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CHANGES IN LATITUDES, CHANGES IN ATTITUDES*

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We will address the following issues: (1) Whether or not there are significant limits to ethical and political discourse (in theory and practice) across cultural differences? (2) If so, what are they? We will propose that there are some significant limits to cross cultural ethical and political dialogue, and that these limits arise from the real impetus for accepting most forms of relativism. [For compatible arguments to ours see, David Wong, *Moral Relativity*, 1984.] (3) Although relativism is well grounded, we will argue that this need not entail that there cannot be peaceful and reasonable debate and decision making in the realms of ethical and political discourse.

RELATIVISM

Relativism, despite well-formed arguments intended to exorcise it, regularly haunts the house of philosophical discussion. Relativism spooks philosophers because, as it is classically understood, it maintains that there are significant limits to our understanding and judgment of others. To acknowledge that there are limits to moral, political, or epistemic understanding and judgment is to jettison the hope of attaining either universally applicable moral, political, and epistemic norms or universal consensus.

Philosophers in search of universal discourse typically have employed arguments intended to show that relativist theses and arguments violate the most basic of philosophical grounds: the rules of logic. Two arguments making such an appeal are prominent in the literature. The first is an argument aimed at the likes of anthropologists who defend relativism based on their fieldwork comparing different cultures. It points out that it does not logically follow from the fact that different people(s) have different beliefs that those conflicting beliefs are equally justified. The second argument attempts to exorcise relativism by showing that the position is fundamentally incoherent. "Everything is relative" is self-refuting, it is claimed, because if "Everything is relative" is true, then there is at least one thing that isn't relative. If these arguments do not persuade because they appear rather a bit too facile, French, building on Davidson's principle of charity, offered another type of argument—a semantic argument—against relativism.

Davidson's well-known argument is that not many of the beliefs of a culture can be false because a belief is identified by that which determines the subject matter of the belief, what the belief is about. [Donald Davidson, "Thought and Talk", *Mind and Language* (Oxford, 1975)] Davidson's point is that if more than only a few of our beliefs about some subject can be false, it would be possible for us to conceive of someone such that almost all of that person's beliefs about that subject are false. Davidson notes, however, that "false beliefs tend to undermine the identification of the subject matter." Simply, if we were to admit to the possibility that someone (or some culture) could hold beliefs about a subject that were mostly false, we would have to conclude that we had misidentified the subject of those beliefs. Suppose that we hold a number of beliefs about some subject and that members of another culture hold beliefs that are incompatible with ours. What must we conclude? Because we cannot hold that most of our beliefs are false and the principle of charity requires we allow the same for their beliefs, then we must either have gotten wrong that their beliefs were about that particular subject or misunderstood at what features of the circumstances their beliefs were directed. In the latter case we should expect to discover our error regarding about what the members of the other culture are talking and then revise our original judgment that radical disagreement exists between us. In the former case we must conclude that their beliefs are not of the same type as ours, e.g. moral beliefs. David Cooper has seen the outcome of this argument: We can only identify another's beliefs as, e.g., moral beliefs about something, if there is a massive degree of agreement between that person's and our beliefs. Hence, there is no chance of radical moral diversity. [see David E. Cooper, "Moral Relativism," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* (1978) p. 101.]

We do not dispute the validity of these arguments against relativism, but we do dispute a certain characterization of relativism that has been held by relativists and critics alike and must be true to insure the soundness of these arguments: that world views are systems of beliefs.

The reason we believe relativism repeatedly haunts philosophy and other humanities is not that there are differences between systems of belief, as such, but that world views, or conceptual schemes, are not, at heart, sets or systems of beliefs. We will argue that world views are primarily clusters of cares and that there is a vast difference between clusters of cares and systems of beliefs. If the relativist is to be defeated, he or she will have to be engaged on quite a different playing field than the well-worn logical turf of propositional beliefs on which the antirelativists have been practicing their arguments.

We take it to be raw fact of human life that people of different cultures assign different degrees of importance to different objects, beliefs, and actions. Simply, they care about different things or they care about the same things to radically different degrees. There are significant differences between the pro and con attitudes people(s) have toward different and, sometimes, conflicting objects. People from different cultures do not merely disagree about what they believe to be true. It is often the non-cognitive rather than the cognitive elements of human relations with the world and others that divide cultures or ethnic groups. Relativism's resilience as a viable stance is more firmly grounded than many philosophers have been willing to admit or than their narrow focus on world views as systems of beliefs permits them. Simply, different people(s) or groups typically have different clusters of cares, i.e. what they regard as important.

