processes of reflection, pragmatism can account for at least one

authoritative ethical proposition: we ought to value this value-justifying process. In other

words, we ought to value evaluation itself.

Chapter 2 begins by looking at another problem for Dewey's value theory: it

seems circular to establish moral authority by declaring evaluation to be intrinsically

valuable. Dewey seems to need a "key value" on which all other values can be founded;

otherwise his notion of "reflective intelligence" is merely a self-legitimizing end-in-itself.

Section 2.A argues that evaluation qualifies as a key value because it is invariably

valuable, but that, in accordance with pragmatism's rejection of pre-given ends, this key

value cannot be considered an end-in-itself. Thus the invariant value of evaluation

cannot be explained by identifying evaluation as an intrinsic value. With Robert Audi,

2.B. argues that there is a distinction between intrinsic and directly justified values (Audi

1982, 166). Because directly justified values are invariably valuable and potentially non-

intrinsic, pragmatism can construe evaluation as a non-intrinsic directly justified value.

Taking this further, I suggest that evaluation is a "foundational" value. As Audi argues, a

value is a foundational value when a) at least one other value is based on it, and b) it is

a directly justified value (Audi 1982, 165). Section 2.C. seeks to establish, from within

the pragmatist account of ethics, the validity of axiological foundationalism. It sets up a

specific form of axiological foundationalism by distinguishing between strong and weak

variants. 2.D. then puts my foundational value in propositional form as an "axiological

foundation": we are directly justified in valuing a justification of a person in valuing any *x*.

Basically, we are directly justified in valuing justified evaluations.

11

The arguments of Chapters 1 and 2 interconnect, though one could accept that evaluation has a unique kind of value without accepting axiological foundationalism, and likewise accept that there are directly justified values without identifying any of these as the value of evaluation. In order to avoid circularity, however, Deweyan pragmatism needs a "key value". Since pragmatism rejects intrinsic value, I think that Dewey is committed to evaluation as a directly justified value and, moreover, to the foundational proposition that we are directly justified in valuing justified evaluations.

Through the value theory of Robert Nozick, Chapter 3 finishes the argument that evaluation is a foundational value. Section 3.A. explains the value of the axiological foundation in terms of its self-subsumption: specifically, because the axiological foundation itself satisfies the requirements it sets for being valuable, it explains its own value. This means that its value is not derived from any non-values. I argue that this logical property of the axiological foundation establishes the autonomy of value systems and, therefore, that value judgments must be based on it in order to resist reduction to non-value judgments. Section 3.B. points out that the judgment that evaluation is directly valuable presupposes the *value* of these values and thus that, in order to prove that evaluation is valuable, the *value of value* needs to be established. I contrast my consideration of the value of value from Nietzsche's, ultimately suggesting that the value of value constitutes a meta-value. I argue that, unlike first-order values, this meta-value is expressed in existentially quantified judgments. This essential difference allows me to consider the meta-value as the non-value on which the value of evaluation is based and in virtue of which we are directly justified in valuing evaluation.

Chapter 1: The value of evaluation

1.A. Dewey on value and evaluation

In *Some Questions about Value*, Dewey raises "the question of the relation of *valuation* and *value* to one another" by asking, "does *valuation* affect or modify things previously valued in the sense of being held dear (desired, liked, enjoyed), or does a valuation-proposition merely communicate the fact that a thing or person has in fact been held dear (liked, enjoyed, esteemed)?" (Dewey 1944, 452). The question here pertains to the function of evaluation: does evaluation shape or merely express values? As Dewey notes in this essay, the underlying question is whether "'value' is a noun standing for something that is an entity in its own right or whether the word is adjectival, standing for a property or thing that belongs, under specifiable conditions, to a thing or person having existence independently of being valued" (452).

Dewey addresses this problem at length in *Experience and Nature*. He argues that values are "things immediately having certain intrinsic qualities", but that "of them as values there is accordingly nothing to be said; they are what they are" (Dewey 1981, 328). In themselves, immediate values can only be pointed at: they simply are. There is nothing to be said about these values because, as Dewey argues, they are not subject to theoretical analysis. Since theory is properly concerned with the conditions and consequences of phenomena, not phenomena as they are in themselves, immediate values are not proper objects of value theory. Thus Dewey rejects a strictly phenomenological conception of value theory, arguing that it "rests upon a confusion of causal categories with immediate qualities" (328).

With this account of immediate value qualities, it might seem that Dewey considers "value" to be "a noun standing for something that is an entity in its own right". But, as outlined above, Dewey argues that value-entities are not the proper objects of value inquiry; he thinks value theory should instead attribute value to the conditions and consequences of immediate values. Thus, in this sense, it also seems that Dewey considers values to be adjectival. An interpretive question arises here: does Dewey ultimately think that evaluation shapes or merely expresses immediate values? While the former seems explicitly constructivist, the latter seems to be far more realist, or perhaps even Platonist.

In *The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism*, Dewey puts forward some constructivist theses that clarify his general position. Like William James in *A World of Pure Experience*, Dewey argues for an "immediate empiricism" in which things "are what they are experienced as" (Dewey 1905, 393). In the case of immediate values, this implies that a value is defined by the way it is experienced. On its face, though, this seems like a crude account of value: many things immediately experienced as good are, upon later experience, no longer thought to be good – the esteemed taste of the present becomes the detested heartburn of the future.

This tension between immediate and retroactive appraisal is the preoccupation of much of Dewey's metaphysics and value theory. He needs to square this distinction, however, with immediate empiricism's rejection of an appearance/reality distinction. In order to do so, Dewey takes a particular tack on "deceiving" or "illusory" experiences, such as the initial experience of a something as good that, at a later point, is retroactively appraised as bad. He argues that if "illusoriness can be detected, it is

because the thing experienced is real, having within its experienced reality elements whose *own mutual* tension affects its reconstruction" (Dewey 1905, 398). This tension is present within any immediately experienced value that may upon later reflection be considered a dis-value: the experience of that taste as valuable is not so straightforward; in fact, the careful experiencer detects within immediate experience a tension between an appreciated taste and an anticipated pain. This tension belongs to the immediate experience and the immediate value. Therefore, in order to appropriately appraise immediate values, close attention must be paid to immediate tensions. The detection of these tensions leads to what Dewey calls the "reconstruction" of experience. That is, if the tension between the present taste and the future pain is noticed, then the value of the taste can be reconstructed to reflect trade-offs. But how is this reconstruction achieved?

Dewey argues that reconstruction entails subjecting immediate values to intelligent reflection, and ultimately, criticism. Through reflection, "enjoyment ceases to be a datum and becomes a problem, [and]… as a problem, it implies intelligent inquiry into the conditions and consequences of a value object" (Dewey 1981, 329). Thus it seems that, despite the role of immediate values in his metaphysics, Dewey's value theory is explicitly constructivist. Intelligent critique (read: evaluation) is meant to affect and shape immediately experienced values. In this sense, Dewey denies the notion that evaluation merely expresses values and commits himself to the proposition that evaluation shapes values for the better.

In *The Quest for Certainty* Dewey goes even further, pursuing the possibility that evaluation not only shapes values, but also *creates* values. He argues that values are

not values without the intervention of evaluation. Just as, with the scientific revolution, the objects of immediate experience came to be understood as problematic objects "to be transformed by reflective operations into known objects", value theory should come to understand immediate values as problematic values. On this view, it follows that "without the intervention of thought, enjoyments are not values but problematic goods, becoming values when they re-issue in a changed form from intelligent behavior" (Dewey 1981, 579). By emphasizing the importance of "operational thought", Dewey emphasizes not only the notion that evaluation shapes values, but also the notion that, without evaluation, there could be no values.

This constructivist account of value and evaluation entails a rejection of "the notion of a predetermined limited number of ends inherently arranged in an order of increasing comprehensiveness and finality" (Dewey 1981, 327). Aristotle thought that happiness was the end pursued by all action, and as such was complete and self-sufficient. His eudemonistic ethics saw happiness as an end-in-itself. Kant argued that the rational agent, as the self-legislator of moral law, has absolute value. As such, Kant saw persons as ends-in-themselves. Phenomenologists like Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann argued that we directly intuit values and their "value-ranking". Platonists have long argued for an immutable concept of goodness and a hierarchy of values accessible to rational investigation. By prioritizing evaluation over values, Dewey rejects all these traditions in one fell swoop.

In place of these theories, Dewey wants a value theory that focuses on means-ends relations. Dewey argues that, "when theorizing sets in, when there is anything beyond bare immediate enjoyment and suffering, it is the means-consequence relation

that is considered" (Dewey 1981, 328). Value theory should not focus on what qualifies

as a value-entity, but instead on what gives rise to those things that we value and the

ways in which those valuable things can be sustained. Contrary to other accounts of

ethics, this account is not fixated on ends-in-themselves; it is concerned with the whole

means-ends relation.

Accordingly, evaluation takes the form of conditional judgment. Given a certain

valuable end, evaluation discerns the means to this end. Or given certain valuable

means, evaluation discerns what ends can be produced therewith. Or given neither

means nor ends, evaluation can discern what pairs of means and ends are

complementary. The important point for Dewey is that, unlike in ethical theories that

emphasize ends-in-themselves, means and ends cannot and should not be considered

in isolation: "means-consequences constitute a single undivided situation" (Dewey 1981,

328).

This idea is not without precedent. Kant argued that, "if we assume that the

means to happiness could be discovered with certainty, this imperative of prudence [to

seek happiness] would be an analytic practical proposition; for it differs from an

imperative of skill only in this – that in the latter the end is merely possible, while in the

former the end is given" (Kant 1991, 94). Since for Kant an analytic proposition carries

with it necessary truth, we can interpret him as saying that, even though it would still not

be categorically imperative, this imperative of prudence is ethically significant. Moreover,

this proposition is analytic in virtue of the means-ends relation under examination: if

happiness is given as an end, then not willing the means to this end would result in self-

contradiction. Thus Kant would agree with Dewey when he says that "it is self-

contradictory to suppose that when a fulfillment possesses immediate value, its means of attainment do not" (Dewey 1981, 328). The idea here is that imperatives of prudence rely on a unified means-ends relation, valuable and valid only as a whole.

1.B. The problem of moral authority

However, it is only coincidental that Kant and Dewey agree that imperatives of prudence carry ethical weight; for while Kant wants to subsume the ethical significance of hypothetical imperatives under the absolute authority of categorical imperatives, Dewey wants to deny the existence of categorical imperatives altogether. This highlights a problem for Dewey: where does evaluation derive its authority? Kant appeals to categorical imperatives, but can Dewey appeal to hypothetical imperatives to the same effect?

The problem is this: without ends in themselves, a person could reject any evaluation by rejecting the ends that it presupposes. If certain preconditions of an enjoyment or immediate value are identified, and the means-ends relation prescribed in a value judgment, the authority of that judgment would be lost on someone who did not value that particular enjoyment or immediate value. A further concern is that Dewey's account cannot discriminate between acceptable ends and those the vast majority find morally reprehensible. That is, by emphasizing the means-ends relation, Dewey focuses on mere practicality at the expense of passing judgment on the proper ends of action. As J.P Diggins notes in *The Promise of Pragmatism*,

> If we were to accept the criterion of the value's practical usefulness, we would have to admit that all values by which people have organized their lives have functioned successfully, and this includes the repugnant as well as the attractive. 'Taboo against murder works, since societies flourish where this taboo is prevalent; a systemic killing of aging parents also works.' Surely we

ought not accept all values that have arisen to serve human ends. How then do we discriminate and create values by the experimental method proposed by Dewey? (Diggins 1994, 246)

Dewey's experimentalism, which emphasizes evaluation over value and "operational thought" over immediate enjoyment, also seems to lack the capacity to issue meaningful assessments of valuable and dis-valuable ends. The worry here is that accounts of means-ends relations do not bear any kind of moral authority.

J.L. Mackie, for example, agrees with the premises of Dewey's experimentalism, but draws the skeptical conclusion that there is no moral authority at all. Mackie agrees that "if someone wants to get to London by twelve o'clock, and the only available means of transport that will get him there is the ten-twenty train, and catching this train will not conflict with any equally strong desires or purposes that he has, then he ought to, indeed must, catch the ten-twenty" (Mackie 1977, 66). This shows the ethical vacuity of particular "oughts" that are predicated on a means-ends relation like those of Kant's analytic practical propositions: they seem to say nothing more than that "the agent has a reason for doing something" (67). This is hardly an ethical imperative. Instead, it seems merely that a superfluity of factual (non-evaluative) conditions have produced what looks like an "ought" statement. Like Dewey, Mackie denies the existence of categorical imperatives and affirms the validity of hypothetical imperatives based on means-end relations; but for the aforementioned reasons, Mackie draws conclusions hostile to Dewey's account of evaluation:

let us suppose that we could make explicit the reasoning that supports some evaluative conclusion, where this conclusion has some action-guiding force that is not contingent upon desires or purposes or chosen ends. Then what I am saying is that somewhere in the input to this argument… there will be something which cannot be objectively validated… [that] is constituted by our choosing or deciding to think a certain way. (Mackie 1977, 30)

Dewey wants value theory to follow the model of scientific inquiry by searching out the conditions and consequences of immediate values. But, as Mackie argues, it is all too easy to see how this results in a plurality of evaluations relying on arbitrary and personally preferred ends. Dewey needs something more than Kant's analytic practical judgments in order to defend evaluation from this kind of criticism.

1.C. Reflection, criticism, and possible values

To begin constructing Dewey's response, it is important to recall his notion that the tensions between immediate values and retroactive appraisal are fully present in experience, and that the role of reflection is to detect these tensions in order to reconstruct values. The ubiquity of this kind of tension is, for Dewey, vital for understanding the relation between value and evaluation: "there occurs in every instance a conflict between the immediate value-object and the ulterior value-object; the given good, and that reached and justified by reflection" (Dewey 1981, 331). In this sense, the distinction between immediate values and values reached through reflection amounts to a distinction between unjustified and justified values. Because reconstructions of value are only *possible* with reflection, value judgments are justified only *after* reflective processes.

If we assent that our capacity to experience a thing as good or bad and then to later re-evaluate it is itself of value, then we are committed to the "value of reflection in general, and of a particular reflective operation in especial"; reflecting on reflection itself we find that "there is something unique in the value or goodness of reflection" (Experience 332). Dewey argues further that:

> Since reflection is the instrumentality of securing freer and more enduring goods, reflection is a unique intrinsic good. Its instrumental efficacy determines it to be a candidate for a distinctive

> position as an immediate good, since beyond other goods is has power of replenishment and fructification. In it, apparent good and real good enormously coincide. (Dewey 1981, 334)

This amounts to saying that, since reflection makes the discrimination between immediate goods and critically appraised goods possible, it is a unique kind of value. Since without reflection we would not have the capacity for evaluation, Dewey finds it to be of intrinsic value. This amounts to the claim that evaluation has intrinsic value. How, though, does this confer authority on value judgment?

It seems to do so instrumentally: Dewey says that, since evaluation is the means to any valuable end whatsoever, it has intrinsic value. Thus we are at least justified in partaking in evaluation; at its most basic level, the activity of evaluation carries an inherent authority. Again Kant can provide some clarification here. "Ethics," Kant says, "views a possible kingdom of ends as a kingdom of nature… it is a practical Idea used to bring into existence what does not exist but can be made actual by our conduct – and indeed to bring it into existence in conformity with this Idea" (Kant 1991, 115). First and foremost, Dewey tries to use the means-end relation in this way: by presuming any possible system of ends, evaluation can focus on the means to these ends and, most importantly, bring about changes in the world which conform to these evaluations. The authority of evaluation lies directly in its instrumental capacity to shape the world through conduct.[2]

The instrumental authority of evaluation allows Dewey's constructivism to hold that that evaluation not only shapes values, but also constructs values. As Dewey argues, immediate experience contains only the "*possibility* of values to be achieved" (Dewey 1981, 579). This "operational definition" of value "gives only a conception of a

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[2] Dewey does say that it is *due* to instrumentality of evaluation in achieving more enduring values that evaluation has special value (Dewey 1981, 334). Thus Dewey endorses the possibility of values that are both instrumental *and* intrinsic, despite this being an uncommon notion.

value, not a value itself… but the utilization of the conception in action results in an object having secure and significant value" (Dewey 1981, 580). Contrary to Mackie's presupposition that values would have to be something like Platonic objects, Dewey sees values as objects constructed with the instrument of evaluation.

Thus, also contrary to Mackie, Dewey would argue that the "oughts" used in certain means-ends judgments, such as Kant's practical analytic judgments, are not entirely descriptive. That is, the "oughts" are not derived from a superfluity of factual statements concerning an agent's reasons for acting. By utilizing evaluative conceptions, the agent actualizes possible values by creating new values or re-shaping old ones. The ontological status of these values may not be entirely clear, but Dewey wants to emphasize the process aspect of evaluation over concerns about the being of values (such as Mackie's concern about their objectivity). For the person wanting to get to London by twelve noon, the ten twenty train has value, and this value is a result of the agent's processes of evaluation. In every selection of means and ends, agents reconstruct values with evaluation. In this manner evaluation has a unique value for valuers.[3] And if nothing else, Dewey can assert the authoritative value-theoretic proposition that, in every instance, evaluation is of a unique and essential value to the valuer.

Diggins is right to argue that we ought not accept all human values; but, as he asks, "how then do we discriminate and create by values by the experimental method

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[3] Rather than explore the notion of "valuer", I will merely echo Sharon Street's observation that, "in order to be plausible, the account of what a creature must be doing in order to count as a valuer at all will have to be very thin indeed, since we think it is compatible with a creature's recognizably being a valuer that a creature value virtually anything at all" (p.10). Street, Sharon. 2010. "What is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?" *Philosophy Compass.* 5 (5): 363-384.

proposed by Dewey?" (Diggins 1994, 246). The short answer is: through more and more refined processes of evaluation. Dewey's term for refined evaluation is "criticism":

> Criticism is not a matter of formal treatises… it occurs whenever a moment is devoted to looking to see what sort of value is present; whenever instead of accepting a value-object wholeheartedly, being rapt by it, we raise even a shadow of a question about its worth, or modify our sense of it by even a passing estimate of its probably future… After the first dumb, formless experience of a thing as a good, a subsequent perception of the good contains at least a germ of critical reflection. For this reason, and only for this reason, elaborate and formulated criticism is possible. The latter, if just and pertinent, can but develop the reflective implications found within appreciation itself… Criticism is reasonable and to the point, in the degree in which it extends and deepens these factors of intelligence found in immediate taste and enjoyment. (Dewey 1981, 330)

This is Dewey's sole and modest imperative: to critically and intelligently appraise the tensions between immediate and possible values.

