A Morality Fit for Humans

Joseph Raz

Oxford University

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr

Part of the Law and Philosophy Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol91/iss6/17
A MORALITY FIT FOR HUMANS

Joseph Raz*


“If there’s one thing I detest it’s a man of principles.” “You’re right,” Ménalque answered, laughing, “he’s the most detestable kind of person in the world. You can’t expect any kind of sincerity from him, for he only does what his principles have ordered him to do, or else he considers what he does as a transgression.”

André Gide, The Immoralist.

I believe that it was opposition to utilitarianism which first bred arguments claiming in one way or another that a view of morality according to which morality is very demanding is mistaken just because morality cannot be so demanding. On first hearing, this type of argument is liable to seem suspect. Humans should be fit for morality, and unfortunately too often they are not — one is inclined to say. If we find morality too demanding the fault is with us and not with morality. The idea of human morality, in the sense of a morality fit for humans in not being too demanding, is surely, one is tempted to say, a typical modern perversion of the truth. If, however, my conjecture is correct and consideration of the demandingness of morality arose and gained currency in the context of discussions of the merits and demerits of utilitarianism, then this dismissive response is shortsighted. Utilitarianism, whatever its shortcomings, was the first widely accepted view of morality which gave the interests of every sentient being direct and exclusive weight in distinguishing morally right from morally wrong action. To be sure other views of morality held that all human or all rational life is as such of (equal) value. But for no previous view was the road from value to right action so direct, being neither mediated by nor mixed with other considerations. That is why utilitarianism — and any other view of morality which shares this feature of it — gave rise to concern about the demandingness of morality. If it is wrong for me to act in my own interest whenever I could instead do something that would serve the interests of others more than any act open to me could serve my own interest, then arguably I am only rarely allowed to act in my own interest. This is absurd, and a view of morality of which this is a consequence is surely wrong. Hence the eagerness of utilitarians and others with similar moral views to argue

* Professor of the Philosophy of Law, Oxford University, and Fellow of Balliol College. M. Jur., 1963, Hebrew University, Jerusalem; D. Phil., 1967, Oxford University. — Ed.
that no such conclusion follows from their way of understanding morality.

In the last thirty years or so the debate has moved a long way beyond the crude formulations of the previous paragraph. Yet it has never been so carefully and systematically examined as in Samuel Scheffler's *Human Morality.* Scheffler distinguishes four responses to a view of morality which presents it as being very demanding. Apart from denying its correctness and insisting that morality's demands are moderate, one can also seek to moderate the consequences of a demanding morality without denying that it is demanding, either by claiming that there are actions which are not at all subject to moral judgment (the question of the scope of morality), or by claiming that it is sometimes rational to act against morality since morality is sometimes overridden by other considerations (the question of the authority of morality). Finally one may object to a view of morality because it presents it as demanding by being overintrusive, that is by requiring that every action however trivial (taking a sip from the mug of coffee in front of me) be preceded by a deliberation of the moral permissibility of the act. This raises the question of the role of morality in our practical deliberations.

Scheffler's own view is that morality's scope is pervasive, that is that moral considerations bear on any conceivable action, but that it does not impose a pervasive presence in our deliberations. Except when special reasons apply one acts morally if one acts as morality directs and would not have done so had one been aware of moral considerations against the act unless they proved insufficient to prohibit the act. That is, in the majority of cases moral (or morally explicit) considerations need not be present to one's thought. All that is morally required is that had moral reasons against the action been perceptible they would have been given the consideration they deserve. Additionally and most importantly, morality's demands are — according to Scheffler — moderate and not demanding. On the authority of morality Scheffler reserves judgment. He does not believe that no consideration can ever override the ultimate moral verdict on an action. But he leaves the question open.

Low-keyed and closely argued, Scheffler's book is itself exemplary in the humaneness of its tone and wisdom. I find myself largely agreeing with his general outlook and with his conclusions. Where I have doubts they are commonly not about what Scheffler says, but about what he does not say. Sometimes the feeling creeps in that the argument stops too soon. The problems I will briefly discuss below exemplify this feeling.