The sort of cares we have in mind are not simply a set of cognitive states, they are irreducible, thick cognitive and non-cognitive complex states that constitute what are important and unimportant to human beings, as well as being the central basis of human identities. And, we believe that insofar as cares are

constitutive of human identities, objects of care are not merely valuable, but they have and are of central moral significance. Cares, of the sort we are speaking, also are largely outside the realm of human will. By and large, their wellsprings are in culture, history, and, place. If we are right in our characterization of world views primarily in terms of cares then there likely are rather significant limits to understanding, justification, and action at the juncture of moral and cultural discourses, and many of the classical arguments against relativism attack a straw-man. We are going to suggest reasons to reject the standard cognitivist presupposition about relativism, and, hopefully, provide a richer and more plausible non-cognitivist ground which makes relativism immune to the standard criticisms and so its troublesome presence, to some philosophers “demonic,” will continue to resist exorcism from the body (and soul) of cross-cultural ethical and political discourse.

PEOPLE CARE

We think it is a truism that people care. Some may think that this provides us with a universal, non-moral feature of human beings upon which some universal morality may be grounded. However, we contend that “people care” is about as useful to the grounding and justification of a practical, universal moral theory as “people desire”. What is important in the realm of moral theorizing, especially in cross-cultural settings, is the content of cares or, put another way, the objects which people(s) find or make important in their lives. It is in differences of content or in objects of care that moral discourse really begins, where questions central to all the normative disciplines are born and thrive. In addition, it is in the affective elements of cares (e.g. feelings of attachment) where a non-cognitive basis of relativism gets its hold in human consciousness.

Care is a scalar concept. One cares a great deal, a bit, somewhat, hardly at all. If you care about something, as Harry Frankfurt has noted, it is important to you. (Frankfurt, 1988) The amount of care tracks the amount of importance the object of care has for the person doing the caring. In fact, as Frankfurt notes, the two concepts (caring about and importance) are intimately interrelated. (80-81) I only care about what is important to me, and for something to be important to me, I must care about it.

We want to argue that what people or a group of people do and do not care about (and in various degrees) lies at the very core of who they are and explains much more about what they do and think than all the fancy philosophic discourse about world views as sets of beliefs. In order to care about something, one has to guide one’s behavior in a particular manner or along a specific course. Frankfurt writes, “A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He identifies himself with what he cares about in a sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced.”(83) Caring involves devotion, passion, and the structuring of a life in a certain way. To care about something one must conceive of oneself as a being with identity over time, as a being that casts itself into a future. Cares have “inherent persistence.”(84) Caring about something requires an extended period of time. Frankfurt writes:

The fact that someone cares about a certain thing is constituted by a complex set of cognitive, affective, and volitional dispositions and states. It may sometimes be possible for a person, by making a certain choice or decision, effectively to bring it about that he cares about a certain thing or that he cares about one thing more than about another. But that depends upon conditions which do not always prevail. It certainly cannot be assumed that what a person cares about is generally under his immediate voluntary control. (85)

Various types of beliefs that get incorporated as a matter of course into the accounts philosophers, such as Martin Benjamin, provide of world views do not automatically get included in world views if world views are understood in terms of what, for example, an ethnic group in a certain region of the world really cares about. Benjamin tells us that “interlocking general beliefs about knowledge, reality, and values” are fitted into world views.(Benjamin, 88) He makes it sound as if whatever is logically necessary to hold the elements of one’s world view into a coherent bundle are themselves part of the world view. Philosophers inordinately worry about the coherence of belief sets, people just live in accord with what they take to be

important. For example, we believe that the earth is round. In fact, we more than just believe it. We take it as an established piece of knowledge, something about which we are certain. But, do we really care about whether or not it is round. People once did, but it is no longer that important to most of us.

A world view, Benjamin correctly notes, is dynamically interrelated to a way of life. (90) In effect, world views govern ways of life. To say that the belief that the earth is round is a part, albeit an unarticulated part, (as Benjamin does) of our world view, however, is gratuitous for that belief plays no role in the governance of our way of life. If it's round, it's round. If it's flat, it's flat. We don't give a damn. Our way of life is not at all "dynamically interrelated" to whatever unarticulated beliefs (whatever they are) we may or may not have regarding the shape of the earth. Columbus, of course, really cared about the shape of the earth. He staked his life and reputation on it. He invested himself in it. How he lived, what he did or did not do is made intelligible because he cared about the earth being one kind of shape rather than another. It was not that he just believed that the world was round, it mattered to him that it was, and it mattered in such a way that he could not forbear from taking certain courses of action.