Diggins seems to want some concrete set of conditions for what does and does not constitute a valuable object, some kind of categorical imperative or judgment that, when applied, unfailingly discriminates between that which is and is not valuable. But this is exactly the kind of ethical judgment that Dewey says is impossible. His modest claim is that all hypothetical imperatives, being based on a means-ends relation, are products of evaluative processes. Recognizing this fact, he suggests that the imperative underlying all our hypothetical imperatives, their barest presupposition, is that we should evaluate critically, cautiously and with an awareness of ourselves as constructers of value. This entails the notion that evaluation is of a unique value because it is the essential component of ethical life.

It is clear, then, how we create values by Dewey's experimental method. How, though, do we discriminate between different human values? Dewey's modest imperative and the accompanying commitment to the value of evaluation are his two candidates for authoritative ethical propositions. Together, these two propositions

23

suggest ways in which we could weed out, if nothing else, the most controversial and

abhorrent human values: by a process of criticism. This could take a wide variety of

forms, and Dewey is not specific because his focus is on establishing the general

pragmatist position against the categorical moral intuitions that have dominated ethics

since its inception. The important point is that, in deciding which conclusions to derive

from this outlook, we evaluate critically.

Chapter 2: The structure of evaluation

2.A. Circularity and key values

There remains, however, a technical concern with Dewey's emphasis on the value of evaluation: in asserting its own authority, the proposition that value is valuable seems circular. Kenneth Burke raises issues relating to this concern. Burke argues the following:

> When judging the effectiveness of a value… we have to utilize some other value to appraise it. Though we may know the process whereby people are made fat, lean or middling, we still have to decide whether we ought to make them fat, lean or middling; for there is no judgment inherent in a process. Suppose that we decide to make them lean in order that they may run faster. Then we have founded our value of leanness upon the value of speed in running, which must in turn be founded upon another value, and so on. Where then is our 'key value'? By the experimental method there could obviously be no key value… (Diggins 1994, 246)

On its face, it seems that processes have no inherent criteria. It also seems that Dewey's experimentalism cannot have Burke's key value, especially considering Dewey's rejections of ends-in-themselves. How, then, can evaluative processes compare values in anything but an arbitrary and subjective fashion? Burke's critique suggests that, if the buck doesn't stop somewhere, then evaluation cannot be justified in the sense that Dewey wants it to be.

Diggins takes Burke a step further, arguing that "the reflective intelligence of pragmatism, functioning as an end as well as a means, elevate[s] intelligence to the status of authority in a circular exercise that relativizes the very concept of authority by endowing it with the power of self-legitimation" (Diggins 1994, 247). If this were so, Dewey would have failed in his attempt to construct an ethic without ends-in-themselves by ultimately propping up and appealing to a new end-in-itself: "reflective intelligence".

This problem is complicated by Dewey's own use of terms. As mentioned above, Dewey says that, due to its "instrumentality [in] securing freer and more enduring goods, reflection is a unique intrinsic good" (Dewey 1981, 334). An intrinsic good is typically considered good for itself, independently of other goods. In this way, intrinsic goods are also typically considered ends-in-themselves; Kant, for example, grounds his moral theory in the connected assertions that only a good will is valued for itself and that rational agents with wills are ends-in-themselves. Moreover, as Diggins notes, Dewey wants reflective intelligence to serve as both an end and as a means. But the notion of any static end, even reflective intelligence, is contrary to the pragmatist premises that commit one to the value of reflective intelligence in the first place.

In order to avoid circularity and these derivative concerns, the pragmatist cannot consider reflective intelligence an intrinsic good. An alternative account must be used that recognizes the unique place of evaluation among goods without construing evaluation as any kind of end. That is, if the pragmatist says that evaluation is consistently of value, she must also say that evaluation is valuable in its capacity as a *means*. To consider it otherwise would to be both circular and in tension with pragmatist premises. However, in order to respond to Burke, pragmatism still needs a "key value". And pragmatism wants, for its own reasons, for evaluation to be this key value. How, though, can a value be a key value without being an intrinsic value?

Well, a key value must invariably be of value; whatever the context may be, whatever the other values involved might be, the key value must itself always be of value. But, as noted above, evaluation has to be valued as a means and not as an end. This means that evaluation, if it is to serve as pragmatism's key value, must be

invariably valuable as a means; it must always be valuable due to its relation to other values. While an intrinsic key value would be invariably valued independently of other goods, a non-intrinsic key value would be invariably valuable in its relation to other goods. This kind of non-intrinsic key value is a counter-intuitive, if not seemingly contradictory, notion.

Nevertheless, it can be salvaged. Recall that, in every instance where there are values, Dewey's value theory requires there to be processes of evaluation. The crux of this constructivist argument is that evaluation is the precondition of value. Thus, whatever one may value, one must value evaluation as a means to creating and shaping this value. This is not, importantly, an end-in-itself. Though "better evaluations" could serve as an end in a means-end relation, evaluation is not invariably valued in this capacity. It is invariably valued because one must value to have values. Notice the conditional and hypothetical form of the imperative: "if one wants values at all, one must evaluate". Evaluation is valued here as a means. The point of Dewey's value theory is that evaluation is a key value in this capacity as means to having valuable ends at all.

As a precondition for the possibility of value, evaluation is a necessary condition for value. This means that evaluation is invariably of value: since, regardless of context, one must evaluate to have values, all value systems are founded on the value evaluation. Further, Dewey and pragmatists can hold that, as a precondition for the possibility of value, evaluation is also a means to value. This takes the argument for evaluation as a key value a step further. Since, regardless of context, one must evaluate to have values, *and* one must value the necessary conditions for what one values, one ought to value evaluation. The argument here takes the form of Kant's

27

analytic practical imperatives: to will the end, one must will the means. How, though, can evaluation be considered both precondition and means?

There is an important contrast here between the transcendental and pragmatic conceptions of a precondition. In Kant, for example, space and time are the preconditions of the possibility of experience. By this Kant means to say that without the categories of space and time experience would not be possible. A pragmatist notion of precondition shares this much with Kant's notion: Dewey considers evaluation to be a precondition of the possibility of values, in the sense that without evaluation values would not be possible.

But this is as much as the two notions share. While Kant is considering synthetic *a priori* categories, Dewey is considering processes of justification. Kant's categories are *hard* preconditions: intuition either takes the form of space and time, or it does not. If it does, then intuition becomes the experience of a rational animal. Otherwise, it remains merely phenomenal. The distinction is not a matter of degree: there is no making phenomenal experience more or less spatiotemporal, or making the experiencer more or less a rational animal. This is because Kant's categories are necessary *and* sufficient conditions for experience. As such, there is no altering the character of space and time. There is no voluntaristic element in these preconditions.

Dewey's evaluation, on the other hand, is a *soft* precondition. Though values are formed through procedures of evaluation, one can evaluate more or less, and moreover one can evaluate in a better or worse way. The character and effect of evaluation is a matter of degree: values themselves can be made more or less valuable. This is because Dewey's evaluation is a necessary but *in*sufficient condition for value. One

could evaluate so poorly that one fails to reconstruct immediate values into enduring values. Or perhaps poor evaluations would still construct values, but would not construct the more valuable values that are products of critical evaluations. Regardless of the specifics, this distinction between transcendental and pragmatic preconditions shows how it is possible for Dewey to regard evaluation as a precondition for value, an instrumental value, and a key value all at the same time.

2.B. Intrinsic vs. directly justified values

A more technical way to articulate the thesis of non-intrinsic key values would be to draw out the distinction between intrinsic and *directly justified* values. Directly justified values, I will argue, are key values because they are invariably justified in being valued. However, though directly justified values can be intrinsic values, they do not have to be. Thus non-intrinsic key values might be better understood as directly justified values that are not intrinsic values.

A belief can be either indirectly or directly justified. If it is indirectly justified, then a belief depends on another belief for its justification. If this other belief was not justified, then the indirectly justified belief could not be justified. For example, the belief that "1+1=2" depends on the belief that "1=1" for its justification; "1+1=2" is indirectly justified because it is based on "1=1". What does and does not qualify as a directly justified belief is highly disputed, but many philosophers have proposed directly justified beliefs. The proposition of the *cogito,* "I think, therefore I am", is endorsed by Cartesians as directly justified. Tautologies and belief in tautologies could be considered directly justified; logicians sometimes claim that basic axioms like the laws of identity and non-contradiction are directly justified. More controversially, Kantians might claim that the

categorical imperative is directly justified, and utilitarians that the greatest happiness

principle is directly justified. What all these candidates for directly justified beliefs have

in common is that they are justified on their own terms, without appeal to any other

beliefs.

Normally direct justification is attributed to beliefs, but I want to speak about

directly justified *values*. Whether direct justification is more appropriately attributed to

beliefs or to values is hard to say. If it were appropriately allocated to both, the relation

between directly justified beliefs and directly justified values would require extended

treatment. I would like to entirely avoid this issue by speaking *only* of directly justified

values. Robert Audi characterizes the necessary assumption as follows: "values are

analogous to beliefs in being appropriately called justified or unjustified, and in being

capable of being justified in virtue of being *based on* other valuations" (Audi 1982, 164).

Fortunately, Dewey's constructivism accounts for how values can be both based on

other values and considered justified or unjustified. Thus, though beliefs can be both

valuable and about values, I think it is safe to speak of indirectly and directly justified

values without considering them strictly as attributes of beliefs or as something totally

different than beliefs.

A belief may be directly justified if it does not depend on any other belief to be

justified. A belief may also be directly justified when it does not depend on any other

belief of the same *kind* to be justified. There is distinction here between a *general* and

specific form of direct justification. We might say, for example, that a certain moral belief

is directly justified because it relies on no other moral beliefs to be justified. This would

be an instance of the specific form. If we said that this same belief relied on *no* other

beliefs to be justified, this would be the general form. In considering directly justified

values, I will be considering the specific form of direct justification. That is, I will be

considering a directly justified value that does not depend on another value to be

justified. The notion of a foundational value that exhibits the specific form of direct

justification is captured well by Mark Timmons, who argues that when "we can construct

an argument for that proposition (or for the claim that the proposition is true) *that does*

not involve or appeal to any other ethical proposition", this proposition is ethically

foundational (Timmons 1987, 600). It is clear how this differs from a generally

foundational proposition: while an ethical proposition is foundational "relative to the set

of justified ethical propositions" (600), another proposition might be foundational relative

to the set of *all* justified propositions. In the specific form, if any *x* is directly justified, it is

directly justified in virtue of its justificatory independence from any other *x*. That is, direct

justification holds whenever a justified object does not require any other object of the

same kind to be justified.

Now, if it turned out that all justified objects relied on at least one object of the

same kind to be justified, there would be no direct justification at all. Coherentism, which

rejects the possibility of direct justification, argues that this is the case. Coherentists

claim that beliefs are justified in virtue of their coherence with other beliefs. This implies

that any justificatory object is necessarily based on many objects of the same kind. The

view in opposition to coherentism is foundationalism, which argues that there is at least

one directly justified belief that is not based on any object of the same kind.

Foundationalism, as Audi argues, "may be plausibly construed as a thesis mainly about

the *structure* of a body of justified beliefs… one's justified beliefs divide into foundations

31

and superstructure; but no particular content on the part of either sets of beliefs need be required" (Audi 1993, 72). There are two specific structural claims made here. The first is the claim that at least one indirectly justified belief is dependent on a directly justified belief for its justification. The second claim is that there is at least one directly justified belief. A belief is foundational only when it a) has others based on it and b) is directly justified.

The claim that there is at least one foundational belief and at least one non-foundational belief is the bare minimum for foundationalism. A foundationalist may claim that there are many foundational and non-foundational beliefs, a single foundational and a single non-foundational belief, or any combination thereof. In arguing that Dewey's reflective intelligence is the "key value" on which all other values are based, I am arguing that there is *only one* foundational value: the value of evaluation. Moreover, *all other* values are dependent on it for their justification. Since the claims here are that a) all other values are based on the value of evaluation, and b) the value of evaluation is directly justified, my argument is committed to a form of foundationalism.

While a general theory about the structure of beliefs would be epistemological, a theory about the structure of values would be axiological. Thus my argument is specifically committed to a form of axiological foundationalism. Axiological foundationalism is about the structure of the justification of values, not about beliefs generally. Though some might consider this to be quasi-foundationalism, I will follow Audi in saying that a specific body can have a foundational structure without it following that all beliefs have a foundational structure. Though saying that values have a foundational structure is specific to a certain body, it is still a foundationalist thesis.

The distinction between an intrinsic value and a directly justified value can now

be drawn out. Consider this definition of an intrinsic value:

> *Intrinsic Value*: A value *j* is intrinsic for subject S if and only if, in justifying the value of *j*,
>
> S does not appeal to any other values.

This is basically what it means to value something "for its own sake": a specific value is

not valued for the sake of any other value.

This also applies to directly justified values, because they cannot be justified in

terms of any other values. In this sense, intrinsicality is a *sufficient* condition for a

directly justified value: if a value is intrinsic, then it must be justified independently of all

other values, and thereby qualify as directly justified. But intrinsicality is not a *necessary*

condition for a directly justified value:

> *Directly Justified Value*: A value *j* is directly justified for subject S if and only if, in
>
> justifying the value of *j*, either S does not appeal to any other values or S appeals to non-
>
> values.

A directly justified value can appeal to non-values because the condition for direct

justification is independence from justificatory objects of the same kind. An intrinsic

value, however, could not appeal to non-values: if it did so, it would then be valued "for

the sake of" a non-value and not in and for itself! Thus intrinsic values are more properly

defined as such:

> *Intrinsic value**: A value *j* is intrinsic for subject S if and only if, in justifying the value of *j*,
>
> S does not appeal to any other values or non-values.

So, a directly justified value can be an intrinsic value, if it is justified in and for itself and

without appeal to other values, or it can be a non-intrinsic value, if it is justified in terms

33

of non-values. A foundational value that is justified in terms of non-values would be a non-intrinsic value.

In *Axiological Foundationalism*, Audi makes a similar distinction. He defines a "purely intrinsic value" as such: if S values x purely intrinsically, then S does not value x even partly as a means to some further value y, even if x is indeed a means to y" (Audi 1982, 166). A "partly intrinsic value", on the other hand, occurs when S values x partly 'for its own sake' and partly as a means to a further value y (Audi 1982, 167). To illustrate this distinction, Audi uses the example of Sue, who a) enjoys listening to music for its own sake, b) believes music relaxes her, and c) values relaxation. It seems that Sue cannot value music on grounds of (c) without violating (a); it would mean that she values music as a means to relaxation. But it also seems that, if Sue values relaxation and music does indeed relax her, she must partially value music as a means to relaxation. The question here is whether or not music has intrinsic value for Sue. Audi answers that Sue values music as a partially intrinsic value, because she values it partly for its own sake and partly as a means to a further end.

Though a partially intrinsic value, music can still be a directly justified value for Sue. Audi argues that, "if she truly and justifiably believes that her listening to music is enjoyable, this may justify her valuing it, and it may do so quite independently of any beliefs she may have to the effect that the listening is a means to something else" (Audi 1982, 167). Where her belief that (a) is causally sufficient to sustain Sue's valuing of music, Audi thinks she could be wrong that music relaxes her, and yet still justifiably value music as a means to relaxation: whether or not (b) is justified, Sue's valuing music is directly justified because (a) is causally sufficient to sustain her value. Basically,

whether or not the bridge from music to relaxation breaks down, the structure and justification of Sue's values stays the same.

Audi shows that a wholly intrinsic value is only one kind of directly justified value. But my goal is to show the possibility of a non-intrinsic and directly justified value. Though Audi's example is important for establishing the possibility of directly justified values that are not wholly intrinsic, it does not make the possibility of non-intrinsic, directly justified values apparent. This has to do with a particular way that Audi is construing foundationalism. Specifically, Audi presupposes a form of intuitionism that leads to him a stronger articulation of axiological foundationalism than is wanted for this pragmatist argument.

2.C. Axiological foundationalism

Contemporary epistemological foundationalism, concerned with the structure of all beliefs, typically adopts a form of *reliabilism*. Reliabilism says something like the following: we are directly justified in adopting certain beliefs or believing certain propositions because we are *reliable perceivers*. For example, Sue can be directly justified in her belief that there is a mug on the table because she is the constant recipient of perceptions that consistently portray the world in ways that are, at the very least, pertinent and useful. Taking the reliability of our perceptions as a basic epistemic fact implies that one can be justified in believing that these perceptions are accurate without providing substantial epistemic support for that belief. For reliabilists, these kinds of beliefs constitute foundational beliefs.

Axiological foundationalism, however, cannot make use of reliabilism in the same way: the analogous position of moral "intuitionism", which holds that we directly perceive

values the way we perceive a mug, has (for good reasons) gone by the wayside. In trying to move beyond intuitionism, however, ethical foundationalists have consistent trouble establishing directly justified values that are robust enough to found a full-blooded moral system. As Timmons notes,

> The basic problem here is that it has never been made clear just what it means to say that some belief is self-evident or self-warranted that does not on the one hand simply involve a story about reliability… and on the other is able to provide us with a stock of justified moral beliefs adequate for serving as a basis for nonbasic moral beliefs. (Timmons 1987, 604)

Axiological foundationalism is in a bind because it must either presuppose a questionable intuitionism, or else fail to establish a directly justified value as substantial as the directly justified belief in the mug on the table.

To address this dilemma, I want to motivate a certain distinction between epistemological and axiological foundationalism. Epistemological foundationalism, with its reliabilism, establishes *substantial* foundational beliefs. These foundational beliefs are substantial in the sense that they entail non-foundational beliefs. The foundational belief that there is a mug on the table, for example, could entail a host of non-foundational beliefs: perhaps that there is an external world, or at least that one would be justified in trying pick up the mug and drink from it. Contrary to this, I think that axiological foundationalism *can and should not* establish substantial foundational values. That is, the program of axiological foundationalism should not be to establish foundational values robust enough to entail non-foundational values. Instead, the point of axiological foundationalism should only be to establish foundational values. In the sense that any foundational value would not be robust enough to imply non-foundational values, foundational values would be *axiologically trivial*.

