

Changing One's Mind on Moral Matters

Author(s): Christopher Cowley

Source: *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, Jun., 2005, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Jun., 2005), pp. 277-290

Published by: Springer

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/27504353>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Springer is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*

JSTOR

CHRISTOPHER COWLEY

CHANGING ONE'S MIND ON MORAL MATTERS

Accepted: 10 January 2005

ABSTRACT. Contemporary moral philosophy assumes an account of what it means to legitimately change one's mind in ethics, and I wish to challenge this account by enlarging the category of the legitimate. I am just as eager to avoid illegitimate mind-changing brought on by deceit or brainwashing, but I claim that legitimacy should be defined in terms of *transparency* of method. A social reformer should not be embarrassed to admit that he acquired many beliefs about justice while reading Dickens. As such, appeals to the heart and the imagination are just as legitimate, within limits, as appeals to the mind; and showing can be as legitimate as telling. To demonstrate this, I consider the example of a vegetarian trying to 'convert' a carnivore. I then ask what it means when the carnivore claims to have been previously mistaken.

KEY WORDS: animal rights, Cora Diamond, moral imagination, moral persuasion, moral reasons, Peter Singer, Wittgensteinian ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary moral philosophy, there seem to be three key assumptions about what constitutes a legitimate moral argument between individuals. The first assumption is that the patient exchange of relevant facts and reasons between two enquirers of good will, combined with the discovery and elimination of inferential error and prejudice, will eventually lead to a convergence upon the truth of the matter. Tim Scanlon, for example, is confident that "in cases of actual disagreement there is always room for further argument by appeal to inconsistencies and other inadequacies in each other's position" (Scanlon, 1998, p. 382 n. 60). The second assumption is implied by the first: that there is a *singular* realm of moral facts and moral reasons relating to a concrete situation, and that these facts and reasons are in principle accessible to all participants (real or hypothetical) in that situation. The third is more stipulative than is often realised: that *only* something like this procedure will lead one of the disputants to change his mind *legitimately*; any other change of mind, the assumption continues, will be akin to brainwashing insofar as it bypasses the disputant's rational will. With such assumptions, these philosophers – whom I shall refer to as the Optimists – see themselves as

continuing the good work of Socrates against all the rhetoric and spin of the age.

I agree that the Optimist conception of legitimate argument is suited to disputes over non-moral facts, about whether Berlin is or is not the capital of Germany. Good evidence and good reasons for belief should speak for themselves, and should leave the listener with “nothing else to think,” to use David Wiggins’s celebrated phrase. I also accept that many moral arguments are indeed settled in the above way. However, I want to argue that what distinguishes moral judgements from non-moral judgements is precisely that they allow for a disputant to legitimately change his mind in a manner that falls short of this rational paradigm. In other words, I am rejecting the proposed dichotomy between persuasion and brainwashing, and arguing for a third way.

There is a strong intuition in favour of the Optimist account, of course, and that is that individuals often claim to be making moral *progress* in their lives. The errors of adolescence are indulged as necessary to the learning process. But even in adulthood, we make a moral decision and then discover that it was the “wrong” one, and that, for example, apologies and reparations are now due. Whatever my account turns out to be, it will have to accord with this strong intuition about progress and mistakes.

2. A TYPOLOGY OF MORAL ARGUMENTS

Take two individuals, A and B, who have a *prima facie* moral disagreement: A claims p , and B claims $\sim p$, where p characteristically involves moral rightness or bestness, or some commendatory adjective such as ‘kind’. What might be going on here?

1. It might not be a disagreement at all, but an exchange of preferences.
2. It might not be a *moral* disagreement at all, but a trial of power.
3. It might be a moral disagreement, that could be resolved by the exchange of relevant non-moral facts or by the correction of inferential errors.
4. It might be a moral disagreement, which might then be transformed into a *new* disagreement over whether a given non-moral fact is sufficiently relevant or not.

I will not be considering any of these possibilities further here. Instead, I am interested in genuine moral disagreements between two sufficiently well-informed parties of good will. By ‘sufficient’ here, I am assuming the basic plausibility of reaching a point where no further non-moral information is relevant, and the disagreement ‘jams’: political disagreements between the left and the right are typical of such an ‘agreement to disagree’.

