

Against Moral Intuitions

*Peter Singer's Arguments Against The Use Of Moral Intuitions In Moral
Methodology*

Eivind Kirkeby



Masteroppgave i filosofi, Institutt for filosofi, ide- og kunsthistorie og klassiske
språk (IFIKK), Humanistisk fakultet

Veilder: Christel Fricke

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Mai 2009

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor Christel Fricke for her feedback, and for always trying to steer me onto the right track (though whether or not she succeeded is debatable), and for putting together and leading a master's thesis discussion group of philosophy students which I participated in. Thanks to all the members of this group for all their valuable input on various drafts of this thesis: Andreas Eriksen, Bjørnar Hagen, Sanna Harma, Reidar Myse, and Lise Storm. Thanks to Jakob Elster and Øistein Schmidt Gallen for hosting their class *Evolutionary, experimental and neuroscientific approaches to morality and free will* Autumn semester 2006, and for organizing the conference *Neuroethics and Empirical Moral Psychology* Spring semester 2007 together with Lene Bomann-Larsen and Carsten Hansen, both of which introduced me to the empirical research done on moral intuitions and Peter Singer's view on moral methodology. Thanks to Brad Hooker for supplying me with an unpublished manuscript by Peter Singer. Thanks to fellow student Mathias S. Sagdahl for commenting on an early draft of parts of the thesis, and for many a discussion on philosophy. Last, but not least, thanks to my parents for their financial support.

In the preface to the book *Singer And His Critics*, Dalie Jamieson comments that "Since most of us produce so few books and there are so many worthy people to acknowledge, I believe that all books should have dedications." I believe the same holds true for an MA thesis. Therefore I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of Mike Wieringo.

May 2009

Eivind Kirkeby

Contents

Chapter 1 – AGAINST MORAL INTUITIONS

Introduction	5
--------------	---

Chapter 2 – ARGUMENT I: THE SUBJECTIVISM ARGUMENT

Introduction	8
John Rawls's Reflective Equilibrium Methodology Of Ethics	9
Peter Singer's Criticism Of Rawls's Reflective Equilibrium - The Subjectivism Argument	13
Henry Sidgwick's Axiomatic Methodology Of Ethics	18
John Rawls's Original Position And The Veil Of Ignorance As Sources Of Objective Validity	24

Chapter 3 – ARGUMENT II: THE EVOLUTION ARGUMENT

Introduction	29
The Research Of Joshua Greene: Runaway Trolleys	30
The Research Of Jonathan Haidt: Julie And Mark	33
The Evolution Argument	38
Reason As An Escalator	39
The Deity, The Demon, And Evolution	41
Rational Intuitions?	42

Chapter 4 – ARGUMENT III: THE PARTIALITY ARGUMENT

Introduction	46
Impartiality, And The Partiality Argument	47
Does Peter Singer Make The Partiality Argument?	51
Jean Piaget: The Three-Mountain Problem	52

CHAPTER 5 – TOWARDS AN ETHICAL SOCIETY

Introduction	55
--------------	----

Peter Singer's Moral Methodology: The Top-Down Approach To Ethics	56
The Top-Down Method In Action: "Famine, Affluence, And Morality"	60
Intuitions As Invaluable Tools	64
Reason As An Invaluable Tool	67
Philosophers As Moral Authorities, And The 'Danger' Of Paternalism	68
Esoteric Morality	69
The Importance Of Talking Ethics In Public	71
Summary And Concluding Remarks	73

CHAPTER 1

AGAINST MORAL INTUITIONS

Peter Singer's Arguments Against The Use Of Moral Intuitions In Moral Methodology

INTRODUCTION

Every day we make judgments about morally appropriate and what is morally wrong. Often these judgments just seem to come to us, like immediate gut feelings. We may feel a strong, immediate repulsion and disgust if we see children torturing some animal. But do these gut feelings about what is appropriate and inappropriate, these moral intuitions, actually provide us with valid information about morality?

According to philosopher Peter Singer, they don't.

Peter Singer is possibly the most controversial currently living moral philosopher, having caused outrage among many due to his views on topics such as euthanasia, abortion, and animal rights. He is an outspoken preference utilitarian, arguing that the right thing to do in any situation is that action which would maximize preference satisfaction. He has spoken against devoting time and resources to topics in normative philosophy devoid of real practical consequences, believing that doing moral philosophy is to decide how we ought to live and should have real consequences as to how we lead our lives. He also tries living by his own moral tenets, having been arrested for demonstrating for the rights of animals, and he is known for donating 20% of his income to charities.

The main aim of this thesis is to try to find out why Singer is against moral intuitions, looking at and trying to understand his arguments. And if we can't rely on our intuitions to tell us what's morally right from wrong, what other method of doing so do we have?

First I will be looking at the subjectivism argument against the use of intuitions, mainly focusing on the paper “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, published in 1973. In this paper he argues that the methodology of influential political philosopher John Rawls, dubbed reflective equilibrium, makes ethics subjective as it relies too heavily on actual human intuitions, as well as rebuking Rawls’s claim that famed utilitarian 19th century philosopher Henry Sidgwick is a proponent for this method. The latter is of less interest for the purposes of this thesis.

Then I will be looking at the evolution argument against intuitions, focusing on Singer’s paper “Ethics And Intuitions” from 2005. In this paper Singer wishes to show that recent research in neuroscience, combined with an evolutionary understanding of the history of the human species, gives us reasons to be sceptical of using intuitions in ethics.

Then in the next chapter, I will be suggesting a third possible argument against intuitions, an argument which Singer has never made explicitly but which almost seems implicit in some of his work, and which may be tested empirically to some extent. This argument I call the partiality argument, arguing that intuitions are rooted in a form of partiality.

Finally I will try to point out some of the possible consequences of Singer’s rejection of intuitions in the light of our previous reflections. Here Singer’s own moral methodology will be made explicit and demonstrated, the top-down methodology, serving as an option to relying on our moral intuitions. It will also be pointed out that intuitions may actually be morally helpful, but Singer’s strong emphasis on reasoning could in theory pave way for paternalism and esoteric morality.

A few notes need to be made before we proceed. First of all, when we are talking about whether or not we ought to use our moral intuitions, we are, in this thesis, referring to the methodological level as opposed to the practical level. Morality deals with the world as it is, including our intuitions, and these intuitions should certainly be taken into consideration together with all other empirical facts, when a moral theory is put into practice. In some cases, our intuitions may make it so that it will be impossible to fully implement a certain moral theory. But can the intuitions disprove the moral theory itself? So the relevant question is whether the fact that we have certain intuitions as to whether something is morally right or wrong proves that it in fact is morally right or wrong, and that any theory which goes against our intuitively based judgments must be invalid.

Whenever I talk of intuitions, and of right and of wrong, I will, unless otherwise is stated, be speaking of them in reference to morality. I will also not seek to define what morality is in this thesis, separating moral norms and oughts from other non-moral norms and oughts; that task would surely be a separate (and worthy) project in and of itself. Instead I will try to rely on our common of what morality is, and how the term is normally used in academic discussions. But to give a brief and tentative definition, morality is the question of how we ought to live our lives, in particular how we ought to conduct ourselves as members of a community consisting of other people similar to ourselves, and what duties (if any) we have to our fellow humans (or animals).

I will also be using the words ethical and moral, and their variants, interchangeably throughout this thesis; they will all refer to the same basic concept.

CHAPTER 2

ARGUMENT I: THE SUBJECTIVISM ARGUMENT

“SIDGWICK AND REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM”

“We cannot test a normative theory by the extent to which it accords with the moral judgments people ordinarily make.”

Peter Singer, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”¹

INTRODUCTION

In the paper “Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium” Singer sets out to show that philosopher Henry Sidgwick does not use political philosopher John Rawls’s method of reflective equilibrium, as Rawls himself claims in his book *A Theory of Justice*². However, Singer states that “my concerns are not limited to refute a few peripheral sentences of *A Theory Of Justice*”³, instead aiming to ask and reflect over a more fundamental question altogether, namely: what method of doing moral philosophy is the correct one? His conclusion in this paper is that Rawls starts with an outright incorrect account of what moral philosophy is about, in turn giving rise to an incorrect moral methodology, and that it would be preferable to use the method that Sidgwick favours. In this section my goal is to locate and in the process try to explain his argument against Rawls’s method as phrased in “Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium”, which, as we shall see, amounts to an overall argument against the use of intuitions in ethics.

¹ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 515.

² Note that Peter Singer is using and quoting the first edition of *A Theory Of Justice*, not the revised edition. At the time, the revised edition had not yet been published. I will be quoting and referring to the revised edition.

³ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 491.

Singer's paper consists of four sections (not counting the introduction), divided by Roman numerals. In section I Singer seeks to define Rawls' method of reflective equilibrium; in section II he looks at the evidence that Sidgwick also uses this method and refutes it; in section III he tries to make explicit what exactly Sidgwick's preferred method is; and in section IV, he concludes by comparing the two methods. It is in section I and IV where we can most clearly see his arguments against Rawls's methodology. Let us start by trying to define and explain Rawls's methodology, looking at both what Singer himself says and at excerpts from *A Theory Of Justice*.

JOHN RAWLS'S REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM METHODOLOGY OF ETHICS

Most people will have, under normal circumstances, a certain moral capacity, by which is meant the ability to judge something morally good or bad, or just or unjust.⁴ We are on a daily basis presented with situations that elicit this capacity, and examples of this are plenty. When watching the news we may find ourselves appalled when we hear about a certain violent episode, or we may find it less than fair when we hear of people getting offered jobs due to their social relations or their having a certain gender or race, or perhaps we're frustrated when a motorist has parked in a way we believe shows little consideration for others. People are not only highly social but highly judgmental creatures; most every day some people are the object of our judgment, as we judge whether their actions have been right or wrong with the greatest ease.

This moral capacity serves as a starting point for Rawls's approach to moral philosophy, and it plays an important part in his moral methodology, dubbed *reflective equilibrium*. As he states in *A Theory Of Justice*: "[O]ne may think of moral philosophy at first (and I stress the provisional nature of this view) as the attempt to describe our moral capacity"⁵. However, for Rawls's reflective equilibrium, not all of our everyday moral judgments are relevant: only *considered judgments* are relevant. Considered judgments are, says Rawls, "those judgments in which our moral capacities are most likely to be displayed without distortion."⁶ So apparently what we are looking for are those judgments which best represent our undistorted moral capacity.

⁴ Singer, Peter, "Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium", p. 491.

⁵ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 41.

⁶ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 42.

As Singer puts it, this means that we must “exclude judgments made without real confidence, or under stress, or when we may have been swayed by undue consideration of our own interests.”⁷ So a snap judgment made in a heated situation is not a considered judgment, and one may not be able to make a considered judgment in a case involving the murder of one’s child, to give a somewhat grisly example. Considered judgments are then judgments without any of the mentioned irregularities (and there may be other irregularities than those mentioned), and it is these that best represent our moral capacity.

Looking at what has been said so far, is the correct moral theory or moral principles those which best match, or *describe*, our considered judgments? Not quite. Rawls admits, “considered judgments are no doubt subject to certain irregularities and distortions despite the fact that they are rendered under favorable circumstances.”⁸ Since these judgments are not perfect and may be distorted, we must be prepared to revise or discard certain considered judgments, as he goes on to explain:

“When a person is presented with an intuitively appealing account of his sense of justice (one say, which embodies various natural and reasonable presumptions), he may well revise his judgments to conform to its principles even though the theory does not fit his existing judgments exactly. He is especially likely to do this if he can find an explanation for the deviations which undermine his confidence in his original judgments, and if the conception presented yields a judgment which he finds he can now accept.”⁹

He then goes on to introduce the idea of reflective equilibrium:

“From the standpoint of moral philosophy, the best account of a person’s sense of justice is not the one which fits his judgments prior to his examining any conception of justice, but rather the one which matches his judgments in reflective equilibrium. As we have seen, this state is one reached after a person has weighed various proposed conceptions and he has either revised his judgments to accord with one of them or held fast to his initial convictions (and the corresponding conception).”¹⁰

So Rawls’s reflective equilibrium is both a process and a state we reach; the process consists of inspecting, revising and discarding our considered judgments and our moral principles in conjunction to one another, and the state is reached once we have a certain harmony – or equilibrium – between the two: our principles support our judgments and vice versa, and we have few if any situations in which they conflict with one another. These principles would then, presumably, be “the best account of a person’s sense of justice”. The theory of

⁷ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 492.

⁸ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 42.

⁹ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 42-43.

¹⁰ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 43.

utilitarianism could be one such principle to be tested against one's considered judgments. The utilitarian principle might seem intuitively appealing at first glance, but it is no great secret that strict, classical utilitarianism leads to a number of actions few would be willing to accept. The theory would, most likely, clash with enough of our considered judgments to be discarded, or the theory could be kept but revised into a considerably less strict form of utilitarianism – perhaps some form of rule utilitarianism. I say this with some confidence as Rawls uses much of *A Theory Of Justice* to discuss and combat the strict utilitarian principle, showing it to be incompatible with our considered judgments.

Singer goes on to give the following explanation of Rawls's methodology of reflective equilibrium, comparing it to that of science:

“Thus Rawls's view is that a normative theory is like a scientific theory. As in science, the aim of the theory is to explain all the data; but, also as in science, if a promising theory conflicts with only one or two observations, the observations may be jettisoned and the theory retained, rather than the other way around. In science this is achieved by introducing additional hypotheses, or assuming that an instrument was faulty, or some disturbance overlooked; in moral theory, what was previously thought to be a considered moral judgment may after all have been a result of distorted thinking, and so may be explained away. In both cases, although there are no “brute” facts, there are facts, and the successful theory is the one that provides a plausible systematization of them.”¹¹

So just as in science, a normative theory is to be tested against certain data, and if the data appears to go against the theory one can discard the theory, or revise the theory or add to it so that it matches the data, or put the data aside for now – the data may have been the result of some as of yet unknown distorting factors and the theory may perhaps be strongly supported by other data, so some minor discrepancies may be ignored.

For example, imagine that we have a scientific theory stating that things fall downwards and not upwards.¹² We may test the theory by letting objects fall from our hands: we may lift up a book, and then let it fall. It should fall to the ground, thus supporting our theory. However, what if we pick up a ball instead, and let it fall? It may bounce some after being dropped, actually not only going downwards but also upwards. Is this compatible with the theory? Or imagine dropping a feather, and a gust of wind catches it, raising it high up, carrying it out of our line of sight; as far as we can see, it never even hits the ground. These observations could lead us to discard the theory as faulty, now having some data which we may believe conflict

¹¹ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 493.

¹² I admit my ignorance when it comes to the natural sciences, so this should not be taken as good science.

with it. However, the theory may seem to be roughly right, matching much of our everyday experiences when it comes to falling items. So we may try to test the cases again in which the falling objects seem to defy the theory, trying to determine any factors that are present, and revising the theory in light of the new data we gather; ‘objects fall downwards, except when they have a certain structure and weight and a gust of wind of a certain strength hits the object at a certain angle’. In the end we may end up with a more complex and accurate theory.

An interesting question which Singer then asks is whether “the fact that a moral theory matches a set of considered moral judgments in reflective equilibrium, to be regarded merely as *evidence* of the validity of a theory, or is it then to be valid *by definition*”¹³. So if we have achieved reflective equilibrium, is the theory we then have simply the one which is the *most likely* to be correct, or does the fact that it has achieved an equilibrium with our considered judgments *make it* the correct theory by definition? Singer believes the latter to be correct, stating that “Rawls has left no room for any idea of validity that is independent of achieving reflective equilibrium.”¹⁴ A curious point, which Singer does not make, is that this appears quite *unscientific*, if science is the model we are to aim for in ethics if we use reflective equilibrium; in science, the fact that the theory matches our observations does not make the theory correct by definition, but only gives evidence for it and the theory may yet turn out to be false.

But, what is the relation between considered judgments and intuitions? Considered judgments are something different than intuitions, but intuitions make up a part of them. We may intuitively feel that killing is wrong, and we may make a snap judgment based on this that killing indeed is wrong. This would then not be a considered judgment, but if we were to reflect over our intuitively made judgment under the ideal conditions for such endeavors, i.e. if we were to seriously and coolly consider it, we may end up with a fully considered judgment. This in turn is used to achieve reflective equilibrium and may end up as being one of the building blocks for a normative theory. So our initial, raw and impulsive intuitions may, in a way, provide leverage for or against a theory, but there are certain obstacles in the way (or more accurately, two: that of surviving being coolly considered, and thereafter that of surviving the process of reflective equilibrium) which, if it manages to get through them, may render the initial intuition into something unrecognizable when comparing it to the raw intuition we started out with.

¹³ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 493.

¹⁴ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 493.

PETER SINGER'S CRITICISM OF RAWLS'S REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM – THE SUBJECTIVISM ARGUMENT

Now that we have explained Rawls's methodology, let us look at Singer's criticism of this method. His most fundamental point against Rawls seems to be the following:

“[...] Rawls is a subjectivist about morality in the most important sense of this often-misused term. That is, it follows from his views that the validity of a moral theory will vary according to whose considered moral judgments the theory is tested against.”¹⁵

And he immediately continues with the following elaboration of his claim:

“There is no sense in which we can speak of a theory being objectively valid, no matter what considered moral judgments people happen to hold. If I live in one society, and accept one set of considered moral judgments, while you live in another society and hold a quite different set, very different moral theories may be “valid” for each of us. There will then be no sense in which one of us is wrong and the other right.”¹⁶

Singer does not here give a definition of subjectivism independent of Rawls's theory, so it is initially difficult to fully grasp what is meant by subjectivist. A crude and well known form of subjectivism is to interpret all moral judgments as really being nothing but statements of one's own attitudes. According to this form of crude subjectivism, when you are making a claim like ‘Killing is wrong’ you are really saying something akin to ‘I disapprove of killing’. In other words, when you are making a moral judgment you are really just giving your personal opinion on the matter, and your judgments are to be interpreted as nothing more than statements of what you personally approve or disapprove of.