36

There are other meta-ethical theories that argue for meta-ethically substantial but axiologically trivial principles. R.M. Hare's universalizability thesis, for example, posits that one must choose between any two value judgments that cannot be held simultaneously without contradiction. Since this applies only to conjunctions of value judgments, and not to single value judgments, Hare's thesis implies nothing about the substantiality of individual value judgments; as he notes, "no moral judgment or principle of substance follows from the [universality] thesis alone" (Hare 1963, 32). In this way, the principle of universalizability is axiologically trivial.

This position, however, does not imply that foundational values are entirely trivial. Recall Dewey's argument that evaluation is the precondition of and means to value. Though this thesis that evaluation is a foundational value does not imply any specific values, it is hardly trivial: it is evaluation that establishes the possibility of justifying of *any values whatsoever.* Thus if the value of evaluation is directly justified, and evaluation is the process of justifying values, then we are also directly justified in valuing the justification of values. In this sense an axiological foundation can be axiologically trivial while still being *meta-ethically substantial*. It is substantial in a meta-ethical sense because it establishes the value of justifying value judgments, which is the first stepping stone to refuting nihilistic meta-ethical theories.

So there are two options for axiological foundationalism. It can maintain that foundational values are axiologically and meta-ethically substantial, in that they entail a set of non-foundational values. I call this *strong* axiological foundationalism. Or it can maintain that foundational values are axiologically trivial but nevertheless meta-ethically substantial. I call this *weak* axiological foundationalism. This distinction goes back to the

distinction I introduced earlier between hard and soft preconditions. Reliabilist

foundationalism views foundational beliefs as hard preconditions. Thus strong

axiological foundationalism, which presupposes reliablism as intuitionism, identifies

foundational values as necessary and sufficient conditions for non-foundational values.

Pragmatist foundationalism, on the other hand, views foundational beliefs as soft

preconditions. Thus in its pragmatism, weak axiological foundationalism identifies

values as necessary but insufficient conditions for non-foundational values.

Now, recall how Audi established the possibility of partially intrinsic, directly

justified values. Audi considered Sue's partially intrinsic valuing of music to be directly

justified because her belief that she enjoyed music for its own sake was causally

sufficient for her retaining her evaluation of music. This kind of casually sufficient

justification resembles the directly justified perception of the mug on the table. Contrary

to this view that directly justified values are sufficient for retaining specific values, weak

axiological foundationalism maintains that a foundational value must be axiologically

trivial. Basically, weak axiological foundationalism would never allow a substantial value

such as "music" to be considered directly justified. The directly justified value in Audi's

example is partially intrinsic specifically because he presupposes a strong

foundationalism in which values are axiologically substantial. Contrary to this view, my

weak foundationalism allows directly justified values to be axiologically trivial, and thus

non-intrinsic.

2.D. Evaluation as a foundational value

I want to quickly characterize evaluation as a foundational value by putting it in

propositional form. To this end, a distinction from Audi is helpful:

> …an important distinction which is often not observed [is] the distinction between *justification of a person in valuing x* and *justification of valuing x*. The first represents a kind of subjective justification, the second a kind of objective justification… the distinctions just drawn are apparently crucial to another which seems as important in the domain of valuation as in those of action and belief: the distinction between reasons and rationalizations. (Audi 1982, 176)

A justification of a particular personal evaluation is a subjective rationalization, while a justification of an evaluation itself is an objective reason to accept that evaluation. I want to consider an objective "justification of valuing *x*", where *x* is any subjective rationalization. If evaluation is a foundational value, and we accept Dewey's conception of evaluation as a justificatory process, then we are directly justified in valuing a justification of a person in valuing something. Here is this *axiological foundation* in propositional form:

> *AF*: we are directly justified in valuing a justification of a person in valuing some *x*.

The axiological foundation is a direct justification for valuing justified evaluations; it is an objective reason to value criteria for the justification of value judgments.

For *AF* to hold, evaluation must be a foundational value. For evaluation to be a foundational value, it must a) have other values that are founded on it, and b) be a directly justified value. I think that Dewey's arguments concerning the value of evaluation roughly show how (a) and (b) are properties of evaluation. In regards both (a) and (b), however, I made two specific claims that go beyond Dewey's. First, I claimed that evaluation goes beyond the minimal condition for a foundational value: evaluation not only has at least one other value founded upon it, but it fact has *all other* values founded upon it. Thus in regards to (a), I need to show that all values are justified via an appeal to the value of evaluation. Second, I have claimed that evaluation is not an intrinsic value, and instead that it is a non-intrinsic, directly justified value. I argued that

non-intrinsic, directly justified values must appeal to non-values for justification. Thus in regards to (b), I need to identify the non-value that the foundational value of evaluation is founded upon. Claims (a) and (b) are defended in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: The value of value

<u>3.A. Self-subsumption</u>

In regards to (a), I argue that judgments concerning the value of evaluation (like *AF*) display a unique logical characteristic: *self-subsumption*. Because self-subsuming judgments explain themselves, this logical property shows how value systems might maintain structural autonomy. Since this autonomy is necessary for resisting the reduction of value to non-value judgments, and only the value of evaluation can establish it, all other values must appeal to *AF* in order to be justified.

A self-subsuming judgment is one that provides requirements that it itself satisfies. This means that from a self-subsuming judgment *p* some property of *p* can be deduced. It might, for example, be deduced from just *p* that *p* is true:

p: any judgment with characteristic *x* is true.

p is a judgment with characteristic *x*.

Therefore *p* is true.

This pattern of self-subsumption clearly does not constitute a proof that *p* is true. But, as Robert Nozick points out, it may constitute an explanation for why *p* is true, and he asks, "*if* the statement is true, can the reason why be the very content it itself states?" (Nozick 1981, 119).

It is important to point out the difference between proof and explanation. A proof shows that a proposition has a certain property, like being true or false, while an explanation indicates *why* a proposition has a certain property. Nozick's question is whether a given property of a proposition can ever be *explained* via its property of self-subsumption. In considering this possibility, two kinds of self-subsumption should be distinguished: a direct and indirect subsumption (Nozick 1981, 133). Direct subsumption

happens in one step: the self-subsuming judgment *p* is an instance of itself. Indirect

subsumption happens in several steps: the self-subsuming judgment *p* is an instance of

another judgment *q* that is an instance of *p* (with any number of steps possible).

Now, reconsider *AF:*

AF: we are directly justified in valuing a justification of a person in valuing some *x*.

This can be reworked as:

AF: any judgment with characteristic *y* is valuable, where *y* is a justification for a person

valuing some *x*.

Notice that *AF* has characteristic *y*: *AF* is a justification for a person in valuing

something, specifically a justification for valuing a justification for valuing something.

Thus *AF* is directly self-subsuming:

AF: any judgment with characteristic *y* is valuable.

AF has characteristic *y*.

Therefore *AF* is valuable.

It is important to remember that this does not constitute a proof that *AF* is valuable. But

it does show that *AF* can explain its own value.

In this way AF functions in a similar manner to Kant's categorical imperative,

which dictates that one act such that the maxims of one's actions can be universalized.

It is fair then to ask of Kant: can the maxim "act on universalizable maxims" itself be

universalized? And the answer is yes. Thus, as Mackie puts it, Kant's categorical

imperative is "the source of the requirements which it is also such as to satisfy" (Mackie

1997, 60). *AF* is the same: it gives the requirement for being directly valuable, namely,

being a justification for a value judgment. *AF* also satisfies this requirement, because it

is a justification for the value judgment that it would be better to justify value judgments. What are the implications of *AF* being self-subsuming?

The first implication is that, because *AF* subsumes itself, its value is derived from itself. This means that the value of *AF* is not derived from some non-value. This is important because, as Nozick points out, "if an explanation involves a derivation, deductive or otherwise, of what is to be explained from what does the explaining, then this last mode of explanation requires that an ought be derived from an is" (Nozick 1981, 540). Nozick's idea is that values can generally explain other values, but that at a certain level one can no longer explain deep values in terms of other values; at this juncture, it seems that some values would have to be explained by non-values. If we accept such explanations, in which what is to be explained are some values and what does the explaining are some non-values, we will also have to accept that ought can be derived from is. This will in effect sacrifice the structural autonomy of value systems.

Thus it is important that *AF* is self-subsuming, because it shows that what is to be explained and what does the explaining are both values, namely, the one foundational value of evaluation. This effectively shows that value systems have at least some degree of autonomy from non-values. As Nozick remarks, "if ethics is an autonomous realm, we should not be surprised to come upon a general ethical truth with no further explanation… one so deep that it subsumes and thereby explains itself" (Nozick 1981, 541). The autonomy of value systems implied by the self-subsumption of *AF* supports my argument that values have a foundational structure with a single foundational value.

The second implication is that *AF* and the foundational value of evaluation are the explanatory basis for all other value judgments. Evaluation is the only value that explains its own value; similarly, *AF* seems to be the only value judgment that exhibits self-subsumption. In this sense, value systems must presuppose the value of evaluation if they are to resist the reduction of value judgments to non-value judgments. This shows that the value of evaluation meets criterion (a) from last chapter: all other values are based upon on it.

I want to point out one more time, however, that this is a weak axiological foundationalism that does nothing more than establish the autonomy of value systems by showing that, in appealing to the value of evaluation, they are not reducible to non-values. In discussing deep and self-subsuming ethical propositions, Nozick remarks that "the one fundamental principle of morality, if there be such a thing, would be a fundamental principle that subsumed itself while yielding all other moral truths" (Nozick 1981, 541). Kant's categorical imperative tries to be this sort of principle. But I am not proposing a principle of this sort: my foundational value is axiologically trivial and does not, in subsuming itself, yield any other truths about values. All values are based on *AF*, but *AF* is only a necessary condition for those values being justified.

3.B. Meta-value

There is still the concern, however, that self-subsumption is not a sufficient condition for proof that *AF*. In order to prove that *AF* is true, it will be helpful to recall Dewey's arguments for the value of evaluation: because evaluation constructs values, it is directly valuable. Evaluation explains its own value because it is the precondition of and means to values (and, as the last section showed, it is the explanatory basis for all

values). It does not, however, demonstrate its own value: because evaluation is valuable in virtue of the values that it constructs, the judgment that evaluation is directly valuable presupposes the *value of these values*. That is, if the values that evaluation constructs were not themselves valuable, then evaluation would not be valuable. Thus, in order to prove that evaluation is valuable, the *value of value* needs to be demonstrated. I will argue that this "meta-value" is not itself a value and, as such, is the non-value in virtue of which evaluation is a directly justified value. This meta-value is the non-value through which evaluation is justified as a foundational value, thereby satisfying condition (b).

The first thing to note in considering the value of value is that such considerations need not concern the value of *specific* values. I have construed evaluation as valuable, not because of the specific values that specific evaluations construct, but because evaluation is the precondition of any means to having any values whatsoever. This means that, even if evaluative processes led to dis-valuable values (as has historically been the case, perhaps to a greater extent than their leading to valuable values), this would not threaten the claim that value is valuable, if this claim were considered in a more general (or formal) sense.

Importantly, this distinguishes my consideration of the value of value from Friedrich Nietzsche's, which is the most prominent philosophical treatment of the issue. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche wanted to consider the value of certain historically influential value judgments, specifically those made by the aristocratic and priestly classes. When he says that we have taken "the *value* of these 'values'… as given, as fact, as beyond all question" (Nietzsche 1997, 8) , he does not mean that we

have taken the value of having *any* values for-granted; instead he means that we have

taken for granted specific conceptions of good and evil that may not be the most

valuable conceptions of good and evil. Thus his "new demand" for a "critique of moral

values", in which "the value of these values [are] called into question*"* (8), is different

from my own demand: I am questioning the value of having *any* values whatsoever, not

of the value of historically specific moral values.

   Though I have a different object of consideration, I am asking some of the same

questions as Nietzsche: "under what conditions did man invent the value-judgments

good and evil? *And what value do they themselves possess?*" (Nietzsche & Smith 1997,

5). Again, the conditions under consideration are not historically specific conditions

under which man *did* invent value judgment, but instead under what general formal

conditions man *should* choose value judgment instead of not valuing at all. In this way, I

am expanding Nietzsche's consideration of "the value of previous evaluations"

(Nietzsche 1997, 37) to the ahistorical consideration of "the value of evaluation itself".

Perhaps Nietzsche would object to this move, but at a minimum there is a shared

conception here: philosophy's task is to solve the problem of value (38).

   Now, in regards to the value of having any values whatsoever, consider Plato's

problem from the *Euthyphro*: is a thing good because God deems it good, or does God

deem it good because it is good? Robert Nozick brings up an interesting dimension to

this dilemma that is usually overlooked. Considering the perspective of an all-powerful

being in a moral solitude, it seems that this being can choose whether or not there will

be any values at all. Nozick asks, "will God see it as better, more valuable, that there be

values?" (Nozick 1981, 554). Well, it would not be more valuable at the moment in

which God is considering whether or not there should be values, for at that time there would be no value standard with which the relative value of the two worlds could be measured. But if God were to choose that there be value, it would retroactively be the more valuable choice, according to the values he created. Therefore,

> God creates values, according to which the existence of these values is valuable, his creating values is valuable, his further adherence to values is valuable, his existence is valuable, and so forth. (554)

God is correct to choose that there be values, because "the values created validate their own creation; they envalue God's creating them" (554). There is something to the judgment that "it would be more valuable if there were values".

Specifically, this value judgment seems justified in virtue of the kind of retroactive appraisal that Dewey considered central to the construction of values and the justification of value judgments. Recall how Dewey argued that the distinction between immediate and retroactive appraisals amounts to the distinction between unjustified and justified value judgments: because reconstructions of value are only *possible* with reflection, value judgments are justified only *after* reflective processes. In Nozick's thought experiment, God's choice that there be value is justified by the retroactive appraisal that finds that choice to be valuable.

And not only is God's decision that there be value valuable, but so is that same choice made by evaluative beings in a moral plurality. As Nozick argues, "our choosing that there be value is itself retrospectively and retroactively held to be valuable… the value not only is chosen but is instanced in its very choosing" (Nozick 1981, 560). Basically, the choice to value value is, according to that very decision, a valuable choice. Robert S. Hartman makes a similar point, arguing that "…to ask 'is it good that x is a

good C?' does not leave the question open, but closes it. It is indeed good that x is a good C, according to both the definition of 'x is a good C' and 'it is good that'" (Hartman 1967, 120). The idea here is that, just as it is necessarily good when a thing is a good thing, it is necessarily more valuable to value values.

In a collection of his notebooks called *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche draws out this point in connection to moral nihilism. Recognizing the untenability of moral values as typically conceived, "we see that we cannot reach the sphere in which we have placed our values; but this does not by any means confer any value on that other sphere in which we live" (Nietzsche 1967, 11). The point here is that recognizing the absence of value is not sufficient to create value; what is needed is an active choosing that there be value, an active choice to evaluate. Thus Nozick speaks of "we who choose that there be value", counting himself among those recognizing that "the choice that there be value also involves.. seeing this retributive connection as valuable" (Nozick 1987, 564).

Perhaps all this seems too metaphysical. In order to deflate the notion of the value of value, it can be recast in a more dialectical light. Nietzsche argues that moral nihilism, to at least some degree, is a logical consequence of the way moral systems have historically conceptualized values:

> why has the advent of nihilism become necessary? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals--because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these "values" really had.--We require, sometime, new values. (Nietzsche 1967, 4).

Moral nihilism presupposes that values, if they were to exist, would have to be the kinds of things that traditional moral theories considered them to be; consider, for example, Mackie's claim that "Plato's Forms give a dramatic picture of what objective values

would have to be" (Mackie 1977, 40). Nietzsche argues that, because of the robust

metaphysical presuppositions of these conceptions of value, such conceptions were

doomed to failure: it follows from their premises that values could not exist and,

therefore, that nothing is valuable. In drawing out this logical consequence, nihilism is

more of a critique of traditional conceptions of value than a theory in its own right.

Drawing out this consequence, however, is a necessary condition for moving value

theory beyond these traditional conceptions *and* beyond nihilism itself: in essence, the

negation clears the way for a new affirmation. Thus nihilism is not really the dead end it

seems to be.

The point in asserting the value of value is to, in effect, posit a *new* value, one

that is in tension both with metaphysical conceptions of value and with nihilism's

rejection of value. As Nietzsche argues, these previous conceptions of values have little

value, specifically because they inevitably lead to nihilism. It should be clear, then, that

the judgment that "it would be more valuable if there were values" is indeed a *value*

judgment. Thus, in proving that values are themselves valuable (in proving the value of

value), we must justify a value judgment. Importantly, this value judgment can be

justified in Deweyan fashion by demonstrating that all retroactive appraisals would find it

more valuable that there be value.

Though it is clearer how proof might be offered for the value of value, the

question remains as to the ontological status of this value. That is, the *value* of value is

itself a value, but one that seems to differ in an important way from other values: it is a

second-order value (or, as I will call it, a meta-value). Moreover, it appears to be the

only possible meta-value; though we may speak of the value of specific values in a

critical way (as Nietzsche did), this is really just a way to propose alternative values. For example, we might judge that the priestly conception of good is not the most valuable value and that a less rigid artistic conception of good would be more valuable. Ultimately, however, this process of critique aims to replace one first-order value with another first-order value; it seeks the replacement of one conception of good with another. In contrast, critiquing the value of value aims to replace valuelessness with value, not one first-order value with another.

To see how the meta-value differs from first-order values, it is important to recall Dewey's notion that immediate experience contains only the "*possibility* of values to be achieved" (Dewey 1981, 579); because only "the utilization of [a value] conception in action results in an object having secure and significant value" (Dewey 1981, 580), first-order value judgments can refer only to possible values. This is part of the reason why retroactive appraisal can produce justified value judgments: the truth-value of first-order value judgments are not contingent on successful reference to an object. Similarly, Nozick's notion that valuing value is retroactively justified leads him to suggest that "the existence of value lies in its possibility; if it exists in some other possible world, then for any practical or theoretical purpose, it exists here as well" (Nozick 1987, 563). On this view, first-order values are possibilities and not necessarily objects.