The difference is then in the set of relevant values and priorities each person holds. What I want to do now is to divide these remaining disagreements into three types:

5. A *resolvable* disagreement. One person comes to agree with the other, but not through the process described in 3. Instead, one disputant comes to see the situation through the other's perspective, perhaps through the deployment of helpful analogies and comparisons, of illustrative examples, etc. Whether and to what degree such a change involves rhetoric of the pernicious kind will be examined in a moment.¹
6. An *irresolvable* disagreement. The above efforts fail. However, each can acknowledge the other's opinion as intelligible and even respectable, although they will 'agree to disagree'. Sometime the disagreement will be harmlessly mysterious; at other times it will require efforts to explain the contrary opinion *away* with reference to some character-based or role-based determinism: "you would think that, given that you're a bank manager!"
7. A *radical* disagreement. Not only do the two disputants disagree, but the position of each is not fully intelligible to the other as a coherent moral position. Moreover, one disputant finds he is unable to explain away the other's position with reference to the other's character or role. The paradigm examples of this involve great evil, but I suggest such disagreements are more prevalent than acknowledged. I will not be considering such disagreements in this paper.

What is not always obvious here, I suggest, is the amount of contingency that distinguishes success from failure in these attempts to persuade. The Optimist account of a disagreement about the capital of Germany could be straightforwardly resolved, leaving the corrected disputant with "nothing else to think." But whether the reasons, analogies and examples adduced by one disputant find purchase in the other's set of values and priorities relating to the subject of the disagreement, will depend on *who* the disputants are. Individual A might use exactly the same formulation with B as he does with C; and yet B comes to agree with A, but C does not.

It will be clear that I agree with Williams's account of reasons-internalism (Williams, 1981). According to Williams, there are no external reasons, that is, no reasons that would be a reason *for* a given agent to Φ whether or not he (i) knows about the reason or (ii) accepts the reason.

¹ This central idea is argued powerfully by Diamond (1991a). See also the McDowell quotation.

Instead, says Williams, a reason can only function as a reason if it finds purchase in the agent's 'subjective motivational set' via a 'sound deliberative route'. The only exception to this would be reasons which did not find purchase because of the agent's inferential error or ignorance of certain relevant facts. Williams's internalism remains controversial, and I will not be able to offer more than a partial and implicit defence in what follows.

One last comment before I move on to a discussion of a concrete example. So far I have been taking two disputants as comprising the disagreement, such that the disagreement is resolved when one changes the other's mind. But I have deliberately chosen to concentrate on mind-changing rather than persuasion in order to include a solitary change of mind – the ordinary situation of one individual reflecting on a past moral judgement and changing his position without interacting with anybody else. Again, the important question concerns the legitimacy of such solitary mind-changing: clearly, I cannot allow my account to collapse into mere whimsy.

3. THE VEGETARIAN AND THE CARNIVORE

Consider the following disagreement between two people, V a vegetarian, and C a carnivore. They agree in many of their moral judgements, but clearly they have one source of persistent disagreement, and that is the moral status of animals. What would it mean for one to persuade the other to change his mind on this issue? Here is the situation: (i) V claims that killing animals for food, when not a matter of human survival, is morally impermissible. (ii) C claims that as long as the animals are well-treated during their lives (e.g. on organic farms) and killed humanely, then it is morally permissible to eat them, and therefore permissible to breed them to that end. (iii) The two of them are visiting a local village zoo with small domestic and local forest animals, including a common chicken. (As such I shall not consider the rejection of animal *products* (eggs, milk), nor shall I consider blood sports or experimentation on animals here.)

The disagreement is not one of preference – both parties are worried about doing the morally right or at least permissible thing. What's more, V is determined to persuade his friend C to see the light, and C is willing to make the effort to understand V's position (he will not change his mind just to please his friend).

V might start with some of the classic arguments to favour of restricting the way we treat animals: (i) that humans don't *need* to kill animals, since they can live perfectly well as vegetarians; (ii) that animals share certain capacities with humans, especially the capacity to suffer, and therefore they deserve to be treated in the way that we treat other humans; (iii) that

mentally, animals are no different than infant or senile humans, and therefore deserve the same respect.²

One phenomenological point. The chicken's inviolability is an integral part of V's perspective on the chicken; it is not *deduced* from the perception of the chicken. V sees the chicken not only under its physical description but also under its *objective* moral description as living-thing-which-must-not-be-killed-for-food. There are no explicit reasons to support this in V's experience because V does not need to give reasons to himself; he does, however, need to *come up* with reasons for C in the face of the latter's apparent intransigence. Such reasons, however, are logically subsequent to the perception of the chicken.