Frankfurt reminds us of Luther's famous "Here I stand, I can do no other." speech at the Diet of Worms. Think also of Thomas More's refusal to swear the oath that would have saved his life. How should we understand them? In what sense could they do no other, and how could we have done the other without flinching? Apparently, we do not care about what Luther or More cared about, though we probably believe much of what they believed. Or, we do not care about it as much as they did. We care about other things much more. Why could Luther or More do no other? Both certainly could do something else. Luther could retract his writings before the Diet and get on with whatever else he cared to do. More clearly could sign the documents thrust at him by Cromwell and Cramner, go back to his family and his home in Chelsea, and live out a profitable life. Surely they knew the alternatives open to them. Their examiners had explained the alternatives, and Luther and More had the capacity to act other than they did. They were not under duress to continue to take their stands. If there was any duress, it ran all the other way. But, for them the alternative actions were unthinkable, not that they could not think of them. Frankfurt uses the term "volitional necessity" to refer to the kind of constraints that rendered Luther and More unable to take the alternative path of doing what their examiners wanted them to do. (Frankfurt, 86ff) We want to say that they found it impossible to act in an alternative way, a way most of us would regard as the rational thing to do, because what a person cares about caring about blocks certain paths of action for that person, in the sense that the person cannot force himself or herself to take those paths.

The sort of volitional necessity that is involved is not self disassociative. It is a matter of resolute self-investment. Luther and More did not accede to the force of their self-investment (what they cared most about) because they did not have the strength of will to overcome its influence on them. This was what they cared about. Luther can do no other "because he really does not want to do it." (Frankfurt, 87) In that sense, that bundle of things one cares about caring about is a vital part of one's identity, a point the playwright Robert Bolt ascribes to Thomas More as he tries to explain his stand to his daughter. [Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons*, (1962)] We cannot hope to understand Luther and More if we do not grasp what it is to truly have their cares. The best we could hope for is some abstract drivel about admiring people who stand by their convictions in difficult, indeed life-threatening, circumstances.

Following Frankfurt then, we believe that human cares may be generally illuminated as follows:

What people care about tracks what is important in their lives.

The objects people find important are so because they make some significant difference in their lives.

Though cares resist any clear and simple definition, there are certain characteristics of cares that expose how they are different from beliefs, desires, or feelings. Consider the following prototypical characteristics of cares:

- Identity Characteristic: Agents are necessarily invested in what they care about.
- Continuity Characteristic: Cares are retrospective and prospective.
- Thrownness Characteristic: Cares are not a matter of will.

These three characteristics are not utterly independent. They are intertwined in subtle ways. As a result, our treatment of each of these characteristics on their own will be somewhat artificial.

Bernard Williams, as well as others, has argued that an often overlooked aspect of human moral lives by impartialist (especially consequentialist) ethical theories is the value of personal projects or commitments and the integrity of agents who greatly value the aims and means of their projects. (Smart and Williams, 1973) What makes the silencing of personal projects morally significant is the fact that people identify themselves, and themselves as members of a community, through the aims and means of projects they find ultimately worthy of action and fulfillment. In other words, people constitute their personal, social, and moral identities through the objects and their means of production and sustenance about which they care most. Moral views that fail to recognize the moral stature of cares as intimately associated with the very constitution of personal agency fail to address a morally significant aspect of people.

We depart from Frankfurt's view with respect to cares being constitutive of personal identity and agency. Frankfurt argues that, "Caring, insofar as it consists in guiding oneself along a distinctive course or in a particular manner, presupposes both agency and self-consciousness." (Frankfurt, 83) We believe that this transcendental argument is unwarranted. We suggest that insofar as agents have cares they have choices to make and reflection on the options becomes necessary. An agent without cares would be no agent at all. Such a person would have no choices to make and nothing worthy of reflection. We argue that cares are the condition of the possibility of agency and personal identity and not vice versa.

We agree with Frankfurt, as earlier noted, that to care about something is to be invested in it, to identify oneself with it and to make oneself "vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether or not what one cares about is diminished or enhanced." (83) Insofar as people care about the fruition or continuation of some project, they will personally identify with the objects and activities of the project, and they will be personally harmed or benefited by the fates of their objects of care. The fact that there is a concomitant relation between personal, social, or moral identity and the objects on which people place levels of importance with respect to their emergence and preservation leads us to the next characteristic of human cares: that they are prospective.

As Frankfurt argues, "The outlook of a person who cares about something is inherently prospective, that is, he necessarily considers himself as having a future." (83). As a result, it is the case that as agents have cares they will interpret their futures via those features that are relevant to the emergence or preservation of their objects of care. In this sense, cares are radically different from beliefs, a point also made by Frankfurt.

To care about something one must conceive of oneself as a being with identity over time, as a being that casts itself into a future. A momentary being, one with no continuous existence into the future, cannot care about anything. Imagine an intelligent being that comes into existence only for a single moment and then vanishes. Call this being *Momentus*. Suppose that *Momentus* is endowed with a set of beliefs at its birth. Included in that set is the belief that there exists a hell for the damnation of the sinful. *Momentus* believes that there is a Hell and *Momentus* might even be said to believe in Hell. But it would make no sense for *Momentus* to care about Hell, to attach any importance to Hell, at least as far as *Momentus* is concerned about itself. By the same token, a person can want something, desire it, like it, while believing that her life "consists merely of a succession of separate moments" (Frankfurt, 83) and none of those moments is an integral element in a continuing life. The reason for this is that beliefs and desires need not have persistence through time. Beliefs are transitory. Beliefs, by their nature, do not have to endure beyond the instance in which they are believed. They have, in Frankfurt's terms, "no inherent persistence." (Frankfurt, 84) Caring about something, however, requires an extended period of time. It involves, at least some degree of, persistence of the caring self. Caring about something is not merely being

moved by a momentary impulse. Though, of course, one may make the decision to care about something in an instance.