This view is not totally without precedent. In *Mathematics Without Foundations*, Hilary Putnam argues that mathematical entities can be conceived as both objects and modalities. His "objects-modalities duality" (Putnam 1967, 19) holds that both conceptions are "equivalent descriptions" of mathematical entities; like in the wave-particle duality, "there is no particular advantage to taking one of the two theories as

fundamental and regarding the other one as *derived*. The two theories are, so to speak, on the same explanatory level" (8). On this view sets do not have to be thought of as systems of objects (21), implying that one can conceive of mathematics as non-extensional and lacking special objects of its own (11).

Similarly, first-order value judgments could be thought of as containing modal and not existential quantification. (Though, on an equivalent description view, this does not entail that we may *never* consider value judgments as containing existential quantification; different "pictures" are useful in different contexts). On this view, value judgments would not be about special objects called values. On a view like Dewey and Nozick's, first-order values and value judgments would involve possibilities and not necessarily concrete objects.

In contrast to first-order values, the meta-value could not be considered a mere modality: it must be considered a concrete and special object. Consider, for example, the relation between a value and a non-value, let's say, the relation between justice and law. Is this relation itself valuable? Well, it might depend on the value of law: if law is valuable, then the relation between justice and law might itself be valuable. But then, is it valuable that the relation between justice and law is valuable? If the value of the relation is partially a function of the value of a law, then claiming that it would be more valuable for this relation to be valuable amounts to claiming that it would be more valuable for law to have value.

But it seems pretty redundant to make claims about the value of the value of law; in fact, it almost seems like this value judgment *describes* an aspect of the value of law, specifically that it would be more valuable for it to exist. This seems to me to be a

descriptive and existentially quantified judgment. Thus, in the same sense, the value judgment that "it would be more valuable if there were values" contains existential quantification. And since this latter judgment expresses the meta-value, it seems to me that the meta-value satisfies at least some of the conditions of being a non-value, namely being expressed in descriptive and existentially quantified judgments.

I should note that this conception of meta-value is something of an *ad hoc* requirement for the position that I have reached: I need to identify a characteristic that distinguishes the meta-value from first-order values and identify a non-value on which the value of evaluation is based. Since the judgment that values evaluation presupposes the value of value, it makes particular sense to claim that the value of evaluation is based on the value of value. Moreover, claiming that the meta-value is an object and not a modality distinguishes it from values such that it can be called a "non-value", and also accounts for the logical differences between first-order and second-order value judgments. Thus this particular conception of meta-value rounds out my account and shows how the value of evaluation satisfies condition (b) from last chapter: it is founded on a non-value and thereby directly justified.

I do not think it is ontologically extravagant to claim that the "value of value" is both a value and a part of the "fabric of world" (as Mackie likes to characterize objectivity): it seems that, if value judgments are to stand as justified, there needs to be *some* kind of bridge between value and non-value, and the meta-value seems to me to perform this function. But I also cannot think of a convincing ontological argument on its behalf. It might make sense to say that the meta-value refers to a necessary formal property of evaluation that is dictated by the nature of the world. I would press this point

if I didn't have a suspicion that this ontological proposition is undecidable. Though I do not have an ontological argument on behalf of this position, there is still the original axiological argument for this position. There is the argument that, without accepting the meta-value as proposed, that we cannot justify value judgments at all. Moreover, the point of positing the value of value was for its valuable consequences: it allows a step beyond nihilism. Thus there may be axiological reasons for accepting that the meta-value occupies this peculiar ontological status.

This may seem circular: I have used the meta-value to show that evaluation is a directly justified value, and then appealed to the direct value of evaluation in suggesting that we accept the meta-value. Part 2 of this thesis shows how this argument is non-circular by considering a pragmatist account of justified beliefs and meta-ethical theory choice: basically, I argue that axiological judgments and ontological judgments exhibit a kind of reciprocal justification. This means that the reasoning here falls, not into a vicious circle, but a virtuous circle.

An important dilemma to bear in mind throughout is that this generally coherentist notion has to be squared with the axiological foundationalism that has been proposed in Part 1. I will ultimately make the claim that neither axiological foundationalism nor pragmatistic coherentism are sufficient to refute moral nihilism, the former because of its circularity and the latter for reasons to be discussed. The ultimate meta-philosophical claim is that these two positions are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for a refutation of nihilism.

<u>Conclusion</u>

I have argued, with Dewey, that evaluation is invariably of value because it is the means to any values whatsoever. Contrary to Dewey, I insisted that evaluation cannot have intrinsic value; instead I characterized it as a non-intrinsic, directly justified value. In addition to being directly justified, I argued that all value judgments are founded on the value of evaluation, because if evaluation was not valuable than value judgments would be reducible to non-value judgments. These two characteristics of evaluation qualify it as a foundational value. I argued that pragmatism is properly committed to a weak axiological foundationalism, where foundational values do not entail non-foundational values. Thus, as a weak foundational value, evaluation is axiological trivial. It is still, however, meta-ethically substantial because it establishes the possibility of justified value judgments in a way that threatens moral nihilism.

I characterized my foundational value in propositional form as *AF*: "we are directly justified in valuing a justification of a person in valuing some *x*." I then argued that, because *AF* is self-subsuming, it explains itself without need of non-values; as such it establishes the autonomy of value systems and shows specifically why other value judgments must be founded on it. I argued further that the value of evaluation presupposes the value of value, and that the value of value is justified by the kind of retroactive appraisal that Dewey identifies as central to evaluation. In considering the ontological status of this meta-value I reached the conclusion that it is, in contrast to the modal status of first-order values, a concrete and special part of the fabric of the world. In the absence of an ontological argument on behalf of this position, I appealed to the value of accepting the position, which exhibited a circularity that must be cleared away

in Part 2. Nevertheless, I was able to conclude that this meta-value is the non-value in virtue of which evaluation is a directly justified value.

All this is meant to establish my meta-valuation thesis: that it would be more valuable if at least some value judgments were justified. It remains to be shown, however, that this value judgment is relevant to the justification of our meta-ethical beliefs.

Part 2: The value-justification thesis

<u>Introduction</u>

Part 2 defends a 'value-justification thesis', which holds the greater value of value-justifying theories warrants a rejection of nihilistic theories. It has three chapters. Chapter 4 argues for a pragmatist premise needed for the value-justification thesis: the justification for choosing one belief over another depends on which belief is *better*. Chapter 5 examines the relationship between first-order value judgments and meta-ethical theories, and argues that value judgments must be considered relevant to the acceptability of meta-ethical theories. Chapter 6 takes these two arguments as its premises, arguing first that meta-ethical justification should proceed via an typical version of the method of reflective equilibrium, and then arguing that with this method it is impossible to justify error theory or expressivism.

Section 4.A., called "James on the ethics of belief", considers William James' thesis that we should believe the most valuable of possible beliefs (James 1907, 47). I distinguish between James' utilitarian ethics of belief and my own axiological ethics of belief, and 4.B. argues that my position avoids some undesirable implications of Jamesian pragmatism. Section 4.C. is titled "the value of meta-ethical beliefs", and it considers how a meta-ethical belief can be 'better' than another meta-ethical belief. It also heads off two important objections to my application of James' argument to meta-ethical theories: first, that meta-ethical theories are not the kind of things that can have value, and second, that even if meta-ethical theories could have value, this value would merely be a function of the theories' epistemic value or truth-value. In regards to the first objection, I argue that meta-ethical commitment consists of both second-order *and* first-

order commitments, and that meta-ethical beliefs have value in virtue of these first-order

commitments. In regards to the second objection, I consider the relation between

justification and value *simpliciter*, where the latter signifies the general value underlying

different types of value. Drawing on the similarities between my axiological ethics of

belief and virtue epistemology, I argue that a reduction of value *simpliciter* to truth-value

ignores the normative character of justification.

Section 5.A. starts by establishing a substantial distinction between prescriptive

value judgments and descriptive meta-ethical judgments. I take this approach for a

meta-philosophical and a strategic reason. First the meta-philosophical reason: a rigid

distinction between value and non-value judgment exacerbates the is/ought distinction

in a manner foreign to most pragmatist projects. My goal is to make use of a substantial

distinction between value and non-value judgments, in order to make the meta-

philosophical point that, contrary to popular interpretations, a pragmatist account of

justified true belief can be based on an is/ought distinction. Now the strategic reason:

moral nihilism typically takes as its premise that there is a substantial distinction

between descriptive judgment and value judgment. By adhering to this distinction, then,

I am accepting a premise of moral nihilism. My goal, therefore, is to show that nihilism is

inconsistent *on its own terms*. It would make less strategic sense to start from the

premises of the committee pragmatist precisely because moral nihilists would reject

these premises outright; in this sense my meta-philosophical and strategic reasons are

intertwined. Further, by accepting that there is *logical* distinction between descriptive

and value judgments, my argument forces nihilism to defend the specific premise that

this logical distinction has *metaphysical* implications. Severing the logical distinction from the metaphysical distinction cuts nihilism's strongest premise in half.

Section 5.B. then considers three possible justificatory relations between first-order ethics and meta-ethics. Section 5.C. surveys Thomas Kuhn's work on scientific theory choice, outlining his argument that value judgments are necessary for theory choice. 5.D. argues that, because only a "bilateral" relation between first-order and meta-ethical theories allows value judgments relevance in the justification of meta-ethical beliefs, it alone is compatible with Kuhnian conclusions.

Chapter 6 argues that the bilateral model of meta-ethical justification entails a commitment to the method of reflective equilibrium. Specifically, I find that this model entails that meta-ethical theories are justified when brought in narrow reflective equilibrium with axiological judgments and first-order theories. I then look at the compatibility of the reflective method with my axiological foundationalism and argue that, because my foundationalism is a weak foundationalism, it is compatible with the reflective method. It does have the implication, however, that theory justification is not fully coherentist. Within my quasi-coherentist picture, the method of reflective equilibrium cannot justify beliefs without the use of value judgments. This implies that nihilistic meta-ethical theories, which cannot make use of value judgments in justification whatsoever, are themselves unjustified.

Chapter 4: The value of beliefs

<u>4.A. James on the ethics of belief</u>

My value-justification thesis requires the premise that we should believe the most valuable of possible beliefs. In order to make the claim that it is the greater value of one theory that warrants the rejection of another theory, it must be supposed that we are justified in holding more valuable beliefs rather than less valuable beliefs. This line of thinking is inherently pragmatist, for it entertains the possibility that beliefs can be accepted or rejected for reasons other than their correspondence to reality; even if correspondence were a necessary condition for justification, this pragmatist premise entails that it is not sufficient.

The most prominent defender of this claim is William James, who argues that, "if there be any life that it is really better we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then it would be really *better for us* to believe that idea" (James 1907, 47). This is the central notion in James' account of justified belief: a belief is acceptable if it makes life better than alternative beliefs would, and a belief is unacceptable if holding an alternative belief would improve life to a greater degree. In defending this thesis, James asks, "ought we ever not to believe what it is *better for us* to believe?" (47). He answers "no", and it is easy to see why: it makes little sense to claim that we are required to hold beliefs that would be detrimental to life.

Notice that James does not introduce abstract criteria for choosing which beliefs we should or should not accept. Instead, he looks to practical criteria for belief selection, namely, those conditions whose fulfillment leads to a more valuable life. Here James seems to be advocating what Richard Rorty calls a "utilitarian ethics of belief", wherein

"talk about our responsibility to truth, or to reason, must be replaced by talk about our responsibility to our fellow human beings" (Rorty 1997, 84). By shifting from abstract to practical criteria for the justification of beliefs, pragmatism also shifts to a utilitarian ethics of belief. And as Rorty argues, this ethic finds no defensible grounds on which to stake the normative claim that we should adhere to beliefs that decrease the value of our lives.

Rorty's interpretation of James' pragmatism as a utilitarian ethics of belief is bolstered by James' own consideration of what it means for one thing to be 'better' than another. James argues,

> Surely there is no *status* for good and evil to consist in, in a purely insentient world. How can one physical fact, considered simply as a physical fact, be 'better' than another? Betterness is not a physical relation. (James 1948, 69).

James argues that 'betterness' is not a physical relation because something must always be better *for* something else, and he does not believe that these moral relations "can swing *in vacou*": "their only habitat", he says, "can be a mind which feels them" (69). This makes more sense of Rorty's claim that we have no responsibility to anything besides other living beings. Because only living being beings can make demands, these are only demands that we must accommodate; thus James argues that "claim and obligation are, in fact, coextensive terms; they cover each other exactly" (James 1948, 72). On this account of obligation we need only consider our responsibility to other living beings when deciding which beliefs to accept and reject. The basic idea is that, if a belief would lead to better lives for such beings, we can in no way be violating an obligation of any kind by accepting it.

Frederick Copleston summarizes the implications of this position nicely, saying that "on pragmatist principles we are entitled, other things being equal, to embrace that

belief which corresponds best with the demands of our moral nature" (Copleston 1993, 343). In this way, the pragmatist account of justified belief radically undermines the traditional opposition between facts and values. If the beliefs we are justified in calling true are just those beliefs that prove themselves to be most valuable, then truth is something far different from that supposed by Platonists, skeptics, rationalists, idealists, and many empiricists. Many of these traditions supposed that truths were immutable, necessary, or at least held independently of human attitudes in an important way. On these shared assumptions, human beliefs are justified only through correspondence to these truths.

Pragmatism turns the correspondence theory on its head by arguing that those beliefs which qualify as justified and true are such in virtue of their coherence with human attitudes. Because those beliefs which best serve human interests (which lead to better lives) are justified true beliefs, the values that direct human activity are directly relevant to the acceptability of beliefs. Thus for pragmatism justified true beliefs do not correspond merely to facts, leaving a disjoint realm of value; by rejecting such a conception of fact and value, both are seen as intersecting in justified beliefs. Pragmatism, to borrow Hilary Putnam's phrase, endorses "the entanglement of fact and value" (Putnam 2002, 28).

The pragmatist ethic of belief can be better understood in contrast to the positivist account of justified belief. A.J. Ayer argues that moral disagreement cannot be resolved through argumentation, because two people who agree on all the facts of a situation can still reach different value judgments pertaining to that situation. By identifying this disagreement as a product of different peoples' moral conditioning,

positivists maintain that there is nothing further for these two people to argue about; the two people merely employ different sets of values, each feel theirs to be superior to the others', and that is that. As Ayer argues, "we cannot bring forward any arguments to show that our [value] system is superior… for our judgment that it is so is itself a judgment of value, and accordingly outside the scope of argument" (Ayer 1952, 111). The pragmatist ethic of belief contends with this assumption by claiming that value judgments of value systems are inside the scope of moral disagreement. Like any other set of beliefs, value systems can be accepted or rejected in accordance with their value.

Now, there are a variety of normative properties that beliefs may have, including value, utility, goodness, and truth. James does not carefully distinguish between these different properties. And though the fundamental orientation of the pragmatist ethic of belief is clear, the distinctive relevance of each normative property to the justification of beliefs is not apparent. I want to make clear what exactly I mean by the 'value' of a belief by contrasting it to what James says about the 'utility' or 'goodness' of a belief, and further to distinguish the justificatory relevance of value from that of utility. This will lead me to distinguish James' utilitarian ethics of belief from my own *axiological* ethics of belief.

James famously argued that "the true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief" (James 1907, 46), but this identification of true beliefs with good beliefs is somewhat crude. C.I. Lewis critiques James on this point, arguing that "by and large, beliefs which are warranted lead to good results in practice… but such working – good results – is not the criterion of justified believing" (Lewis 1969, 106). The problem here lies in the reduction of justification to measurement of practical import:

seemingly true beliefs do not necessarily produce good results and, moreover, the mere production of good results seems out of step with our notion of truth.

Lewis suggests that pragmatists change the Jamesian dictum that the true is what is good in the way of belief to the dictum that the true is what is *right* in the way of belief. For Lewis, "it is desirable to cleave to what is good, [but] imperative to conform to what is right" (Lewis 1969, 107). His point is that the normative character of thinking does require that we adopt value criteria for what is and is not an acceptable belief, but that these criteria are only indirectly related to what we normally call 'good'. Far from being the pleasant or the desirable, Lewis sees the cognitive virtues as issuing "nonrepudiable demands" that one must follow, such as conforming our empirical conclusions to what is most fully supported by evidence (108). In this way, Lewis disagrees with James' ethics of belief: rather than considering our sole obligation to be to other living beings, Lewis suggests that must also satisfy the demands of the cognitive virtues.

Lewis convincingly suggests that, when speaking of the value criteria in virtue of which we accept beliefs, we are not referring to what is merely 'good' about those beliefs. Instead, the notion of an acceptable belief is *indirectly* related to a good belief, in that acceptable beliefs also conform to the demands issued by cognitive virtues. By arguing that what is right in the way of belief can be distinguished from what is good in the way of belief, Lewis' critique shows how the value of a belief may be distinguished from the utility of a belief. In this way, Lewis' distinction clears the way for my own; but what exactly Lewis' intends by 'right' belief is not evident, so my distinction between value and utility will not be identical to his distinction between right and good.

I want to consider one specific way that the value of a belief may be distinguished from the utility of a belief. When someone claims that belief x has greater utility than belief y, they are making a claim about what is 'good' in the way of belief. That is, they are necessarily presupposing a certain conception of goodness in claiming that x has greater utility than y. If x were a duty-oriented ethical theory and y were a pleasure-oriented ethical theory, then our judgment as to which has greater utility would have to use a specific conception of goodness in making its comparison. If we accepted a deontological conception of goodness, x would have more utility; if we accepted a hedonistic conception of goodness, y would have more utility.

This kind of judgment does not consider the relative utility of competing conceptions of goodness. What if, for example, one were asked to compare the relative utility of the deontological and hedonistic conceptions of goodness; on what grounds could one make this kind of judgment? The problem here is that this judgment, if it is trying to evaluate different conceptions of goodness, cannot presuppose any specific conception of goodness. Many meta-ethical theories would claim that a decision between believing a deontological or hedonistic conception of goodness would not involve considerations of utility, that it would require picking out accurate descriptive theories. But pragmatism does not agree with these theories, because on its view beliefs are accepted or rejected in accordance with their relative value. So the problem from above sticks: how can the pragmatist judge the relative value of competing conceptions about goodness?