Now there are two questions to ask about these classic arguments: first, is it possible to deliver the arguments without any rhetoric *at all*? Second, what sorts of rhetoric might, nevertheless, be legitimate when deciding how to deliver the argument?

With regard to the first question, I suggest that for a presentation of facts and reasons to aim at a genuinely neutral ideal in the desired way, it will have to be made within a context that will give determinate meaning to the very concepts of 'neutrality', 'distortion' and 'deceit'. In the context of the law court, for example, the distinction is clear enough to all those who are sufficiently versed in the practice to take part in or follow the proceedings. At the same time, however, it is also true that one lawyer can be a better speaker than another, even though both speak equally 'neutrally'. Outside such a formal context, it becomes less clear what the concept of neutrality might require of the disputants. For the reasons that each adduce in support of his position partly expresses the way he experiences the situation at hand: the reasons *strike* A, but not B, as relevant and powerful. It is surely difficult to ask which of A or B then experiences the situation more neutrally?

On the second question, I have already suggested that comparisons and examples might be legitimate. But I would go further than this: first, by claiming that *showing* can be as legitimate as *telling*, especially since certain positions cannot be adequately put into words; second, following Diamond, by appealing to the heart and to the imagination, as well as to the mind.

What I am trying to do in moral arguments is to get the other to *see* things my way, perhaps almost like a religious conversion. Here is McDowell, describing this process in relation to the virtues.

Conveying what a circumstance means, in this loaded sense, is getting someone to see it in the special way in which a virtuous person would see it. In the attempt to do so,

²The locus classicus of the modern debate is probably the following two books: Singer (1975), and Regan and Singer (1976).

one exploits contrivances similar to those one exploits in other areas where the task is to back up the injunction 'see it like this': helpful juxtapositions of cases, descriptions with carefully chosen terms and carefully placed emphases, and the like. (Compare, for instance, what one might do or say to someone who says 'Jazz sounds to me like a mess, a mere welter of uncoordinated noise.')

No such contrivances can be guaranteed success, in the sense that failure would show irrationality on the part of the audience. (McDowell, 1998, p. 85)

4. TRANSPARENCY OF METHOD

With this in mind I propose an alternative construal of legitimate persuasion than that spelled out in the three assumptions with which I opened this paper. Legitimacy, I suggest, depends on *transparency of method*: if I acquire a new belief through an obviously illegitimate process such as brainwashing, and then discover that I had been brainwashed, then I will also suspect the belief thus acquired to be invalid (I consider an objection to this remark in the final section of this paper). Brainwashing, hypnosis and deception involve bypassing the victim's will; but the use of "helpful juxtapositions of cases", etc. can withstand full exposure of the method. It is no embarrassment for a social reformer to admit to being first moved to political action by reading Dickens. Indeed, it goes further than this: without being moved by something like reading Dickens, then social reform activism can only be hollowly over-intellectual.³

Let us return to the disagreement between V and C. Let us assume that C has now read Singer's works, but remains unmoved. Indeed, C might well agree with V and Singer, and might not be able to think of any good reason to continue eating meat, and yet he does so – I suggest that this is quite common among meat-eaters. The next stage in V's efforts might be, following Diamond, to try to get C to see animals as *kin*: not by arguments, but by appealing to the intuitions that C displays in the presence of domestic pets. Why should a cat merit such affection and concern, while a chicken is fit for slaughter? Once again, however, the failure of such a move is readily conceivable.