1. Samuel Scheffler is Professor of Philosophy of the University of California at Berkeley.
2. I somewhat simplify here Scheffler's conditions.
I. THE PROBLEM OF MORAL INTRUSIVENESS

Perhaps one distinction between various ways in which morality can be too demanding can be helpfully mentioned here. The most obvious way for morality to be too demanding is by leaving too little room for a person to pursue his own interest. But even if morality is not too demanding in this way it can be too demanding in requiring that on all occasions — even those on which people may pursue their interests — people's actions should be at least partly motivated by explicitly moral thoughts, even if those amount to no more than the thought that the action is morally permissible. When this is the case then morality is too intrusive. Life, as Scheffler (who does not refer to this as a way of morality being too demanding) puts it, is overmoralized. Fear of overmoralizing life is, according to Scheffler, one major difficulty with the conclusion, which he rightly defends, that morality is pervasive in scope, i.e., that no voluntary human action is in principle resistant to moral assessment. The fear of overmoralization arises out of what he calls the strong assumption, which he finds Bernard Williams endorsing, namely

that if we deem it morally permissible for the man to save his wife precisely because she is his wife, we are then committed to a further view about what the man's "motivating thought" should be when he acts; his motivating thought should be that it is his wife who is in danger, and that in such situations it is morally permissible to save one's wife.3

More generally the assumption is that "once one classifies an act as morally permissible, one is committed to holding that the agent who performs it should be motivated, at least in part, by the thought of its moral permissibility" (p. 29).

Scheffler is aware that if the strong assumption (or even some watered down version of it) is correct then the view that morality is pervasive commits one to "an overmoralised conception of the self" (as he puts it (p. 29); but we know roughly what he means).

He counters the strong assumption, and weakened variants of it, by listing five ways in which moral considerations can figure in one's deliberations and motivations, the fifth and least explicit being that:

[A]lthough acting in response to some feature of a situation that he does not represent to himself in overtly moral terms, a person may nevertheless satisfy two related counterfactual conditions: first, that he would not have acted as he did if he had believed that doing so was wrong; second, that if a consideration had come to his attention that seemed to militate against the moral permissibility of his act, he would not have performed the act, unless further deliberation had convinced him that there was reason to discount the consideration in question. [p. 32]

I agree, but the difficulty is not yet avoided. Two related consider-

ations remain to be confronted. First, is what is true of morally permissible actions also true of morally obligatory actions? Second, even if morality does not require that people act for explicit moral reasons, must it not be morally acceptable for them to do so? Scheffler and others may feel that whatever the answer to these questions they are irrelevant to his concern with the demandingness of morality: none of the possible answers to these questions raises the specter of the overmoralization of life which was Scheffler's concern in this part of the book. But I am not so sure that that is so.

Consider the case of moral duties. If it is one's moral duty to develop one's musical talents, or to encourage one's child to develop a musical appreciation, then is it not overmoralizing to suppose that one's duty is discharged only if one acts as duty requires out of a sense of moral duty? Of course these are not rhetorical questions. Some may deny that one can have moral duties to oneself. I mentioned this example merely to illustrate what is to me the most surprising aspect of the book, namely that at no point does it buttress its arguments (all with direct bearing on our understanding of the nature of morality) by considering other essential features of morality. My example of duties to oneself suggests that Scheffler's arguments leave hostages to fortune. Those whose understanding of morality differs from his (unstated) conception of it may well find various ways of avoiding some of his conclusions. From now on I will disregard the question of duties to oneself, or other problems which to my knowledge may depend on controversial views about the boundaries of morality.

Possibly parents in our culture do not have a moral duty to attempt to develop the musical appreciation of their children, but the example is not controversial in the same way. If such a duty exists it is a moral duty. It is an aspect of parents' duties to look after their children. So let us assume that it exists. Does it follow that parents who develop their children's musical appreciation out of sheer delight in music and in experiencing it together with their children, and who never give a thought to the question whether they have a moral duty to do so, are morally at fault? Or, is there a moral defect or blemish in their conduct because they are not motivated by the thought that their actions are ones they have a moral duty to perform? I am going to assume that in the conduct of our relations with friends and family many perfectly mundane actions, actions unremarkable in any way except that they are a large part of what such relations consist in, are in fact actions through which we discharge our moral duties towards friends and family. These are for the most part imperfect duties which could have been discharged in some other ways as well. But the fact that acting other than as we did would not have been wrong does not show that in acting as we did we were not discharging our moral duties. If explicit moral motivation is morally required in such cases
then morality is unacceptably intrusive even if such motivation is not required when an action is merely morally permissible.

Arguably our actions are more often morally permissible than obligatory. Quantitatively a requirement to be motivated by explicit moral considerations is more intrusive if it applies to permitted actions than to obligatory ones. But qualitatively the requirement is equally intrusive regarding many actions through which we discharge our duties. The example of musical education is one such case. The reason is that many of the actions by which we fulfill our duties have to do with personal, sometimes intimate relationships where spontaneity of action, and motivation by affection or by unmediated desire, are acceptable and often are the preferred, sometimes the necessary, motivation for the action to be what it is morally required to be.

There is of course nothing to prevent Scheffier from extending his view about the morally required motivation when performing morally permissible acts to the case of acts which discharge moral duties. But while I favor that view I feel that it calls for a further justification, as the claim that moral duties require, for compliance, explicit moral motivation has a greater appeal, and more arguments supporting it than the view that morally permissible actions require such motivation. That may well be the reason why Scheffier remains uncommitted on this question. My point is that he cannot remain uncommitted, and that his view on this matter requires further buttressing before it can be accepted.