The pragmatist needs to make room for beliefs to have a second-order normative property that differs from the utility of a belief. There is the persistent

possibility that, if a belief *x* that has less utility than belief *y* under conception of utility *p*, belief *x* will have greater utility than belief *y* under the alternative conception of utility *q*. Now, if utility scheme *q* itself has greater utility than utility scheme *p*, then the pragmatist would say that we are justified only in adopting belief *x*. Moreover, even under utility scheme *p*, belief *x* must be said to retain a normative property that differs from its utility; this normative property is *x*'s greater utility under utility scheme *q*. I want to call this second-order property the 'value' of a belief. It is essentially the utility of the utility of a belief. If the pragmatist ignores this second-order property, if she conflates the utility of a belief with the value of a belief, then she risks ignoring a key consideration in the pragmatist procedure of justifying beliefs: the consideration of whether, given that a certain belief is useful, the conception of usefulness being utilized is indeed the best conception of usefulness we could have.

I think that James failed to either recognize or make explicit the importance of this second-order normative property in the justification of beliefs. While his utilitarian ethics of belief ignores the distinction between the value and the utility of a belief, an axiological ethics of belief would take both into account. In this sense, my disagreement with James' ethics of belief resembles Lewis' disagreement: I also think that pragmatism must recognize demands other than those made on behalf of living beings. Specifically, we have an obligation to critique the conceptions of goodness used in these demands. Incorporating this Deweyan concern with second-order "criticism" into James' account of justified belief can, I think, save pragmatism from the charges of "subjectivistic madness" issued by Bertrand Russell and similarly minded philosophers (Russell 1948, 818).

Thus in response to James' question, "ought we ever not to believe what it is *better for us* to believe", I find that, when the conception of 'better' being used in the question is not the best possible conception of 'better', the answer might very well be "no". Importantly, however, this second-order consideration in no way threatens the basic orientation of James' ethics of belief. It merely expands on the notion that we should believe what is better for us to believe by pointing out that we may be mistaken about what is better, and thereby mistaken about what would be better for us to believe.

4.B. Consequentialism, fictionalism, and religion

I think that, in addition to bolstering the pragmatist position against cries of subjectivism, an axiological ethics of belief also dodges some undesirable implications of James' utilitarian ethics of belief. Specifically, an axiological ethics of belief can ward off consequentialism, fictionalism, and religious conclusions.

James' basic idea of truth as the cash-value of a belief is summed up by the following definition: "an idea is 'true' so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives" (James 1907, 46). Now, this seems to set up a particularly consequentialist ethics of belief, because the implication here is that we have no grounds on which to reject a belief that has good consequences. In fact, James says as much explicitly, arguing that "on pragmatic principles we cannot reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to life flow from it" (James 1907, 171). This differs from the notion that we must accept beliefs with the greatest utility, for one could take a non-consequentialist view of utility.

A utilitarian might object to a consequentialist ethics of belief a variety of ways; she might, for example, cite Mill's observation that the cultivation of higher faculties raises the threshold for pleasure and increases sensitivity to acute suffering (Mill 1979,

9), and argue that a consequentialist ethics of belief entails that we reject intellectually substantial beliefs. Moreover, a consequentialist ethics of belief would be subject to a variety of deontological objections. In any event, an axiological ethics of belief has the virtue of rejecting the idea of truth as the cash-value of belief, replacing it with truth as the value of a belief. By incorporating second-order normative concerns, an axiological ethics of belief wards off consequentialism and the most obvious utilitarian and deontological objections to it.

James' utilitarian ethics of belief could also be interpreted as a fictionalist doctrine wherein were are justified in calling *false* beliefs *true* when they are useful. Such a view would resemble Nietzsche's position on truth and justification:

> we do not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment… the question is how far the judgment promotes and preserves life… we are fundamentally inclined to claim that even the falsest judgments are most indispensable to us, and that… without a constant falsification of the world through numbers, people could not live – that a renunciation of false judgments would be a renunciation of life, a negation of life. (Nietzsche 1989, 7)

Much of Nietzsche's rhetoric echos James' emphasis on the truth of beliefs that lead to more valuable lives. James, however, does not want to "acknowledge untruth as a condition of life" (7); he wants to construe the criteria for truth as grounded in the conditions of life.

Moreover, a fictionalist account of justified belief also threatens the pragmatist conception of value. As Nietzsche argues in *The Will to Power*, fictionalism

> …places the value of things precisely in the lack of any reality corresponding to these values and in their being merely a symptom of strength on the part of the value-positers, a simplification for the sake of life…Values and their changes are related to increases in the power of those positing the values. (Nietzsche 1967, 14)

Pragmatists do not want to identify lack of correspondence as the source of value. Pragmatism can make one of these two claims: value is a function of both

correspondence *and* coherence, or, value is a function of coherence. Either way,

pragmatism does not consider value to be a function of a *lack* of correspondence. This

fictionalist emphasis, as Nietzsche notes, makes values a posit of powerful individuals.

Pragmatism, however, identifies values as *public* posits, not private posits; thus

Dewey's value theory emphasizes shared procedures of reflection and criticism over

immediate personal values.

A utilitarian ethics of belief could easily turn into fictionalism. It's certainly

possible that some talented writer could create a rich fantasy world of characters and

settings that, if a group of people believed were their own world, would increase their

quality of life. In this way, a patently fictional belief may have more cash-value than

alternative beliefs. Thus James' ethics of belief could wind up endorsing the two

Nietzschean positions discussed above, thereby undermining its own pragmatist

commitments. An axiological ethics of belief, on the other hand, can reject these

Nietzschean positions by saying that our Deweyan obligation to public criticism

precludes accepting the truth of fictions. Such an argument would resemble the Quine-

Putnam indispensability argument against mathematical fictionalism.[4] In fact, later

Putnam makes a sort of indispensability argument for values (Putnam 2002, 32) by

ultimately appealing to Dewey's account of evaluation (Putnam 2002, 45 & 97). In this

way, an axiological ethics of belief can resist fictionalist conclusions that contradict

pragmatist commitments.

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[4] This argument holds that a) mathematics is indispensible for our empirical theories, b) we are justified in believing our empirical theories are not mere fictions, and c) we are justified in believing that mathematics does not consider fictions.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, an axiological ethics of belief gives pragmatism the necessary tools to stop short of James' radical religious conclusions. James argues that,

> If theological ideas prove to have value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much. For how much more they are true, will depend entirely on their relations to the other truths that also have to acknowledged. (James 1907, 44)

From just this notion, it seems that James could maintain a conservatism regarding religious belief: though absolutism may be good for giving men "moral holidays" (45), the goodness of other truths antagonistic to religious belief give good reason for rejecting absolutism. James, however, endorses a less conservative position. In *The Will to Believe*, he argues against W.K. Clifford's famous principle that "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence" (James 1948, 93), claiming that our "passional nature" must decide between competing beliefs when there are no "intellectual grounds" on which to do so (95). This is ultimately a dispute about the ethics of belief, with Clifford claiming that we have an obligation to accept beliefs supported by evidence and to suspend belief when evidence is lacking, and James arguing that we should accept certain beliefs on grounds other than sufficient evidence.

In saying this, James specifically has moral and religious beliefs in mind; he argues that "moral questions immediately present themselves as questions whose solution cannot wait for sensible proof" (James 1948, 103). These questions cannot wait for an answer because they offer "momentous" decisions, where "we are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain vital good" (105). If we did not adopt these beliefs on insufficient evidence, we would be making a moral error, in the sense that we would lose a "vital good". The logic of this claim is interesting.

Speaking specifically of the "religious hypothesis", James says that "we are better off even now if we believe [it] to be true" (105). More generally, his claim is that there may be hypotheses that, regardless of their epistemic status, we may be immediately better off in accepting.

James' position on religion gets to the heart of his ethics of belief, and ultimately underscores the distinction between his utilitarian and my axiological position. James takes religious belief out of the public sphere, making it a matter of personal faith rather than of public justification; as Rorty points out, "the underlying strategy of James' utilitarian/pragmatist philosophy of religion is to privatize religion" (Rorty 1997, 85). With this move, religious belief becomes compatible with the utilitarian ethic: because one has an obligation only to believe what benefits other living beings, and religious belief does nothing other than benefit oneself, a person may adopt such a belief (if they choose) *without needing to justify it at all*. This move on James' part reflects the great degree to which his utilitarian ethics of belief is both consequentialist and fictionalist: personal faith is acceptable when it has good consequences, regardless of whether it is obviously fictional. As argued above, an ethics of belief that is consequentialist and fictionalist is subject to a variety of objections and un-pragmatic implications.

Contrary to the utilitarian ethic of belief, my axiological ethics of belief rejects that there are *any* beliefs that can be accepted without needing to be justified. This is because the second-order considerations that establish the value of a belief require an *ongoing* process of criticism and evaluation of relative utilities. In this sense, all beliefs are subject to public justification, because it is the public character of evaluation that allows us to claim that beliefs are valuable in the first place. Thus I think that the

70

distinction between a utilitarian ethics and an axiological ethics of belief can be summarily considered a distinction between Jamesian and Deweyan justification, where the latter retains a conservatism that the former cannot.

4.C. The value of meta-ethical beliefs

James' theory of justified belief considers beliefs generally, but does not specifically account for *how* beliefs are valuable. Moreover, it seems likely that different kinds of beliefs would be valuable in different ways. Scientific beliefs, for example, may accrue value differently than moral beliefs do. For my value-justification thesis, it is especially important to consider how meta-ethical beliefs can be said to be valuable. Through a consideration of how one meta-ethical belief can be better than another, this section also heads off two nihilistic objections to my pragmatist premise: one which argues that meta-ethical beliefs cannot have value, and another which argues that any value a meta-ethical belief could have would merely be a function of its epistemic value or truth-value.

It is difficult to identify what would make one meta-ethical theory better than another. It is possible that there is one central feature all ethical theories must have to be valuable: if Platonism were true, then objectivist theories would be more valuable than subjectivist theories; if Kantianism were true, then absolutist theories would be more valuable than empiricist theories.[5] This is not the sense in which pragmatists want to construe 'valuable'. The existence of a single necessary and sufficient condition for a valuable theory seems, to the pragmatic temperament, entirely suspect.

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[5] Kant may indeed be a moral constructivist, but his account of value appears absolutist: at many points in the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant appeals to (or perhaps presupposes) the absolute value of a good will.

It seems to me that the value of meta-ethical beliefs can be explained in terms of various commitments. Specifically, it seems that meta-ethical beliefs consist of both second-order *and* first-order commitments. In this sense, accepting certain value judgments is a necessary condition for believing in any given meta-ethical theory. These value judgments, I think, express the value of a meta-ethical belief. More specifically, these judgments are the basis on which believers in meta-ethical beliefs could claim that one meta-ethical belief is better than another. The first-order commitments of meta-ethical belief can be drawn out through the following example from Henry Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*.

Consider an egoist who argues to a utilitarian that his personal pleasure is objectively good. The utilitarian can then respond that the egoist's personal pleasure cannot be any more good than any other person's personal pleasure, for if personal pleasure is really an *objective* good, then it is good regardless of whose pleasure it is. This is because objective goods must be goods regardless of the subjective fact that the egoist is the egoist, that person *A* is person *A*. Now, if the egoist did not claim that personal pleasure is an objective good, but only claimed that it is a universal good, then he would not fall into this trap: it would be entirely rational to claim that he ought to pursue his own pleasure, just as each person ought to pursue his own pleasure. Unlike objective goods, universal goods can take into account subjective facts, such as the identity of the individual considered.

J.L Mackie draws from Sidgwick's example the following claim: "if ethics is built on the concept of objective goodness, then egoism as a first order system or method of ethics can be refuted, whereas if it is assumed that goodness is only subjective it

72

cannot" (Mackie 1977, 25). In this sense, a second-order belief about the objectivity or subjectivity of values can explicitly invalidate or implicitly validate a first-order belief about what one should or should not do. Meta-ethical theories have a variety of component claims that, though interdependent, can be separately identified: judgments regarding the objectivity or subjectivity of values, judgments regarding the validity (truth-aptitude) of value judgments, and judgments regarding the matter and form of value judgment, among others. Sidgwick's example and Mackie's analysis show how component claims of meta-ethical theories, in this case judgments concerning the objectivity and subjectivity of values, can themselves have value.

Imagine the egoist committed to the notion that his personal pleasure is a unique good for him. For the egoist, the meta-ethical belief that holds values are subjective is *better* than the meta-ethical belief that holds values are objective. This is not simply because he might consider the latter belief to be true, but moreover because only the latter belief allows him to maintain his first-order beliefs. And certainly it is a component of first-order beliefs that, if a certain course of action *x* should be taken, one should also believe that *x* should be taken instead of *y*. Therefore, for the egoist, subjectivist theories can be better than objectivist theories *in a first-order sense*. On the other side and in the same manner, the utilitarian could hold that objectivist theories are better than subjectivist theories. In this way, though they differ on the value of meta-ethical theories, both the egoist and the utilitarian agree, and indeed presuppose, that meta-ethical theories do indeed have value. In this case, the egoist thinks subjectivism more valuable than its negation, and the utilitarian thinks objectivism more valuable than its negation.

The first objection to my value-justification thesis is that meta-ethical theories are not the kinds of things that can have value. Independent of the more general objection that beliefs cannot have value (which I will not address), this objection might maintain that, because meta-ethical theories are theories *about* values, it does not make sense to say that they themselves *have* value. It could be maintained that meta-ethical theories are more like formal theories than evaluative theories, where only the latter are meant to determine what is valuable and what evaluations are true or false. The force of this objection is derived from the subject and context sensitivity of value judgments. Most would consider judgments regarding the value of a belief to be (at best) a side issue in justifications of that belief. We don't, for example, justify scientific beliefs *solely* with value oriented criterion. And nor should we, for such justifications would undermine scientific claims to (even minimal) objectivity.

Yet meta-ethical beliefs differ in at least one significant way from scientific beliefs: meta-ethical theories are concerned with values and value judgments. Since value is the *analysans* of meta-ethical theories, meta-ethical theories are in some sense value theories. Thus instead of importing value considerations from the outside, as we might be in judging the value of a scientific belief, the value of a meta-ethical theory is to some degree a function of its own consideration of value. This means that the value of a meta-ethical theory is at least partly a product of its component claims and internal logic.

Through Sidgwick's example I have argued that meta-ethical belief consists in both first-order and second-order commitments. Thus it seems that meta-ethical theories have value specifically *because* meta-ethical theories are theories about values: because a second-order theory can support a first-order theory, and a first-order theory

74

is supported for first-order reasons, second-order theories can have first-order significance. In regards to meta-ethical theories, this means that they have ethical significance or, in other words, value. It is true that non-evaluative theories may then not have value; for a second-order theory that supports a first-order theory that itself does not have value would not have value.[6] But a meta-evaluative theory must have value in virtue of the value of the first-order evaluative theories it supports.

The second objection to my value-justification thesis argues that, though a meta-ethical theory may indeed have value, this value is only a function of its truth-value or epistemic value. That is, meta-ethical theories do not have any special ethical, aesthetic, or prudential value that would make the 'more valuable' relation the kind of relation I have construed it as. This objection might be raised by empiricists would hold that value is generally reducible to truth-value. In regards to beliefs, this would imply that beliefs are valuable when they are justified, not justified when they are valuable. This clearly strikes at the root of my axiological ethics of belief.

In order to respond to this objection, I want to go back to Sidgwick's example. The egoist and the utilitarian are committed to their meta-ethical theories in a first-order sense specifically because they share an implicit distinction between the value of a belief and the truth-value of a belief. Though the egoist probably thinks that subjectivist theories are true (this may even be why he is an egoist), once he is an egoist he is committed to subjectivism in both a second-order and first-order sense. Though the falsity of subjectivism may weaken his commitment to both subjectivism and egoism (as it should), he does not resist objectivism merely because of the (perceived) truth of

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[6] I will let the possibility hang for now, because for the moment I just want to show that meta-ethical theories have value. Chapter 5, however, considers whether scientific beliefs must also have value.

subjectivism. He also resists objectivism on the first-order grounds that, if objectivism were true, what he considers to be good could no longer be considered to be good. It is this latter kind of justification that I think appeals directly to the value of a belief, without regard to its truth-value.

The distinction between value and truth-value might be better understood by considering value as value *simpliciter*, by which I mean the attribute shared by all the types of value (epistemic, ethical, aesthetic, prudential) and in virtue of which they are values. Though there are certainly important distinctions between the different types of value, there are all still *values*. Many would resist this general notion of value, and indeed some have argued that a general approach to value should be abandoned.[7] Nevertheless, there is a compelling reason to keep a notion of value *simpliciter*: the distinctions between the different kinds of value are not definitive. Consider 'coherency' and 'simplicity' as values. Certainly these qualify as epistemic values, for they figure importantly in standards for empirical justification: it is widely accepted that we are justified in preferring the more *elegant* theories that have these values than more obtrusive and unwieldy theories that lack them. But is elegance not also an aesthetic value? Where, then, does the epistemic value end and the aesthetic value begin? It is not entirely clear. Thus it does not make sense to follow the empiricists who have claimed that only epistemic values are relevant to justification; for as Putnam notes, "epistemic values are values too" (Putnam 2002, 30).

Another argument for the category of value *simpliciter* might follow Guy Axtell in drawing parallels between axiology and the newer field of virtue epistemology (Axtell

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[7] See James Ward Smith's essay, *Should a General Theory of Value be Abandoned? Ethics.* 57 (4): 274-288.

1996). Virtue epistemology argues that justification is an inherently normative project. In this sense virtue epistemology is opposed to naturalized epistemology, which seeks to reduce justification to causal psychological descriptions. Virtue epistemology does not concern itself with normative "facts" as such, but focuses on the role that normative properties play in explanation and justification. Like "warrant", justification is considered a term of epistemic evaluation or appraisal.

Virtue epistemology shares this notion with my axiological ethics of belief. As Axtell notes, value theorists such as Dewey considered "knowing and valuing to be interdependent" and stressed that "a theory of valuation is essential for an adequate philosophical study of the aims and governing norms of… human practices" (Axtell 1996, 183).[8] On Dewey's view, knowledge and justification cannot and should not be conceptually isolated from normativity. Or, as virtue epistemologists put it: we don't just seek reasons, we seek *good* reasons. Importantly, both the Deweyan and virtue theory arguments resist restricting epistemologically relevant value judgments to a specific kind of value judgment, since both "seek a unified conception of epistemology and ethics as two primarily *normative* subdisciplines of philosophy" (Axtell 1996, 175). The notion of value employed here is not restricted to any particular kind of value. It is this "unified" notion of value I have called value *simpliciter*.