However, seeing animals as bearers of rights (Singer) or as kin (Diamond) should not be exaggerated, for fear of anthropomorphic sentimentality on the one hand, and wilful ignorance of human practices on

³Much anthropological and psychological evidence could be adduced in support of this point, evidence that would probably be considered irrelevant by philosophers. However, my argument throughout concerns the importance of starting any moral philosophical discussion by looking at what we *already* do, rather than starting with what an idealised rational being would do. This also relates to Diamond's point in the next paragraph but one. I stress, however, that it is a starting point, and not a conclusion in favour of some broad unquestioned conservatism in moral matters.

the other. As Diamond puts it, it is important to begin with a more general look at the way we *already* think about and behave towards animals (what we have *made of* animals), as revealed, for example, in the widespread belief that a funeral would be appropriate for a human infant but not for a puppy – even if their mental capacities, as Singer uses the term, are similar. This is an important intuition. Singer's error is to start with some vague notion of a 'neutral being' and then infer what sort of rights or moral status it might have.⁴

Because of this lack of rational necessitation underlying even legitimate efforts to persuade, it would be implausible to deny that V could *run out* of effective arguments, reasons and evidence, 'effective' in the narrow sense of being sufficiently forceful to change C's mind without uncontentiously illegitimate rhetoric (deceit, etc.), and without external enticement or coercion. In other words, the disagreement between C and V may, despite best efforts and the best will, be irresolvable. This is because C and V see the chicken in different ways.

In terms of biological classification, of course, they will share enough for them to identify a chicken from other animals, based on its physical features; but they have different perspectives when it comes to its moral 'rights' or 'immunity' or 'inviolability', whatever the best shorthand is for the prohibition against the performance of a set of specific actions, notably the killing of it for no other purpose than human consumption under conditions of plentiful alternative nutrition. It should not be thought that C experiences *no* moral prohibitions upon perceiving the chicken, of course – for example, he sees it as someone else's property that cannot be appropriated without the owner's informed consent. So even for C, it's not simply a *physical* chicken (two-legged, feathered, etc.) but also an owned good, the appropriation of which would have to be appropriately justified. And like V, the reason why C does not just grab the chicken (he is hungry, after all) is simply that "it belongs to someone else." This reason is good enough for him, and probably most people (though of course not all), given the wide acceptance of property rights. But in exactly the

⁴ Here is Cora Diamond:

"A difference like that may indeed start out as a biological difference, but it becomes something for human thought through being taken up and made something of – by generations of human beings, in their practices, their art, their literature, their religion, their ethics. [...] It is absurd to think these are questions you should try to answer in some sort of totally general terms, quite independently of seeing what particular human sense people have actually made out of the differences or similarities you are concerned with. And this is not predictable. [...] We are never confronted merely with the existence of 'beings' with discoverable empirical similarities and differences, towards which we must act, with the aid of general principles about beings with such-and-such properties deserving so-and-so." (Diamond, 1991b, p. 351).

same way, “that it’s an animal” is a good enough reason for V not to eat it.

5. SHOWING, TELLING, AND CONVERSION

What if V takes C to a slaughterhouse? Perhaps C has not hitherto made the connection – at a deeper than merely intellectual level – between the harmless living creature and the tidily-packaged lump of meat in the local butcher’s. He knows that chicken meat comes from chickens, of course, but in his primary school he was never asked to draw the intermediate stages between the happy farmyard and the dinner table. So it could be said that he does not *know* where the meat comes from, with the Socratic implication that *if* he really knew – knew more than the mere proposition, knew enough and in the right way to be *moved* – the chicken would change its moral shape. Again, in one sense this is ridiculous, the chicken remains a chicken whatever happens to C; in another sense, however, the chicken would become a very different object within C’s perspective, because it would now come with extra prohibitions. And whatever the debate about Humean projection, the important thing is that these prohibitions would be experienced by C as *just as objective* as the chicken’s primary qualities of size and shape. This is a different kind of objectivity in that it lacks the singularity of the primary qualities (i.e. that we all see the same primary qualities); but it is objectivity nonetheless in being discoverably independent of the observer’s will.

C’s conception of the chicken would turn out to be ‘cognitively penetrable’. This is to be contrasted to the cognitive *impenetrability* of our perception of the famous optical illusion comprising arrowheaded parallel lines of equal length, such that one set of arrow-heads is pointing out, the other pointing in. No matter how confident I am that they *are* of the same length, no matter how elaborate my measurements, they will always *appear* of different length.

So perhaps the slaughterhouse could join the experience of living and dead animal together, suitably accompanied by the blood and the cries and the twitching freshly-killed corpses. This might ‘work’, and C might be ‘converted’; *then again, he might not*. And if it doesn’t work, there is probably little more that V could do except say helplessly “but don’t you see?” However, at least C will probably be able to say that he can better *imagine* what V sees; that he knows better “where V stands,” or “where he’s coming from.”