This form of subjectivism runs into a problem which proves fatal for the theory. Let's say a certain person says just this, that ‘Killing is wrong’, when another person comes along and says ‘Killing isn't wrong’. The two persons, plainly, disagree on whether killing is or isn't wrong. Now, if we were subjectivists in the fashion just described, we would interpret the person saying ‘Killing is wrong’ as really saying ‘I disapprove of killing’ and the person saying ‘Killing isn't wrong’ as really saying ‘I do not disapprove of killing’. The result is that the two people no longer disagree, as the crude subjectivist interpretations of their moral judgments turn these judgments merely into claims about their attitudes; they aren't claims about whether killing is or isn't wrong, but simply claims about their own attitudes as to

¹⁵ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 494.

¹⁶ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 494.

whether killing is or isn't wrong. In such a world there would be no real moral disagreements, but it is obvious that there really are moral disagreements and that such disagreements must be possible. From the standpoint of this form of subjectivism, no such disagreement could be possible. There are therefore few (if any) philosophers who subscribe to this form of subjectivism and it does not seem to be what Singer here is claiming Rawls to be, either.¹⁷ Still, this has given us an idea of what subjectivism may entail.

If we look at the first chapter of Singer's book *Practical Ethics*, he there devotes a few pages to the topic of subjectivism. This discussion is found under a section entitled "What ethics is not", which is certainly a good indication that Singer believes subjectivism should be altogether avoided in ethics. Unfortunately his discussion of it is brief and vague and no clear definition of it is given, the closest being the following: "[subjectivism] makes ethical judgments depend on the approval or disapproval of the person making the judgment[.]"¹⁸ He then proceeds with briefly sketching and defeating the crude form of subjectivism, as we did above, before mentioning other philosophers who may be called subjectivists but who give more sophisticated and plausible accounts of how exactly moral judgments should be interpreted – specifically he mentions C. L. Stevenson, R. M. Hare, and J. L. Mackie. Though it is unclear whether Singer is saying that these philosophers are actually subjectivists or simply people who have interesting accounts on how moral judgments are to be interpreted and give viable options to crude subjectivism. (It is then difficult to see whether the stated definition is purely for crude subjectivism, or if it applies to most or all forms of subjectivism, including the case at hand, i.e. how the claim that Rawls is a subjectivist is to be interpreted.)

Singer also contrasted subjective with objective: "There is no sense in which we can speak of a theory being objectively valid" he said, and we may find some further clarification if we look to what is meant by objective. A philosophy dictionary gives it the following definition: "The belief that there are certain moral truths that would remain true whatever anyone or everyone thought or desired."¹⁹ So if we are objectivists in regards to ethics, whether killing is wrong does not depend on how I feel or think about the matter, what my attitudes are and whether I approve or disapprove; it's true or false independently of me as an individual.

¹⁷ This was a rough sketch of the argument, and it leaves open the question as to what moral judgments really are and how moral disagreements arise and resolve.

¹⁸ Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics*, p. 6.

¹⁹ *A Dictionary Of Philosophy*, p. 391.

The same dictionary does unfortunately not have an equally concise definition of what subjectivism entails. Philosopher Simon Blackburn however gives us the following brief definition of subjectivism from his book *Ethics – A Very Short Introduction*, saying that it entails “that each individual has his or her own truth.”²⁰ Combined with the above quoted definition from Singer, that “[subjectivism] makes ethical judgments depend on the approval or disapproval of the person making the judgment”, and the above contrast to objectivism, an idea of what subjectivism is should be starting to form. If we are subjectivists in regards to ethics, our feelings and beliefs about killing may very well affect whether or not it’s wrong. In a way, the measure of validity becomes internal if we take on a subjectivist stance; the claim that something is right or wrong must be measured against the subject itself making the claim. If we take on an objectivist stance instead, the measure of validity becomes external; whether or not something is right or wrong must be measured against something that is not relative to the individual.

So if we are objectivists, there is a standard of right and wrong and what people believe or feel on the matter does not affect the standard. If we are subjectivists, what people think and feel matters and is what decides what right and wrong is.

Many volumes have been written on the topics of objectivism and subjectivism, and there are many nuances and variants of these two stances. So it is not clear cut exactly what they refer to and entail, but the above rough sketch should give us an idea of what exactly we’re dealing with here and what it is Singer is accusing Rawls of.

So how exactly is Rawls a moral subjectivist? As stated, Rawls does not seem to adhere to crude subjectivism: moral judgments are claims as to what is actually right and wrong, and cannot be interpreted as ‘I approve / disapprove of...’ statements. But let us see what Singer is saying here: “it follows from [Rawls’s] views that the validity of a moral theory will vary according to whose considered moral judgments the theory is tested against.”²¹ As we have seen, the process of reflective equilibrium consists of testing our moral theory or principles against our considered judgments, which are judgments made under certain conditions in which they are not distorted, and the theory is to be revised or discarded in light of our considered judgments just as these considered judgments are to be revised or discarded in light of the theory. However, Singer is saying, considered judgments may vary from person to

²⁰ Blackburn, Simon, *Ethics – A Very Short Introduction*, p. 25.

²¹ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 494.

person, and consequently may lead to different moral theories: “If I live in one society, and accept one set of considered moral judgments, while you live in another society and hold a quite different set, very different moral theories may be “valid” for each of us.”²²

Given this, if the method we are to use in moral philosophy is that of reflective equilibrium, i.e. achieving a state in which our principles coincide with our considered judgments, it would seem possible to start with quite a preposterous set of considered judgments, and in turn end up with a state of equilibrium which may seem quite immoral to most people. It may be that brutish dictators and street thugs have a fine equilibrium, having managed to get their considered judgments to coincide with certain principles, but both their considered judgments and their principles are so that most would find them to be repugnant, recommending things most would say are clearly immoral, and which would be judged immoral according to most moral theories. But, if we are to interpret Rawls this way, such people would actually be quite moral indeed.

If it seems implausible that someone could really achieve reflective equilibrium with plainly immoral considered judgments and principles, one could consider the possibility of brainwashing – an activity which specifically cults are infamous for subjecting people to (and perhaps, some may claim, various mainstream religions or religious organizations and institutions, the media, and even the governing body of a nation). Through brainwashing, could one not create such a plainly immoral reflective equilibrium in someone? Of course, the question remains as to what happens when such a person is presented with a certain moral theory which most find appealing, and is asked to consider it. Could one be convinced, or would the effect of the indoctrination prevail? But as presented, the method does not require us to be exposed to any specific moral theories for us to be able to achieve reflective equilibrium.

Similarly, it may be claimed that we actually all have the same considered judgments (we may just need to be able to reflect over our judgments *cooly* enough), and so we would not really end up with two or more theories which would be equally valid. To this point, Singer gives the following reply:

“Even if everyone shared the same considered moral judgment, this would only mean that a theory might have intersubjective validity: it would not make for objective validity. People might have judged differently, and then a different moral theory would have been “valid”.”²³

²² Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 494.

As with subjectivism, he does not make it as explicit as to what he means by intersubjective to the extent we may have liked. In the above example, everyone have the same considered moral judgments – mine would be the same as yours – and the validity of a theory is here fixed to several persons rather than just one person. So for a theory to be intersubjectively valid, it must presumably be able to achieve reflective equilibrium with *everyone*. (Though I am unsure whether some form of consensus is needed for intersubjective validity, or if a majority would be sufficient.) It could be claimed – perhaps optimistically – that this would be the case if simply everyone thoroughly thought through their judgments and various moral theories. But even if this could be achieved, Rawls’s method of reflective equilibrium still creates validity; whether or not we all believe it doesn’t seem to matter.

So, the standard which gives validity to a moral theory is still subjective, and it could have varied. However, this possible variation is not quite where the subjectivism seems to lie. The fact that two people can make conflicting moral judgments may *seem* to be the problem, but many utilitarians make conflicting moral judgments and presumably this does not mean that these utilitarians are subjectivists. For, it is not just that reflective equilibrium may result in different moral judgments and theories, but that these judgments and theories would all be equally valid, as stated above, and it might be here that the claimed subjectivism of the reflective equilibrium arises.

But, one may ask, what if we were to interpret Rawls differently? What if we were to say that the method and process of reflective equilibrium merely gives evidence for the validity of a theory, but that the process does not itself make it valid? Would the theory still be subjectivist? It would still rely heavily on intuitions though, which Singer says may be remnants from “discarded religious systems” or “warped views of sex and bodily functions”²⁴ and which could vary from person to person. In a way, it would then be subjectivist in regards to the evidence it accepts, using our intuitive moral judgments as data, but objectivist in that the actual validity is not decided by this evidence. In practice, however, it seems it would matter little as the same conclusion would be reached.

It is difficult to say whether or not this theory would then still be subjectivist, but Singer points out the following:

²³ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 494-495.

²⁴ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 516.

“We have all been making moral judgments about particular cases for many years before we begin moral philosophy. Particular views have been inculcated into us by parents, teachers and society – telling the truth, not stealing when we have the opportunity to do so, and so on. These judgments sink deep, and become habitual.”²⁵

So when we use our considered judgments as data, or our particular judgments of intuitions or common sense morality or what one wished to call it (which all are different from one another but all catch the same meaning that is relevant for this case), testing theories against them, then if a conflict arises odds are usually stacked against the theory. The theory must be discarded, and our indoctrinated norms prevail. It is difficult to see how any moral progress could be had if one used such a method, which I will have more to say about later in this chapter.

HENRY SIDGWICK’S AXIOMATIC METHODOLOGY OF ETHICS

In part III of his paper, Singer seeks to explicitly explain what Sidgwick’s method actually is. Sidgwick naturally enough gets mentioned throughout the paper though, and we find bits and pieces that shed light on his methodology throughout the other parts as well. The main aim of Singer’s paper has been to showing how Sidgwick is not – and in part how he could be confused as – a supporter of any kind of reflective equilibrium model of ethics. So what exactly is the method that Sidgwick himself endorses, and what is it that makes a moral theory valid? Here Singer states: “The short and simple answer is [...] he is an intuitionist.”²⁶

This may initially seem absurd after we have seen Singer’s argument against Rawls and the use of intuitions qua considered judgments and the high regard Singer shows for Sidgwick throughout the text. Even in the concluding part of his paper, part IV, where he pits Rawls and Sidgwick more directly against one another, he lambastes Rawls for using intuitions. Let’s try to see if and how this makes any sense.

When trying to make explicit Sidgwick’s method, Singer states: “We begin with the search for “real ethical axioms - intuitive propositions of real clearness and certainty” (ME, p. 373)”²⁷. We are then looking for something that is self-evidently true, a proposition which neither requires nor can be given any further proof than the stating of the proposition itself,

²⁵ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 516.

²⁶ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 509.

²⁷ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 510.

which will serve as an axiom in our ethical theory. And in the concluding part of the paper Singer states that Sidgwick's method is to "search for undeniable fundamental axioms; build up a moral theory from them"²⁸. What does this amount to?

A good analogy is that of the famous 17th century philosopher René Descartes's famous treatise *Meditations On First Philosophy* in which he tries to arrive at what he can know with certainty. Everything he knows can be doubted, even the realness of the perceived world – it may be that he is just dreaming or that there's some evil entity distorting his mind. So everything is cast into doubt. But he cannot doubt the fact that he doubts, and when he doubts he is in fact thinking, and thinking cannot happen without the existence of the thinker. So he famously concludes: "*I am, I exist*"²⁹, popularly re-stated as the Latin phrase *cogito ergo sum*, which roughly translates into English as 'I think, therefore I am'. Thus he has secured his own existence with a self-evident proposition, a statement he can't doubt no matter how hard he may try and which neither can nor need be supported by any further proof. He uses this as an axiom to help establish or deduce the existence of the rest of the world (though this part of the argument is more dubious); so he starts by discrediting everything he thought he knew, before finally arriving at some fixed point that remains, on which everything else must be based if we are to have some certainty in our knowledge. In a way, one is trying to find the smallest and purest building block possible, untainted by everything else, and which then must be used to build everything else. In the case of Descartes, what he was trying to build was certain or reliable knowledge – to be confident that circles really are round, that the objects we see really are there, etc. No small task. What moral philosophers seek is 'merely' to arrive at certain or reliable knowledge regarding what is right and wrong, though our focus here is on *how* this is to be done – the method we are to use when doing ethics.

We seem to be facing the same process with Sidgwick's method: to find out what is right and wrong we must find some moral axiom, some proposition which seems self-evident, and self-evidence seems to be something one perceives or experiences *intuitively*, and hence why Sidgwick can be called an intuitionist. Such a principle is often referred to as a *first principle*, as it is the principle that all subsequent principles and all knowledge within the relevant field must be derived from.

²⁸ Singer, Peter, "Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium", p. 517.

²⁹ Descartes, René, "Meditations On First Philosophy", p. 17.

As the method was just presented above in regards to Descartes, it may seem as if we're really looking for *the* axiom, a single self-evident first principle, but it is possible to find and operate with several equally valid first principles to serve as axioms within an ethical theory.

Sidgwick himself arrives at three such axioms, according to Singer. The first of these Singer presents as an axiom of impartiality, namely that if we judge for something to be right in our own case we must also judge it to be right for all relevantly similar persons in all relevantly similar cases.³⁰ The second is an axiom of prudence, which Singer says "is the idea of impartial concern for all parts of our conscious life, so that we do not prefer a smaller present good to a greater future good, once any difference in the certainty of gaining the good has been taken into account."³¹ So we must aim at what is best for ourselves totally, and not just (for example) what is good for us temporarily in the present – drinking substantial amounts of alcohol is a good example of this, which may be 'good' right now, but the future pain of a hangover and the possible economic loss and other bad consequences may outweigh this immediate good. The third and final axiom is another axiom of impartiality, stating that one must aim at good generally rather than a particular part of it as a rational agent.³² This means that one should not always aim at what is good for oneself rather than something that would be good for someone else; that is, one should not act selfishly.

Singer does not go into detail as to how these axioms were arrived at or how they were argued for, but if they are to be self-evident then no such argument may be necessary. But are the above three proposed axioms really self-evident? The last axiom may seem the least convincing (or the least self-evident); why should we not only be concerned with and aim at our own good? But Singer briefly argues and clarifies that if we were to act so as if to only consider our own interest, our own good, we would not be acting morally; would we say that someone acting in such a fashion, only aiming at his own good, was acting morally? No, we would rather say that he was selfish.³³ Both Singer and Sidgwick seem to admit that an essentially selfish person is a hard (if not impossible) nut to crack when it comes to motivating him to act morally, as he will not be convinced by any self-evident moral principles to change his behavior.³⁴ Sidgwick's axioms as here presented aren't arguments for

³⁰ Singer, Peter, "Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium", p. 510.

³¹ Singer, Peter, "Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium", p. 510.

³² Singer, Peter, "Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium", p. 511.

³³ Singer, Peter, "Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium", p. 511-512.

³⁴ They also seem to be agreeing that the selfish person commits no error of logic when he chooses to be selfish rather than moral, and that such a person consequently may be called fully rational. This makes the nut not only hard to crack, but hard to comprehend, explain and accept for any ethicist if one believes that the morally right is the ultimate and absolutely right. Can it be equally right to be both selfish and to act selfishly, or being moral and

morality per se, but rather principles within the sphere of morality; if we wish to be moral we must follow them, but if we have no such desire then they hold no real sway over our behavior, self-evident as they may be; knowing the rules to a game doesn't make it necessary that we actually choose to play the game.

Now there are some obvious questions and difficulties which arise to such a method. Here I will address a few.

One question is whether or not utilitarianism, both Sidgwick and Singer's normative theory of choice, is such a self-evident moral axiom or if it is merely supported by such axioms. Are actual moral theories themselves axioms, or do the theories consist of one or more axioms? In the concluding chapter of the paper, Singer states that Sidgwick's method is to "search for undeniable fundamental axioms; build up a moral theory from them"³⁵, so it seems the latter would be the case. However, it depends on how one defines a moral theory: can a single principle, such as the greatest happiness principle, be considered a moral theory; or does one mean by moral theory some larger account detailing things such as practical application and implications, possible sub-principles deduced from the axioms and how they interact, how the moral axioms themselves are to be interpreted, and so forth? If moral theories were reducible to nothing more than a handful of intuitively self-evident propositions, works on moral philosophy would be awfully short. There are many kinds of utilitarianism, act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism being well known variations, and they all operate with the greatest happiness principle as the core.

Another question is how we can know whether or not a proposed moral axiom really is correct – may we not be mistaken, even if it seems at the time to be self-evident and undoubtable? Indeed we can, and one such check against error is what is here referred to as *common sense morality*, meaning the sum of our overall everyday judgments and norms – what most of us feel and believe is right and wrong. Singer states:

"Sidgwick had a great deal of respect for common sense morality. He refers to it as "a marvelous product of nature, the result of long centuries of growth." At the same time, Sidgwick was sufficiently skeptical of his own primary method of testing the truth of moral theories – which was, as we shall see, based on the alleged self-evidence of certain ethical axioms – to realize it was fallible. Accordingly, he looked to common sense morality as a safeguard against error. If an apparently self-evident moral

acting morally? For an interesting discussion of this problem, see Mathias Sagdahl's thesis *Why Follow Norms?* on normative pluralism, printed Spring 2008 at the University of Oslo.

³⁵ Singer, Peter, "Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium", p. 517.

principle has consequences at odds with common sense morality, this should be a warning to us that we may be mistaken in our intuition of self-evidence.”³⁶

This does seem a bit odd, given what has already been mentioned; for exactly why should we rely on such everyday intuitions that undoubtedly make up much of common sense morality? Especially since, as we have seen, these are likely to be a product of “discarded religious systems” or other apparently outdated and irrelevant views. Singer provides us with a lengthy Sidgwick quote from an article published in 1879 entitled “The Establishment Of Ethical First Principles”, where this is somewhat, but perhaps not satisfyingly, clarified. Here is an excerpt of this quote, where Sidgwick explains why common sense morality should be appealed to when using his axiomatic method: “it [...] excludes all such error as arises from the special weaknesses and biases of individual minds, or of particular sections of the human race.”³⁷

So by looking to how people ordinarily judge, it may help counteract any possible weaknesses and biases we may have. (It is tempting to compare it to a library, the common sense morality being a collection of books we may utilize to fill any gaps in knowledge we may have.) It is still difficult to see how this would work. Presumably we may learn new facts, be exposed to new perspectives and principles by tapping this resource, which in turn may affect our intuition about the *self-evidence* of a proposed self-evident moral axiom. But could not also the effect be a negative one, for example making us doubt a proposed self-evident moral axiom which is actually true? Or the effect could be nil, not changing our views or feelings in regards to the principle – which would be bad if it turned out to be false, and good if it turned out to be correct.