The notion of value *simpliciter*, then, is important for understanding the justification of beliefs. One could admit that an incredibly unwieldy theory had a greater truth-value than an exceedingly elegant theory with slightly less truth-value, and nevertheless be justified in accepting the theory with greater value *simpliciter* over the theory with greater truth-value. Now, the justification of a theory is clearly not about just

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[8] Dewey makes these arguments in Chapter 10 of *Experience and Nature*.

truth-value or value *simpliciter*, for if we considered any theory utterly lacking one or the other, we can see that it would be unjustifiable. This illustrates the problem in reducing value *simpliciter* to truth-value, as the second objection wants to do: such a reduction would ignore the normative character of knowledge and the interplay between value and truth in the justification of beliefs.

Having a) shown that my axiological ethics of belief avoids the undesirable implications of James' utilitarian ethics of belief, and b) responded to the two apparent objections to this view, I think that I can at this point adopt my 'pragmatist premise' and assert we are justified in believing the most valuable of possible beliefs.

Chapter 5: Meta-ethical theory choice

5.A. First-order ethics and meta-ethics

It is standard in ethics to separate between "first-order" judgments and "second-order" judgments. First-order ethical judgments are value judgments such as "pleasure is good" or moral judgments such as "murder is wrong". Philosophers typically distinguish second-order ethical judgments from first-order judgments by saying that second-order ethical judgments have first-order judgments as their objects. Examples of second-order judgments would therefore be "the assertion that 'pleasure is good' is subjective" or "the assertion that 'murder is wrong' is truth-apt". Notice that second-order judgments do not make claims about value, but instead make claims about the status of claims about value. Because second-order judgments make non-ethical claims about ethical judgments, they are considered "meta-ethical" judgments.

The distinction between first-order and meta-ethical judgments is tricky, and it is not perfectly clear where the line should be drawn. R.M. Hare categorizes judgments into three different kinds: descriptive, prescriptive and evaluative. A descriptive judgment contains only descriptive terms, a prescriptive judgment contains only prescriptive terms, and an evaluative judgment contains both (Hare 1963, 26). On this scheme, not all moral judgments are value judgments, for judgments can be entirely prescriptive without any elements of description. Since I am only concerned with the distinction between first-order and meta-ethical judgments, and not with the distinction between moral and value judgments (both of which are first-order), I will lump together Hare's prescriptive and evaluative judgments into the category of first-order "axiological"

judgments. Meta-ethical judgments, by contrast, will be considered to contain only descriptive terms.

Axiological judgments predicate values such as 'good' and 'better' to a subject. Where an axiological judgment contains a predicate like 'good', the judgment is *indicative*. Hare argues that value predicates in indicative judgments have a dual-function, prescriptive in some contexts and descriptive in others. Take, for example, the value predicate beautiful: this seems to function descriptively in many contexts. Moreover, where 'good' is predicated to a "functional noun", it may operate descriptively: "once we have said fully enough what an *A* is supposed to do, a good *A* will simply be an *A* which is such as to be able to do that" (Mackie 1977, 53).

Now, the litmus test I propose for whether a value predicate in an indicative judgment is functioning descriptively, and therefore for whether the indicative judgment is axiological or not, is to see whether the judgment entails a further judgment about what would be 'better'. Unlike *monadic* value predicates like 'good' that refer to single value, *dyadic* value predicates like 'better' establish a value relation. ('Better' can also be *polyadic* if it establishes a relation between more than two things). While a judgment containing a monadic value predicate may be intended to merely or partly describe, a judgment with a dyadic or polyadic value predicate must involve *some* prescription: I cannot imagine describing one of two states of affairs as 'better' without quite intentionally meaning that one should be preferred to and pursued in lieu of the other.

Although axiological judgments may contain value predicates, they do not need to; values can be implicitly predicated in the subjunctive or imperative mood. "John should do X" or "John ought to do X" has the same meaning as "It would be better if

80

John did X". In this manner judgments pertaining to what we 'should' or 'ought' can be axiological. They do not have to be, however: imperative judgments may order someone to do something without any implication that it would be better for them to do so. And, of course, a subjunctive judgment like, "I would have paid you back, but…" does not contain value predication. As before, the litmus test for axiological status is whether the judgments at hand entail a further judgment containing a dyadic or polyadic value predicate (and really what I have in mind is a comparative judgment concerning what would be 'better').

Unlike axiological judgments, meta-ethical judgments do not contain or entail judgments containing value predication. When meta-ethical judgments contain value predicates, these predicates operate *only* in a descriptive sense. "The assertion that 'pleasure is good' is subjective", for example, is clearly not prescriptive at all. An obvious criteria for meta-ethical judgments is thus that, if a judgment's value predicate is contained in quotes, the judgment is meta-ethical, for this means that the judgment has a first-order axiological judgment as its object.

But consider a less obviously meta-ethical judgment that, nevertheless, I maintain is entirely descriptive: "pleasure and nothing but pleasure is good". Notice that this assertion does not entail a judgment about what would be 'better': it does not mean "it would be better if pleasure and nothing but pleasure were good". This meta-ethical judgment is the fundamental descriptive claim of hedonism, which defines 'good' instead of judging something to be of value and then prescribing it.

Consider Mill's utilitarianism, which makes the descriptive status of this hedonist judgment more apparent. Mill's first-order theory is the "greatest happiness principle",

which "holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (Mill 1979, 7). This principle concerns what it would be better or worse to do. Now, Mill himself distinguishes this "theory of morality" from the "theory of life" on which it is grounded. This latter theory holds that "pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things are desirable either for pleasure inherent in themselves or as a means to the promotion of pleasure and prevention of pain" (7). Contrary to his theory of morality, Mill's theory of life does not entail a better-worse relation at all: it is a purely descriptive theory about some necessary feature of human preferences.

In this sense, hedonism is a descriptive theory about what the good is, not about what the good should be or how the good should be considered. Hedonists seek to *define* the good as pleasure and nothing but pleasure, implying that 'good' functions only to signify the pleasant. Since the hedonist dictum that pleasure is good does not translate into judgment with a dyadic value predicate, it is not an axiological judgment. As such, hedonism is a meta-ethical theory. Of course, accepting hedonism would have many consequences for first-order ethics (it is the basis on which Mill grounds the greatest happiness principle), but this by itself does not show that it is a first-order theory: notice that Mill shares meta-ethical hedonism with Epicureans, for example, but differs greatly from Epicureans on first-order issues.

Deontologists may resist this characterization of value judgment, for deontological theories do not explicitly translate 'should' or 'ought' into terms of what is 'better'. I should say first that I do not think that deontologists need resist this translation: though deontology may consider imperatives to be justified independently of

hypothetical judgments, this does not imply that categorical imperatives are justified independently of axiological judgments. Superlative axiological judgments about absolute value, in which a polyadic value predicate establishes a universal relation, can play a role in justifying deontological theories. Thus Kant begins the *Groundwork* with the premise that a good will is the only thing with absolute value, and specifically uses the unconditional goodness of the good will in drawing out and justifying the categorical imperative. I think Kant would say that it would be better if everyone did his or her duty, not better in the utilitarian sense of course, but better in an absolute sense.

Yet many would characterize axiological judgments as hypothetical imperatives, and thus deny that they play a role in justifying categorical imperatives. If a deontologist were to insist on this position, then it would follow on my view that categorical imperatives are meta-ethical judgments and are purely descriptive. But I don't think this threatens the deontological position: given the deontological claim that categorical imperatives are justified, it does not then threaten their moral status to call them descriptive instead of prescriptive. The content of the justified imperative would still be the same, in that it would dictate which actions are and are not moral. But this would not, in my sense, be prescribing these actions; it would merely be describing them as moral. Not only does this meta-ethical status accord categorical imperatives with the kind of objectivity they desire, but I think it also captures the essence of the deontological position, which does not offer reasons to pursue one thing over another but, as Mackie notes, describes moral "requirements which are simply there, in the nature of things" (Mackie 1977, 59).

To summarize, the first major distinction between first-order and meta-ethical judgments is that, while the former is or entails an axiological judgment containing a dyadic value predicate, the latter contains only descriptive predicates. As I have argued, this provides a litmus test for determining whether a value predicate is part of a value predication or part of a description. Also, where a judgment has a first-order axiological judgment as its object, this judgment is clearly meta-ethical and need not be subjected to the litmus test.

There is, however, a second major distinction between first-order ethics and meta-ethics: meta-ethics deals with the epistemic and ontological status of first-order judgments. In this sense, a meta-ethical theory has two components: a semantic theory about value judgments and a value ontology. The semantic theory concerns the truth-aptitude of value judgments, and can fall into the objectivist, subjectivist or non-cognitivist categories. The ontological component concerns the existence or non-existence of values or value properties, and can be either a positive or negative value ontology. In this sense, meta-ethics is concerned with more than just a conceptual or linguistic analysis of first-order judgments; meta-ethics also passes judgment on the character of the values that are predicated in first-order judgments.

Error theory, for example, makes direct claims about the existence or non-existence of values. Mackie's denial that objective values exist allow him to argue that, specifically because the objectivist semantic theory of value judgments is correct, value judgments are systemically false. Thus of his theory Mackie writes,

> …what I have called moral skepticism is an ontological thesis, not a linguistic or conceptual one. It is not, like the other doctrine often called moral subjectivism, a view about the meanings of moral statements. Again, no doubt, if it is to be at all plausible, it will have to give some account of their meanings… but this too will be a development of the theory, not its core. (Mackie 1977, 18)

Mackie wants to make the point that the *core* of his meta-ethical theory is negative value ontology that denies the existence of values and value properties.

The "other doctrine often called moral subjectivism" that Mackie mentions is expressivism, which is typically construed as a *purely* semantic meta-ethical theory. I think that both Mackie and the typical interpretations are mistaken to claim that expressivism lacks a value ontology. Expressivism, for its part, makes claims about possibility or impossibility of describing values. Now, even though expressivism does not make direct claims about the existence or non-existence of values (as error theory does), it still presupposes a certain value ontology, specifically a negative value ontology.

This can be made clear through a certain consideration: would it be possible to be an expressivist and have a positive value ontology? Such a view would assert that values exist in an important way, but still deny that we can formulate justified judgments about these values. This is certainly a logically possible view to hold (and an interesting one), but it is certainly not the view that expressivists are trying to convey: expressivism is not arguing some fallibilist point about our inability to speak meaningfully about fully existent entities or properties. Expressivism says that we cannot meaningfully describe values because there are no such values to describe. The non-existence of values explains why value judgments express mere "excitations of feeling which do not necessarily involve any assertions" (Ayer 1952, 110): there is nothing there to assert anything about.

Therefore I think that, even though error theory is objectivist and expressivism is non-cognitivist, both share a negative value ontology. Moreover, this negative value

ontology is the *core* of both meta-ethical theories. Mackie admits as much of his theory

explicitly, and makes the first sentence of his *Ethics* the ontological judgment that "there

are no objective values" (Mackie 1977, 15). Ayer, for his part, says that "it is impossible

to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgments" because, lacking

"absolute validity which is mysteriously independent of ordinary sense-experience",

"they have no objective validity whatsoever" (Ayer 1952, 108). Since both of these

claims deny that values exist in a certain way (objectively), they are ontological

judgments. Moreover, both these ontological judgments are core components of these

nihilistic theories.

Thus I think that Mackie's emphasis on the importance of a negative value

ontology for error theory should be carried over into expressivism, and the commitment

to a negative value ontology understood as the core commitment of moral nihilism. This

is not to say that that any view with a negative value ontology is nihilistic. And of course,

much of nihilistic theories do not deal directly with ontological judgments, focusing

instead on semantic theories of value judgment. Nevertheless, I think that the core of a

nihilistic theories is an ontological judgment concerning the non-existence of values.

The epistemological and semantic judgments of objectivist, subjectivist, and non-

cognitivist strands are best understood as extensions of this core ontological

commitment. This shows that nihilistic meta-ethical theories are fundamentally

committed to a robust is/ought distinction.

Thus far I have introduced two distinctions between first-order ethics and meta-

ethics. First, first-order judgments are or entail axiological judgments containing a

dyadic value predicates, while meta-ethical judgments contain only descriptive

predicates. Second, the core commitment of meta-ethical theories is to a certain value

ontology[9] which, in the case of nihilistic theories, is a negative value ontology. These

two distinctions comprise a "modest" is/ought distinction that will be an important

component in the apparatus of this chapter. Within this distinction, value judgments are

semantically distinct from non-value judgments, and meta-ethical theories are distinct

from first-order theories because of their core ontological commitments.

5.B. Possible justificatory relations

In what follows I will characterize the justification of beliefs in terms of their

"acceptability". "Acceptance" is first meant as a technical term that is neutral between

cognitivist and non-cognitivist accounts of commitment to values. As Mark Kalderon

notes,

> As linguistic observation is the common ground between the cognitivist and the non-cognitivist,
> one might begin with it and see if moral commitment can be neutrally characterized in terms of
> what a competent speaker is committed to in accepting a moral sentence. The idea is that one
> might then determine, in a non-question-begging manner, the nature and content of the attitudes
> involved in moral commitment, by determining the nature and content of the attitudes involved in
> accepting a moral sentence. (Kalderon 2005, 3)

Following Kalderon, I use "acceptability" as a characteristic of meta-ethical theories,

namely that characteristic which belief holders cite in justifying their commitment to

these theories. In this sense, I will be more concerned with "the pragmatic relation

between utterance and attitude" than "the semantic relation between a sentence and a

proposition" (Kalderon 2005, 64); while examining the latter relation between expression

and semantic content puts one in the debate between cognitivists and non-cognitivists,

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[9] I could have argued for this more general formulation by considering the fundamental commitments of
non-nihilistic theories. For the sake of space, however, I have not done so. Nevertheless, my
consideration of nihilistic theories should be sufficient to suggest that his general formulation is plausible.
Importantly, even if the general formulation were not viable, the specific formulation would still hold for the
nihilistic theories that are the focus of my critique.

examining the former relation between utterance and propositional endorsement does not.

But acceptability is more than a technical term for meta-ethics. It also captures features of scientific theories that are important features of meta-ethical theories. Carl Hempel refers to various "aspects that affect the acceptability of a hypothesis", including coherence, simplicity, and other criteria (Hempel 1966, 33-41). In scientific theory choice, Hempel argues, the evidence in favor of hypotheses has to be weighed against these cognitive virtues. Treating meta-ethical theories in these terms unstiffens their component claims: by viewing them in terms of their acceptability we are brought to the fact that, like scientific theories, they are adopted as beliefs for more than their truth-value. If an incredibly complicated and unwieldy scientific theory were to be a little "more true" than an exceedingly elegant and simple scientific theory, we may be justified in choosing to adopt the latter theory over the former. Similarly, we may choose to adopt a more valuable meta-ethical theory in lieu of a "more true" one.

Now, what are the possible justificatory relations between first-order and meta-ethical theories? It seems to me that there are three ways this relation can be conceived: as an independence relation, a unilateral relation, or a bilateral relation.

1. Independence relation

First, the relation could be modeled as an *independence relation* in which first-order and meta-ethical theories are logically independent of one another. Nagel seems to hold such a view when he argues that,

> ...our claims about value and about what people have reason to do may be true or false independently of our beliefs and inclinations. No others kinds of truths are involved. Indeed, no other kinds of truth *could* imply the reality of values. This applies not only to moral values but also

> to prudential ones, and even to the simple reasons people have to do what will achieve their present aims. (Nagel 1986, 144)

Let's say that it is a deep meta-ethical truth that expressivism is true, that there are no objective values and that whenever we say "pleasure is good" we actually mean "hooray for pleasure!" Since expressivism is a theory about what we mean when we make value judgments, its theses are not about values themselves. As such the truth of expressivism does not concern truths about value. On Nagel's view, the meta-ethical truth of expressivism has no relevance to the acceptability of first-order theories, because only truths about values can imply the truth or falsity or first-order theories. I take Nagel to mean that only first-order truths justify axiological judgments; thus some meta-ethical truths (such as the non-existence of Platonic values) have no relevance to axiological justification. Nagel's implication seems to be that the acceptability of first-order theories is totally independent of any meta-ethical theories we may hold.[10]

Though they seem to be strange bedfellows, Mackie agrees with Nagel to some extent. Mackie argues that "first and second order views are not merely distinct but completely independent" (Mackie 1977, 16). He argues further that a meta-ethical theory "about the status of moral values and the nature of moral valuing, about where and how they fit into the world" is independent of all first-order theories that assert the value of actions or objects (16). Thus, for Mackie, the logical distinction between first-order ethics and meta-ethics might imply that "first order judgments are not necessarily affected by the truth or falsity of a second order view" (21).

Bearing in mind that first-order judgments are axiological and meta-ethical judgments are descriptive, the independence relation can be thought of as making two

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[10] That is, independently of all meta-ethical views besides Nagel's own meta-ethical view that holds that first-order judgments are logically independent from meta-ethical views.

claims: 1) only axiological judgments are relevant to the acceptability of first-order theories, and 2) only descriptive judgments are relevant to the acceptability of meta-ethical theories.[11] Since the independence relation allows for first-order ethics and meta-ethics to be logically isolated, each is self-contained. Thus the acceptability of a first-order or meta-ethical theory is function of its internal consistency. By internal consistency I mean the capacity of a view to be articulated soundly without producing logical confusions. For example, a meta-ethical theory consisting of the assertions that "value judgments claim objectivity", "there are no objective values", and "all value judgments are true" seems internally inconsistent.

    2. Unilateral relation

The second model conceives of the relation between first-order ethics and meta-ethics as a *unilateral relation*. By a unilateral relation I mean that one of the two kinds of ethics determines what is and is not acceptable for the other; either meta-ethical judgments affects the acceptability of axiological judgments, or vice versa.