How about the other way around? Could C convince V, for example by getting him to directly experience the pleasures of smelling and tasting roasted meat, until he had to ‘cave in’? Certainly. But would this be symmetrical to C’s conversion? Not if I insist in describing one as a mere

cave-in and the other as a noble-sounding conversion: a 'cave-in' would necessarily comprise an avoidance of the question of moral impermissibility, while C is adopting a moral stance where he previously said there was no moral issue at all. To truly convert V would require V coming to see his past vegetarianism as somehow mistaken: in the past, V now says, he sentimentalised and anthropomorphised animals, whereas now he sees them as complicated soul-less machines with no greater moral stature than vegetables; or he could continue to see them as something like fellow living creatures, but with a different place in a (divinely-sanctioned) food-chain or evolutionary scheme of things.

Let us say that the slaughterhouse visit persuades C to become a vegetarian. Is this then a legitimate form of mind-changing, or is it a form of brain-washing? The slaughterhouse visit does not involve explicit reasons, and so might be argued to fall short of the Optimist paradigm of legitimate persuasion: the persuadee recognising the superior force and/or relevance of the persuader's reasons, evidence, arguments, justifications, etc. I suggest that the slaughterhouse visit *is* an instance of legitimate persuasion, because – at least in the scenario I've envisaged – C could adopt V's moral judgement during the visit (or during reflection soon after the visit); and then adopt V's reasons, evidence, etc. after adopting the judgement. When asked why he became a vegetarian, he could respond that he *came to realise* that "animals are kin" or that "meat is murder" or that "animals have souls", etc. As such, the slaughterhouse persuasion is legitimate because he now *endorses* the conversion, and its supporting reasons, in a way he would not have done if he had become aware of a deception. Not only does he endorse the judgement, he also takes his change of mind as an improvement of some sort, a development for the better.

6. BEING MISTAKEN

Given the above, then, what does it mean to consider oneself to have been mistaken; what does 'wrong' mean when I acknowledge myself to have been wrong on an ethical issue? How do I fit it in with the rest of my understanding of myself, how do I provide myself with an 'error theory' – an account of why I went wrong? Without the Optimist framework, it now seems that I am unable to provide any sort of robust sense of such wrongness to distinguish it from *whimsically* changing my mind. That's the problem for this section.

When I discover that my non-moral belief that Bonn is the capital of Germany was incorrect, I have made progress. Not only do I acquire a new belief that Berlin is the capital, but I also come to believe that I was mistaken before. I might support this second belief with an explanation of the source

of my confusion: it is true that Bonn *was* the capital during the Cold War, so it is an honest mistake. However, such an explanation will depend on the context if it is to *justify* my mistake: if I am a German diplomat, such a mistake would be blameworthy. Throughout, I might again be mistaken in my present belief that Berlin is the capital; there is nothing to prevent further evidence revealing this, and a further explanation revealing why I am presently mistaken. But throughout, there is a palpable sense of progress, of convergence on and answerability to a singular (albeit time-indexed) truth of the matter.

Things are more complicated with moral beliefs. Some changes of mind will follow the non-moral paradigm above: certain non-moral facts come to light, or certain inferential errors are pointed out. And this will involve a relatively unproblematic sense of progress. However, the cases I am more interested in are not that simple. Can C, once converted to vegetarianism, claim that he was previously mistaken in his beliefs about animals? Perhaps, but not necessarily. He would also be able to say that he just saw animals in a different way: he had been able to eat them before, and now he is no longer able to. It is a personal matter, but it is not *merely* personal, like his choice of hairstyle, for it was not an object of choice in the same way his hairstyle was.

So if C does judge himself to have been mistaken before, how does he know he is not mistaken now? Here it is important to understand what it means to experience the world in the first person and at the same time to acknowledge certain remembered events as *mine*. If I say “eating meat is morally impermissible,” and if I am sincere and serious about the declaration, if I *stand behind my words*, then within my perspective my being wrong about this is not simultaneously conceivable. I cannot say “X is impermissible – but I may be wrong,” just as I cannot say “I promise to do Y, but I might not do it,” just as I cannot say “I am certain that this is Z, but I may be wrong.” Of course C could change his mind again; but this possibility does not enter the experience of *finding* animals to be inviolable *now*. Any uncertainty would have to be reflected in the declaration itself (It seems to me that . . .).