One way to solve this would be to simply claim that if the principle really is true, then no matter how far we dip into the pool of common sense morality, our belief in the principle will remain. If our belief in the principle disappears after we resurface, we can simply conclude with certainty that it was no real moral principle.

A more fundamental question though, is how we are to find these moral principles which are to serve as our axioms in the first place. No definite answer seems to be given here, other than simply *thinking* – using one’s rationality and thinking critically – which may not be as helpful an answer as we would have liked. It doesn’t seem impossible that some amount of luck is

³⁶ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 507-508.

³⁷ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 508.

involved as well in finding these first principles, as we may accidentally stumble over them when reflecting, which doesn't sound like an appealing way to do moral philosophy.

But Sidgwick now seems strikingly similar to Rawls: we have certain principles which we make our axioms, and they are to be tested against our judgments, i.e. our common sense morality. One difference is certainly the notion of considered judgments, which might exclude much of what is to be found in common sense morality, but more importantly is the question of validity, as Singer explains:

“Common sense morality, representing as it does the accumulated experience of mankind, is a useful check on our intuitions of self-evident moral axioms; but even when it is in harmony with our own intuitions we may after all be mistaken. It is this possibility [...] that marks the distinction between the two authors – for on Rawls's view, one could not even make sense of such a possibility. For Rawls, reaching this kind of harmony is the goal of moral philosophy; it is the definition of “valid” as far as moral theories are concerned; for Sidgwick, it is the best possible insurance against error, but because our target is a moral theory that is true, and not merely in harmony with our intuitions and with common sense morality, we may still be in error.”³⁸

So one of the main differences between the two seems to be their views on moral validity: according to Rawls (or at least Singer's reading of him), the outcome of the method of reflective equilibrium is a moral theory that is necessarily valid. The outcome of Sidgwick's method, however, is a theory that aims at validity, but may or may not be valid.

So now we're instead left with a striking difference between the methods of Rawls and Sidgwick as presented here which I wish to make explicit. According to Sidgwick's method we may always be wrong in our moral judgments; it may be that our moral axioms aren't valid first principles after all, or that there are other first principles which in effect could lead to a different moral theory and therefore different moral judgments, and so forth. But when we use Rawls's method, we are always right in our moral judgments. By harmonizing our considered judgments with our principles, what we achieve is a valid moral theory. It may later change as we are exposed to certain principles or as certain judgments arise, in which case we need to go back and forth again between our considered judgments and our principles until equilibrium is reached. But, it does not seem, at least not from our discussion of the method, that this equilibrium is any more or less valid than the previously achieved equilibrium was. There is then no real moral progress to speak of, only moral change. This would be unlike Sidgwick's method, in which our goal is to get closer to that which is truly

³⁸ Singer, Peter, “Sidgwick And Reflective Equilibrium”, p. 509.

moral and any theory which is closer to this is more valid or closer to being valid than one which isn't. We may initially hold a certain moral theory to be true, but we're later presented with an axiom that is incompatible with the theory so we discard it and adopt one which is compatible, and this may happen again and again, theories discarded as we come into the realization of certain axioms. Presented in this way, Sidgwick's method may seem like the preferable one, but neither seem to fully satisfy: for if we follow Rawls's method then we can never be wrong, but if we follow Sidgwick's we can never quite know whether we are right or wrong and it seems difficult to measure exactly how far we are from the truly moral in our theory. So our choice seems to be between knowing we are always right, or knowing we may always be wrong.

As we recall, Singer chided Rawls for comparing ethics to science and for promoting a method of ethics with many similarities to the scientific method. But, a curious point worth noting is that Sidgwick's method, in a way, now seems closer to the ideal of science than Rawls's method did. In science, after all, we try to arrive at what is really true, and we like to believe that progress within the field of science brings us closer to this goal. This is also what's happening with Sidgwick's method: we gain knowledge, we discover new principles or find out that previous principles were not correct after all, and we presumably (or hopefully) get closer to devising a moral theory that is as correct as it can be.

Singer does not explicitly say whether or not Sidgwick's method is the method of doing ethics which he favours, only stating that it is the better method of the two presented in this paper, but it is clear from Singer's other writings and arguments that this is his method of choice. This method, in its modern incarnations, is often referred to as the deductive or top-down method of doing ethics, and we shall revisit it in the final chapter of this thesis, also trying to illustrate how it works in practice.

JOHN RAWLS'S ORIGINAL POSITION AND THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE AS SOURCES OF OBJECTIVE VALIDITY

One idea of Rawls that Singer doesn't mention in his paper, is that of the veil of ignorance, which is an important part of *A Theory Of Justice*. These are novel methodological ideas which are worth looking into, and then we can see how the case against Rawls looks then.

The aim of *A Theory Of Justice* is to arrive at the principles of justice that we would accept as being the basic structure of our society.³⁹ These principles of justice are to be chosen from what Rawls refers to as *the original position*, which is equivalent to the state of nature in used by the classic contractual thinkers; a hypothetical state of affairs in which all men are equal, rational, and self-interested. Rawls's original position is behind what he calls the veil of ignorance.

In the original position, also called the initial situation, we do not know where we will end up in the society that we are deciding the principles of justice for. In fact, we do not have access to any contingent information regarding ourselves, such as what talents we possess, what we like and dislike, our character traits, and what we would deem as being a good life. As Rawls states: "The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance."⁴⁰ To explain these odd restrictions, he immediately adds: "This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances."⁴¹ This means that, while behind the veil of ignorance, we would not be able to formulate any principle which would specifically benefit ourselves, which we may otherwise be tempted to do, as we simply would not be able to do so. For example, if I knew that I had a particularly high IQ I might want to promote some principle that would make life as good as possible for those with high IQs. Or if I knew that I was wealthy, be it as a result of my own hard work or sheer luck, I would perhaps want the wealthy to be taxed as low as possible. But, we do not know whether we are wealthy or have a high IQ when behind the veil of ignorance. Ergo, we are not able to formulate any principles that benefit us over any others.

While we do not have access to information about such contingencies behind the veil of ignorance, we do have access to *general* information. This includes general facts about human society, human psychology, politics, and economics. Rawls writes: "Indeed, the parties are presumed to know whatever general facts affect the choice of the principles of justice."⁴² So presumably we would then know the basics in regards to the various religions as well as sexual orientations, and we might keep in mind that we could end up belonging to any religion and having any sexual orientation when choosing the principles of justice for society.

³⁹ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 11.

⁴¹ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 11.

⁴² Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 119.

It should be noted that the principles of justice do not make up an all-encompassing theory of ethics, as Rawls makes explicit: “we should recall here the limits of a theory of justice. Not only are many aspects of morality left aside, but no account is given of right conduct in regard to animals and the rest of nature. A conception of justice is but one part of a moral view.”⁴³ So the theory presented says little about topic of, say, abortion, animal rights, or other oft-debated areas of applied ethics, and it does not tell us what we ought to do in any given situation. Of course, though the principles of justice are of limited scope, the underlying methodology of reflective equilibrium may still be used as the basis of a more complete, all-encompassing ethical theory – and perhaps the same goes for the idea of an original position behind the veil of ignorance.

To reach his description of the original position and the veil of ignorance, Rawls imagines that he has gone through a process of reflective equilibrium in order to describe it, while not actually going through it in writing.⁴⁴

But why is the idea of the original position needed when we have the method of reflective equilibrium? Could we not simply use this method when trying to arrive at the principles of justice? Rawls gives the following justification: “It represents the attempt to accommodate within one scheme both reasonable philosophical conditions on principles as well as our considered judgments of justice.”⁴⁵ It seems then that it is a sort of short cut or a helpful tool, designed to let our sense of justice more easily come through; rather than going through the method of reflective equilibrium directly to arrive at the principles, which would no doubt be a tiresome and difficult affair, we try to take on a certain point of view which is (presumably) easier to grasp and apply. It seems that we, in a way, use reflective equilibrium to arrive at a description of the original position in which we do not have to directly use reflective equilibrium anymore.

In Chapter IX of *A Theory Of Justice*, section 78 is entitled “Autonomy And Objectivity”, which is worth looking into considering Singer’s claim that Rawls turns out to be a moral subjectivist and not an objectivist. In this section Rawls discusses the concepts of autonomy and objectivity in relation to the broader theory he has explored throughout. He writes:

⁴³ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 448.

⁴⁴ “I shall not, of course, actually go through this process. Still, we may think of the interpretation of the original position as the result of such a hypothetical course of reflection.” Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 18-19.

“The idea of the initial situation is central to the whole theory and other basic notions are defined in terms of it. Thus acting autonomously is acting from principles that we would consent to as free and equal rational beings, and that we are to understand this way. Also, these principles are objective. They are the principles that we would want everyone (including ourselves) to follow were we to take up together the appropriate general point of view. The original position defines the perspective, and its conditions also embody those of objectivity: its stipulations express the restrictions on arguments that force us to consider the choice of principles unencumbered by the singularities of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. The veil of ignorance prevents us from shaping our moral view to accord with our own particular attachments and interests. We do not look at the social order from our situation but take up a point of view that everyone can adopt on an equal footing. In this sense we look at our society and our place in it objectively: we share a common standpoint along with others and do not make our judgments from a personal slant. Thus our moral principles and convictions are objective to the extent that they have been arrived at and tested by assuming this general standpoint and by assessing the arguments for them by the restrictions expressed by the conception of the original position.”⁴⁶

So it seems then, according to Rawls, that whatever principles we arrive at when hypothetically situating ourselves at the original position, would be objective. We do not arrive at the principles from our own viewpoint, but rather a viewpoint that is accessible to all others equally. If we are to agree to this, it would seem that Rawls may avoid Singer’s subjectivism accusation, now that we have added in the idea of the original position and the veil of ignorance; ethics becomes more than judgments based on one’s individual psychological past or personal inclinations, but is rather judgments arrived at from a certain position equally valid for all others who’ve taken up the same stance.

However, as we saw, Rawls said: “The idea of the initial situation is central to the whole theory and other basic notions are defined in terms of it.” And later he adds: “It is clear that this interpretation of autonomy and objectivity depends upon the theory of justice. The idea of the original position is used to give a consistent rendering of both notions.”⁴⁷ And as mentioned above, the original position and its veil of ignorance are something we arrive at through reflective equilibrium.

In short, it seems that Rawls’s conception of objectivity is something that one arrives at through his original position, and the original position and its veil of ignorance is given its description through the process of reflective equilibrium, and it is through engaging in this process that intuitions, and thus also subjectivism, creeps in; our considered judgments are used as data to give rise to the original position which in turn gives rise to the idea of

⁴⁶ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 453.

⁴⁷ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, p. 454.

objectivity. His definition of objectivity is perhaps also too bound to his own theory; as he phrases it, it appears that objectivity is achieved specifically by using the original position idea that he has sketched. It then makes no sense to speak of other theories as even aspiring to any objective validity. Additionally, the way he explains that the original position results in objective validity for the principle of justice reached, it sounds more like an explanation of intersubjective validity, which we looked into earlier – principles being valid by reference to several individuals rather than just one.

Though this may sound like a harsh verdict (and more could no doubt be said in regards to his conception of objectivity), Rawls's method and his overall ethics is certainly appealing for many reasons. It promotes agreement and critical thinking, and it manages to set up a certain safeguard against frivolous, impulsive, and perhaps just plain dumb opinions being taken seriously with his idea of considered judgments. The idea of the veil of ignorance may be a helpful mental tool for avoiding that our own selfish tendencies affect our judgments and actions. The method of reflective equilibrium may perhaps also seem more human and based in reality than a search for any self-evident principles to help guide our lives, taking its starting point in our actual moral capacity, ultimately treating morality as a social and cultural phenomenon. Thus whether we prefer Rawls's method, or something more similar to Sidgwick's method as presented here, may ultimately depend on how we view morality as an enterprise.

CHAPTER 3

ARGUMENT II: THE EVOLUTION ARGUMENT

“ETHICS AND INTUITIONS”

“There is little point in constructing a moral theory designed to match considered moral judgments that themselves stem from our evolved responses to the situations in which we and our ancestors lived during the period of our evolution as social mammals, primates, and finally, human beings.”

Peter Singer, “Ethics And Intuitions”⁴⁸

INTRODUCTION

Moral philosophers are not the only ones who have made morality their business; morality is also the business of moral psychologists. But unlike philosophers, psychologists are looking specifically at the human mind and the brain. Instead of wanting to find out what is morally right and wrong, they instead seek to study how humans develop the capabilities to reason and judge morally, and the cognitive processes behind moral judgment. Especially with the various technological advances, such as the development of the fMRI machine, some exciting new research in the field of moral psychology is being done.

In Peter Singer’s more recent paper “Ethics And Intuitions”, published in 2005, he again argues against the use of intuitions in ethics. Here he retreads some old ground, again referring to Rawls and holding up his reflective equilibrium method as both a misguided and ultimately dangerous way of doing ethics. But rather than arguing that using intuitions leads to subjectivism, he makes the claim that some recent research within moral psychology makes

⁴⁸ Singer, Peter, “Ethics And Intuitions”, p. 348.

a new case as to why intuitions should be dismissed. This argument I will be dubbing *the evolution argument*.

In this chapter I will first look at and explain this new research Peter Singer bases his argument on,⁴⁹ before proceeding to examine his actual argument and how he believes this research makes a case against intuitions. For this part the focus will naturally be on the relevant paper mentioned above, but I will also look to both older and newer writings by Singer for some clarification in regards in to his argument.

THE RESEARCH OF JOSHUA GREENE: RUNAWAY TROLLEYS

Trolley problems or dilemmas are well known moral dilemmas in moral philosophy, introduced by philosopher Philippa Foot in her paper “The Problem Of Abortion And The Doctrine Of Double Effect” from 1967⁵⁰, and many different variants of these dilemmas have since been created and discussed. The classic trolley dilemma is as follows: There is a runaway trolley heading down a pair of tracks on which five people are walking. If the trolley continues down the tracks, these five people will be killed by the trolley. As the trolley heads down the tracks, you are situated next to a switch which you can pull to make the trolley head down a different pair of tracks instead. However, on this other track there is a single person. He will be hit by the trolley and die if the switch is pulled. You have no way in which to warn any of the people on the tracks or to stop the trolley. Should you pull the switch? I shall refer to this dilemma simply as the trolley dilemma.

There is another version of this dilemma, which will be referred to as the footbridge dilemma. As with the original trolley dilemma, there is a runaway trolley heading down a pair of tracks on which there are five people who will be killed if the trolley follows its route. You are standing on a footbridge above the tracks, and in front of you there is a very large man. In fact, he is so large that if you were to push him from the bridge and onto the tracks, the trolley would come to a stop. If you were to do so, the large man would be killed. So in order to stop

⁴⁹ Note that two of the texts Peter Singer refer to are Joshua Greene’s Ph.D. dissertation *The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Truth About Morality, And What To Do About It*, and an unpublished manuscript by Jonathan Haidt *et al.* entitled “Moral Dumfounding: When Intuition Finds No Reason”, neither of which I have access to. Fortunately the relevant information is available through other published papers by the same authors, which I will be using for this chapter.

⁵⁰ *The Penguin Dictionary Of Philosophy*, p. 572-573.

the trolley, you must push this large man down from the footbridge and onto the tracks, ending his life. Should you push the large man?

Most people say yes to the trolley dilemma – that you should pull the switch – and no to the footbridge dilemma – that you should not push the heavy man onto the tracks.⁵¹ What exactly are the relevant differences between the two cases that warrants different answers - that it is right to sacrifice one life to save five lives in the one but not the other? The difference in judgement, according to Joshua Greene *et al.*, lie in the emotions.

“We maintain that, from a psychological point of view, the crucial difference between the trolley dilemma and the footbridge dilemma lies in the latter's tendency to engage people's emotions in a way that the former does not. The thought of pushing someone to his death is, we propose, more emotionally salient than the thought of hitting a switch that will cause a trolley to produce similar consequences, and it is this emotional response that accounts for people's tendency to treat these cases differently.”⁵²

Greene and his colleagues did experiments in which participants were asked to respond to a number of dilemmas, both moral and non-moral, while their brains were scanned using fMRI. fMRI is an abbreviation of *functional magnetic resonance imaging*.^{53 54} This technology allows researchers to see the ongoing neural activity in the brain more or less as it happens, getting live images of which parts of the brain are active.

They had two main hypothesis when conducting their experiments. The first was that those moral dilemmas relevantly similar to the footbridge dilemma would engage in people's emotional processing to a greater extent than those moral dilemmas relevantly similar to the trolley dilemma, and that these differences were relevant for people's final judgments. If this were the case, the fMRI scan would show the parts of the brain associated with emotions being more active during contemplation over dilemmas similar to the footbridge dilemma as opposed to the trolley dilemma. The second hypothesis was that there would be a longer reaction time in cases where a person's judgment would be going against their own emotions, such as for example saying yes to the footbridge dilemma – you ought to push the large man – despite having the feeling that it would be inappropriate to do so.⁵⁵

For the experiments conducted, they labeled the two kinds of moral dilemmas as *impersonal* and *personal*, with those relevantly similar to the trolley dilemma being labelled an

⁵¹ Greene, Joshua, *et al.*, “An fMRI Investigation Of Emotional Engagement In Moral Judgment”, p. 2105.

⁵² Greene, Joshua, *et al.*, “An fMRI Investigation Of Emotional Engagement In Moral Judgment”, p. 2106.

⁵³ Passer, Michael W., and Ronal E. Smith, *Psychology*, p. 85-86.