It seems to me that, when philosophers have been willing to grant a unilateral relation between first-order ethics and meta-ethics, they have typically prioritized meta-ethics over first-order ethics. Mark Timmons characterizes this relation well. Using the language of the method of reflective equilibrium, Timmons characterizes the typical unilateral relation as an "independence thesis" (which unfortunately grinds against my own use of terms) in which "relevant background theories, sufficient for constraining a choice between competing moral systems, can be developed independently of moral considerations" (Timmons 1987, 607). Basically, the typical unilateral relation supposes

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[11] Perhaps Nagel and Mackie would not endorse this interpretation of their views. Regardless, the line of argument I have identified as running through (at least portions of) their work stands independently of the rest of their theories; the independence relation is indeed a logical possibility.

that meta-ethical judgments can, by themselves, provide sufficient grounds for supporting or rejecting certain first-order theories.

Mackie wavers somewhat between an independence relation and a unilateral relation. In what seems like an argument for a unilateral relation prioritizing meta-ethics over first-order ethics, Mackie says,

> ...it is quite true that it is logically possible that the subjective concern, the activity of valuing or of thinking things wrong, should go on in just the same way whether there are objective values or not. But to say this is only to reiterate that there is a logical distinction between first and second order values...but it does not follow, and it is not true, that there is no difference between these two worlds. In the one there is something that backs up and validates some of the subjective concern which people have for things, in the other there is not. (Mackie 1977, 22)

Here Mackie suggests that his negative value ontology has implications for the acceptability of first-order claims; despite the logical distinction between first-order ethics and meta-ethics, a world without objective values lacks something that warrants and validates axiological judgments. Specifically, Mackie seems to think that first-order ethics would be more warranted if there were objective values. As Mackie says, "it would make a radical difference to our metaphysics if we had to find room for objective values – perhaps something like Plato's Forms – somewhere in our picture of the world" (Mackie 1977, 24). This radical difference implies a radical difference in how we conceive and accept axiological judgments.

The notion that a radical ontological difference entails a radical difference in first-order acceptability presupposes the unilateral relation I am describing: the meta-ethical judgment that there are no objective values determines (at least partially) how acceptable first-order theories are. In this manner the typical unilateral relation amounts to three claims: 1) axiological judgments are relevant to the acceptability of first-order theories, 2) descriptive judgments are relevant to the acceptability of meta-ethical

theories, and 3) descriptive judgments are relevant to the acceptability of first-order theories.

I have argued that, when philosophers have accepted a unilateral relation between first-order and meta-ethical judgments, they have typically prioritized meta-ethics over first-order ethics. I think this generalization holds. There are, however, a few philosophers who accept a unilateral relation that prioritizes first-order ethics over meta-ethics. One such view is articulated by H.P. McDonald in *Radical Axiology.* McDonald argues that (analytic) value theory typically presupposes Aristotelian substance-attribute ontology, and as such tends to consider values as static essences that are the ultimate subjects of value predication. Considering the possibility that "values are not tied to being" (McDonald 2004, 145), McDonald argues that "first philosophy" should not concern being *qua* being (as Aristotle argued), but should instead concern value *qua* value.[12]

McDonald sees this radical unilateral relation as challenging certain presuppositions of meta-ethics as practiced in the analytic tradition, namely its "hidden value judgments about the use of language, for example that formal language was better, or scientific language is better" (McDonald 2004, 147). He argues that analytic philosophers dogmatically and uncritically accept these linguistic standards. McDonald sees radical axiology as undermining these standards by asserting the priority of first-order theories over meta-ethical theories. He argues,

> The epistemological 'validity' of values is not a question that can arise in a radical value philosophy, since knowledge must be justified itself as a value: it is consequent not ground. Subjects, objects, and all such metaphysical constructs are problematic for a radical philosophy of

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[12] A similar position is motivated by Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity.*

values; their value must be justified. They can hardly serve as a ground for value. (McDonald 2004, 146)

If knowledge claims are justified by value judgments, then axiological judgments are relevant to the acceptability of meta-ethical theories (and not the converse). In this way, radical axiology entails a radical unilateral relation.

The unilateral relation does not allow for first-order ethics and meta-ethics to be completely isolated because one is supposed to have justificatory significance for the other. Thus the unilateral relation adds to internal consistency an additional condition of acceptability: the subordinated theory must be externally consistent with the subordinating theory. If a theory *x* must be externally consistent with theory *y* to be justified, then *x* must be revised whenever *y* is revised. (What exactly this revision would constitute would depend on the demands of theory *y*). Thus in the typical unilateral relation, where first-order theories have to be externally consistent with meta-ethical theories, first-order theories have to be revised whenever meta-ethical theories are revised. Likewise, in the radical unilateral relation, meta-ethical theories have to be revised when first-order theories are revised.

3. Bilateral relation

The third conception and final model consists is of a *bilateral relation* between first-order ethics and meta-ethics. In a bilateral relation, both first-order ethics and meta-ethics play a role in determining what is and is not acceptable for the other. A bilateral relation between first-order ethics and meta-ethics admits the following: 1) axiological judgments are relevant to the acceptability of first-order theories, 2) descriptive judgments are relevant to the acceptability of meta-ethical theories, 3) descriptive

93

judgments are relevant to the acceptability of first-order theories, and 4) axiological judgments are relevant to the acceptability of meta-ethical theories.

Take, for example, the ontological judgment that "objective values exist". An axiological judgment of this judgment might be, "it would be better if objective values existed". The bilateral relation would admit that this judgment is relevant to the acceptability of a meta-ethical theory affirming or denying the existence of objective values. These kinds of axiological judgments are the logical equivalents of meta-ethical judgments such as "value judgments are systemically false". Thus there is no *prima facie* reason to deny that axiological judgments can have meta-ethical judgments as their objects in the same way that meta-ethical judgments can have axiological judgments as their objects.

Importantly, the bilateral relation is not a radical unilateral relation, meaning that the relevance of these axiological judgments to our ontological commitments can be offset by the relevance of descriptive judgments to our axiological commitments. Yet, unlike the other justificatory relations between first-order ethics and meta-ethics, the bilateral relation levels the playing field. Instead of privileging one side of ethics over the other, it allows for axiological judgments to have meta-ethical theories as their objects and for meta-ethical judgments to have first-order theories as their objects; it holds that "first philosophy" should concern both being *qua* value and value *qua* being. Thus within the bilateral relation, first-order and meta-ethical theories exhibit a form of "reciprocal justification".

Though the explicit object of my critique is the typical unilateral relation adopted by nihilistic theories, I hope implicitly to show that the bilateral relation should be

94

preferred to the radical unilateral relation as well. McDonald's unilateral relation, like that of the analytic metaphysics he criticizes, contains its own hidden value judgments. Radical axiology assumes that prioritizing axiological justification over ontological justification would be *more valuable* than any alternative. Perhaps such a set of priorities would be better than the converse set of priorities; maybe the radical unilateral relation is better than the typical unilateral relation. This, however, does not imply that the radical unilateral relation is more valuable than the bilateral relation. If the bilateral relation can perform all the activities that make the radical unilateral relation more valuable than the typical kind, while still granting ontological judgments relevance to axiological commitments, then the bilateral relation would be better than the unilateral relation. In this case, McDonald's own premises would compel him to accept the bilateral relation. Unlike the premises of radical axiology, the premises of typical analytic meta-ethics cannot compel an acceptance of the bilateral relation. I have therefore focused my energies on the more demanding task of *refuting* the typical unilateral relation, rather than the less demanding task of *amending* the radical unilateral relation.

5.C. Scientific theory choice

Since the work of Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, philosophers have accepted that even our most basic scientific judgments are revisable. Because of the persistent possibility of another paradigm shift like that which occurred between classical and quantum mechanics, we cannot say with certainty that any scientific paradigm will be the final scientific paradigm. This realization had drastic consequences for the field of "theory choice", which seeks to understand how we should choose between competing theories. Traditionally theory choice sought an objective

95

procedure that could determine the acceptability of a theory by considering only its formal consistency and the evidence in its favor. Rudolf Carnap, for example, spent the early 1950s trying to work out an *algorithm* for hypothesis-selection (Putnam 2002, 31). Kuhn's early work on the persistent revisability of scientific beliefs showed that formulating this kind of algorithm was impossible.

His later work bolsters this conclusion with a second line argument: value judgments play a fundamental role in choices between scientific theories. Kuhn points out that scientists may reasonably disagree about whether a) certain theories meet certain criteria, and b) whether satisfying certain criteria has greater weight than satisfying different criteria. This means that, even if two scientists were fully committed to the same list of criteria for acceptability, they may still wind up endorsing different theories. This persistent possibility is a product of certain subjective factors, namely, the scientists' individual value judgments about a) what constitutes certain criteria, or b) which criteria are more important for a theory to satisfy. Thus Kuhn argues that "every individual choice between competing theories depends on a mixture of objective and subjective factors, or of shared and individual criteria" (Kuhn 1977, 359). Or, as Putnam puts it: "theory selection always presupposes values" (Putnam 2002, 31). This is the deeper reason for persistent revisability.

Philosophers seem to have gotten over the idea of value-free science. By accepting that there cannot be an entirely objective procedure for choosing between competing scientific theories, philosophers have also accepted that value judgments play at least some role in scientific theory choice. It is striking that philosophers have not come around to similar views regarding meta-ethical theory choice. It seems to me that

96

much of meta-ethics still strives to be value-free, in the sense that each of its competing theories try to justify their theses without appeal to value judgments. This is certainly true of nihilistic theories.

I can imagine a scientist saying that it would be better to sacrifice a little accuracy for a little social utility, but I cannot imagine the error theorist or the expressivist saying something like this. In contemporary scientific judgment there is a space for subjective value judgment to influence acceptability, but there seems to be no similar space in meta-ethics. This is especially nonsensical considering that meta-ethics is clearly part and parcel of value theory, while science is not. I think that meta-ethics is guilty of a kind of chauvinism, in that it tries to say with certainty that a certain meta-ethical paradigm will be the final meta-ethical paradigm. This view entails a narrow conception of the acceptability of meta-ethical theories: justified meta-ethical theories are totalizing accounts that are not subject to revision. While science has generally overcome its attachments to this static view of justified belief, meta-ethics still clings to it. If hard-nosed nihilists wish to model ethics after science, they should adopt a less rigid conception of meta-ethical acceptability.

5.D. Reciprocal justification

It is important to note, however, that value judgments are not sufficient for any theory choice procedure. Kuhn argues that "values like accuracy, consistency, and scope may prove ambiguous in application, both individually and collectively: they may, that is, be an insufficient basis for a *shared* algorithm of choice" (Kuhn 1977, 362). This point carries over into meta-ethical theory choice: in incorporating value judgments into the criteria of acceptability for meta-ethical theories, we should not seek to justify meta-

ethical theories *solely* with value judgments. As in science, theory choice is about more than value judgment. Nevertheless, value judgments are still necessary for meta-ethical theory choice: value judgments are needed to pick out criteria of acceptability, determine the character of these criteria, and motivate subjective endorsement of these criteria. Thus in following scientific theory choice by incorporating value criteria, meta-ethical theory choice must recognize that value judgments are necessary but insufficient conditions for choosing between competing meta-ethical theories.[13] From this recognition it seems to follow that both the independence and typical unilateral relations are predicated on an erroneous judgment: namely, that choices between competing meta-ethical theories can be made independently of value judgments. First-order and meta-ethical theories, it seems, exhibit a kind of reciprocal justification that these relations fail to account for.

It might be objected, of course, that only *epistemic* values are necessary for theory choice. But in Chapter 4 I tried to show how, at the very least, the pragmatist need not accept a clear distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic values. I set up the category of value *simpliciter*, which subsumes all values, epistemic or otherwise. In the sense that axiological judgments contain or entail a judgment containing a dyadic value predicate, and thus establish a relation of value, I think that axiological judgments are properly understood as predications of value *simpliciter*. Thus, within the apparatus of this chapter, my claim is that axiological judgments are necessary for theory choice. In other words, theory choice requires that one be able to judge that a) it would be better to adopt a certain conception of what constitutes certain criteria, or b) it would be

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[13] In this sense, theory choice exhibits striking parallels with social choice theory, for which value judgments are necessary to choose between Pareto-optimal states but not sufficient to determine which states are themselves Pareto-optimal.

better to adopt theories meeting certain criteria over theories meeting other criteria. On my view, then, the independence and bilateral relations must be rejected on the grounds that they admit that axiological judgments are relevant to the acceptability of meta-ethical theories.

Having blurred the distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic values, however, I do not think that pragmatism must *also* blur the distinction between axiological and descriptive judgment. Though pragmatism rejects the orthodox distinction between fact and value, some have misinterpreted the character of this rejection. Dewey, for example, is thought to have argued that there is no significant difference between existential and axiological judgment (Axtell 1996, 193). As Hilary Putnam points out, however, Dewey sought throughout his work to attack philosophical *dualisms*, not philosophical distinctions (Putnam 2002, 10). The important point for pragmatism is a rejection of a dualism between fact and value that, like the mind-body dualism, seems to require a reduction of one to the other. This does not preclude, however, the possibility of a significant and useful distinction between fact and value. Thus pragmatism may adopt Putnam's "modest" fact/value distinction; on this view, "nothing metaphysical follows from the existence of a fact/value distinction" (Putnam 2002, 19), but it is nevertheless helpful to draw a distinction between facts and values (Putnam 2002, 9).

Ayer and the positivists are (in)famous for characterizing this as a metaphysical dualism with counter-intuitive implications. Expressivism itself is predicated on this dualism. And though he was no positivist, Mackie also made a substantial use of this distinction: as pointed out above, he argues that the core of a meta-ethical theory is an

ontological thesis concerning the existence or non-existence of values (Mackie 1977, 18). In this way, the ontological commitments of error theory show that it is also predicated on this distinction.

Instead of rejecting the distinction between value and non-value judgments outright, it would make more strategic sense for pragmatism to accept this distinction but insist on the category of value *simpliciter*. This allows for pragmatism to adopt the bilateral relation, wherein first-order and meta-ethical theories exhibit a kind of reciprocal justification. In this way, the acceptability of the core ontological commitments of a meta-ethical theory would be subject to value judgments. Specifically, these commitments could be rejected on the Deweyan grounds that they do not yield criteria for the justification of value judgments, and as such are less valuable than alternative meta-ethical theories. By arguing for this reciprocal justification via a *logical* distinction between descriptive and value judgments, my argument forces nihilism to defend its immodest fact/value distinction, which holds that the logical distinction has *metaphysical* implications. By appropriating the logical distinction, pragmatism can cut nihilism's strongest premise in half.

Chapter 6: Meta-ethical justification

This chapter presents a model of meta-ethical justification in which acceptable meta-ethical theories are products of a reflective equilibrium between first-order and meta-ethical beliefs and their axiological and descriptive component judgments. Only this position is consistent with a) my pragmatist premise, and b) the bilateral model of reciprocal justification that, as mentioned above, is the only justificatory relation between meta-ethical beliefs and axiological beliefs recognizing that value judgments are necessary for theory choice. I characterize this position as "quasi-coherentist" and argue that it clears away the possibly vicious circle established at the end of Part 1. I conclude that, within the quasi-coherentist picture of justification, nihilistic meta-ethical theories cannot be justified.

6.A. Method of reflective equilibrium

Both my pragmatist premise and the bilateral model of reciprocal justification seem to support a list-revision model of the criteria for justified beliefs: in such a model we do not start with *a priori* criteria of acceptability, but instead proceed from a provisional list of acceptable beliefs, altering and dropping beliefs as competing beliefs are pitted against those on the provisional list. On this view of meta-ethical acceptability, the justification of meta-ethical beliefs follows the "method of reflective equilibrium". This method, originally outlined by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*, has been the object of increased philosophical attention in the literature on ethical justification. Essentially, the method suggests that justification is produced through a process of belief selection in which sets of beliefs are adopted or discarded through comparison with other plausible sets of beliefs. As Norman Daniels characterizes it, "at every point, we are forced to

assess [beliefs'] acceptability relative to the theories that incorporate them and relative to alternative theories incorporating different considered moral judgments" (Daniels 1996, 28).

An equilibrium of justification is a state in which two beliefs or two sets of beliefs are entirely coherent and consistent with one another. A reflective equilibrium is a state of coherence reached through a process of reflection upon two sets of beliefs, where one considers the internal consistency of all beliefs and the external consistency of these beliefs with each other. Nelson Goodman first introduced reflective equilibrium in an attempt to justify inductive logic (and avoid problems like Hume's fork). Goodman argued that rules of induction should be accepted on the basis of their compatibility with accepted deductions, and that rules of deduction can likewise be accepted (or rejected) on the basis of their compatibility with accepted inferences.

John Rawls reworks Goodman's notion of reflective equilibrium in *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls argues that, in determining which principles of justice are and are not acceptable, we should employ a method in which we examine our notions of justice with certain "background theories". By broadening the set of beliefs under consideration to include background theories, he argues, better choices can be made between competing principles. In advocating his notion of "justice as fairness," Rawls wants his principle to compete with utilitarianism through just this method of reflective equilibrium. Importantly, Rawls argues that background theories include normative as well as non-normative judgments. His claims about justice are not founded on independently justified non-normative background theories; they are justified at least partially through their coherence with revisable normative judgments.

In *Justice and Justification,* Norman Daniels advocates a method of reflective equilibrium similar to that employed by Rawls. Daniels (among others) distinguishes between *narrow* and *wide* reflective equilibrium. A narrow reflective equilibrium exists between specific subsets of beliefs. In considering whether I should believe in God, for example, I might consider which of my other beliefs are relevant to belief in God; I would then revise various relevant beliefs in order to produce the most coherent subset of beliefs possible. A wide reflective equilibrium, on the other hand, entails a broadening of the beliefs under consideration to include *all* background theories. In the pragmatist bilateral relation I have advocated, a specific subset of beliefs needs to be brought into equilibrium: first-order ethical beliefs and meta-ethical beliefs. Thus I am more concerned with a narrow equilibrium involving certain background beliefs than a wide equilibrium involving all background beliefs.

In relation to moral judgments, Daniels defines a reflective equilibrium as "a coherent triple of sets of beliefs held by a particular person; namely (a) a set of considered moral judgments; (b) a set of moral principles; and (c) a set of relevant background theories, which may include both moral and nonmoral theories" (Daniels 1996, 81). The reflective method of then consists in considering (a), (b) and (c) by "advancing philosophical arguments that reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the competing sets of principles" (82). Particular sets of arguments "win" and are thereby justified. For my purposes, Daniel's (a) and (b) can be collapsed into the category of axiological judgments. Since Daniels is solely concerned with normative judgments, he only considers (a) and (b) to be moral judgments. In considering the bilateral model of justification, however, (a) and (b) can also be descriptive judgments. That is, both first-

order beliefs and meta-ethical beliefs can be considered and put into competition with background theories.