The second issue Scheffier leaves underexplored is this: his contention is that morality does not require one to be motivated by an explicit moral evaluation of one's action when that action is morally permissible. So be it. I suggested that the same holds for acts which discharge moral duties. But is it not the case that it is morally acceptable to be motivated by an explicit moral evaluation of one's intended action?

Scheffier deals with the question rather briefly confining himself to the observation that

not only does the formulation of such a verdict [i.e., that an act is morally permissible] not commit us to thinking that overtly moral thoughts should enter directly into the agent's deliberations, it does not even commit us to thinking that it is morally unobjectionable if they happen to do so. [p. 35]

That is indeed so, but although in some cases engaging in explicit moral deliberation before acting in accordance with morality, or being partly motivated by a moral view, may be undesirable it does not follow that such cases can ever be anything but exceptional. Arguably they are necessarily exceptional, and in the generality of cases it must be morally permissible to be motivated by knowledge of the moral verdict on the action, and to contemplate it as part of one's deliberations before acting.
Here again Scheffler's claim is made all the more plausible by being confined to cases where the ultimate moral verdict on an act is that it is permissible. Later on I will have more to say about moral permissibility. Here suffice it to note that stating that an action is morally permissible is something like stating that neither its omission nor its performance is morally wrong, all things considered. Therefore a statement that an act is morally permissible does not indicate the presence of any moral reason which could motivate either the performance of an act or its omission. Scheffler writes as if whenever a belief features in the deliberation which leads to action that belief is part of one's motive, or motivation for the action. As belief in the moral permissibility of an action is not a belief that there is a reason either to perform or to omit it, it cannot, barring exceptional circumstances, be part of the agent's motivation for performing it. We should therefore separate two versions, both valid, of the view that morality is not intrusive. One claims that being motivated by an explicit moral thought is, in certain important classes of cases, undesirable. The other claims that the view that the moral value of an act depends on performing it as a result of explicit moral deliberation is, regarding some important classes of cases, morally wrong.

Scheffler's view that when an act is morally permissible it need not be motivated by the thought that it is morally permissible is true, but not as a matter of morality. It is a consequence of the nature of permissions. Moral permissions need not motivate for neither they nor any other permissions can motivate. They are not the sort of things which can motivate. Nor, barring special circumstances, can the thought or the belief that something is permissible motivate. Of course before one proceeds to perform an act one may reassure oneself that performing it is not morally wrong, just as one may reassure oneself that it will not set the house on fire. But it is absurd to say that when one did so reassure oneself one was motivated, even in part, to perform the act by the thought that it is not morally prohibited, just as it is absurd to say that one was motivated to light the stove (in order to cook one's dinner) by the thought that doing so will not set the house on fire.

The second version of the argument from moral intrusiveness also has an easy win in the case of morally permissible actions. There is very little reason to think that morally permissible acts are morally permissible only if undertaken as a result of an explicit moral deliberation. Such a view is not only contrary to deeply held common views about morality. It lacks the support of the arguments that may seem...

---

4. In some contexts it would not be misleading to describe an act as permissible if its performance is not wrong, even if its omission is wrong.

5. An example of a case where thinking that an act is permissible may motivate me to perform it is if I made a bet which I will win if and only if if the act is permissible I will perform it.
to lend it support. For example, it is not the case that the Kantian view that an act lacks moral worth unless motivated by respect for the moral law conflicts with our common views on these matters. Whatever the merit of the Kantian view all it entails, regarding moral permissions, is that performing morally permissible actions cannot have moral worth under that description. It cannot have moral worth just because it is doing something which is permissible. (This follows from the argument above.) This conclusion is sound even if the Kantian principle is unsound. There is nothing in an act’s being such that neither its performance nor its omission is morally wrong, to indicate that the act can have moral worth.

The real force of the argument against moral intrusiveness is felt only when we apply it to acts by which we fulfill our duties. As I illustrated above the argument applies to some moral duty-discharging acts as well as to morally permissible ones. Regarding various classes of cases the moral merit of an action is diminished if it is done as a result of explicit moral deliberation, or if it is motivated by explicit moral beliefs. Yet in all these cases the thought that being morally motivated diminishes the moral merit of the action is troubling. The problem is not merely that it does run counter to the Kantian view. The Kantian view has always been suspect, and I will not consider it here. It runs counter to a much weaker and more plausible view according to which morality has to do with the guidance of human conduct, and therefore, barring special cases, consulting it and being motivated by it is morally permissible, and attracts no moral censure. To put it crudely, morality is there to motivate behavior, and it is paradoxical to suppose that in many important cases the moral worth of an action is diminished if people consult morality and are motivated by it. We are all aware of some exceptions. We know of values which cannot be pursued by directly intending to pursue them. One cannot act spontaneously by intending to act spontaneously. But must not the moral analogues of these cases remain exceptional? Must it not be the case that, exceptions aside, there is no moral blemish in being motivated by explicit moral considerations?