⁵⁴ Reber, Arthur S., and Emily Reber, *Dictionary Of Psychology*, p. 289.

⁵⁵ Greene, Joshua, *et al.*, “An fMRI Investigation Of Emotional Engagement In Moral Judgment”, p. 2106.

impersonal moral dilemma, and those relevantly similar to the footbridge dilemma labeled as a personal moral dilemma.⁵⁶ A personal moral dilemma would be a dilemma “in which the moral violation occurs in an ‘up-close-and-personal’ manner”⁵⁷, a property that would be absent from the impersonal moral dilemmas.

The experiments conducted supported both of their hypothesis; areas of the brain associated with emotion showed increased activity when presented with the personal than the non-personal dilemmas, and the reaction time increased if the participants for example approved of pushing the large man in the footbridge dilemma, going against their own emotions.^{58 59}

The fact that there was a resulting delay in reaction time in the cases where participants went against their own emotions, indicates that the increased activity in the parts of the brain associated with emotions is simply not a correlation between one’s final judgments, but is actually a cause of the judgment made.

But why exactly do personal moral-dilemmas engage our emotions in a way non-personal moral dilemmas do? Why is it that people feel it is right to pull the switch to divert the trolley, but not push the large man off the footbridge to stop the trolley?

Greene suggests that we react in this way due to our evolutionary past.⁶⁰ It is now widely recognized that “natural selection can favour altruistic instincts under the right conditions[.]”⁶¹ Consequently we may feel as if we ought to save others from harm whenever we are so able. However, Greene states that “our altruistic instincts will reflect the environment in which they evolved rather than our present environment.”⁶² It is not until recently, thanks to new technology (such as trolleys and airplanes), that we have become able to directly save others from harm in a much less personal manner; our ancestors were only able to save others in a more direct, hands-on manner. The same is also true of inflicting harm; those in certain positions are now theoretically able to cause the death of a number of human beings just by the push of a button, unlike our ancestors who could only kill in a more

⁵⁶ Greene, Joshua, et al., “An fMRI Investigation Of Emotional Engagement In Moral Judgment”, p. 2106-2107.

⁵⁷ Greene, Joshua, “From Neural ‘Is’ To Moral ‘Ought’: What Are The Moral Implications Of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?”, p. 848.

⁵⁸ Greene, Joshua, et al., “An fMRI Investigation Of Emotional Engagement In Moral Judgment”, p. 2106-2107.

⁵⁹ Though there seems to be some speculation here from the researchers as to what the participants were actually feeling.

⁶⁰ Greene, Joshua, “From Neural ‘Is’ To Moral ‘Ought’: What Are The Moral Implications Of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?”, p. 848.

⁶¹ Greene, Joshua, “From Neural ‘Is’ To Moral ‘Ought’: What Are The Moral Implications Of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?”, P. 848.

⁶² Greene, Joshua, “From Neural ‘Is’ To Moral ‘Ought’: What Are The Moral Implications Of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?”, p. 848-849.

direct, hands-on manner. In short, “people who are ‘up close and personal’ push our emotional buttons, whereas those who are out of sight languish out of mind.”⁶³

THE RESEARCH OF JONATHAN HAIDT: JULIE AND MARK

Jonathan Haidt is another researcher who has done work in the field of moral psychology, and believes that his own social intuitionist model, or SIM for short, can provide a good description of how human beings normally⁶⁴ make moral judgments. The SIM stresses the importance of human interaction and human intuitions when it comes to making moral judgments, with less emphasis on the reasoning process, which Haidt believes has been overemphasized in the past.⁶⁵ Making moral judgments is not normally a solitary affair in which we reason our way to what is right and wrong, but it is rather a complex, dynamic process which is a part of the social life of human beings and therefore must be explained as such.

Haidt and his colleagues did interview experiments in which participants were subjected to various hypothetical scenarios and asked to make a judgment as to whether or not the actions of those in the scenarios were morally right or wrong.⁶⁶ One of the scenarios the participants were presented with was the following:

“Julie and Mark are brother and sister. They are traveling together in France on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At very least it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other. What do you think about that, was it OK for them to make love?”⁶⁷

Most of the participants would say that the above action is wrong; it would not be right for Julie and Mark, two consenting adult siblings, to have sex. These evaluations would often be

⁶³ Greene, Joshua, “From Neural ‘Is’ To Moral ‘Ought’: What Are The Moral Implications Of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?”, p. 849.

⁶⁴ For people who suffer from psychopathy, autism, or similar conditions and deficiencies, the SIM may not be as accurate a model.

⁶⁵ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 815.

⁶⁶ Bjorklund, Fredrik, and Jonathan Haidt, “Social Intuitionists Answer Six Questions About Moral Psychology”, p. 196-198.

⁶⁷ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 814.

arrived at shortly after the case had been stated. When asked to give a reason for their judgment by the interviewer, people might refer to the dangers of inbreeding, or the possible emotional harm that could suffer, only to be reminded that the siblings were using two forms of birth control and that they both enjoyed the act and would remember it fondly. The reasons participants gave for their judgment would be shot down, and the participants would search harder for other possible reasons, but they would rarely change their mind about their initial judgments; eventually the participants would simply admit to the interviewer that “I don’t know, I can’t explain it, I just know it’s wrong.”⁶⁸ Sometimes they would even laugh at their own inability to explain themselves. Haidt and his colleagues coined the phrase *morally dumfounded* to refer to the state the participants would be in.⁶⁹

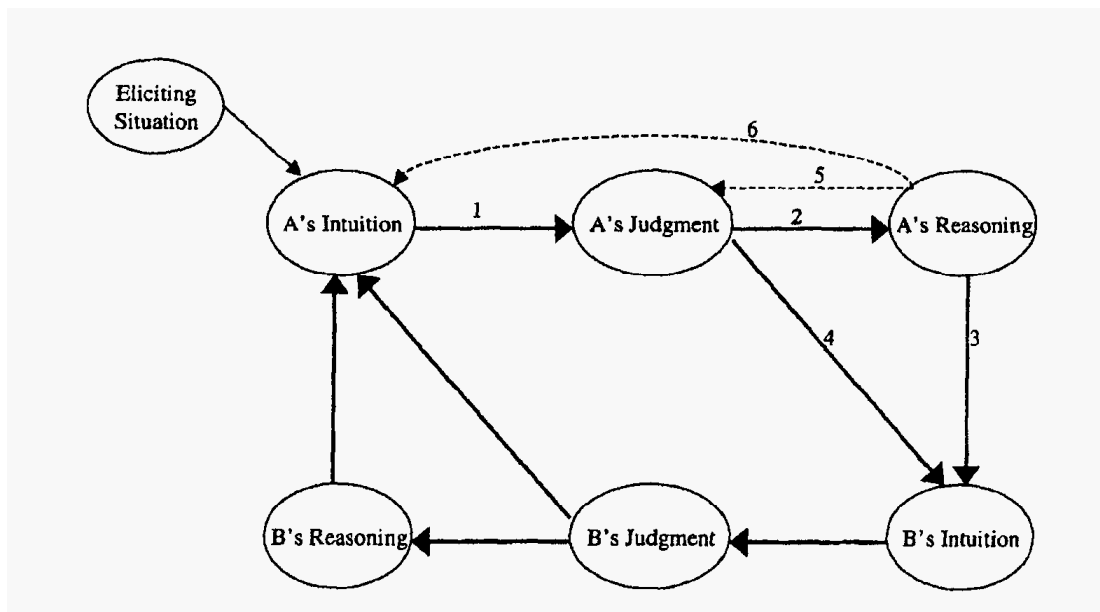
So it seemed that the reasons or arguments were not the cause of their judgments of right and wrong, as the judgments would stand even though the reasons they gave for it had been shown to be incorrect. So Haidt asks: “what model or moral judgment allows a person to know that something is wrong without knowing why?”⁷⁰ The answer is, the SIM, which I will now try summarize.

The SIM consists of four core links, and two additional links, all six explaining how moral judgment usually work in humans. See the illustration below.

⁶⁸ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 814.

⁶⁹ Bjorklund, Fredrik, and Jonathan Haidt, “Social Intuitionists Answer Six Questions About Moral Psychology”, p. 197.

⁷⁰ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 814.



71

When a person A finds himself presented with a certain situation, for example the hypothetical situation described above of consensual incest, A may find that this elicits in him a certain moral intuition. This intuition occurs before any judgment is made or any reasoning is conducted. A's intuition then dictates his judgment. This is called the intuitive judgment link (1). If A is like the majority of the participants in Haidt's research, his judgment would be that consensual incest is morally wrong. After A has made his judgment, he will go on to search for possible arguments that support the judgment he has made. This is the post hoc reasoning link (2). If A communicates his arguments for his judgments, a person B who is exposed to A's reasoning may find that it elicits in him certain intuitions, perhaps the same ones as A have, which may persuade him to agree with A. This is the reasoned persuasion link (3). But often our own moral intuitions are influenced just by others expressing moral judgments; humans are social creatures, and group norms can take root. Thus B may find his own intuitions not only shaped by A's reasoning, but also by A's judgment in and of itself. This is the social persuasion link (4). Likewise, A may find his intuitions influenced by B's judgment or reasoning.

In addition to these four links, which make up the core of the SIM, there are two secondary links, which see less frequent use. For the most part, people do not change their moral judgments through the power of their own reasoning, Haidt claims, but it is rather changed by

⁷¹ Illustration taken from Haidt, Jonathan, "The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment", p. 815.

having our intuitions affected by the reasoning or judgments of others, as “people rarely override their initial intuitive judgments just by reasoning privately to themselves because reasoning is rarely used to question one’s own attitudes or beliefs[.]”⁷² But even though it rarely happens, it is possible; we may be able to reason our way to a certain judgment, finding actual arguments and then letting these arguments decide our judgment. This is the reasoned judgment link (5). And finally, our own reasoning process may lead us to activate new intuitions within ourselves, and in effect overriding our old intuitions, which in turn change our judgment. This final link is called the private reflection link (6).⁷³

Let us try to make more sense of the above illustrated model, adding some meat to the links that have been sketched. According to Haidt, our reasoning is rarely the actual cause of our moral judgments. Instead it is most often our intuitions which are the cause of them. These are described as our immediate sense that something is wrong or right, our moral emotions or gut feelings, quick and automatic responses we do not have conscious access to.⁷⁴ Our reasoning process normally only kick in after the initial judgment has been made, constructing *post hoc* justifications. Our reasoning about certain cases is then normally rather a *consequence* of our moral judgment, and it is not the *cause* of it. That makes moral reasoning “generally a post hoc construction intended to justify automatic moral intuitions.”⁷⁵

“It is primarily when intuitions conflict, or when the situation demands thorough examination of all facets of a scenario, that the reasoning process is called upon”⁷⁶, Haidt says. For example, if we meet someone who states that something is morally right which we believe is morally wrong, we may start giving reasons as to why our view is the correct one, and why this other person’s view is incorrect. Or as with the participants presented with the case of Julie and Mark; if only presented with the case they may just have made their moral judgment based on their intuitive feelings, finding it to be wrong, and left it at that. But when asked to justify their judgment, reasoning kicks in. Reasoning comes to our aid when our own judgment is challenged in some way. Haidt therefore suggests that the “reasoning process is

⁷² Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 819.

⁷³ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 818-819.

⁷⁴ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 822.

⁷⁵ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 823.

⁷⁶ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 820.

more like a lawyer defending a client than a judge or scientist seeking truth.”⁷⁷ But will the disagreeing party be persuaded by the reasons we present for our side?

Haidt claims that “our moral life is plagued by two illusions”⁷⁸ the first of which is the *wag-the-dog illusion*⁷⁹: we believe that our moral judgments, which would be *the dog*, are caused by our moral reasoning, *the tail*. The second illusion, which is more or less the first illusion but in a social aspect, is the *wag-the-other-dog’s-tail illusion*: we believe that by proving that another person’s reasoning or arguments in regards to a moral issue to be flawed, we will change the mind of our opponent. But as Haidt states: “Such a belief is like thinking that forcing a dog’s tail to wag by moving it with your hand will make the dog happy.”⁸⁰ In a way, we’re trying to persuade the wrong end.

Normally we do not change the minds of others through reasoning directly, but rather by triggering in them certain intuitions. This is often done through reasoning though, arguments triggering certain intuitions in us. This would be the reasoned persuasion link. We can also change someone’s mind simply by stating our own judgment on the matter, which may affect their intuitions as well, which would be the social persuasion link.

But using the reasoned judgment link, it is possible for someone to override their intuitions, to reach a new judgment in spite of any intuitions they may feel, through the sheer force of their own reasoning. However, Haidt points out that this is something which rarely occurs in people, except for those who are more commonly used to this practice - namely philosophers, as Haidt states in the following two paragraphs:.

“[P]eople are capable of engaging in private moral reasoning, and many people can point to times in their lives when they changed their minds on a moral issue just from mulling the matter over by themselves. Although some of these cases may be illusions [...], other cases may be real, particularly among philosophers, one of the few groups that has been found to reason well (Kuhn, 2001).”⁸¹

”[A] person could, in principle, simply reason her way to a judgment that contradicts her initial intuition. The literature on everyday reasoning (Kuhn, 1991) suggests that such an ability may be

⁷⁷ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 820.

⁷⁸ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 823.

⁷⁹ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 823.

⁸⁰ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 823.

⁸¹ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 819.

common only among philosophers, who have been extensively trained and socialized to follow reasoning even to very disturbing conclusions (as in the case of Socrates or the more recent work of Peter Singer [1994]), but the fact that there are at least a few people among us who can reach such conclusions on their own and then argue for them eloquently (Link 3) means that pure moral reasoning can play a causal role in the moral life of a society.”⁸²

If it wasn't clear, the SIM is a descriptive model and not a normative model; it does not tell us how we *ought* to go about making moral judgments, or how we ought to debate one another on moral matters. It merely describes how both normally occurs.

THE EVOLUTION ARGUMENT

Not let us turn our attention to Peter Singer's text "Ethics And Intuitions", published 2005. In the introduction of said text, Singer gives us the following promise: "In the following pages I argue that recent research in neuroscience gives us new and powerful reasons for taking a critical stance toward common intuitions.”⁸³ The research he refers to is that of Joshua Greene and Jonathan Haidt, as summarized above. The fourth part of his paper, entitled "Normative Implications", is where he seeks to deliver on his promise. Let us see how exactly he goes about doing this.

As Greene himself did, Singer connects Greene's neuroscientific research with the theory of evolution, and thus paints an evolutionary story of why we have certain of our intuitions – in specific, why we intuitively object to pushing the large man in the footbridge dilemma, but not to hit the switch in the trolley dilemma. Both dilemmas seem to have the same results: we may deliberately bring about the death of one man to save five. The only difference is that we do so by different means, and with a different degree of direct personal involvement, which would not have been possible for our ancestors. The possibility of killing someone in such a way is too recent a possibility that it has not yet had the time to affect our evolutionary development in any way, and so it has not had time to affect our intuitions which has been shaped by evolution. In a way, our intuitions are *outdated*, not meshing well with our technology and the society we currently live in.⁸⁴ This leads Singer to conclude, "what is the

⁸² Haidt, Jonathan, "The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment", p. 829.

⁸³ Singer, Peter, "Ethics And Intuitions", p. 332.

⁸⁴ However, they may not ever become fully *up to date* either. If we were to fast-forward the process of evolution some hundred thousand years, with our society and technology remaining roughly the same as they are now, there is no guarantee that our intuitions would have changed so as to make our intuitions tell us that it would be

moral salience of the fact that I have killed someone in a way that was possible a million years ago, rather than in a way that became possible only two hundred million years ago? I would answer: none.”⁸⁵

Though this may be correct, what is really the argument Singer here gives against using our intuitions as data in ethics? Singer seems to be arguing that because our intuitions are a result of our evolutionary past, they can't be trusted and should be ignored. I will call this the evolution argument.

But if this is his argument, what then of reason? Reason is also a product of our evolutionary past. The evolution argument would most likely not bode well for any way of doing ethics whatsoever, perhaps making it an impossible endeavor. We are all products of our evolutionary past, and thus all our beliefs about and efforts to engage in ethics are tainted by it, not to be trusted, and must be discarded. So is he not shooting himself in the foot by making this claim, sketching an argument against the use of intuitions which also undermines his own way of doing ethics?

REASON AS AN ESCALATOR

Singer addresses this particular point in a text entitled “Morality, Reason, And The Rights Of Animals” which was printed in the book *Primate And Philosophers - How Morality Evolved* from 2006. The text is mainly a commentary on a lecture by Dutch primatologist Frans de Waal, but Singer here also sheds some light on his evolution argument, although indirectly. Singer writes:

“Though a capacity to reason helps us to survive and reproduce, once we develop a capacity for reasoning, we may be led by it to places that are not of any direct advantage to us, in evolutionary terms. Reason is like an escalator—once we step on it, we cannot get off until we have gone where it takes us. An ability to count can be useful, but it leads by a logical process to the abstractions of higher mathematics that have no direct payoff in evolutionary terms.”⁸⁶

The metaphor of the escalator was also used in Peter Singer’s book *The Expanding Circle*, published in 1981: “Beginning to reason is like stepping onto an escalator that leads upward

right to sacrifice the large man in the footbridge dilemma. The question is whether this intuition would make an individual more evolutionary fit, and it may be difficult to paint a picture in which that would be the result.

⁸⁵ Singer, Peter, “Ethics And Intuitions”, p. 348.

⁸⁶ Singer, Peter, “Morality, Reason, And The Rights Of Animals”, p. 146.

and out of sight.”⁸⁷ Here he further elaborates upon the example of mathematics.⁸⁸ Being able to count can undoubtedly be evolutionary beneficial, both for ourselves and for other animals; “if four hunters go into a thicket and only three come out, baboons will keep away, for they know that someone is still there”⁸⁹. Presumably the same has held true for our ancestors, and probably holds true today – where would we be if we couldn’t all pull at the count of three? Mathematics could further be used to divide loot or food among one’s tribe, measure up land that belongs to your tribe, and a number of other uses. Eventually we arrive at the more advanced forms of mathematics. We started out merely counting, but in so doing we have stepped onto an escalator which will take us to the higher, more abstract forms of mathematics (at least if we follow its progression and do not step off the escalator prior to its destination).