Cares work in both temporal directions. Objects of care determine which features are relevant both for interpolating a person's foreseeable future and interpreting a person's actual past. And the same is true of collectives. In short, objects of care pick out which features of both past and future are relevant for interpreting a person's life (or the life of a community) as a meaningful, (at least partially) integrated whole. This suggestion parallels, and we think deepens, Alasdair MacIntyre's view that people construct their identities via coherent narratives.

In *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre argues that people shape their identities via constructions that are analogous to stories. People, MacIntyre claims, integrate the various facts and roles of their lives together into meaningful, continuous time lines by filtering relevant from irrelevant features followed by foregrounding the most relevant elements and allowing the rest to fade into the background. MacIntyre argues that people acquire the norms of relevance necessary for constituting the narratives of their lives from their community and tradition. However, other than positing that human beings desire to be a part of the community, MacIntyre has little to offer by way of explanation for why the communal norms of relevance are found to be authoritative in constructing narrative selves by individuals. We think that the norms of relevance are authoritative to individuals insofar as the norms are related to the emergence and preservation of their objects of care, i.e. the objects the individuals find or make important in their lives. Only insofar as persons find that communal norms of relevance fit those objects that they really care about will they find the communal norms of narration authoritative and suitable for understanding their lives as mostly integrated wholes. Although this view differs from MacIntyre's presupposition that people necessarily desire to belong to a community, it is certainly not surprising that what individuals care most about will be more or less identical to the norms of relevance concerning what ought to be in the foreground of the stories about selves that mark the communities with which they associate. The theme of communal norms and individual cares leads us to the third characteristic of human cares: "thrownness."

As Frankfurt notes, cares are largely independent of will. They are, in large measure, not a matter of choice. There are, at least, two reasons for this:

Insofar as cares are intimately intertwined with identity, they are largely constitutive of the possibility of choice rather than objects of choice.

Cares are largely rooted in such things as history, culture, and place.

Due to the fact that cares determine what is relevant and irrelevant within a person's life, they frame and filter which means and (subsidiary) ends are in the field of possible actions or potentially worthy of choice for that person. In hermeneutic terminology, cares are the "horizon" of the will. Unlike beliefs and desires, cares appear, as Frankfurt notes, not to be subject to mere decision or choice. Our explanation for this feature of cares is that they are, in fact, constitutive of the very possibility of choice. No cares, no choices. The reason for this is, as Heidegger and other existential phenomenologists have suggested, choice requires a horizon of human interpretive practice that is already laden with values that filter the manifold of human experience into relevant and irrelevant phenomena. This means that there must be a hermeneutic filter that sifts means and ends into relevant and irrelevant possibilities, and it is on the set of relevant possibilities that human agents deliberate and from which they make their choices. We suggest that what people care about constitutes the horizon of human interpretive practice and, as such, is the condition of the possibility of choice. What people care about then is largely not a matter of choice. What they care about 'precedes' choice. However, there is another reason why cares are largely 'prior' to individual choices.

In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger argues that the basic existential constitution of being-in-the-world (human being) is care. His analysis of care is twofold: (1) Humans are concerned with the potentialities of their own lives and with those of the others with whom they live; (2) The investigation by humans of their own potentialities and of those of others in the place where they dwell is essentially interpretive, i.e. it is 'theory-laden', and its interpretive matrices are grounded in the history within which

dasein finds itself thrown. Although we do not intend to enmesh ourselves in either Heidegger's broad ontological project or attempt an interpretation of his corpus, we suggest that Heidegger's thoughts on the existential condition of human life as care suggests some compelling reasons for believing that cares are central to human existence and that they are intimately associated with history, culture, and place.

It is a part of the very conception of care, according to Heidegger, that we are beings that are always thrown among persons who are also *dasein* and, as such, an essential part of our existential constitution as care is that we are 'being-with' (*Mitsein*). As such, care is not an isolated feature of individual existence. Care is existentially constituted in our relations with others. Finally, Heidegger argues that our relations with others are existentially constituted environmentally, i.e. that our being-with-others is essentially related to the space we share. We encounter others within existentially given spaces, e.g. homes, offices, building, cities, regions, etc. As a result, it seems that our being-with-others (how and whom) is largely determined by the space of place.