I do not find an answer to this question in Scheffler’s book. I do not know how he reconciles the force of the argument from the fact that morality is a guide to conduct with the arguments against moral intrusiveness. The way I find the two reconciled, and only the most cursory remarks explaining the issue can be ventured here, raises doubts in my mind regarding Scheffler’s basic approach to the problem of the relation between morality and self-interest. There are I believe

---

6. Notice that when the argument from the nonintrusiveness of morality is applied to duty-discharging acts it has no bearing on the issue of the pervasiveness of morality, with which Scheffler associates it. There can be no doubt that duty-fulfilling acts are within the scope of morality. This may explain why Scheffler does not consider these ramifications of the argument. But as I indicated above they are critical to an understanding of the demandingness of morality.
two fundamentally different approaches to moral values as well as to moral reasons. Any moral value or moral reason can be understood in only one of these ways, though it is possible that morality contains some values and reasons which are correctly understood one way and some which are to be understood in the other.

According to one conception moral values and reasons for action are established as values and reasons by specifically moral procedures or forms of reasoning. Approaches which follow this route usually assume that there are other ways of establishing other values and reasons. Most typically they assume the totally independent existence of so-called prudential values and reasons. Moral values or reasons are derived from the nonmoral ones through some specially moral mode of reasoning. Kant’s Categorical Imperative and Hare’s test of Universalizability are perhaps the best known examples. But all nonreductive contractarian approaches to morality, i.e., those which do not reduce morality to self-interest, exemplify this approach, as do some other Kantian and utilitarian approaches. In general it seems to me that those, and they include Scheffler, who think of morality as constituting a distinct point of view have something like this in mind. I say this with all due caution as I am far from sure what the expression the moral point of view is meant to signify. But it seems to involve the view that moral values and reasons are distinct from other values and reasons so that their recognition requires a capacity, or modes of thought, reasoning, or experiencing things which are not involved in the recognition or pursuit of nonmoral goals or values.

The alternative approach sees moral values and reasons as being justified or established in ways which are not specifically moral. Morality is not a way of establishing reasons and values. It is merely a way of classifying them. Since this approach is less familiar today I will spend a little longer explaining its nature.

One may hold, for example, that reasons and values pursuit of which directly promotes the well-being of others are moral. Other values and reasons are not. Alternatively, one may hold that only activities which are motivated by concern for the well-being of others are moral, whereas the value of other valuable activities is not moral. For example, the value of caring for one’s children, or for the poor, is moral whereas the value of restoring Renaissance paintings or playing golf is not. We can imagine that the arguments which will

---


9. I am not suggesting that only activities are valuable. But for the purpose of drawing the distinction under discussion it is helpful to start with the value of activities, and the point of the current argument does not require proceeding beyond that category.
establish the value of these activities will not be radically different. They may, for example, all relate to the way these activities exploit and develop characteristically human potential in a way which contributes to sustaining the existence of societies and their culture. But, one would then say, the value of caring for the poor differs from that of playing golf. Since it directly promotes the well-being of people other than the agent, or since it manifests concern for the well-being of others, depending on which of the two views of morality I mentioned is favored, it is morally valuable. Playing golf is not.

With this distinction in hand we can return to the argument that morality is not intrusive. The argument, as Scheffier makes clear, applies against the view that it is a moral defect in actions if they are not motivated by explicit moral reasoning. I have argued that regarding some common types of moral action it makes such motivation morally undesirable. If, as I believe, the argument is sound it poses a serious objection to the first view of morality. If a moral consideration is one established by specifically moral argument then awareness of a moral consideration is, however inarticulately, awareness of it as a specifically moral argument. Add to this the claim, which I have advanced above, that there is no moral defect — some limited exceptions aside — in being motivated by moral reasons, and we get a conflict between this approach to morality and the argument from the nonintrusiveness of morality.

Interestingly, however, no such conflict arises if we assume that moral considerations are not established by distinctively moral procedures or arguments. On this view even if one is motivated by moral reasons to do what one is morally required to do morality is not intrusive. Being aware of moral values or reasons is, on this view of morality, quite distinct from being aware that they are moral values or reasons. The moral reasons for looking after one's children or after the poor are that one cares about them. But one can do so without realizing that those motives endow the action — according to one of my examples — with a moral character. No danger of moral intrusiveness arises here.