The question was asked as to why intuitions should be written off due to being products of evolution and why reasoning shouldn’t, even though reasoning is also undoubtedly a product of evolution. He here seems to have given an answers to the question as to why having an evolutionary origin doesn’t mean we should discard reasoning, namely that reasoning may lead to abstract thinking which do not increase one's chance of survival – does not give any *evolutionary benefits*. Intuitions presumably do give specific evolutionary benefits.

But his answer falls short, as he fails to give any explanation as to *why* reasoning in any way should be placed higher than intuitions given that reasoning does not always give evolutionary benefits. Why should it matter that reasoning is an *escalator* which does not always increase our chance of survival? A preliminary answer would be that it shouldn't matter – at least not without any added explanations as to why. We may perhaps imagine a world in which high-level abstract reasoning did grant several evolutionary benefits; would that mean that reasoning would suddenly have to be discarded as well? It is not whether or not reasoning gives evolutionary benefits or not that matter, but its intrinsic properties.

In addition, not all of our intuitions do necessarily grant evolutionary benefits. Some intuitions may have granted them in the past when we lived under different circumstances, but not anymore. Would it be okay to use such intuitions in ethics when they grant no evolutionary benefits? The absurdity of this should be obvious, so there must be something more to the argument than this.

⁸⁷ Singer, Peter, *The Expanding Circle*, p. 88.

⁸⁸ Singer, Peter, *The Expanding Circle*, p. 89-90.

⁸⁹ Singer, Peter, *The Expanding Circle*, p. 89.

Looking again to *The Expanding Circle*, Singer here makes a similar (if not the same) point. It is normal for humans to feel that we should give greater priority to the suffering and interests of those who are a part of our community and are closer to us, than those who are not a part of the community and more distant. Some believe that such a principle of preferring our own over those who are strangers to us is only right and proper, and take the fact that many if not most of us feel such a principle to be evidence of its correctness. But this principle is simply a product of our biology, which again we can credit to our evolutionary history. Singer writes:

“Discovering biological origins for our intuitions should make us skeptical about thinking of them as self-evident moral axioms. [...] Without a biological explanation of the prevalence of some such principle, we might take its near-universal acceptance as evidence that our obligations to our family are based on a self-evident moral truth. Once we understand the principle as an expression of kin selection, that belief loses its credibility.”⁹⁰

So when someone claims that their feeling that something is right or wrong is sufficient evidence that something is right and wrong, even if this feeling may be shared by the majority of the human population, we can merely point out that their feeling so is simply the product of evolution; they have a certain intuition *because* of evolution, not because the intuition is somehow *valid*. To phrase it differently, one could say they refer to no moral facts and are merely evolutionary constructs. Thus science can help us debunk and explain away moral beliefs and claims, showing that they are really something else rather than evidence for or against any specific moral claim.

Still, the difficulties seem intact, namely that reason is also a product of evolution – and a part of our biology. Why can't the same be said of reasoning, and judgments made based on reasoning? We may have stepped onto an escalator which leads to levels of reasoning which would in no way help us survive, but we almost seem to have done the same with intuitions; they started out helping us survive and spreading our genes, but now they are preventing us from pushing large men off bridges in order to save lives.

THE DEITY, THE DEMON, AND EVOLUTION

I believe the following thought experiment should further illustrate why the evolution argument fails to persuade, and why a different approach may be recommended.

⁹⁰ Singer, Peter, *The Expanding Circle*, p. 70-71.

Imagine that there is a possible world in which our moral intuitions were given to us by a deity. Now imagine that there's another possible world in which our moral intuitions had instead been given to us by a demon. Would our intuitions in either of these worlds be more or less valid than those in the other world? It would only to the extent in which the source changed the actual intuitions themselves in some way, but then the real question seems to be about the content rather than the source. If the intuitions remained fixed, if the actual intuitions would not in any way be changed from the one world to the next, they would be equally valid or invalid, whether they were bestowed upon us by a deity or a demon – or through evolution.

Of course, we may feel that intuitions given to us by a deity contra a demon would be more reliable, that they would be more likely to turn out to be good or correct intuitions. And certainly this could be the case. If the deity was benevolent and virtuous, only willing what was best for humanity, and with knowledge about truth and ethics, we could certainly feel confident to put our trust in intuitions given to us by this being. If the demon, on the other hand, was a vile and corrupt being, only willing what was worst for humanity, finding its pleasure in pain and pestilence, we may feel more sceptical in putting our trust in intuitions given to us by this creature. If the actual intuitions they would give us would reflect their respective good and evil natures, we would certainly reject them if they came from the demon and accept them if they came from the deity.

But as stated, if the intuitions remained fixed, if they were the same in both cases, the source would not matter, be the source a deity or a demon or the process of evolution. We need to look more specifically at what intuitions are, not where they come from – though answering the latter may help answering the former. So rather than saying they are normatively impotent due to their origins, we should instead say that they are normatively impotent due to their very nature. I will be trying to sketch such an argument in the next chapter.

RATIONAL INTUITIONS?

As we remember from the last chapter when looking at Henry Sidgwick's method, the question as to how we ultimately would arrive at and prove valid a moral principle was left unsatisfactorily answered. Self-evidence was referred to, but how seeing a principle as being

self-evidence is different from using intuitions might be unclear. In the concluding part of “Ethics And Intuitions”, Singer tries to give us an answer.

He starts by making the problem explicit, airing what many readers may feel is at stake:

“Whenever it is suggested that normative ethics should disregard our common moral intuitions, the objection is made that without intuitions, we can go nowhere. There have been many attempts, over the centuries, to find proofs of first principles in ethics, but most philosophers consider that they have all failed. Even a radical ethical theory like utilitarianism must rest on a fundamental intuition about what is good. So we appear to be left with our intuitions, and nothing more. If we reject them all, we must become ethical skeptics or nihilists.”⁹¹

So if we say that all our intuitions are invalid, that they cannot be used because they are subjective or the result of evolution, does that mean that we’ll have to throw away any notion of any theories of morality being shown to be valid or invalid? How else are we to find out what is right, if we are not to use our moral intuitions? In short, do we have to become nihilists?

Singer proposes a solution to this conundrum, referring to the research of Haidt and Greene: “Haidt’s behavioural research and Greene’s brain imaging studies suggest the possibility of distinguishing between our immediate emotionally based responses, and our more reasoned conclusions.”⁹² So it may be possible to separate between two kinds of responses: those that are rational, and those that are not, and we can separate between the two through empirical research, studying human behaviour as well as the direct activity that occurs in the human brain, as Haidt and Greene have to some extent done. One such rational response, Singer suggests, is that the death of one is a lesser tragedy than the death of five (or, presumably, two, three, and four as well). Participant’s in Greene’s experiment who were exposed to the two trolley cases did not always recognize this when it came to the footbridge dilemma. As we’ll recall, the footbridge dilemma showed increased activity in the emotional parts of their brains compared to the trolley dilemma, as it was a more personal dilemma that went against their evolutionarily developed altruistic feelings, and those who believed it would be better to save five people by pushing and in effect killing the one person showed increased reaction times due to the conflict between their own emotions and their reasoning. So Singer confidently concludes: “The death of one person is a lesser tragedy than the death of five

⁹¹ Singer, Peter, “Ethics And Intuitions”, p. 349.

⁹² Singer, Peter, “Ethics And Intuitions”, p. 349-350.

people. That reasoning leads us to throw the switch in the standard trolley case, and it should also lead us to push the stranger in the footbridge”⁹³.

But isn't this some kind of intuition, that “the death of one person is a lesser tragedy than the death of five”? And weren't Singer against the use of intuitions as they were just evolutionary artifacts and morally irrelevant? Singer admits that the former, while denying the latter, as we see here:

“It might be said that the response that I have called “more reasoned” is still based on an intuition, for example the intuition that five deaths are worse than one, or more fundamentally, the intuition that it is a bad thing if a person is killed. But if this is an intuition, it is different from the intuitions to which Haidt and Greene refer. It does not seem to be one that is the outcome of our evolutionary past.”⁹⁴

And Singer concludes his paper with the following paragraph:

“In the light of the best scientific understanding of ethics, we face a choice. We can take the view that our moral intuitions and judgments are and always will be emotionally based intuitive responses, and reason can do no more than build the best possible case for a decision already made on nonrational grounds. [...] Alternatively, we might attempt the ambitious task of separating those moral judgments that we owe to our evolutionary and cultural history, from those that have a rational basis. This is a large and difficult task. Even to specify in what sense a moral judgment can have a rational basis is not easy. Nevertheless, it seems to me worth attempting, for it is the only way to avoid moral scepticism.”⁹⁵

Thus Singer's conclusion is that, yes, we do actually have to rely on some intuitions on a methodological level when we go about building our moral theories. But, we can separate between rational and non-rational intuitions, and one way to do this is through empirical research, revealing which intuitions correspond with the parts of our brains associated with emotions, which give us evolutionary benefits, and which are culturally contingent; in short, revealing which intuitions can be *explained away* and which a moral theory then does not need to account for. Presumably the intuitions we are left with, and which presumably correspond with the parts of our brain associated with more abstract reasoning, are the ones we can use as data in regards to building, disproving, or validating a moral theory. As Singer admits, finding these intuitions would be no small task.

⁹³ Singer, Peter, “Ethics And Intuitions”, p. 350.

⁹⁴ Singer, Peter, “Ethics And Intuitions”, p. 350.

⁹⁵ Singer, Peter, “Ethics And Intuitions”, p. 351.

In a way, Singer is then not actually an anti-intuitionist as he often may appear to be, being against the use of intuitions in ethics; but rather, he is a *rational* or *restrictive intuitionist*, believing that only *certain* intuitions may be used, as opposed to *none*.

Similarities to John Rawls's concept of considered judgments, as described in the previous chapter, seems obvious; only our everyday judgments which can be called considered can actually be used as valid data when doing moral philosophy. They are, however, not identical; first and foremost, Rawls did not appear to place as heavy an emphasis on reason as Singer here does. Rawls is also referring to judgments, which these rational intuitions are not. Considered judgments are arguably a wider concept as well, encompassing more, whereas Singer's idea of rational intuitions is narrower, allowing fewer pieces of data to pass scrutiny.

CHAPTER 4

ARGUMENT III: THE PARTIALITY ARGUMENT

“[I]t is our developed capacity to reason that gives us the ability to take the impartial perspective.”

Peter Singer, “Morality, Reason, And The Rights Of Animals”⁹⁶

INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the two arguments Peter Singer tries to develop against using our moral intuitions as data for any kind of moral truth or validity, may not be as convincing as he would have liked, with certain central aspects not sufficiently clarified for us to be fully won over. Singer seems to concentrate too much on the origin of intuitions through evolution, culture, and psychology, and devotes too little time on what exactly intuitions are (or are not), independently of their origin. It may turn out that their origin is something entirely different than we have so far believed. Would this then change the status of our moral intuitions as potential data to be used when constructing our normative theories? If we argue against intuitions based mainly on their origin, then maybe it would.

In this chapter I will try to sketch a different argument against the use of intuitions, an argument I believe is not only fully compatible with Singer’s ethic, but an argument which may lie *implicitly* in some of his works and arguments; it is an argument which he seems to have *almost* made himself, but which he has never made explicit. The argument is, briefly stated, that by using our own moral intuitions as moral data, we may be committing the sin of partiality, and it is widely recognized that partiality must be altogether avoided in moral theory and that the opposite of partiality is the ideal, namely impartiality.

⁹⁶ Singer, Peter, “Morality, Reason, And The Rights Of Animals”, p. 145.

I do not expect that this attempted sketch of an argument to be free of problems (which perhaps few, if any, arguments in philosophy are), but I hope it will serve as a promising start for a more sophisticated and streamlined argument against moral intuitions, as well as presenting some interesting propositions not yet fully explored elsewhere. As Singer states in a footnote in his paper “Ethics And Intuitions”, which we discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis: “this paper is no more than a sketch of an argument that I hope to develop more adequately in [the] future.”⁹⁷ The same holds true for the current chapter.

IMPARTIALITY, AND THE PARTIALITY ARGUMENT

Impartiality and its evil twin partiality, are terms that are often used and referred to, often thrown around in discussions of morality, but are rarely the sole subject of any such discussion and is rarely attempted fully explained. To quote philosopher Bernard Gert from his book *Common Morality*: “Impartiality has been so neglected by philosophers that it is not surprising that the brief characterizations of it has been so inadequate.”⁹⁸ I fear that I may here end up committing the same crime as I will not supply a concise definition, but will instead be satisfied with trying to shed sufficient light on the terms so that we can more or less make out what they imply and refer to.

Singer is one of these philosophers who often talks of impartiality when discussing normative ethics, and though he may not have given an airtight definition of the concept, he has said enough of substance to give us a good idea of what it entails. In his book *The President Of Good And Evil*, he has the following to say about impartiality: “When we think ethically, we should do so from an impartial perspective, from which we recognize that our own wants and desires are no more significant than the wants and desires of everyone else.”⁹⁹ So from this we may infer that impartiality is about taking a certain perspective, and that this perspective then leads to recognizing that other people have wants and desires that are neither more nor less significant than our own wants and desires.

When talking of impartiality, Singer occasionally cites the following famous line from Henry Sidgwick’s *The Methods Of Ethics* (which Singer identified as making up Sidgwick’s third axiom, as stated in the previous section): “the good of any one individual is of no more

⁹⁷ Singer, Peter, “Ethics And Intuitions”, p. 351.

⁹⁸ Gert, Bernard, *Common Morality*, p. 116.

⁹⁹ Singer, Peter, *The President Of Good And Evil*, p. 109-110.

importance, from the point of view (if I may say so) of the Universe, than the good of any other[.]”¹⁰⁰ ¹⁰¹ At more length, he Singer has the following to say about impartiality in his book *Practical Ethics*:

“[A]n ethical principle cannot be justified in relation to any partial or sectional group. Ethics takes a universal point of view. [...] [I]n making an ethical judgment we go beyond our own likes and dislikes. From an ethical point of view, the fact that it is I who benefit from, say, a more equal distribution of income and you who lose by it, is irrelevant. Ethics requires us to go beyond ‘I’ and ‘you’ to the universal law, the universalisable judgment, the standpoint of the impartial spectator or ideal observer, or whatever we choose to call it.”¹⁰²

Several new concepts are introduced here, which Singer seems to be saying refer roughly to the same idea, but let us try to stick with impartiality. We can now add that impartiality involves breaking down the boundaries between individuals, erasing the differences between *the me* and *the you*. In a way, we try to remove ourselves from ourselves. And if we say that a moral judgment is impartial, then it must be a judgment that has been made from an impartial perspective.

This kind of impartiality can be demonstrated by looking to a well known example found in anarchist William Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, published 1793, which has been the topic of some of Singer’s writings.¹⁰³ Imagine that the palace of Archbishop Fénelon is burning, and two people are trapped inside: the Archbishop himself, and his chambermaid. Imagine further that you would be able to save one and only one of the two, having to leave the other to perish in the flames. Whom should you choose to save? At the time of the fire the Archbishop is known and loved by the society at large, and he has not yet contributed his most important intellectual work, the didactic novel *Telemachus*, which would be of great personal help to many. So the answer, according to Godwin, is that the Archbishop Fénelon should be saved.

But imagine instead that the chambermaid had been your wife or mother. How should this affect your choice? According to Godwin, it shouldn’t: the Archbishop is still the one who should be saved. At the time of publication, this spurred a series of objections, and it remains a controversial proposition today. Do we not, after all, have some sort of special obligations

¹⁰⁰ Sidgwick, Henry, *The Methods Of Ethics*, p. 382.

¹⁰¹ See for example Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics*, p. 334.

¹⁰² Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics*, p. 11-12.

¹⁰³ Singer, Peter, *One World*, p. 154-160; Cannold, Leslie, Helga Kushe, and Peter Singer, “William Godwin And The Defense Of Impartialist Ethics”, p. 157-177.

towards our mothers or wives? They are, after all, *our* mothers and wives. But from an impartial perspective, this does not seem to matter, as we evaluate the situation removed from ourselves and our special relations to one another do not weigh heavier than other considerations.

Readers may see that this appears fairly utilitarian, but impartiality is something most normative theories aim at and try to incorporate in some way – at the very least also deontological theories. The deontologically inclined could very well agree that we need to take on an impartial perspective and do our moral evaluations unsullied by the various contingencies of our lives. Famous 17th century deontological philosopher Immanuel Kant stated in his *Groundwork Of The Metaphysics Of Morals* that “every rational being must act as if he were by his maxims at all times a lawgiving member of the universal kingdom of ends.”¹⁰⁴ Imagining ourselves as the lawgivers of this “kingdom of ends” seems to be roughly the same as the idea of an impartial perspective. However, Kant and other deontologists may disagree with the conclusion Godwin reached. It could be, due to certain duties or rights present, that we ought, impartially, to save our mothers or wives before Archbishops from burning palaces – as would anyone in the same situation be obligated to do.

It should be noted that impartiality is not the same as equality. Impartiality is to take a certain perspective, and to act on this perspective, whereas equality, I would suggest, seems to be more practical. Equality always refers to something specific, like equal pay or equal rights, whereas impartiality seems a more abstract concept from what we have said above. And it does not appear impossible that we may very well arrive at some forms of practical inequality when we take the impartial perspective.

But so far we have said little of partiality and intuitions. Partiality must be something akin to the opposite of impartiality; perhaps to perceive things as ourselves, seeing and acting upon our own preferences. Presumably this would involve saving our own mother or wife from the burning palace rather than the Archbishop, simply because it would be a greater personal tragedy to me than any considerations made impartially.

What I would like to claim is that if we use rely on our intuitions to tell us what is right and wrong, we are being partial. Instead of helping us to remove ourselves from ourselves, intuitions instead help anchor us further to ourselves. Intuitions are something that *we* feel, they are inaccessible to others, and they are often tied up to the contingencies of our own lives

¹⁰⁴ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork Of The Metaphysics Of Morals*, p. 45.