Our second consideration culled from Heidegger's analysis of *dasein* is the fact that even when we attempt to understand ourselves and the world around us, the interpretative categories that inform or condition our interpretation emerge from the cultural history of the people into which we have been thrown. Each individual will find himself or herself not only thrown into a world with others in a place, but into a cultural milieu with a history of people in a place. The culture into which a human being finds himself or herself provides the resources for that individual to interpret others and the world around him or her. We argue that much of what the history of a culture provides is a set of objects of ultimate concern, of care. In short, we believe that the cares of a people in a culture form the interpretive schemas accumulated in the history of that people and region and provide the grid for intelligible narration to individuals of that culture. In large measure, what one cares about (and what is cared about by those in one's community) is not a matter of will, but is determined by factors into which one has been thrown. The conceptual scheme, the world view, is neither primarily a cognitive assemblage of propositional beliefs nor the result of volitional individual or collective actions.

In sum to this point, (1) we have suggested that cares are a kind of basic disposition towards life and the objects people encounter within it and that world views are better understood in terms of collections or clusters of cares rather than neatly packaged sets of beliefs; (2) we have maintained that cares are largely constitutive of human agency and the options agents will find relevant within their pasts and futures; (3) we have argued that human cares are not merely a matter of will because they are constitutive of the will and that human cares are largely provided by the culture, history, and place in which people find themselves thrown.

BOUNDARIES AND INCOMPATIBLE CARES

In the foregoing section we tried to establish that what is fundamental to moral outlooks are not beliefs, but cares that are predominantly non-cognitive in nature. In this section, we aim to establish the claim that different people frequently learn or create divergent cares that lead to significant difficulties in adjudicating disparate moral claims. This will involve showing that different groups with different histories and environments often find or make important different features of the world. In short, different people often care about disparate things, or they care about the same things but with significantly different levels of importance. The features of the world that they find or make important are often features that come to have central justificatory force with regard to moral questions and issues. To put this another way, the features that have been found or made important by a group of people are features in their moral discourse that will have high or ultimate appeal in deciding moral issues for persons that share a set of cares. In addition, different groups of people will often appeal to divergent, and sometimes significantly incompatible, cares in judging the morality or appropriateness of given actions and policies, and that there are no neutral and transcendent features from which to clearly and ultimately adjudicate the conflicts. Finally, we will try to demonstrate that differences over what people care about are often concomitant with some form of boundaries, e.g. geographical, political, and ethnic boundaries, between peoples.

We shall refer to the boundaries noted above as “national boundaries”, because if one looks at the geopolitical and social world, then one will find that these various ‘boundaries’ are most often interrelated. For instance, geographical barriers, such as mountain ranges, are often related to ethnic/historical boundaries, and ethnic/historical boundaries are often related to differences in what people take to be objects of political importance, if not, outright differences in political ideology. In spite of these parallels, we would like to note the obvious, that national boundaries are sometimes politically recognized and sometimes not, because nationality or being a nation with certain borders need not be merely set by whatever officially sanctioned international borders are recognized or created. One can clearly recognize boundaries within officially sanctioned nations that demarcate different groups of people within a politically sanctioned nation. We would like to suggest that national boundaries, such as these, are constituted by the fact that we recognize differences concerning what features of the world are ultimately important for people living in certain regions or in some proximity to one another. Let us give an example.

Some peoples with certain histories emphasize the importance of community relations and tradition over autonomy and individual expression. Others with distinct histories may reverse this order of emphasis. (Note: We think that this is a matter of emphasis and not a matter of exclusivity. Contemporary anthropology demonstrates that most peoples recognize both of these values, but often to different degrees of importance or priority.) Hence, such groups of people find or make different objects of the world important. Relations of care, such as these, can be found to create boundaries and sometimes borders between peoples that have different histories or traditions of how they have comported with the world and their environment. We suggest that within the United States we have both of the above orderings of priority in what features are found to be morally important and that we, at least, tacitly recognize that they create boundaries between people and sometimes have led to the creation of recognizable borders.