None of the above remarks establishes anything. Too many claims which were not thoroughly argued for were relied upon, and many vague generalizations allowed room for vague exceptions. I believe, however, that my comments are sufficient to show some shortcomings in Scheffier's treatment of the subject. First, the claim that morality is not intrusive is more powerful than Scheffier allows. In particular it rejects certain ways of being motivated by "explicit" moral considerations in performing acts one is morally required to perform, and not merely when one does what one is morally permitted to do. Second, they establish that Scheffier's reconciliation of the pervasiveness and nonintrusiveness of morality disregards the difficulty posed by the fact
that it is generally no moral defect to be morally motivated when doing what one is morally required to do. Finally, I have suggested that the reconciliation of the pervasiveness and nonintrusiveness of morality requires going deeper than Scheffier does into the nature of morality. In particular I have given some reason to think that such reconciliation is possible only if at least some important moral values or reasons can be established in ways which are not specifically moral. This last conclusion has far reaching consequences for the evaluation of Scheffier's main argument about the nondemandingness of morality.

II. A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

So far I have discussed the problems arising from one way in which certain views of morality err by making it too demanding, i.e., the view that morality is intrusive. Scheffier's main concern is with another way in which morality can be thought of as very demanding, that is by leaving little room for some or all moral agents to pursue their own interests. Scheffier is anxious to rebut one particular view of morality, the view that morality represents the impersonal point of view, the point of view of self-transcendence. According to it, in judging what one ought morally to do one transcends one's own perspective and interests and judges what to do by taking equal account of the perspective of every agent, one's own perspective and interests playing no greater role in that judgment than those of everyone else. Against that view Scheffier advocates what he calls the "alternative construal" of the moral standpoint:

According to the alternative construal, morality attaches unmediated significance to each of two basic propositions. The first proposition is that, from an impersonal standpoint, everyone's life is of equal intrinsic value and everyone's interests are of equal intrinsic importance. The second proposition is that each person's interests nevertheless have a significance for him or her that is out of proportion to their importance from an impersonal standpoint. On the alternative construal, moral norms reflect and attempt to balance these two fundamental propositions. [p. 122]

The alternative construal, Scheffier contends, is to be preferred basically for two reasons. First, it accounts for the common-sense convictions about the moral legitimacy of disproportionate attention to one's major projects, concerns, and commitments. Second, it better accounts for the role of morality in our lives. In particular it chimes in better with the fact that a person

attempts . . . to shape his or her projects, insofar as it is possible to do so, to avoid conflicts with moral requirements. But since one's projects and commitments help to determine what is in one's interests, this means that the individual in effect shapes his or her own interests in such a way as to avoid perceived conflicts with morality. The upshot is that, in addition to structuring our perceptions and our deliberations, our emotions
and our relations to others, moral beliefs also help to shape our projects, our commitments and our interests themselves. In short, even when we are not thinking in explicitly moral terms, moral beliefs and concerns help to determine what we see and think, what we do and feel, and how we react and relate to each other; they help to determine the projects and activities around which our lives are organized, and what our good and our misfortune consist in. In all of these ways, they help to determine who and what we are. [p. 129]

The alternative construal of the moral point of view is better able to explain this integrative function of morality.

I could not agree more with the description of the contribution of morality to the formation of our self-interest in this quotation. But I am at a loss to understand why these facts support the alternative construal. The explanation offered for the way morality can help to shape our self-interest depends on the fact that people's self-interest is, at least in part, a result of their own choices. It is not entirely determined by factors beyond our control. Rather to a large extent it is constituted by decisions and actions we take in the course of our lives.

It is in my interest to improve my teaching ability. My neighbor has no interest in the quality of her teaching ability. That is because I am (have become through my past decisions) a teacher, whereas she has chosen to become a secretary.

The dependence of our self-interest on our choices has far-reaching consequences for the puzzling question of the relation between self-interest and morality. First, as Scheffler has written, it means that at the very least the degree of conflict between them is contingent, and that individuals can shape their lives in such a way as to minimize that conflict. Whether they can shape their life to avoid any conflict between self-interest and morality is a question he does not thoroughly discuss. I agree with him, however, that such a result is unlikely. If in the life of any person conflict between morality and self-interest is altogether avoided that is in part the result of good luck, that is of factors beyond that person's control.

Second, and this is a question that Scheffler seems to ignore, given that individuals can greatly reduce the conflict between morality and their self-interest is there any reason to uphold a view of morality according to which its content is in part a result of a need to reduce the incidence of such conflicts? Again, I agree with Scheffler's view that even if morality's content is in part determined by that concern, even if it is in part determined by the fact that people's self-interest has greater significance to them than the interests of other people, this will not avoid conflict altogether. It is far from clear that it would

10. For my own similar, but perhaps more radical, account see Joseph Raz, The Morality of Freedom 366-99 (1986).
11. See the definition of the alternative construal on p. 122, cited above.
avoid any conflicts for a person who did the most that one can do to develop his own commitments and pursuits (i.e., to shape his own self-interest) by moral considerations. Given that, according to Scheffier (and I again agree), one has a moral interest in so choosing one's commitments and pursuits what more need morality contain to recognize the special importance of the individual's own projects and commitments and to avoid conflict between them and morality?