– such as our mothers and wives, and our overall interests. This to me appears to be the opposite of impartiality as we have sketched it.

If we accept this, and if we accept that any moral judgments and theories must have a certain element of impartiality, then it would be wrong to say that moral intuitions are merely morally relevant; instead, we would have to say that intuitions are actually immoral as intuitions would lead to partiality which is opposed to impartiality. It also appears to me that this is a stronger argument than the two previous arguments Singer has made, as it seems to make intuitions *necessarily* wrong, independently of their origins; intuitions have certain qualities that make them partial, and if they do not have these qualities they are not intuitions.¹⁰⁵

The kind of impartiality we have tried sketching above is not without its problems, though. Philosopher Mary Ann Warren says in her book *Moral Status*: “In making judgments about the moral status of living things, we are not (or should not be) seeking to estimate their value from the viewpoint of the gods, or that of the universe. We are not gods but human beings, reasoning about how *we* ought to think and act.”¹⁰⁶ And Bernard Gert, whom we quoted above, makes a similar comment: “Very good philosophers have said that impartiality is taking a God’s-eye point of view or the point of view of the universe. Since no one knows what such a point of view is, these remarks are useless.”¹⁰⁷

So according to Gert, we do not know enough about what taking an impartial perspective would involve for this to be a useful notion; and according to Warren, this is a flawed project as morality is not about removing ourselves from our own humanity. These may be valid points worth exploring further, and to give a brief reply, it appears that humans are capable of great feats of imagination. A favourite pastime of children is to *play pretend*, to play that they are astronauts or pirates or a number of other fanciful things. In a way, they are removing themselves from themselves, pretending to be someone else. When human children are capable of this, it does not seem impossible that we as adults can put ourselves at the more abstract “viewpoint of the gods”, even though some further clarification would be needed. And it might altogether be unnecessary to invoke the idea gods as well; perhaps we could

¹⁰⁵ This also appears to leave room for Singer’s notion of rational intuitions, which perhaps may not be like other intuitions in that they have impartial rather than partial qualities. So the partiality argument could perhaps be used to discard the *wrong* intuitions, while leaving the *right* ones. I will, however, not be trying separate between the two kinds of intuitions in this chapter, as I believe this would make matters needlessly complex for our purposes, and I will instead be talking of moral intuitions in general.

¹⁰⁶ Warren, Mary Anne, *Moral Status*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁷ Gert, Bernard, *Common Morality*, p. 116.

instead call it a ‘viewpoint from our common humanity’ and try to describe it as such, or perhaps instead build on Kant’s idea of a “kingdom of ends”. Our moral reasoning will necessarily always be rooted in our human nature one way or the other, and I see nothing immediately wrong or *inhumane* about rooting it in our capabilities for impartiality.

DOES PETER SINGER MAKE THE PARTIALITY ARGUMENT?

At times it almost appears that Singer makes something akin to the partiality argument – that intuitions are partial, and cannot lead us to any form of impartiality. In “Morality, Reason, And The Rights Of Animals” there are a number of passages where he comes close to doing so, as we can see:

"[I]t is our developed capacity to reason that gives us the ability to take the impartial perspective. As reasoning beings, we can abstract from our own case and see that others, outside our group, have interests similar to our own. We can also see that there is no impartial reason why their interests should not count as much as the interests of members of our own group, or indeed as much as our own interests. Does this mean that the idea of impartial morality is contrary to our evolved nature? Yes, if by “our evolved nature” we mean the nature that we share with the other social mammals from which we evolved. No nonhuman animals, not even the other great apes, come close to matching our capacity to reason. So if this capacity to reason does lie behind the impartial element of our morality, it is something new in evolutionary history.”¹⁰⁸

“We do not have to accept, as a given, the emotional responses imprinted in our biological nature by millions of years of living in small tribal groups. We are capable of reasoning and of making choices, and we can reject those emotional responses. Perhaps we do so only on the basis of other emotional responses, but the process involves reason and abstraction, and may lead us [...] to a morality that is more impartial than our evolutionary history as social mammals – in the absence of that reasoning process – allow.”¹⁰⁹

So Singer appears to be saying that it is through our advanced reasoning ability that we are capable of being impartial and taking an impartial perspective, going beyond the limits of the secluded tribal societies of old. Reasoning is also what we use to reject “emotional responses”, or moral intuitions. Implicitly it then seems as Singer is saying that impartiality is

¹⁰⁸ Singer, Peter, “Morality, Reason, And The Rights Of Animals”, p. 145.

¹⁰⁹ Singer, Peter, “Morality, Reason, And The Rights Of Animals”, p. 150.

at odds with relying on our intuitions for moral validity, but he never says so explicitly. Instead we see that what he ultimately tries arguing for is the evolution argument, equating intuitions with evolution and therefore declaring them to be morally irrelevant. As we saw in the previous chapter, the evolution argument ended up not being a fully satisfying argument, and I believe he could have a better case against intuitions if he instead tried developing an argument against intuitions based on the notions of impartiality and partiality (preferably without invoking evolution).

JEAN PIAGET: THE THREE-MOUNTAIN PROBLEM

Singer looking to Jonathan Haidt and Joshua Greene's research and theories to show the possibility of using reasoning when making moral judgments and to develop the evolutionary argument. But for the partiality argument, we ought to look at the famous research conducted by the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, a pioneer in the field of developmental psychology, who sought to explore the thought processes of children and how it developed as they aged.¹¹⁰ According to Piaget's stage model of cognitive development, children can be in one of four stages depending on their age (and certain other factors), each stage with their own cognitive milestones and limitations.

One of these stages is the *preoperational stage* (age 2 to 7), where the children show a large degree of egocentrism, which is defined as "difficulty in viewing the world from someone else's perspective."¹¹¹ This can be illustrated by what's referred to as Piaget's three-mountain problem.¹¹² We can imagine a model in front of us which consists of three mountains. On one side of the model, a path is visible. On the opposite side of the model, the path is not visible. A child in the preoperational stage sees the model, let's say his name is Ted, from the side on which the path is visible. Another child, Beth, is looking at the same model as Ted, but from the opposite side, from which the path is not visible. But if Ted were asked to describe what Beth sees when she is looking at the model, Ted would include in his description the path. For anyone who has progressed beyond the preoperational stage it should be obvious that Beth is incapable of seeing the path from where she is viewing the model. This shows that Ted "has

¹¹⁰ Passer, Michael W., and Ronald E. Smith, *Psychology*, p. 382.

¹¹¹ Passer, Michael W., and Ronald E. Smith, *Psychology*, p. 383.

¹¹² Example taken from Passer, Michael W., and Ronald E. Smith, *Psychology*, p. 384, including the names, Ted and Beth.

failed to recognize Beth's perspective as different from his own”¹¹³ and therefore is egocentric.

It should be noted that egocentrism this is not the same as selfishness. Selfishness would be to only care about your own needs and desires, never to give any weight as to what other people would want. Egocentrism, on the other hand, is the inability to realize that other people perceive things differently from you.

So Ted, a child at Piaget's preoperational stage, is not able to separate his own point of view from that of others'. Once he grows older, given that he develops normally, he will be able to do so. Then he will be able to distinguish his own perspective from that of Beth's, and be able to put himself in her shoes when he is to describe what it is Beth can see when looking at the model described above. We may feel tempted to say that Ted is unable to be impartial at his current age, and that once he comes of age he will be able to be impartial. But that would be too strong a proposition, as how the ability to recognize another's perspective as being different from one's own connects with the concept of impartiality is not clear. But I would claim that it is a cognitive ability that would be needed if impartiality is at all to be possible – how can we be impartial if we are trapped in our own perspective? More cautiously we could maybe suggest that this ability is, at least, a *necessary condition* for impartial thinking.

I believe that further research into egocentrism and impartial thinking could prove to be of some interest for modern normative ethics. For example, one could organize an experiment in which fMRI technology would be used to see the activity in the brains of participants when engaged in activities similar to those that Ted was in (recognizing and taking another person's perspective), and then compare this to the activity evident in the brain when making moral judgments. Looking at the data, we could then ask, are the parts of the brain associated with recognizing another's perspective active, and to what extent are they active when someone judges mostly from pure intuition compared to that of judgments where the a process of reasoning is taking place to a larger extent? The results could have implications for the partiality argument which I have tried to sketch; if it turns out that the activity in the brain when recognizing another's perspective corresponds significantly to the activity in the brain when making moral judgments with a larger degree of reasoning, we might say that the argument is supported; if on the other hand it turns out that the activity present when

¹¹³ Passer, Michael W., and Ronald E. Smith, *Psychology*, p. 384.

recognizing another's perspective mostly corresponds to the activity when making intuitively based moral judgments, we might say that the argument has been undermined.

Let's try to make this suggested research a bit clearer by looking at Joshua Greene's research once more. It was suggested that people who required more time to arrive at a judgment in the footbridge dilemma did so because they went against their own intuitive responses, and instead used their reasoning abilities. Participants who did not make a judgment contrary to their intuitive responses did not use as long to arrive at their judgment. The former would then be a moral judgment involving a larger degree of reasoning, and the latter would be a purely intuitive judgment. fMRI was used to capture the brain activity of the participants; thus we roughly know what activity occurs in the brain when we make moral judgments based on reasoning, and when we make moral judgments based on intuitions. Optionally further and perhaps different experiments could be conducted to get more data on this.

This data could then be compared to the data of a second experiment for which the aim is to map the brain activity involved in forms of impartial thinking. Participants could be presented with the three-mountain model and asked to describe what someone else, looking at the model from another perspective, should be able to see from their perspective. Other models or tasks could certainly be used, perhaps ranging from the simple to the more complex, and perhaps the experiment could be conducted on people of varying ages. While engaged in this task, the activity in the brains of the participants would be captured using fMRI. This data could then be compared to the data we have on the brain's activity when making different moral judgments, and we could see where the activity overlaps.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS AN ETHICAL SOCIETY

“[I]f we are philosophers, there should be times when we reflect critically on our intuitions – indeed not only philosophers, but any thoughtful people, should do this.”

Peter Singer, *One World*¹¹⁴

INTRODUCTION

Now we have looked at three possible arguments against the use of moral intuitions as data in moral methodology. We have also looked at some research that has been done within the vast field of psychology. But what, if any, practical implications does all this have? Or is this all merely theory, without any effect on our society or on our individual lives?

Singer does not wish to do philosophy that is merely theoretical, nor does he want others to do so, instead wanting philosophers and philosophy to focus on actual issues that matter.¹¹⁵ By doing normative moral philosophy, we are actually exploring how we are to live.

Peter Singer has released several books on how we ought to live and how to achieve (according to his brand of utilitarianism) a better world; *One World*, *Animal Liberation*, and *Rethinking Life And Death* being examples. However, this section is not so much about how one ought to live according to Singer’s utilitarianism or any other specific moral theory, but rather how we are to engage in and apply morality, and how we can create a more moral society in and of itself, regardless of the content of the morality we wish to spread, given that we agree with Singer’s methodological stance and aversion towards intuitions.

¹¹⁴ Singer, Peter, *One World*, p. 163.

¹¹⁵ See in specific Peter Singer’s “The Triviality Of The Debate Over “Is-Ought” And The Definition Of “Moral””.

Some of these suggestions may be fairly obvious and perhaps even dull, which one would accept regardless of one's views on intuitions and moral methodology; other suggested implications may be less obvious and not so easy to accept.

So in this concluding chapter I will be exploring some practical implications that may be inferred from the foregoing discussion about the use of intuitions, which could lead to a society which can be said to be more ethical. I will start by making explicit Singer's moral methodology – the basic method for which we are to find out what is right and wrong – and showing how Singer has applied it in one of his classic texts in applied ethics.

PETER SINGER'S MORAL METHODOLOGY: THE TOP-DOWN APPROACH TO ETHICS

Through the previous sections we have gotten a good idea of the methodology Singer himself recommends. It appears to essentially be the same as Henry Sidgwick's method, which we described in the second chapter. But let us use this section to try to illustrate this method a bit more clearly.

Gerald Dworkin gives the following description of this method's ethos in his article "Theory, Practice, And Moral Reasoning": "A moral theory contains rules or principles that, together with the details of the particular circumstances, allows us to deduce the right thing to do."¹¹⁶

So if we were utilitarians, we would start with the greatest happiness principle as the core moral principle. In order to know what the principle would recommend, we would need a certain amount of knowledge regarding the situation we are facing – specifically: how any possible alternatives for action would affect the amount of happiness in the world. Imagine that we find ourselves in a situation with two routes available to choose from as to how we would act, *action 1* and *action 2*. Presumably we would know enough to know roughly which of these two possible actions would lead to the most happiness, and we could make the following calculation:

Premise 1 (the principle): The right thing to do is that which would lead to the most happiness.

¹¹⁶ Dworkin, Gerald, "Theory, Practice, And Moral Reasoning", p. 627.

Premise 2 (the relevant information about the case in question): Action 1 would lead to the most happiness.

Conclusion: Action 1 is the right thing to do.

But what if we disagree with the conclusion? What if we believe that action 2 would actually be the right action in this situation? One could claim that there may have been a miscalculation involved in how much happiness each of the two actions would lead to. Perhaps some factors were overlooked; factors which would clearly show that action 2 would lead to the most happiness out of the two, thus making premise number two untrue, and therefore the conclusion false. This would be a perfectly valid counterargument against the conclusion reached. We would then have this illustration instead:

P1: The right thing to do is that which would lead to the most happiness.

P2: Action 2 would lead to the most happiness.

C: Action 2 is the right thing to do.

Another possibility would be to argue against the conclusion by arguing against the first premise, namely that utilitarianism is correct. One could argue for Kantianism, virtue ethics, or any other theory of ethics. Let's say that we argue for virtue ethics. Then we may end up with something akin to this:

P1: The right thing to do is that which a virtuous person would do.

P2: Action 2 is what a virtuous person would do.

C: Action 2 is the right thing to do.

Either of these two ways would be a perfectly valid way of arguing for or against the rightness of any action: by discarding either of the premises involved, which could be either the actual moral principle or the empirical facts.

Given this, our intuitions or beliefs that a conclusion about what is right or wrong is false, is no actual measure as to whether said conclusion is or is not actually false. The domain of morality is under the rule of the moral principle. A moral theory X may tell us that action 1 is the morally right action to do, and we know that it is morally right because this is what theory X tells us. You, however, may believe that action 2 is the morally right action to do, not

action 1. Your belief or intuition that this is so is not sufficient grounds for an argument that this is the case. Instead, you must have a theory Z that tells you that action 2 is the right action. In a way, it is not the instances that are pitted against each other – action 1 versus action 2 – but rather the theories which justifies the instances – theory X versus theory Z. To argue for action 2, you must argue for theory Z. Theory Z, however, may very well be a theory which states that that which is right is that which matches our intuitions.

Also, the principle itself may recognize that the actual moral intuitions and beliefs people have should be counted as relevant empirical data while holding that intuitions still are not to be counted as data for any moral truth. Having our personal moral convictions violated in some way is rarely pleasurable, so going against someone's moral convictions might reduce the total amount of happiness in the world, which is undesirable from a utilitarian perspective. Thus we might in theory end up with complex situations in which the right thing to do would actually be the wrong thing to do if it weren't for enough people believing strongly enough that it would be the right thing to do.

So to arrive at what is right we first need to have a moral principle. This principle should tell us what elements we should look for in certain cases, what relevant empirical data we need. The principle together with this data then gives us the verdict as to what is the morally right action in any specific case.

This method of doing ethics can be referred to as a top-down approach to ethics. We start at the top, and work our way down. At the top we have a certain principle or principles, some moral truth or truths in which we are certain, and we work our way down from the top to the specific cases. It is always this top which we refer to when judging and acting in specific instances. In short, we *deduce* our way to what is right; this method can then also appropriately be referred to as the deductive method of ethics.

An obvious possible problem with the top-down method is how we are to arrive at the supposed top principle. As the reader may have noted, a big leap was made above when we simply discarded utilitarianism in favour of for virtue ethics above. It's all well that particular actions must be justified by being shown to be deductible from a moral principle, but how can the moral principle itself be justified?

We recognized this as a problem in chapter 2 when we looked at Henry Sidgwick's method. And in fact, both of the founders of modern utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart

Mill, seem to agree that the utilitarian principle cannot really be proved – nor could any other first principles be proved. Referring to the principle of utility, Bentham wrote: “Is it susceptible of any direct proof? it should seem not: for that which is used to prove every thing else, cannot itself be proved: a chain of proofs must have their commencement somewhere. To give such proof is as impossible as it is needless.”¹¹⁷ Mill seems to be in agreement with Bentham, as he writes: “questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. To be incapable of proof by reasoning is common to all first principles; to the first premises of our knowledge, as well as to those of our conduct.”¹¹⁸ Perhaps ironically they both actually proceed to give proofs for the utilitarian principle all the same - and Mill’s proof in particular has faced heated debate among philosophers. However, they were perhaps not thinking that such principles could not be shown to be right, but rather that you could not arrive at them through deductive reasoning; first principles are what you use to deduce other things from, but they cannot themselves be deduced from anything else. If they could, then what you have is not really a first principle after all, and rather the principle or principles you used for the deduction are the true first principles.

The answer we appealed to in chapter 2 was simply the *self-evidence* of the principles, and in chapter 3 the notion of *rational intuitions* was introduced. In short, the only way in which a moral principle can be justified is if it doesn’t need to be justified; simply stating and understanding it is sufficient ‘proof’ of its moral validity or lack thereof, using our ability to reason. We may still be mistaken about the top principle though, but mistakes can be reduced by drawing on the resource pool of common sense morality as we saw Sidgwick suggest, comparing our principles to the moral judgments and intuitions of others. We may also separate between our own intuitions of a principle’s self-evidence from the moral intuitions that have their origins in our culture, our specific personal psychology, or which grant (or have previously granted) evolutionary benefits, as we saw Singer suggest in chapter 3. In short, separating our morally irrelevant intuitions from those which are grounded in reason – such as the lives of five having more worth than the life of one.