In the first instance, one may legitimately argue that the Amish in the U.S. hold that community and tradition are more central objects of care than are autonomy or individual expression. This is a fact, because the object of ultimate care in the Amish community is *Gelassenheit* or “submission” of the individual’s will to the will of God, church, family, and tradition. These central objects of care are incompatible with the cares of the secular peoples of the United States that have learned or created autonomy and individual expression as higher objects of care than submission to the objects of importance held by the Amish. (Timmons, 1998. 219) These differences have led to the tacit recognition of certain boundaries. For instance, we legitimately refer to ‘Amish Country’ in Ohio or the ‘Pennsylvania Dutch’ in Eastern Pennsylvania. Hence, there is a tacit recognition of non-politically sanctioned boundaries. (This occurs throughout the world, e.g. Basque country in Spain, the Albanian region of Kosovo, etc.) In the second instance, differences in objects of care can also lead to the formation of politically sanctioned borders. One need only think of the creation of the United States as a nation, because a significant populace desired to protect and sustain the object of individual representation rather than remain loyal to a monarch (different objects of care) the group seceded from the British Empire and won their independence. And, finally, the borders and institutions created for indigenous peoples of North America (e.g. Native American Reservations and the Bureau of American Indian Affairs, etc.) are maintained—in part—because of certain peoples’ desire to preserve and protect their unique objects of care. Finally, we suggest that one will regularly find that objects of care differ as one traverses the globe’s latitudes and longitudes. Thus, we find that changes in latitudes corresponds significantly to changes in attitudes. The question is whether differences between cares can be truly incompatible, and without transcendent principles to adjudicate conflicts; hence, relativism maintains a foothold. We will here suggest that there really are such conflicts, and in the next section we will take up the issue of the possibility of any transcendent adjudication between conflicting cares.

Are there incommensurable differences between cares? We believe that the answer is affirmative. By “incommensurable cares”, we mean not that the different cares cannot be understood from the perspective of a divergent set of cares, but that differences in cares make people (even a single individual) view the world in incompatible ways that necessarily produces conflicting judgments and/or actions.

A poignant example of how disparate cares can incommensurably conflict is described in Tony Hillerman's *Sacred Clowns* (1994). The main character, Jim Chee, is a Navajo Tribal Policeman sworn to uphold both State and Federal laws, but he is also training to become a shaman. He is investigating a case of a hit-and-run that involves a Navajo suspect and a Navajo victim. Chee tries to explain to the public defender that this case involves him in incompatible cares as a tribal policeman and a traditional Navajo.

We are dealing with justice. Just distribution. That's a religious concept, really. We'll say that the tribal cop is sort of religious. He honors his people's traditional ways. He has been taught another notion of justice. He was a big boy before he heard about 'make the punishment fit the crime' or 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' Instead of that he was hearing of retribution in another way. If you damage somebody, you sit down with their family and figure out how much damage and make it good. That way you restore *hozho*. You've got harmony again between two families. Not too much difference from the standard American justice. But now it gets different. If somebody harms you out of meanness—say you get in a bar fight and he cuts you, or he keeps cutting your fences, or stealing your sheep—then he's the one out of *hozho*. You aren't taught he should be punished. He should be cured. Gotten back in balance with what's around him. Made beautiful again—beautiful on the inside, of course. Back in harmony. So this hypothetical cop, that's the way he's been raised. Not to put any value on punishment, but to put a lot of value on curing. (Hillerman, 315-316)

The conflict of cares, both of which his own, grounded upon other disparate cares, e.g. the care of oneness with nature and the world behind *hozho* and the care of fairness in a world of scarcity and competing egoistic interests on the other is very real. We suggest that the farther one goes into the more general objects of care that ground the original differences, the more incommensurable the objects of importance will be. (See also Jonsen and Toulmin, 1990) Although we do not have the space to elucidate it here, much cross-cultural philosophy bears out the fact that slight moral conflicts between people with distinct histories often bear witness to even more divergent objects of care in their 'metaphysics of morals'. The question that remains is whether differences in objects of care—insofar as they are significant to the moral evaluation of actions and policies—makes moral relativism viable. We suggest that they do make moral relativism much harder to overcome than previous attacks on relativism assume. Here we want to strengthen our claim by, first, granting an essential cognitivist presupposition we have denied above. And, second, demonstrate that even with a central element of cognitivism presupposed it does not entail that moral objectivity or consensus easily follows.

ASSERTORIC DISCOURSE, CHANGES IN ATTITUDES, AND MORAL OBJECTIVITY

The central presupposition of philosophers that attack relativism is that relativism is a matter of beliefs, e.g. things that can be asserted or denied. The account of care we have borrowed from Frankfurt maintains that cares are more rudimentary than beliefs. Thus, we denied the cognitivist presupposition of relativism's critics. However, here we will grant the critic's cognitivist presupposition, and show that even with cognitivism as a significant element in the realm of morality, it does not follow that one will achieve an adjudication of conflicting cares through some account of moral objectivity or consensus.