Of course most people have not directed their commitments and pursuits in such a way. Most people have allowed their lives to turn round relationships, commitments and pursuits undertaken with much more limited consideration of their moral value, and of the possibility that they may conflict with moral requirements. But possibly such people are morally at fault. It does not follow that they should be punished or even severely condemned. Often their fault is natural given the society they live in. Often it would have been unreasonable to expect them to behave other than as they did. But even so, while these people may be totally excused for their moral failings is there anything wrong with a view of morality which recognizes their moral failings as such, rather than one which adjusts the content of morality in such a way that these moral failings are failings no longer? Scheffier does not consider these points. For him the fact that conflicts remain is good enough reason for believing that morality has "a moderate" content (pp. 131-32). But to the extent that the remaining conflict results from a moral failing of the people concerned this conclusion is not obvious without further argument.

Third, the whole argument presented above, following Scheffier's discussion of the way we shape our own commitments and projects (p. 129), illuminates the nature of self-interest, and not the nature of morality. It is therefore a puzzle to me that Scheffier invokes it as a consideration supporting the "alternative construal." It seems that any conception of morality so long as it makes moral goals in principle adoptable by people is consistent with the explanation offered by Scheffier about the way morality can affect one's self-interest.

Fourth, and this is my most serious misgiving about Scheffier's argument, the alternative construal of the moral standpoint seems not so much to be supported by his argument as to be dissolved by it. To be more precise the argument seems to confute the presupposition of both construals of the moral standpoint, namely it casts doubt on the view that moral values and reasons constitute a special point of view, if the expression a moral point of view is meant to have any substantive content, if it is not merely a reference to all those values and reasons which are moral. "Morality and prudence," Scheffier writes, "represent two distinct perspectives, neither of which can be reduced to, or defined in terms of the other. Each has its own characteristic concerns and priorities" (p. 118). This is, to be sure, the way the view of moral-
A Morality Fit for Humans

ity as an expression of some ideal of impartiality sees matters. On this view of morality, which I join Scheffler in rejecting, though not for his reasons, moral values and reasons are those which derive from or are justified by the ideal of impartiality, that is, roughly speaking, the ideal according to which everyone counts for one and no one counts for more than one. Here there is clear meaning to talk of the moral point of view. It does represent a unified and distinctive perspective.\(^{12}\)

It is far from clear that Scheffler's alternative construal amounts to an alternative way of understanding the moral standpoint as a unified and distinct standpoint. What he says raises a doubt that the moral standpoint can be understood as a distinct standpoint, and he says nothing to resolve this doubt. I should hasten to add here that I do not mean this point to challenge Scheffler's conclusion that morality itself is moderate. My point is not to support a conception of morality as pure and stringent, relegating any "moderating" considerations to the question of the right resolution of conflicts between morality and so-called prudence. I agree with Scheffler's view that morality is in itself fit for humans. But I suspect that that view leads one in the direction, supported by a variety of other considerations as well, that there is no such thing as a moral point of view. Thus consideration of Scheffler's arguments for the moderateness of morality return us to the conclusion of the discussion of the nonintrusiveness of morality, namely to the rejection of the Kantian-inspired understanding of morality as representing a distinctive standpoint.

III. The Interpenetration of Values

Kant's great efforts to establish the autonomy of morality notwithstanding, the assumption that the moral standpoint is separate and distinctive, and that — barring good luck and special efforts — it tends to conflict with self-interest reflects the same illusion which breeds the alienation from morality expressed by Gide's characters. To disabuse them one has to dispel the illusion.\(^{13}\)

The thought that there is a moral point of view, and that moral values are those established from the moral standpoint, faces a difficulty in explaining the interdependence between nonmoral values and moral ones. For the purpose of this discussion I will assume that moral values are those which manifest some aspect of an ideal of impartial concern for the well-being of all people. On this understanding of the moral there are many nonmoral values. Nonmoral values are in no way inimical to morality. They are nonmoral in that they do not manifest an aspect of the ideal of impartial concern for all. But there

\(^{12}\) It does if it is not open to the objection of incoherence, which I suspect it to be guilty of. But this issue cannot be taken up here.

\(^{13}\) In fairness to Michel, Gide's immoralist, one should remember that later on in the book he wonders skeptically about what he could mean by "sincerity."
is an argument, only to be lightly sketched here, suggesting that non-
moral values presuppose the value of human life, which we agreed to take as belonging to the heart of the moral perspective.