It should be made explicit that this particular method of doing ethics is not reserved for utilitarianism in specific nor consequentialist theories in general. Deontologists appear to be using this method as well, or something close to it. There is Immanuel Kant, who establishes his categorical imperative as the core ethical principle, which is then the principle situated at

¹¹⁷ Bentham, Jeremy, *The Principles Of Morals And Legislation*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Mill, John Stuart, *Utilitarianism*, p. 81.

the top which we deduce our way down from to the specific cases.¹¹⁹ Rights and duties, central concepts for most deontological theories, may very well serve as first principles, and they must then be referred to in specific situations to justify our actions morally.

THE TOP-DOWN METHOD IN ACTION: “FAMINE, AFFLUENCE, AND MORALITY”

Singer’s top-down methodology to ethics is well illustrated in his paper “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, published 1972, which has become a classic in both contemporary normative ethics as well as applied ethics. The topic of this paper is what obligations those living in wealthier nations have to those living in poorer, famine-struck nations. In particular he writes about the nation of Bengal and the hardships and suffering its population were enduring at the time of the paper being written, and what the normally well-off in other countries, which would be us, should do – if anything – to help reduce the suffering of those in foreign nations. His conclusion, roughly stated, is that we ought to help until it starts hurting us more than it benefits those who’re being helped.

Singer begins his argument with the following assumption, namely “that suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.”¹²⁰ This may seem like a fairly uncontroversial statement, and few may feel inclined to disagree. He then goes on to add and briefly explain another principle:

“[I]f it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it. By “without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance” I mean without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent. This principle seems almost as uncontroversial as the last one. It requires us only to prevent what is bad, and to promote what is good, and it requires this of us only when we can do it without sacrificing anything that is, from the moral point of view, comparably important.”¹²¹

As Singer points out, this principle – “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it” – should appear fairly uncontroversial. The principle can be illustrated by

¹¹⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork Of The Metaphysics Of Morals*.

¹²⁰ Singer, Peter, “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, p. 106.

¹²¹ Singer, Peter, “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, p. 107.

the following example¹²²: a man walks past a shallow pond in which a child is drowning. By wading in to save the child, the man's clothes would get muddy. After saving the child he would then have to get the clothes cleaned, perhaps paying a professional business to have them cleaned for him if he happened to be wearing a suit and tie. Getting his suit cleaned would then take both time and money. In worst case scenario, the man's clothes might be a lost cause, and he would have to throw the clothes away and spend more time and money on purchasing new clothes. Ought he to save the child?

The answer, according to Singer, would be yes. The man's clothes, time, and money, are not of comparable moral importance to the child's life. Or to phrase it differently, while the man's clothes getting muddied might be bad, it wouldn't be *as bad* as the child dying by drowning, at least morally speaking. Ergo, the man should save the child, sacrificing his clean clothes. This is what follows from the above principle, and presumably no one but a few would disagree with this conclusion.

However, the principle does not discriminate based on geography; it does not matter whether the child that is in danger of dying is close to us or not if we are actually able to help the child. This fact has great consequences as to how we ought to live our lives, and how we ought to invest our resources. As Singer writes:

“The uncontroversial appearance of the principle just stated is deceptive. If it were acted upon, even in its qualified form, our lives, our society, and our world would be fundamentally changed. For the principle takes [...] no account of proximity or distance. It makes no moral difference whether the person I can help is a neighbor's child ten yards from me or a Bengali whose name I shall never know, ten thousand miles away. [...] I do not think I need to say much in defense of the refusal to take proximity and distance into account. The fact that a person is physically near to us, so that we have personal contact with him, may make it more likely that we *shall* assist him, but this does not show that we *ought* to help him rather than another who happens to be further away.”¹²³

To help clarify further, if a child is drowning in another part of the world, we would normally not be able to help the child quite as easily as we would in the example given above. But imagine instead that there is a starving child in a far away country – perhaps in Bengal, as Singer uses as his example. There are various famine relief organizations, and by donating to such an organization we could actually save a child from dying by starvation. Instead of buying fancy and expensive clothes and related accessories, or indulging in other luxuries, we

¹²² Singer, Peter, “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, p. 107. I have elaborated on Singer's example some to make the case more explicit.

¹²³ Singer, Peter, “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, p. 107.

could instead donate the surplus money to such an organization to save a child from dying. In fact, we not only *could* do so, but we *ought morally* to do so and not doing so would be *morally wrong*. Donating to charities that help fight against starvation globally, Singer suggests, is not a charitable act as it's normally considered being, but rather it is the act that morality clearly demands of us, unless we somehow deem such luxuries of a higher moral importance than a human life:

“When we buy new clothes not to keep ourselves warm but to look “well-dressed” we are not providing for any important need. We would not be sacrificing anything significant if we were to continue to wear our old clothes, and give the money to famine relief. By doing so, we would be preventing another person from starving. It follows from what I have said earlier that we ought to give money away, rather than spend it on clothes which we do not need to keep us warm. To do so is not charitable, or generous. [...] On the contrary, we ought to give the money away, and it is wrong not to do so.”¹²⁴

But how much ought we to give? If we are to follow Singer's principle, given the amount of starvation and suffering that exists in the world, he suggests “that we ought to give until we reach the level of marginal utility – that is, the level at which, by giving more, I would cause as much suffering to myself or my dependents as I would relieve by my gift.”¹²⁵ This would mean that we ought, morally, to devote most of our resources to help fight against poverty and famine globally, which would mean leading quite different lives than most of us in the western world are currently leading. Could we really justify going to the movies, purchasing Rolex wristwatches, or going on vacations, when this money instead could be used on saving human lives?

There are a couple of thoughts and distinctions that I feel may be worth adding to what's been said above. One may, for example, question the utility of helping a poor nation and its suffering citizens by donating to famine relief. Perhaps the government of the nation suffering from famine would start relying too heavily on foreign aid, and in effect would not work towards fixing the more fundamental problems their nation may have which could help eradicate the need for such aid at all. This may be true, but it does not mean that we should not devote time and resources to fight against famine. Rather it would mean that we ought to devote our time and resources in a different way, and presumably there are organizations out there which focus more on strengthening a country's economy and infrastructure, in short seeking to make it more ‘developed’ and independent, rather than directly assisting the

¹²⁴ Singer, Peter, “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, p. 110.

¹²⁵ Singer, Peter, “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, p. 115.

affected citizens. Singer seems to have the *direct aid* type of charity in mind in this text, in particular mentioning the Bengal Relief Fund which, if we donate to it, “provide food, shelter, and medical care”¹²⁶, but he would presumably agree that this is not the only aid we ought to give; immediate and direct relief of suffering is important, but it is equally important to help prevent the longevity of the situation that causes the suffering and future suffering.

As we know, according to utilitarianism the right act in any situation is that which would lead to the most happiness and the least pain – or the most preferences satisfied, from a preference utilitarian viewpoint. The action we are then morally obligated to do in any situation is that which would bring about the most happiness, and the action that would bring about the most pain would be the morally worst alternative. But in between these two extremes there are a myriad of possible actions; rarely in any situation do we simply have two acts to choose from, and knowing exactly which action would be the best from a utilitarian perspective could be a difficult task. Acting morally right thus becomes very difficult, if all actions that are not *the* best action in terms of promoting happiness are morally wrong. Perhaps we ought to look at utilitarian morality more like shades of gray, and what we ought to do is to choose the lightest shade, and try to be more charitable in our vocabulary when judging others – not saying that their action is wrong, and condemning them, but rather saying that their action is good, though not as good as another alternative action they could have gone with.

Take the infamous example from William Godwin which we used in the previous chapter, having to choose between saving the Archbishop Fénelon or (let’s say) our mother from a burning building. According to utilitarianism, we ought to save the Archbishop. But would we say that it would be wrong to save our mother? Strictly speaking, this seems to be the case from a utilitarian perspective. But it would not be as wrong as, say, saving neither – nor would it have been as good as preventing the fire in the first place, if we had the option. Thus saying that either action is *the* right and *the* wrong action may be to oversimplify the utilitarian theory, and we might be charitable enough to say that saving our mother was actually a good action (although not the best) – which consequently might make utilitarianism, and Godwin’s example, less offensive to our intuitions. It seems then that we may also say that it’s a good action to give to famine relief, regardless of how much you give, and to not say that every such small donation is actually a wrong action, as the only right action is to give until we reach the level of marginal utility.

¹²⁶ Singer, Peter, “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, p. 108.

And finally, one may perhaps argue that those who are closer to us actually have, for some reason, a stronger right to our help; that we ought to help someone closer to us rather than someone who is further away. But even if one were to agree to this, this does not necessarily mean that one shouldn't give up various luxuries and give to those in foreign countries, for example buying an expensive wristwatch instead of donating the money to a charity organization. It would merely mean that we ought to help those who are closer to us *first*, for example helping the poor and starving in our own and in our neighbouring countries, and *then* help those in more distant countries, which would still mean giving up expensive wristwatches.

So here we have seen a good example of the top-down methodology in action: Singer starts with a particular moral principle which seems plausible if not actually self-evident, and he works his way down from it (pointing out what it does or does not imply – for example, arguing that proximity is not a relevant factor, but never changing the actual principle while doing so), deducing from this principle what we ought to do, what is right and wrong, in more specific cases. If the conclusions arrived at clash with our everyday moral judgments and intuitions, that does not prove the principle wrong. The principle in this case was “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it” (which seems fully compatible with the core utilitarian principle), and the consequence would be to give up all luxuries. The principle itself is never changed during the argument; it's neither discarded nor revised. The argument only helps to clarify the principle, and its practical implications and applications. As Singer writes:

“the way people do in fact judge has nothing to do with the validity of my conclusion. My conclusion follows from the principle which I advanced earlier, and unless that principle is rejected, or the arguments are shown to be unsound, I think the conclusion must stand, however strange it appears.”¹²⁷

INTUITIONS AS INVALUABLE TOOLS

Recall the example that Jonathan Haidt presented to research participants when doing his research: the siblings Julie and Mark who one night decided to make love. Most judge their act of lovemaking to be wrong, and if we are to believe Haidt's research, this is done on the basis of an intuition. But according to the utilitarian principle, if the description is as Haidt

¹²⁷ Singer, Peter, “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”, p. 111.

has presented it without any other relevant external factors, it would however seem to be the right thing to do, contrary to our intuition.

Yet this intuition has arguably served mankind well through our history. It is common knowledge that there is a higher risk of birthing a child with various deformities when the child's parents are closely related to one another. So if not for our intuitive disgust against sexual relations among family members, presumably a higher number of deformed, unhealthy children would be born as more people would engage in lovemaking with one another within the family. The lives of these children would be more likely to be shorter, more painful, and less pleasurable than that of healthy children. Perhaps the lives of some of these deformed children would overall be more painful than happy. It would then be better to copulate outside the family, and give birth to healthy children instead, if the two available options are to give birth to a healthy child contra an unhealthy and deformed child.

These days there are various aids that can be used to prevent conception during sex. If the story Haidt describes had taken place earlier in mankind's history, Julie and Mark would not have had access to such aids, and the chance of birthing a deformed child would be higher, and the contraception available may be more hazardous to their health. But with today's advances it is fully possible for close family members to have sex without a high chance of conception, and there would not be any risks to their health involved in using contraception. So it could perhaps be argued that this particular intuition has outplayed its usefulness, and is now doing more harm than good, making it difficult for family members who wish to live as spouses and engage in sex to lead the lives that would make them happy rather than sparing them and possible children from harm.

In our everyday lives, we rarely have the resources to actually sit down and think through whether or not a certain action we do is moral or immoral. Instead, we rely on our everyday instincts and moral intuitions to quickly give us this information. And as it turns out, many – perhaps the majority – of these appear to be at least roughly in sync with what most moral theories would recommend. Presumably most of us feel that wanton acts of violence are wrong, and would neither want to be the victims of perpetrators of such acts, nor would we want others to fill these roles. We would be hard pressed to find any normative theory that would condone wanton violence. If we see someone coming at us with a knife, our response would probably be to run, trying to preserve our own lives. This would probably be the recommended response by any moral theory as well (in the absence of other relevant factors).

We do a number of more everyday actions without much thought; we feed our children, we perform our jobs, we engage in recreational activities, now and then we might help out friends or family members in larger tasks such as moving, etc.

If on the other hand we were all to sit down and deliberately think about every action and every judgment we were to make, using our ability to reason to find out whether or not something actually is right and appealing to some moral principle, then the man with the knife may have kill us before we've found the answer. Our children would grow hungry, furniture would go unmoved, jobs would go undone. In short, if we were all to do this, the world would stop. We would be unable to function in our everyday lives.

Not using intuitions and solely using reason would then be an unreasonable proposition. Instead, we should let ourselves be guided by our intuitions for the most part, but when we are capable we should try to reflect critically over our intuitions, and see whether or not they actually are right. In short, we should aspire for something akin to utilitarian philosopher R. M. Hare's two-level morality, separating between the intuitive, everyday level of morality, and the critical level.¹²⁸ If upon reflection we find that some of our intuitions turn out to be wrong, we should ignore it, or better yet, strive to change it.

We should then seek to develop in ourselves (and in others) the intuitions which most closely mirror normative, rationally based morality. For example, our intuition about the wrongness of incest, causing us to condemn what Julie and Mark did, was showed to have once been an intuition that was beneficial for us. Now, however, this intuition has outplayed its usefulness, and we should work to rid ourselves of it.

Another example of an intuition that may not be too uncommon, is some people's intuitive disgust with open displays of homosexuality, finding this to be immoral. I believe I can state, without too much disagreement, that there is nothing immoral about homosexuality – and just as there is nothing wrong with heterosexual couples showing displays of affection in public (such as holding hands, hugging, and perhaps kissing), there is nothing wrong with homosexual couples doing the same. If anyone feels disgust at the thought or sight of homosexual affection, it could be suggested that he, ironically, ought to expose himself to it more in an attempt to make his response of disgust numb. Just as someone who works in a slaughterhouse with slaughtering animals might learn to feel no disgust at seeing blood, gore,

¹²⁸ Discussed in R. M. Hare's *Moral Thinking*. Also discussed in Peter Singer's *One World*, p. 159-160.

and even taking the lives of animals, frequenting a gay bars might gradually cure someone's disgust with homosexual affection.

Of course, this isn't as easy with other moral intuitions we have in regards to other cases – such as capital punishment and abortion – but for some, simply exposing ourselves to the right stimuli might prove successful. But sometimes our intuitions may be of such a nature that the best we can do is to remind ourselves that they are mistaken and try to ignore them.

REASON AS AN INVALUABLE TOOL

So intuitions are invaluable tools in our everyday lives, making it possible for us to make quick decisions and judgments in regards to our own and others' actions without going through a time consuming, debilitating (and potentially dangerous, depending on the situation) process each time we are faced with a situation. Intuitions are arguably also biologically unavoidable, a part of how we work and not something we can easily (if at all) get rid of. Yet these intuitions do not prove that something is right and wrong, for which we must ultimately put our ability to reason to work.

The ability to reason is morally important, allowing us to find out what is morally right from wrong. One obvious way in which reasoning and critical thinking could be promoted, could be through obligatory classes in either critical thinking or philosophy. As Singer points out, most people “know less about philosophy than they know about almost any other academic discipline.”¹²⁹ As we saw in chapter 3 when looking at the research conducted by Jonathan Haidt, philosophers were far more likely to ignore their intuitive responses on moral issues than non-philosophers, relying instead on their ability to reason to reach a judgment; philosophers were described as “one of the few groups that has been found to reason well”¹³⁰, so a philosopher might be able to “simply reason her way to a judgment that contradicts her initial intuition”¹³¹. Thus teaching and exposing more people to philosophy seems like an obvious and easy way in which society can be made more moral.

¹²⁹ Singer, Peter, “Philosophers Are Back On The Job”, p. 53.

¹³⁰ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 819.

¹³¹ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 829.

Especially people holding important offices facing tough decisions on a regular basis which may affect the lives of many should be capable of ignoring gut reactions and instead think rationally and critically about important subjects before making any decisions. Presumably they should also be using the top-down method, as should most others.

PHILOSOPHERS AS MORAL AUTHORITIES, AND THE ‘DANGER’ OF PATERNALISM

As has been stated, philosophers are skilled at thinking critically and ignoring their intuitions – much so than the non-philosopher. This should come as no surprise to Singer, who’s argued that philosophers are well suited to provide insight into issues of morality, and to act as moral authorities – specifically in “Moral Experts”, published in 1972, and in “Philosophers Are Back On The Job”, published 1974. Singer writes that: “[I]t would be surprising if moral philosophers were not, in general, better suited to arrive at the right, or soundly based, moral conclusions than non-philosophers. Indeed, if this were not the case, one might wonder whether moral philosophy was worthwhile.”¹³² At more length, he explains exactly why philosophers are more apt at contributing to discussions of right and wrong than non-philosophers:

“On the basis of what has just been said, it would seem that the moral philosopher does have some important advantage over the ordinary man. First, his general training as a philosopher should make him more than ordinarily competent in argument and in the detection of invalid inferences. Next, his specific experience in moral philosophy gives him an understanding of moral concepts and of the logic of moral argument. The possibility of serious confusion arising if one engages in moral argument without a clear understanding of the concepts employed has been sufficiently emphasized in recent moral philosophy and does not need to be demonstrated here. [...] Finally, there is the simple fact that the moral philosopher can, if he wants, think full-time about moral issues, while most other people have some occupation to pursue which interferes with such reflection. It may sound silly to place much weight on this, but it is, I think very important. If we are to make moral judgments on some basis other than our unreflective intuitions, we need time, both for collecting facts and for thinking about them.”