Philosophers, unless they hold that moral utterances are not assertions, tend to believe that we can assert—in the form of propositions—our cares, from which we are justified in believing that these assertions either reflect or constitute moral beliefs. From this rationale one or both of two claims follow: 1) Moral assertions are either true or false. 2) Moral assertions can be rationally evaluated into justified and unjustified. The general logic for accepting one or both of these ideas is that if we have moral beliefs, then they will have, at least, some of the central qualities of all other beliefs. Beliefs, generally speaking, are intensional states that have contents that make some claim about the world, and the content of our beliefs can either be verified as to their veracity or deemed rational or irrational. This suggests two reasonable things: A) Non-cognitivism is excessive, due to Ockham's Razor. The simplest explanation of our

communicative practices is that we have moral beliefs rather than that our language is systematically deceptive only in the case of moral language. B) Our ability to make moral assertions is a strong, if not a definitive, indicator that our moral beliefs, like all other beliefs, are subject to being either true or false, and/or rational or irrational. As a result of this reasoning, many philosophers are convinced that they are well grounded in accepting a cognitivist stance regarding the metaphysics of morality; thus, they are justified in seeking transcendent criteria for determining the veracity or rationality of moral judgments. However, if it can be shown that the mere ability to make moral assertions is not a strong or definitive indicator that we have moral beliefs, then, regardless of Ockham's Razor, even granting the presupposition of cognitivism does not guarantee that we can overcome cares as the central element of morality and the moral relativism that conflicts between cares may engender.

We grant that humans make moral assertions, like 'Lying is wrong.' and 'Autonomy is the highest moral good.' Philosophers in the grip of cognitivism, based on the reasoning outlined above, tend to hold one of two positions: a) Such assertions are subject to verification via intuition or some other epistemological access to the mind independent world. Or b) Such assertions, if genuine, are subject to rational assessment via wide reflective equilibrium, universalizability, or some other epistemological criterion regardless of whether meeting such a criterion is truth-indicative. What we will argue, culling from recent work by Crispin Wright (1992) and Mark Timmons (1998), is that even if moral language is genuinely assertoric it does not immediately follow that such assertions report belief contents that are subject either to verifiability or rational evaluation. In short, the truth of cognitivism with relation to cares does not logically entail that such assertions are apt to be determinable as to their truth, rationality, or objectivity. Hence, the fact that we make assertions about our cares does not, by itself, condemn the position we are defending, nor does it force moral debate onto strictly non-relativist territory.

Following Wright's approach, let us consider humor discourse as an example of a discourse that has assertoric form and content. (Wright, 7ff) Consider the two following claims: 'David Letterman is humorous.' and 'That cigar joke is not funny.' Both of these have the form of assertions and make apparently descriptive claims about the world. In addition, all of us make these types of claims fairly frequently. However, it is not far fetched to claim that humor assertions do not have truth values, and that beliefs concerning what is humorous are not really subject to being rational or irrational (including something about which we can reach consensus). We quite plausibly think of humor discourse as, at least, expressing and possibly prescribing matters of taste. Hence, if we agree that humor discourse has all the trappings of standard assertions, but this discourse does not carry with it either claims of being objective (denoting humor facts) or claims to being rational or irrational (denoting that some claims are impartially justifiable and/or upon which we can reach rational consensus), then humor discourse is not objective in ways necessary for a full fledged cognitivist approach to humor discourse.

We claim that the fact that one can assert cares in the form of descriptive sentences is insufficient support for the position that one can attain an objectivist or rationalist position for adjudicating between conflicting cares. In sum, the fact that cares can be asserted as descriptions of the world allows them to enter the realm of human discourse, but this alone does not entail that they are subject to all the trappings of other assertoric discourses, e.g. science, mathematics, etc. We suggest that Wright's argument concerning the lack of objectivity or rationality in humor discourse applies *mutatis mutandis* for assertions about what is ultimately important. Thus, simply because cares may be expressed in assertoric language does not entail that they must have a truth value or that they may enter into some epistemological mechanism that would ultimately sort the rational from irrational cares or achieve rational consensus. The reason this is so, we suggest, is that cares are non-cognitive or, at least, not cognitive in the robust way necessary to support evaluations of veracity or rationality. Cares are such in spite of the fact that they can be expressed in assertoric form with apparent assertoric content. Hence, even if we grant the cognitivist presupposition, i.e. cares can be asserted as beliefs, it does not entail that they are in fact open to the types of evaluations necessary for clearly and determinately overcoming conflicts between competing cares through some univocal metaphysics of morality or epistemological mechanism. Hence, philosophers that want to overcome the moral relativism that arises from the differences between cares cannot gain the necessary

feature for overcoming it simply by resorting to the fact that we make assertions about or that express our fundamental cares.

CONCLUSION

We have argued the following: 1) Morality is rooted in clusters of cares that are different in nature from and prior to belief; thus, attempts to exorcise relativism on cognitivist grounds are less than cogent. 2) Cares largely arise from distinct environmental and cultural milieus. 3) Differences between cares can (and often do) engender difficult conflicts between peoples (and even within individuals) over moral action, character, and policy. 4) Although cares can be asserted as propositions, this does not provide the necessary grounds for moving to a cognitivist interpretation of morality that is itself necessary for many of the most prevalent forms of moral theory that aim to adjudicate moral conflicts. From these points, we conclude that moral relativism (and it may hold true for the other normative disciplines) is much more difficult to rebut than has been previously supposed.