At the same time as C judges himself to have been mistaken, it should not be thought that in changing his mind he *must* conclude that he was wrong before. To think that he must is to assume parity in the two temporal viewpoints: at t_1 he believed X, while at t_2 he believed not-X and therefore he ‘must have’ been mistaken at one of the times, probably t_1 . However, what such a starting point ignores is that C is making the judgement *at* t_2 , and not at some vantage point whence t_1 and t_2 are equidistant. Rush Rhees imagines someone saying: “But if you cannot prove it, then you may be wrong yourself, and you may be wrong when you say that *he* is.” To which he replies:

Well, what does this show? Sometimes I see afterwards that I *have* been wrong. But how do I see this? Not by any conclusive proof of the universal practical reason. I see it by being convinced that I ought *not* to have done this: i.e., once again by being sure. "We could never find out that we have made mistakes, unless we sometimes made no mistakes." When you tell me that I am wrong, then you are not uttering a logical absurdity: what you are saying makes sense, and I can understand it. In fact, I should not have had the trouble in *coming* to my decision otherwise. So I admit that my decision "may be wrong," if this is all that is meant. (Rhees, 1999, p. 50)

If C judges himself to have been wrong at t_1 , does this mean he was deceiving himself then? Or does it mean that he was right then but is deceiving himself now? Self-deception is a tricky notion. It implies being aware of some uncomfortable truth at one level of consciousness, while suppressing it – without being (fully) aware of the suppression – at another level. Imagine C's friend F, who remains a carnivore, now says to C "you're deceiving yourself. You still like meat, but you're just pretending to be a veggie in order to impress V." The point here is that we have a *new* disagreement, with a new pair of substantive moral judgements. F cannot expose C's putative self-deception in the same way that he can expose C's faulty memory by producing the library book he claims to have returned. If C continues to insist that he changed his mind without self-deception either then or now, then F cannot take the matter further. He may continue to believe his theory without saying any more, but if C insists that he can no longer eat meat, for such-and-such reasons, then he has to be taken at his word, absent strong reasons for believing otherwise. He cannot be mistaken about his reasons, if sincerely uttered, precisely because they are his reasons, because they express how he experiences the situation.

This does not mean that C need rest content with his reasons and his present experience. He may well reflect on what F has said. To think otherwise is to assume that a given situation can only strike a person in a single way, and that such an impression is incorrigible. But there is no reason to think that a person cannot be struck in multiple ways, that certain unpleasant thoughts can be triggered and half-consciously unpursued, that certain dimly-perceived resonances can be stifled by a railroading explanation; and that indeed, a critical reflection on such an explanation could itself be subdued and shelved by a forced preoccupation with immediate business. There is no reason why such mechanisms could not be explored later once the immediate threat had passed.

Importantly, the moral judgement and counter-judgement that constitute a disagreement are necessarily embodied. This means that when I consider your judgement mistaken, such a judgement will itself be embodied, and therefore at the same metaphysical 'level'. F's claim that C is self-deceived and C's indignant self-defence will all encounter each other like bowls on grass, and the outcome will, within limits to do with the intelligible use

of public concepts, always be somewhat unpredictable. None of the participants has a more privileged position whence to observe the truth of the matter – either with regard to the moral impermissibility of eating animals, or to C’s alleged self-deception – and so none can claim an aperspectivally grounded authority.

However, when it comes to C’s own present judgement that a past judgement of his was mistaken, these two judgements are not on the same level, for he has *moved on* from the time when he believed or uttered the past judgement, and therefore has a new view of his past self, of possible distortions, and especially of then-unknown consequences. As DZ Phillips puts it, the earlier and later judgement are not of the same ‘coin’, and as such it does not make sense to ask if there is an improvement in the value of the currency, for

from where would such an improvement be seen? The coinage has value within a perspective, and there are only two available to her: what he was and what he has become – and if he is honest with himself, this becoming will remain mysterious. (Phillips, 1992, p. 35)

The actual mechanics of the ‘becoming’ will only be partly intelligible: one can cite reasons and facts for the new beliefs one adopts, for example; but this will be far from the full story. C can cite the visit to the slaughterhouse as one necessary cause for his change of mind, in the minimal sense that given the way he was before the visit, he would probably not have come to change his mind in any other circumstance; but he can never be certain about what would have transpired without his visit.