Consider one example, the value of being interested in music. Let us assume an interest the main manifestation of which is a habit of listening to music, and an interest in learning about it, reflecting and conversing with friends about it. Such an interest commits the interested person to recognizing the value of other beings like him in two quite distinct ways. First, the person who has the interest is committed to the view that an interest in music can enrich the life of the people who have it. Second, he is committed to the view that the value of music presupposes the value of human life. Let me consider the first point first.

I am assuming that those interested in music value it, i.e., they believe that music and an interest in it are valuable. Therefore they are committed to the view that an interest in music enriches their life. This leads to the view that an interest in music enriches the life of all those who are like them and who have it. So those who have an interest in music are committed to view others who are like them as people who can value the valuable and be enriched by doing so. They are committed to viewing others as valuers. But valuers are themselves valuable. This deep-rooted belief, which manifests itself in the pervasive view that human life is valuable because humans have the capacity to discover and cherish value, or because they have a subjective point of view (and this entails that they are valuers) cannot be argued for here. It reaches to the deepest questions about the nature of values. But if it is right then an interest in a nonmoral value like music commits the interested to the value of human life.

Of course it does not follow from this that those interested in music share a belief in the value of human life. They may be unaware of what such an interest commits them to. The importance of the argument, if it is sound, is that in bringing them to realize the value of human life one is doing no more than unraveling the implications of what they already accept. There is no cognitive jump involved. One is not called upon to undertake a position independent of views one already holds. In terms of Bernard Williams' distinction between internal and external reasons one has an internal reason to respect the value of life of human beings, a reason one can come to realize by familiar processes of reasoning from positions one already holds, from values one is already motivated to acknowledge and uphold.

The sketched argument applies to anyone who is interested in music. An analogous argument applies to anyone who believes in the

14. The respects in which they are like him will emerge as we sketch the presuppositions of the value of an interest in music.
15. We can disregard pathological cases and confine our discussion to the normal ones.
value of music, even though, being tone deaf, or just too busy with other things, he personally is not interested in music. You may well say that none of this shows that there is no distinctive moral point of view. It merely means that one must share it in order to have an interest in music or to recognize the value of music. I have already confessed to a very limited understanding of what the moral point of view is meant to signify. All I wished to argue is that there is no cognitive or motivational chasm between nonmoral and moral values and reasons. Roughly the same capacities, experiences, and thought processes are needed for the recognition of both. While no doubt some people have the capacity to recognize some values and not others, the ones they can as well as the ones they are unable to recognize are likely to be a mixture of the moral and the nonmoral.

There is, I indicated above, a second route to the same conclusion. Let me delineate its direction even more briefly. It proceeds from the fact that the appreciation of music is the appreciation of a cultural product. To enjoy music one has to share in the culture, either to share or to value its values and the value presuppositions of the culture. I do not mean that one cannot enjoy or be interested in Verdi’s operas unless one shares his view of the role of the woman (to sacrifice herself for the sake of her lover), or that one cannot enjoy and appreciate Wagner without sharing the racism expressed in “Siegfried.” The appreciation of music presupposes no endorsement of the values expressed in any particular work of art, or indeed in any particular musical period or culture. All I am suggesting is that the appreciation of music involves (among other things) the exercise of the same capacities that one exercises in moral thought. One has to understand what moral values are and why they have such force over the life of people. Without that one would be as deaf to the work of Mozart or Beethoven as to that of Verdi or Wagner. More generally, one has to share in a culture, with its moral concerns, in order to understand the music of different cultures and societies with their different moralities.

To repeat, the arguments (both arguments) are not that those who value music, if only they worked out the full implications of that fact, would know all the moral truths. The arguments are that valuing and being interested in music is impossible (or possible only in a most truncated form) without the exercise of moral sensitivity, a moral capacity, and these involve the commitment to some moral truths. Therefore there is neither a cognitive nor a motivational leap from the appreciation of nonmoral values to the appreciation of moral ones.

The rejection of a distinct moral point of view casts doubts on the way Scheffler pursues his inquiry into the moderateness of morality. But before concluding this review with this point in the next section let it be observed that the interpenetration of moral and nonmoral values casts some doubts on Scheffler’s discussion of moral motivation.
Much of Chapter Five is given over to a discussion of how Freud’s theory shows the way to construct a naturalistic theory of moral motivation. I have neither the competence nor the wish to join in the substance of this discussion (in which — as Scheffler makes clear — he does not invite the reader to endorse Freud’s theory). Much of this discussion, however, is distorted by Scheffler’s failure to take account of his own subsequent discussion of self-interest. Scheffler is concerned there with a problem which allegedly applies specifically to morality. But if the argument of the interpenetration of values is broadly right then the same problem would arise regarding the pursuit of any values, moral and nonmoral alike. It is not more puzzling how people can volunteer to serve food to disabled people confined to their homes than how they can love going to the opera.