Does this make us simple moral relativists? We believe that it need not. We suggest that moral universalisms, e.g. positions wedded to non-value neutral universal methods of moral conflict resolution, fail to adequately address the relativity of cares across people, but we also suggest that there remains a range of significant non-coercive methods for negotiating genuine conflicts between cares. We suggest that simple relativism also embraces the claim that there are no significant (e.g. peaceful) means for addressing conflicts between conflicting cares. We deny that there are no such mechanisms. And, although we do not have the space here to elucidate a positive proposal for peaceful conflict resolution, we suggest the following. Some form of context sensitive and real-time negotiation is necessary for respecting changes in attitudes that accompany changes in latitude but can also lead to agreeable acts or policies for those who are in conflict.

In concluding, we do want to address a general concern that is likely to arise for many readers. The concern is: "Have you not simply ignored the plausibility of a range of theories of universal moral value(s) rather than argue against their plausibility?" We grant that this is a legitimate concern, but here we will motivate why we believe that present theories of universal moral value are inadequate to the challenge of the relativity of cares. Our arguments rest on the belief that adequate moral theorizing ought to comport with well recognized descriptive evidence of the differences in human cares as provided in literature, as well as the work of anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists.

Consider the general realm of monistic universalism with regards to what is valuable. One variety of monistic universalism is of a Kantian stripe that holds that what is universally valuable is cognitive in nature. It is held that what has moral value are such things as freedom, rationality, and/or impartiality. In this form, universal intrinsic good is rooted in reasoning to and from beliefs that are fully informed through unfettered choice and governed by consistency, and the violation of any part of this triumvirate is an evil. On this view, what is basic is free rational belief. If what we have argued above is true, then this view fails to grasp and ultimately ignores the plausibility that moral value resides in cares rather than belief. In order for this view to be grounded—on our account—a person (or people) must already hold that free, informed, and consistent choice is their object of ultimate concern or care. And, we have suggested that there are good grounds for believing that this is not a universal object of care. In fact, this objection to cognitive monistic universalism also applies to a view of non-cognitive monistic universalism of a Humean variety.

Moral philosophers of the Humean variety may argue that one need not be a cognitivist in order to be a monistic universalist about moral value, because one could argue that there is a universal affective disposition in human beings. Such a thing may be a universal disposition of being beneficent. We agree that this is an option for skirting our objections to the cognitivist presuppositions often behind attacks on relativism, but we suggest that anthropological, sociological, and psychological evidence very plausibly suggests that such a universal moral disposition or a moral emotion does not exist in the human species.

Now although we believe that what we have argued undermines the plausibility of various monistic universalisms concerning value, we must also give reasons for why a universal pluralism concerning moral value is also not a reasonable option for countering our position on the relativity of cares. We admit that this is the most plausible option for responding to our challenge outlined in the body of the paper, and that we

have yet to present reasons for challenging one type of pluralistic universalist positions. We suggest that a cognitivist universalist position, of the likes of W.D. Ross's, is plausibly undermined by our contention that morality is rooted in cares rather than beliefs. Of this view we will say no more here, and turn to our greatest challenger. A non-cognitive pluralistic universalism concerning value. Suggestive of such a view, might be the neo-Aristotelian "Capabilities Approach" in ethics. It is suggested, if not argued, by Capability Theorists that there is a plurality of states-of-being or ways of comporting with the world (functions of a being that need not be functions of belief) that are intrinsically valuable, and that when they are fulfilled together constitute the good-life. The functions or ways of comporting with the world which are the foundation of the pluralism of the Capabilities Approach may be any of a wide range of objects of care, e.g. being educated or intelligent, having physical prowess, power, ability to protect oneself and family from the environment, etc. Without becoming immersed in the complexities of the Capabilities Approach, our argument against this type of moral universalism is that it is inherently unstable. This view is unstable in the following way: If the set of functions that are intrinsically valuable and together constitute the good life are relative to history, tradition, and environment, then the Capabilities Approach is not significantly different from our "changes in latitude/changes in attitude" position. This is the case because it is cares that arise out of history, tradition, and place that determine which functions are intrinsically good, but they will be relative to different histories, etc. If the functions that are the focus of care are of one and only one set, then we argue that this flies in the face of anthropological, sociological, and psychological evidence that different groups care about or care differently about different ways of comporting or functioning in the world.

We maintain that our laying bare the challenge of the relativity of cares has the general resources for questioning the plausibility of all types of moral universalism. Hence, we conclude that unless that challenge is met persuasively, moral philosophers have not exorcised the "demon" of relativism.

* We must acknowledge that this title is borrowed from Jimmy Buffet's "Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes" (Sound Recording, ABC Records, 1977). We would also like to thank Deen Chatterjee and the University of Utah for inspiring us to write this paper for their 1998 conference "Ethics and National Boundaries." We especially thank Neera Badhwar and Deen Chatterjee for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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