7. PROBLEMS IN DEFINING BRAINWASHING AND DECEPTION

In this final section I want to consider two over-simplifications in the above account, both arising from my reliance on an unproblematic distinction between legitimate and illegitimate methods. First, I accepted that brainwashing, for example, was as illegitimate as the Optimists claimed. This assumes, however, that the convert and the observer will be in agreement that the conversion method *was* a case of brainwashing, and there is clearly no reason to assume that. What you regard as brainwashing or haranguing or bullying I might regard as ‘showing’, as ‘helpful juxtaposition of cases’, etc. Second, what if (i) I accept your judgement that the conversion process involved illegitimate means, but (ii) nevertheless independently endorse the judgement to which I have been converted; maybe I go further and say that only such illegitimate methods could provide the shock necessary to uproot my complacent previous beliefs.

Let me take the second possibility first. This will be most familiar in conversions effected by religious cults, and will beg a long discussion

about the nature of religious faith and about the difference between a religion and a cult. For the purposes of this paper I shall not include religious conversions, but only changing one's mind with regard to the adoption of a moral judgement. Can I then simultaneously endorse a moral judgement while accepting that I acquired it by illegitimate means? I don't think so, since moral judgements are essentially *revisable* in the light of future situations and conflicts in a way that religious judgements are not.

With regard to the first possibility, it is important to see that what we have here is a *new* moral disagreement between the interlocutors. If we return to the example of C, V and F, then not only do C and F, after C's conversion to vegetarianism, disagree about the moral permissibility of eating meat, but they also disagree about the legitimacy of the persuasion methods used by V. But at this point we are then back at square one. F *might* be able to adduce reasons and evidence to persuade C that the method was illegitimate – and thereby force C to reconsider his vegetarianism; but this attempt might fail. F might then be able to show C, or use 'helpful juxtaposition of cases', etc. to make C agree that V's method was illegitimate, but this too might fail.

8. CONCLUSION

This example has been fairly benign in the sense that changing one's mind about one's eating habits will probably not involve a radical change in personality. In addition, the disagreement is not serious in that it is easy enough for most vegetarians to share the same world with carnivores without hard moral choices – they can shop in different aisles in the supermarket. But its benign quality allowed me to present the important points without interference from other intuitions. Optimistic moral philosophy all too often considers drastic or far-fetched examples where, I suggest, one's intuitions are no longer reliable, clear or unambiguous enough to corroborate the theory under test; and too often the complexity of the situation is trivialised in order to squeeze it into pre-ordained theoretical categories.⁵ Now that the above framework is in place, however, the same arguments could fruitfully but cautiously be applied to more complicated moral disagreements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank Carolyn Wilde for her extensive help with an earlier draft of this paper.

⁵An infamous case of this is Williams's Jim and the Indians (1973). My point about the trivialisation of complexity is well articulated by Gaita (1989, p. 89 ff).

REFERENCES

- Diamond, C., Anything but Argument?, in *The Realistic Spirit*. Boston: MIT Press, 1991a.
- Diamond, C., Experiments on Animals, in *The Realistic Spirit*. Boston: MIT Press, 1991b.
- Gaita, R., *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*. London: Macmillan, 1989.
- McDowell, J., Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?, in *Mind, Value, Reality*. Boston: Harvard UP, 1998.
- Phillips, D.Z., Allegiance and Change in Morality, in *Interventions in Ethics*. London: Macmillan, 1992.
- Regan, T. and Singer, P. (eds.), *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1976.
- Rhees, R., *Moral Questions*, in Phillips D.Z. (ed.). London: Macmillan, 1999.
- Scanlon, T., *What We Owe To Each Other*. New York: Belknap Press, 1998.
- Singer, P., *Animal Liberation*, New York Review, 1975.
- Williams, B., Internal and External Reasons, in *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: CUP, 1981.
- Williams, B., Part II: Against, in Smart, J. and Williams, B. *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. Cambridge: CUP, 1973.

School of Medicine
University of East Anglia
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom
E-mail: c.cowley@uea.ac.uk