Either (a) and (b) could be an axiological *analysans* or an meta-ethical *analysans* (depending on which is under consideration). When an axiological judgment is picked out as an *analysans*, it is removed from the set of background theories for comparison. Similarly, when a meta-ethical judgment is picked out as an meta-ethical *analysans*, it is removed from the background. This is what allows for a bilateral model of normative justification: meta-ethical judgments are not permanently in the background (as assumed by the typical unilateral relation). Both axiological and meta-ethical beliefs may be picked out from the background to be *analysans*.

Daniels notes that (c) contains both moral and nonmoral theories; in the context of first-order ethics and meta-ethics (c) contains both axiological and meta-ethical beliefs. This implies that the background theories relevant to reaching reflective equilibrium contain both axiological and descriptive judgments. However, it is important to distinguish between the axiological background and the meta-ethical background. Both have relevance to whether an axiological or meta-ethical analysand is justified, but their relevance will be different depending on whether they are of the same category as the *analysans*. For example, the axiological background will have different relevance to the justification of an axiological *analysans* than the meta-ethical background will.

Daniels notes that "the acceptability of the theories in (c) may in part depend on some moral judgments [because] we are not in general assuming that (c) constitutes a reduction of the moral in (b) and (a) to the nonmoral" (Daniels 1996, 83). What is important about this claim is that axiological judgments may play a role in justifying parts

of the meta-ethical background. It would be trivial (or at least unsurprising) if axiological judgments played a role in justifying parts of the axiological background. The striking claim is that meta-ethical theories can (at least partially) be justified axiologically. Importantly, Daniels' focus on the moral is not due to a radical axiology; the claim of reflective equilibrium is not only that part of the meta-ethical background can be justified axiologically. It easily can (and should) admit that part of the axiological background can be justified meta-ethically.

This is all right in the line with the bilateral relation, which seems to entail exactly that that meta-ethical justification proceed by a method of narrow reflective equilibrium, where axiological and meta-ethical judgments are picked out and compared to both the axiological and meta-ethical background. I think this suggests that the critique of theory choice offered in Chapter 5 may offer a justification for adopting the method of reflective equilibrium. This is a substantial possibility because this method of theory justification has been critiqued by Peter Singer as an *ad hoc* and crudely intuitionist.[14] Moreover, examining the interrelation between these pragmatist, foundationalist, and Rawlsian positions may provide a "meta-justification" for the epistemic criteria used by the method. This is important because doubt has recently been cast on the possibility of such a meta-justification.[15]

6.B. Quasi-coherentism

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[14] Singer, Peter. 2005. "Intuitions, heuristics, and utilitarianism". *Behavioral and Brain Sciences.* 28 (4): 560-561.
[15] Kappel, K. 2006. "The Meta-Justification of Reflective Equilibrium".*Ethical Theory & Moral Practice.* 9(2): 131-147

The method of reflective equilibrium is typically thought to involve a coherentist theory of justification. Daniels argues that, unlike the method of reflective equilibrium, foundationalism is committed to intuitionism:

> reflective equilibrium as I have described it is not a standard form of moral intuitionism because it is not foundationalist. Despite the care taken to filter initial judgments to avoid obvious sources of error, no special epistemological priority is granted to considered moral judgments. We are missing the little story that intuitionist theories usually provide, explaining why we should pay homage to those judgments and indirectly to the principles that systemize them. Without such a story, we have no foundationalism and so no standard form of moral intuitionism. (Daniels 83)

It is interesting that, while Daniels critiques foundationalism as essentially intuitionist, Singer critiques the method of reflective equilibrium as essentially intuitionist. Fundamentally, however, it does not seem that either it tied to intuitionism. But that is beside Daniels' more general point. Daniels suggests that any view according "special epistemological priority" to a belief could not be compatible with the method of reflective equilibrium, and foundationalism is certainly such a view. The idea here is that a person following the reflective method would have, in a variety of circumstances, ample reasons to revise her moral judgments, principles and background beliefs. Since special epistemological priority entails non-revisability, it seems that any view endorsing such a priority (like foundationalism) is incompatible with the reflective method.

This argument resembles those which insist that pragmatism is also incompatible with foundationalism. William James liked to say that pragmatism "unstiffens" our theories by accepting full revisability (James 1907, 48). And, in fact, James seems to endorse a view of justification very similar to the method of reflective equilibrium:

> …in the choice of these man-made formulas we cannot be capricious with impunity… for our theory must mediate between all previous truths and certain new experiences. It must derange common sense and previous belief as little as possible… yet sometimes alternative theoretic formulas are equally compatible with all the truths we know, and then we choose between them

for subjective reasons… truth in science is what gives us the maximum possible sum of satisfactions, taste included, but consistency both with previous truth and with novel fact is always the most imperious claimant. (James 1907, 134)

Here James is insisting that a belief cannot be considered justified until its compatibility with previously verified beliefs is considered. This is why he qualifies his idea that we should believe the most valuable of possible beliefs with the rejoinder that these valuable beliefs should not clash with our "greater vital beliefs" (James 1907, 47). The insistence here is on a fully coherentist procedure of justification, wherein beliefs are justified only in relation to others. At certain points we even find James attacking the notion that our beliefs will ever settle into a "stable equilibrium" (James 1948, 160). Thus various pragmatists, such as Rorty (Rorty 1997, 87), have concluded that pragmatism is incompatible with foundationalism.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that some forms of foundationalism are compatible with both pragmatism and the method of reflective equilibrium. As Michael DePaul points out, "foundationalism and reflective equilibrium are not really positions on the same topic": while the reflective method is a "heuristic device for organizing our moral beliefs", foundationalism is an "account of the epistemic status of our beliefs" (DePaul 1986, 68). The idea here is that, just because a belief is considered foundational, this need not imply that it is favored during attempts to bring beliefs into equilibrium. If a conflict arises with this belief it will most likely win out, but that is not due to it being foundational; it is due to the fact that the person following the method is more strongly committed to it. Importantly, a foundational belief may lose out in the method of reflective equilibrium. And almost more importantly, this does not imply that the belief is not itself foundational.

This is important because I have, through pragmatism, advocated both axiological foundationalism and the method of reflective equilibrium. I think that my weak axiological foundationalism is compatible with the reflective method specifically because its foundational value, evaluation, is not considered axiologically substantial. Thus it does not imply that there are any specific values that cannot be revised through the method. Moreover, it allows new values to enter the picture and play a role as *analysans* that can eventually be incorporated into the axiological background. Its only restriction is that the method *must* use value judgments in its revisions: under my weak foundationalism, the only non-revisable principle is that any *analysans*, whether axiological or meta-ethical, must be compared against the axiological background. Thus my foundationalism excludes precisely the possibility that pragmatism and the reflective method seek to reject: that we might determine which axiological judgments and theories to accept entirely on the basis of non-axiological considerations.

In this sense my combination of foundationalism and the reflective method results in a "quasi-coherentist" picture of justification. First, value systems have a foundational structure, and all value judgments are justified via the foundational value of evaluation. This determines both the nature of axiological *analysans* and the axiological background. Coherence with other axiological and meta-ethical judgments is therefore a necessary condition for an axiological judgment to be justified, but it is not sufficient: the judgment must also be based on the value of evaluation. Since the axiological background is also relevant in justifying meta-ethical *analysans*, this has implications for how meta-ethical theories are justified. In this way, first-order and meta-ethical theories

exhibit the reciprocal justification unique to the bilateral relation. But what is the relation between quasi-coherentism and reciprocal justification?

In *Reciprocal Justification in Science and Moral Theory*, James Blachowicz argues for an "epistemological dualism" committed to neither foundationalism or coherentism (Blachowicz 1997, 449). Harkening back to Goodman's original argument for the method of reflective equilibrium, Blachowicz suggests that, when a "reciprocity exists between two qualitatively distinct grounds for justification", a "basic *duality*" between the two grounds is preserved (451). This duality, he argues, is glossed over by coherentist attempts to avoid the weaknesses of foundationalism. Blachowicz thus argues that the method of reflective equilibrium should endorse a "double foundationalism", wherein different justificatory grounds possess different kinds of epistemic priority (456). However, as he notes, foundationalism is typically thought to "preclude such a sharing of power", so he adopts the term "reciprocal justification" instead of "double foundationalism". Blachowicz argues that Daniels' distinction between a judgment as an *analysans* and a judgment as a principle enriched by background theories requires exactly this kind of epistemological dualism and model of reciprocal justification (460). Moreover, it is a virtue of this dualism that it does cede a monopoly to principles enriched by background theories.

While Blachowicz's model of reciprocal justification is predicated on a double foundationalism, my model of reciprocal justification is predicated on a single foundationalism. This is partly a function of the fact that Blackowicz is considering the wide method of reflective equilibrium while I am considering the narrow method. It is also partly a function of my own use of weak axiological foundationalism, which allows

value systems to have a foundational structure without tipping the justificatory scales in favor of value judgments; while Blackowicz allows for reciprocal justification by balancing out the scales with two substantial foundationalisms, I allow for reciprocal justification by denying that my one foundationalism has anything but formal implications. Thus, while Blachowicz's conception is neither foundationalist or coherentist, mine is best understood as quasi-coherentist: meta-ethical theories are justified entirely through the coherentist method, with their internal consistency and external coherence with first-order theories constituting justification; first-order theories, on the other hand, have a foundational structure, but are nevertheless partially justified through their external coherence with meta-ethical theories.

There is a certain advantage for pragmatism in adopting this quasi-coherentist picture of justification instead of the fully coherentist picture. Consider the following objection to pragmatistic coherentism made by Bertrand Russell. In relation to James' notion that beliefs with valuable consequences are true beliefs, Russell argues that,

> you must hold that your estimate of the consequences of your belief, both ethical and factual, is true, for if it is false your argument for the truth of your belief is mistaken. But to say that your belief as to consequences is true is, according James, to say that *it* has good consequences, and this in turn is only true if it has good consequences, and so on *ad infinitum*. (Russell 1945, 817)

The problem is that, for a belief to be true, it must have good consequences; but then in order to call a belief true, one must consider that one's judgment concerning its good consequences is true; but then, this judgment concerning good consequences must itself have good consequences, and so on. My axiological foundationalism ends this infinite regression by making one directly justified in asserting that it is more valuable to evaluate. Thus by mixing this axiological foundationalism into its theory of justification,

and thereby adopting a quasi-coherentist model of reciprocal justification, pragmatism is saved from what is an otherwise embarrassing objection.

Moreover, this quasi-coherentist picture of reciprocal justification clears away the possible vicious circle established at the end of Part 1. There I argued that we should accept the addition of a "meta-value" to our ontology on the grounds that it would be more valuable to adopt belief in this entity than to deny its existence. But the basis of the greater value was the notion that evaluation is a directly justified value, and I could only establish the direct justification of this value if the meta-value was admitted to our ontology. This is clearly circular: both elements play the role of justifying and justified. But my claim is that this is not a vicious circle; it is a virtuous one. The possibility of a virtuous circle is made clear only within the model of reciprocal justification.

In relation to the reciprocal relation between deduction and induction, Goodman argued that "deductive inferences are justified by their conformity with general rules", and that "general rules are justified by their conformity to valid inferences"; this, he pointed out, is "flagrantly circular", but argued that "this circle is a virtuous one" (Blachowicz 1997, 450). Similarly, within my quasi-coherentist picture of reciprocal justification, the ability to bring an axiological and a meta-ethical judgment into mutual agreement and reciprocal support is a virtue of a theory. To some, this kind of agreement may seem an especially weak requirement for justification. But to the pragmatic temperament it is sufficient for acceptability. The real question for the pragmatist, as my consideration of James brought out, concerns which of the many acceptable beliefs would be the most valuable for us to hold.

6.C. Refuting moral nihilism

Any view that denies the validity of value judgment cannot consider itself more valuable than the views that affirm the validity of value judgment. As Nozick argues,

> The view that denies the existence of value cannot claim to be equally good, for it recognizes no notion of goodness according to which it is equal… on the other hand, the view that affirms value is able to rank itself as better than the view that denies it. (Nozick 1981, 559)

One might respond that, nevertheless, nihilistic theories are true. But the nihilist cannot claim that "it is better to be true, or better to believe the truth" (559). Since nihilism cannot make justified claims concerning what would be better to believe, and I have argued that such claims are directly valuable, nihilism is necessarily less valuable than a theory that can make justified claims about what it would be better to believe. From the pragmatist premise that we should believe the most valuable of possible beliefs, it then follows that we should not believe nihilistic theories. And, importantly, nihilism cannot claim against my pragmatist premise that meta-ethical beliefs should be justified independently of axiological judgments: the critique of meta-ethical theory choice in Chapter 5 entails that meta-ethical justification proceed via a method of reflective equilibrium in which first-order and meta-ethical theories exhibit reciprocal justification.

1. Mackie's error theory

Error theory must be concerned with ignoring a certain conceptual distinction: that between the claim that value judgments are systemically false and the different claim that we should not accept these value judgments. Mark Kalderon points out that, "moral acceptance might be moral belief, and such beliefs might be systemically false, but it might not follow that we should abandon those beliefs or suspend judgment concerning them" (Kalderon 2005, 103). In fact, error theory cannot derive the latter conclusion: error theory cannot say anything specific about what it would be *better* for us to believe because this would be an axiological judgment, and error theory denies

their validity! The fact that it does not follow from the fundamental thesis of error theory that we should accept error theory points to Nozick's point from above: theories denying the validity of value judgments cannot say anything about what we should or should not do, not even that we should or should not embrace them as theories.

The second crux of Kalderon's objection is that it does not follow from the argument for the systemic falsity of value judgments "that it is rationally permissible to believe only true propositions", namely because "the epistemic value of truth might be outweighed in a given circumstance by some nonepistemic value" (Kalderon 2005, 104). Kalderon suggests that, even if error theory were true, we may nevertheless be justified in adopting an alternative theory on the grounds of a non-epistemic value. I want to take this further by saying that the epistemic value of error theory is *necessarily* outweighed by considerations of value *simpliciter*: for, as mentioned above, a theory denying the validity of value judgment cannot make *any* justified claims about what would be more valuable. And since I have argued in Part 1 that justified claims about what would be more valuable are themselves directly valuable, it seems that error theory is necessarily a less valuable theory than a non-nihilistic theory.

In pragmatically construing truth and justification, however, I have tried to steer clear of the fictionalist implications of Kalderon's argument. I have argued that the justification of belief is not merely a matter of epistemic value, but is a matter of value *simpliciter*. In this sense, where an epistemic value is outweighed by another value, we would be justified in adopting the more valuable theory, but this would not mean that it was not *true*. Instead, the truth of a belief is a function of its value, not *just* its epistemic value, as Kalderon presupposes.

This is related to Mackie's "argument from relativity", which holds that the lack of moral agreement in the world provides evidence for the thesis that there are no objective values (Mackie 1977, 36). The basic idea here is that, if there were moral truths, then there would be some degree of inter-subjective agreement on them. As Daniels points out, however, such a standard of truth would have ruled out scientific truths at many points in history (Daniels 1996, 34). Daniels thus argues that the method of reflective equilibrium, which is meant to produce such justifications, "is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for claiming we have found objective moral truths"; but he does suggest that convergences attained through the method "may constitute *evidence* we have found some" (35). I bring up Daniels' point in order to further sever the reflective method from any metaphysical claims concerning objective values: the point of the method is to show which sets of beliefs are *feasible* (36), not absolutely and irrevocably acceptable. This means that the method can produce reciprocally justified and feasible sets of first-order and meta-ethical beliefs without presupposing any thesis which Mackie thinks the argument from relativity refutes.

2. Ayer's expressivism

The same kind of objection that Kalderon raises in regards to error theory can be raised in regards to nihilistic expressivism: it does not follow from the thesis that value judgments are not truth-apt that it is rationally permissible to believe only truth-apt propositions. As with error theory, this points to the inability of a theory to tell us what we should or should not do, including endorse its own propositions. Thus with my argument that justified claims about what would be more valuable are themselves

114

directly valuable, expressivism (like error theory) is less valuable than non-nihilistic

theories.

There is another dimension to Ayer's expressivism that further affects its value:

the claim that it is "impossible to dispute about questions of value" (Ayer 1952, 110).

From this claim it does not follow that we should not dispute about questions of value,

but if it turns out that we should, how does expressivism help us? The short answer is, it

does not. This is important because Dewey's emphasis on the value of evaluation, a

Jamesian ethics of belief, and the method of reflective equilibrium all show how it is

valuable to engage in ongoing processes of evaluation. This should also be kept in mind

as another way that non-nihilistic theories are more valuable than expressivism: they

provide the conceptual tools necessary to dispute about questions of value.

Conclusion

With an axiological ethics of belief, theories can be accepted or rejected on the basis of their relative value. Further, Deweyan foundationalism entails that any theory which precludes the possibility of justifying value judgments is less valuable than a theory offering criteria of evaluation. Together, these two views imply that the greater value of value-justifying theories warrants a rejection of nihilistic theories. Moreover, my critique of meta-ethical theory choice argued that first-order and meta-ethical theories exhibit reciprocal justification. Since within this quasi-coherentist picture all theories must be justified against the axiological background, nihilistic theories cannot appeal to an independence or unilateral relation for justification.

As Nietzsche notes, "insofar as we believe in morality we pass sentence on existence" (Nietzsche 1967, 10). The upshot of the myriad considerations of this thesis is that, contrary to the claims of moral nihilism, it would indeed be better for us to pass sentence on existence than to opt out of passing judgment at all. If Nietzsche is right that moral nihilism is merely a logical consequence of our conception of moral evaluation, then what this thesis proposes is a radical reconstruction of this conception. Moreover, this thesis proposes that, whatever the weaknesses of a given reconstruction of evaluation, we may hold steadfast to the claim that we are justified in all such projects of reconstruction. Thus, regardless of the tenability of individual propositions herein, I think this thesis outlines the basic commitments necessary to undermine moral nihilism.

The most important and simultaneously least technical argument of this thesis is that we should choose that there be value. I hope that rest of the thesis has provided, or at least pointed toward, the epistemic tools needed to build a meta-ethics around this

fundamental commitment to value.

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