There is, you may say, a remaining question: How can people be motivated to follow morality when doing so conflicts with their self-interest? But neither is that problem a problem about morality. People act against their self-interest to help friends (when they do not have a moral reason to do so), to save ancient monuments, and to support a whole range of causes that no one, not even they, assumes to have a moral value. The belief in a distinctive moral point of view distorts rather than illuminates the very genuine problems involved in explaining moral motivation.

IV. HOW DEMANDING IS A “NON-MODERATE” MORALITY?

Scheffler is right to think that morality is fit for humans. But is he equally right to think that this is a result of reconciling the ideal of impartiality with the proposition that each person’s interests nevertheless have a significance for him or her that is out of proportion to their importance from an impersonal standpoint? Is morality undemanding because it has built in it principles aimed to make it undemanding? Or is it undemanding without such considerations, as a byproduct, as it were, of its general nature?

Oddly Scheffler assumes without argument the first of these possibilities. It may come as a surprise to the reader not to find in the book any discussion of the rigors of morality when its specially designed moderating elements are excluded. How do we know that a nonmoderated morality is too demanding? Two propositions can be assumed: first, that utilitarianism is too demanding; second, that an unmoderated morality allows for conflict between morality and self-interest, and that it is a matter of luck how rare such conflicts will actually be. But neither assumption justifies the conclusion that there are special moderating elements in morality. Utilitarianism is a mistaken view of morality for many independent reasons; and even a specially moderated morality would allow for conflicts with self-interest, and it is a matter of good luck how frequent they are likely to be and
how severe their consequences to individual self-interest. Of course a moderated morality is guaranteed the achievement of reducing the number of such conflicts. Though — and this point, again unexamined by Scheffler, is of great importance — it is far from clear whether a specially moderated morality will reduce the number of conflicts in which, were the agents to act morally, their interests would suffer severely. It may well simply eliminate those conflicts which have a less severe impact on the self-interest of the agents, leaving untouched those that really have a devastating impact on the agents. This, I think, is the effect of the version of the special moderating devices — the agent-centered prerogatives — advocated by Scheffler's first book *The Rejection of Consequentialism.* To make sure that this is not the case one has to do more than argue for the presence of moderating devices in morality. One has to examine the nature of these devices. Scheffler, however, regards it as a strength of his book that it avoids doing so: that it refrains from any discussion of the nature of the moderating elements in morality.

Leaving this point on one side, the mere reduction of the incidence of conflict between morality and self-interest cannot be regarded as a reason for favoring the view of morality which secures the reduction. One has to show that the suspected conflicts avoided are those one has reason to believe do not exist. No such argument is offered in the book, and none can be given except against the background of an examination of the ways in which an unmoderated morality is too demanding.

Scheffler will protest that the last two paragraphs distort the argument of his book. He does not argue for the existence of special moderating devices, therefore he owes the reader no argument for their existence. He is arguing for the position cited above, i.e.,

[according to the alternative construal, morality attaches unmediated significance to each of two basic propositions. The first proposition is that, from an impersonal standpoint, everyone's life is of equal intrinsic value and everyone's interests are of equal intrinsic importance. The second proposition is that each person's interests nevertheless have a significance for him or her that is out of proportion to their importance from an impersonal standpoint. On the alternative construal, moral norms reflect and attempt to balance these two fundamental propositions. [p. 122]

The second proposition is misunderstood, he will add, if it is taken as a specially designed moderating element in morality. The second statement is, however, open to so many different interpretations as to be a trap waiting for the unwary. It can be affirmed by those who see in it no more than the tautology that a person cares more about what

he cares about than about what he does not care about. It can also be affirmed by people who read it to mean that in deciding what to do people tend to treat their own interests as if they have a greater weight than that assigned them from the impartial point of view. It can of course bear any number of other interpretations as well. The tautological reading of the statement does not lead to any normative conclusions. Scheffler could certainly not have relied on it to support his conclusion that moral norms effect a compromise between the two propositions. No conflict exists and no compromise is called for if the tautological interpretation is adopted. A compromise may be in place if the other interpretation I provided is adopted. But if this is the way Scheffler meant it then his view does involve introducing a specifically moderating device into morality, and doing so without argument as explained above.

The book reaches the right conclusions on the central questions it poses. It is also full of wise and helpful observations and discussions of incidental issues, and it excels in demonstrating the interconnections among a variety of issues. But I doubt that it has really explained in what ways and for what reasons morality is moderate, and how morality relates to self-interest.

---

17. Remember that a person's self-interest is defined to a considerable degree by what that person cares about.

18. See, for example, Scheffler's discussion of the resonance of morality and its psychological fragility. Pp. 68-72.