Thus Singer has high hopes for the role of philosophers in public debates on moral issues:

“By using their understanding of the nature of moral concepts and, above all, by probing more

¹³² Singer, Peter, “Moral Experts”, p. 6.

deeply and taking less for granted than others do, philosophers may be able to raise the standard of moral discussion from its present depressingly low level.”¹³³

In light of the research and Singer’s views on intuitions, there seems to be a certain danger here of paternalism or ethical elitism. Philosophers seem to know what is morally right better than anyone else, being capable of ignoring their moral intuitions better than others (and using the top-down method). If we also recognize morality as being the most important deciding factor for how a nation is run or society is shaped, as opposed to economic and aesthetic concerns, should not those who know best what is morally right and wrong be the ones making the shots, so to speak? Perhaps philosophers should be given free reins to implement their ethical views on the masses (though getting them to agree could be difficult), deciding various policies, and, in short, trying to create the most ethical society that they’d be capable of. In short, should we not have some kinds of philosopher kings running the show?

I believe there is nothing wrong with paternalism in and of itself – it just depends on who the father figure is, so to speak. If we define paternalism as the most suited running things to the greatest interests of all, there seems to be no danger in having a paternalistic society controlled by philosopher kings. However, actually trying to apply paternalism may have its share of problems, one of which might be the outrage of the people over having reduced freedom and their lives controlled. So perhaps rather than outright paternalism, some sort of esoteric morality might be the better option.

ESOTERIC MORALITY

The concept of esoteric morality was made famous in *The Methods Of Ethics* by Henry Sidgwick in this oft-quoted passage:

“[O]n Utilitarian principles, it may be right to do and privately recommend, under certain circumstances, what it would not be right to advocate openly; it may be right to teach openly to one set of persons what it would be wrong to teach to others; it may be conceivably right to do, if it can be done with comparative secrecy, what it would be wrong to do in the face of the world; and even, if perfect secrecy can be reasonably expected, what it would be wrong to recommend by private advice or example.”¹³⁴

¹³³ Singer, Peter, “Philosophers Are Back On The Job”, p. 63.

¹³⁴ Sidgwick, Henry, *The Methods Of Ethics*, p. 489.

Esoteric morality is a complex concept, but for our present purposes it can be stated as the following: it may, under certain conditions, be morally right for those who know what is morally right to not say what is morally right to those who do not know. In fact, those who know what is morally right may be morally obligated to deceive those who don't as to what is morally right; they may deceive them as to what moral principles are correct, and as to what the morally recommended action would be in certain cases. Certain actions may also be morally obligated only insofar as the actions committed are kept secret; that is, as long as they are never made public.

Esoteric morality is the topic in an as of yet unpublished manuscript co-authored by Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, entitled "Secrecy In Consequentialism: A Defence Of Esoteric Morality". Here Singer breaks up and analyzes the above quoted paragraph from Sidgwick, using hypothetical scenarios to try to make clear what the notion of esoteric morality entails. He argues against philosophers John Rawls, Bertrand Gert, and Brad Hooker, all whom he claims believe that "the fact that something *would* be wrong if it were done openly shows that it *is* wrong, even if done in secret."¹³⁵

To more clearly illustrate esoteric morality, we can look at an infamous hypothetical case in moral philosophy which Singer discusses in the manuscript; "a surgeon has to do a delicate brain operation on a patient who happens to be the ideal organ donor for four other patients in the hospital, each of whom will die shortly unless they receive, respectively, a heart, a liver, and – for two of them – a kidney."¹³⁶ From a utilitarian standpoint, the surgeon ought to, *ceteris paribus*, bring about the death of the one patient to save the lives of the four other patients. But, Singer writes, "this is one of those rare cases in which the action is right only if perfect secrecy can be expected."¹³⁷ For if it became publically known, there would presumably be public outrage. People may no longer feel as if they could trust doctors, fearing that the doctors could harvest their organs instead of curing them. So this action is *only right* insofar as it is kept from the public's eyes.

Moral philosophers, as has been stated, have had rigorous training in doing normative ethics, and are better at making moral judgments based on reason as opposed to intuitions than

¹³⁵ Lazari-Radek, Katarzyna de, and Peter Singer, "Secrecy In Consequentialism: A Defence Of Esoteric Morality", p. 1.

¹³⁶ Lazari-Radek, Katarzyna de, and Peter Singer, "Secrecy In Consequentialism: A Defence Of Esoteric Morality", p. 4.

¹³⁷ Lazari-Radek, Katarzyna de, and Peter Singer, "Secrecy In Consequentialism: A Defence Of Esoteric Morality", p. 4.

others. I suggested that this might mean that philosophers really ought to ‘run the show’, making our society into the most ethical society without outside inference – in a short, a form of paternalism. But just as people would find doctors redistributing organs among their patients appalling, people might find such a paternalistic society outrageous as well. So perhaps philosophers should try to spread morality, but doing so without the public knowing?

For example, let’s say philosophers agree that active euthanasia is morally okay, but the public finds this intuitively appalling. So if active euthanasia were to be accepted, public outrage would ensue. So perhaps the intuitions of the public ought to be manipulated discretely, through propaganda or more calculated means, so that they’ll gradually come to accept active euthanasia. Once the intuitions of the bulk of the public have been sufficiently tampered with, euthanasia could be endorsed and practised publically (and until then, it could only be practised in private).

If we are cynical, we might perhaps claim that Singer himself practices a kind of esoteric morality, trying to disguise his arguments so as to not trigger the wrong intuitions in people. Though Singer believes in the utilitarian principle, he often argues without actually referring to utilitarianism directly, despite the fact that his arguments have their roots in said theory. Utilitarianism is well-known as clashing with many of our common intuitions. Consequently, by not making explicit the utilitarian roots, he may avoid triggering certain intuitions in people, which in turn would lead them to discard his argument; instead people may find themselves persuaded to utilitarianism without really knowing it.

A better, less cynical explanation is simply that he does not wish to exclude anyone from the debate on various moral issues. As non-philosophers are not familiar with the terminology of academic philosophy, they may find it discouraging and intimidating, and as we shall be commenting below, open, public discussions of moral issues may be important. Perhaps also the utilitarian specific methodology often remains unused in an effort to show that proposed principles and actions would be accepted by other, non-utilitarian theories as well.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TALKING ETHICS IN PUBLIC

As a counterpoint to the possibility of elitism, paternalism, and esoteric morality – which may be more academic fiction than any real, practical dangers – the preceding chapters can instead give us some good arguments for having frequent and open debates about morality and moral

issues, and for teaching ethics to others. This clearly seems to be what Singer would want, as he writes:

“This suggestion [that moral philosophers are moral experts] is not meant to imply that moral philosophers should pontificate from their professorial chairs while the masses dutifully obey. Moral positions should be discussed and argued about, not accepted on the authority of God or god-professor.”¹³⁸

(Although he does also admit: “We should be reluctant to embrace esoteric morality. Yet sometimes we are right to do in secret what it would be wrong to do, or to advocate, in public.”¹³⁹)

It is through discussions with others, and through conflicts, in which our moral views are often tested. Philosophers have the luxury of being “tested by his colleagues at seminars, conferences, and in the learned journals”¹⁴⁰ on his various claims, as we mentioned above, but by more frequently having open, accessible, public debates, non-philosophers may be able to both contribute and to have their views tested – through newspapers, TV shows, and open academic seminars.

Jonathan Haidt also speculates in the importance of discussing ethics with others, saying that more open discussions about moral matters may lead to personal judgments that are “nuanced and ultimately more reasonable.”¹⁴¹ People may at times be *morally dumbfounded* as a result, holding their views without being able to give any good justification for their views, but hopefully this sort of dumbfounding is at least one step closer to having changed someone’s mind, perhaps causing them to further reflect on their own intuitively based judgments. To refer to Haidt’s SIM, arguing about ethics and occasionally becoming dumbfounded it might help strengthen the reasoned judgment and private reflection links.

People may often find it uncomfortable to discuss their own views on morality though, believing that it is a personal matter, and not feeling comfortable with discussing sensitive issues close to one’s heart. But this seems to be a dangerous stance, allowing opinions which are plainly immoral to remain uncontested. Especially in a democratic society does this seem

¹³⁸ Singer, Peter, “Philosophers Are Back On The Job”, p. 63.

¹³⁹ Lazari-Radek, Katarzyna de, and Peter Singer, “Secrecy In Consequentialism: A Defence Of Esoteric Morality”, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ Singer, Peter, “Philosophers Are Back On The Job”, p. 65

¹⁴¹ Haidt, Jonathan, “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”, p. 829.

especially appalling, as everyone have the power to shape society and, thusly, control everyone else's lives. Singer points out this curious attitude in his book *Rethinking Life And Death*:

“There is a common view that reason and argument play no role in ethics, and therefore we have no need to defend our ethical views when they are challenged. Some people are more ready to reason about the merits of football players or chocolate cake recipes than they are about their belief in the sanctity of human life. This is a force of conservatism in ethics. It allows people to say: ‘Oh yes, well that is your opinion, but I think differently’ – as if that is the end of discussion.”¹⁴²

If we do not have open, public discussions of moral issues, there would be little (if any) moral progress, people simply left to stagnate with their own moral standards. Then it would maybe be for the better to let the philosophers run the show.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

We started this thesis by looking at Peter Singer's argument against the use of intuitions which we called the subjectivism argument, claiming that using intuitions as data against which to test our moral theories would lead to us to be subjectivists. We did not find any fatal errors with the argument per se, but there were uncertainties as to what the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity referred to, and further clarification of these terms from Singer's side might be needed for his argument be persuasive. We looked at John Rawls's method of reflective equilibrium, which Singer was obviously against, yet we found some similarities and overlaps between Rawls's method and that of Singer, and perhaps throughout the paper. We also looked at Henry Sidgwick's methodology, which involved finding self-evident first principles which would serve as moral axioms. How these first-principles were to be justified seemed to be a problem, as the only way they could be justified was by their self-evidence – in other words, their lack of a need to be justified.

Then we proceeded to look at the evolution argument, a later argument that Singer uses against moral intuitions. He based his argument on the research done in the field of moral psychology by Joshua Greene and Jonathan Haidt (and their colleagues), claiming that our intuitions had been shaped by the process of evolution and were therefore morally irrelevant. The research also generally helped drive a wedge between moral judgments based on reason

¹⁴² Singer, Peter, *Rethinking Life And Death*, p. 220.

contra intuitions, making them into two distinct, separable phenomena. The evolution argument was found lacking, as Singer never seemed to give a satisfying answer as to why the evolutionary origins of our intuitions would render them normatively impotent. We asked, what if our intuitions had had a different origin, such as a deity or a demon? Would this have made the moral intuitions more or less valid? The suggested answer was that their origins would not directly affect their normative status, or lack thereof. Singer also showed that he wasn't as anti-intuitionist as one might have believed, introducing the notion of rational intuitions, which seemed to be a similar concept as self-evidence.

Then we went on to try to sketch our own argument against the use of moral intuitions, the partiality argument. It was claimed that Singer himself had come close to making this argument, but that he had never actually done so. Impartiality was roughly defined as taking on a perspective in which you remove yourself from yourself, whereas partiality was doing the opposite, taking on the perspective as yourself in your particular situation. It was suggested that intuitions only helped entrench us in ourselves, and hence would be considered immoral as a source of justification for normative ethics. The findings of Jean Piaget on egocentrism in children referred to as a possible source of credibility for the argument.

And finally, in this chapter we tried to make a few practical deductions and loose speculations from what has come in the preceding chapters, seeing how we are to engage in ethics as well as how we are to make our society into a more ethical one. We described Singer's methodology, a *top-down* approach to doing ethics, basically the same method as that of Sidgwick, and we saw how it worked in practice by looking at the issue of poverty and foreign aid. We then suggested that intuitions did not have to be the foe of normative ethics, but could rather serve as a valuable ally, and that we ought to try to shape our intuitions, as best we can, to be in sync with some recognized moral principles. Without intuitions humans would cease to function effectively. Reasoning is undoubtedly still important as well, as this is what ultimately allows us to find out what's really moral and in so doing, assessing our intuitions. Education in philosophy and frequent, open, debates on moral issues may help to improve our ability to reason, as well as allowing us to test our own views. However, this strong emphasis on reason and the moral expertise of philosophers could be used as an argument for paternalism or esoteric morality.

Have we reached our asserted goal, of identifying and explaining Singer's arguments against the use of intuitions in moral methodology? Somewhat. They were identified and discussed to

the best ability of the author of this thesis (given various factors), but in the end we were left with several new questions which were never fully answered. Just exactly what is meant by subjectivism and objectivism? Is evolution really normatively relevant? How can we actually find first-principles, and why do so many moral philosophers disagree if such principles exist and really are self-evident? And can we, ultimately, trust the actual moral intuitions we have?

In Singer's comment to Cass R. Sunstein's text "Moral Heuristics", Singer makes the following claim, referring to the debate about moral intuitions: "Debate in normative ethical theory will continue. Perhaps, however, one chapter is drawing to a close."¹⁴³ But I believe Singer is premature in his prediction; instead I predict that the work here has just started, especially with the advances within the field of moral psychology. Volumes have been written and many more will be written on the topic of moral intuitions, both for and against.

¹⁴³ Singer, Peter, "Intuitions, Heuristics, And Utilitarianism", p. 561.

LITERATURE

- Bentham, Jeremy. *The Principles Of Morals And Legislation*. Amherst: Prometheus Books. 1988.
- Bjorklund, Fredrik, and Jonathan Haidt. “Social Intuitionists Answer Six Questions About Moral Psychology”. *Moral Psychology – Volume 2: The Cognitive Science Of Morality: Intuition And Diversity*, ed. Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter, p. 181-217. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 2008.
- Blackburn, Simon. *Ethics – A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003.
- Cannold, Leslie, Helga Kushe, and Peter Singer. “William Godwin And The Defense Of Impartialist Ethics”. *Unsanctifying Human Life – Essays On Ethics*, ed. Krusche, Helga, p. 157-177. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 2002.
- Descartes, René. “Meditations On First Philosophy”. *Meditations On First Philosophy With Selections From The Objections And Replies (Revised Edition)*, ed. Cottingham, John, p. 1-62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.
- *A Dictionary Of Philosophy*: “Subjectivism And Objectivism”. Ed. Flew, Antony, and Stephen Priest. London: Pan Books. 1984.
- Dworkin, Gerald. “Theory, Practice, And Moral Reasoning”. *The Oxford Handbook Of Ethical Theory*, ed. Copp, David, p. 624-644. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2006.
- Hare, R. M. *Moral Thinking – Its Level, Method, And Point*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1981.
- Gert, Bernard. *Common Morality – Deciding What To Do*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2004.
- Greene, Joshua, R. Brian Sommerville, Leigh E. Nystrom, John M. Darley, and Jonathan D. Cohen. “An fMRI Investigation Of Emotional Engagement In Moral Judgment”. *Science* 293, p. 2105-2108. 2001.
- Greene, Joshua. “From Neural ‘Is’ To Moral ‘Ought’: What Are The Moral Implications Of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?” *Neuroscience* 4, p. 847-850. 2003.
- Haidt, Jonathan. “The Emotional Dog And Its Rational Tail – A Social Intuitionist Approach To Moral Judgment”. *Psychological Review* 108, p. 814-834. 2001.

- Jamieson, Dale. “Preface”. *Singer And His Critics*, ed. Jamieson, Dale, p. x. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 2000.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork Of The Metaphysics Of Morals*, ed. Gregor, Mary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.
- Lazari-Radek, Katarzyna de, and Peter Singer. “Secrecy In Consequentialism: A Defence Of Esoteric Morality”. Unpublished. 2008.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*, ed. Crisp, Roger. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998.
- Passer, Michael W., and Ronald E. Smith. *Psychology - The Science Of Mind And Behaviour (Second Edition)*. New York: McGraw-Hill. 2004.
- *The Penguin Dictionary Of Philosophy*: “Trolley Problem”. Ed. Mautner, Thomas. London: Penguin Books. 2000.
- *The Penguin Dictionary Of Psychology (Third Edition)*: “Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)”. Reber, Arthur S., and Emily S. Reber. London: Penguin Books. 2001.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory Of Justice (Revised Edition)*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1999.
- Sagdahl, Mathias Slåttholm. *Why Follow Norms? – A Pluralist Approach To Justification*. Oslo: Universitetet I Oslo. 2008.
- Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods Of Ethics (Seventh Edition)*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company. 1981.
- Singer, Peter. “Ethics And Intuitions”. *The Journal Of Ethics* 9, p. 331-352. 2005.
- Singer, Peter. *The Expanding Circle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1981.
- Singer, Peter. “Famine, Affluence, And Morality”. *Writings On An Ethical Life*, p. 105-117. New York: HarperCollins. 2000.
- Singer, Peter. “Intuitions, Heuristics, And Utilitarianism”. *Behavioral And Brain Sciences* 28, p. 560-561. 2005.
- Singer, Peter. “Moral Experts”. *Writings On An Ethical Life*, p. 3-6. New York: HarperCollins. 2000.
- Singer, Peter. “Morality, Reason, And The Rights Of Animals”. *Primates And Philosophers – How Morality Evolved*, ed. Macedo, Stepen and Josiah Ober, p. 140-158. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2006.
- Singer, Peter. *One World – The Ethics Of Globalization (Second Edition)*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2004.

- Singer, Peter. “Philosophers Are Back On The Job”. *Unsanctifying Human Life – Essays On Ethics*, ed. Krushe, Helga, p. 53-65. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 2002.
- Singer, Peter. *Practical Ethics (Second Edition)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1993.
- Singer, Peter. *The President Of Good And Evil – Taking George W. Bush Seriously*. London: Granata Books. 2004.
- Singer, Peter. *Rethinking Life And Death – The Collapse Of Our Traditional Ethics*. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin. 1994.
- Singer, Peter. “Sidgwick And The Reflective Equilibrium”. *The Monist* 58, p. 490-517. 1974.
- Singer, Peter. “The Triviality Of The Debate Over “Is-Ought” And The Definition Of “Moral””. *Unsanctifying Human Life – Essays On Ethics*, ed. Krushe, Helga, p. 17-26. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 2002.
- Warren, Mary Anne. *Moral Status – Obligations To Persons And Other Living Things*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 2001.