AGAINST MORAL UNCONDITIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important normative questions is whether an agent ought to prioritize morality (by "ought" I mean the unqualified "ought," not qualified oughts like "morally ought," "prudentially ought," etc.). To put it differently, if an agent encounters a state of affairs where she can either follow morality or do something else, but not both, then which option should the agent choose? It is common for philosophers to side with morality, and to think that all agents ought to follow morality even if doing so prevents the agent from doing something else. This view is known as moral unconditionalism. The purpose of this dissertation is to question moral unconditionalism. Although many philosophers take moral unconditionalism for granted, I do not. In this dissertation, I criticize three arguments for moral unconditionalism. The arguments are given by philosophers that are notable representatives of three major ethical theories (utilitarianism, divine command theory, and libertarianism, respectively). By criticizing their arguments for moral unconditionalism, I hope to show that moral unconditionalism is neither as justified nor as obvious as many people think it is, and that people ought to try to argue for moral unconditionalism instead of taking it for granted.

§1. Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to question moral unconditionalism, since I believe that most contemporary ethicists accept – and even take it for granted – that moral unconditionalism is true. In this section I shall explain what moral unconditionalism is (§1.1) and what is the plan for this dissertation (§1.2).

§1.1. What is moral unconditionalism?

In this section I will state what moral unconditionalism is, and then I will clarify it further by explaining some relevant notions (e.g., "morality" and "ought").

Below is the definition of moral unconditionalism:

> *Moral unconditionalism* is the view that the principle of morality is normatively unconditional – i.e., the view that the principle of morality ought[1] to be followed even if following the principle of morality conflicts with following another normative principle.[2]

Hence, moral unconditionalism says the following:

> (1) if the principle of morality says that doing X is obligatory, then agents ought to do X.
>
> (2) if the principle of morality says that doing X is impermissible, then agents ought not to do X.

[1] In this dissertation an "ought" implies an obligation (i.e., "X ought to do A" implies that "X has an obligation to do A"). So, in this dissertation the claim that an agent ought to perform an act does not mean that the act is "especially morally desirable, even if not obligatory".

[2] To generalize, the statement "X is *normatively conditional*" signifies that X ought to be followed only if following X does not conflict with following another normative principle, and the statement "X is *normatively unconditional*" signifies that X ought to be followed even if following X conflicts with following another normative principle.

(3) if the principle of morality says that doing X is permissible but not obligatory, then agents can decide whether they ought to do X or ought not to do X.[3]

Notice that moral unconditionalism implies that whatever morality says is what we ought to do, and it should not matter what another normative principle says – i.e., for moral unconditionalism, all normative principles besides the principle of morality are

[3] Someone may object by saying the following: "(3) seems false because an agent might have an overall obligation to do what is prudentially best, for example, and perhaps it is prudentially best to do X. To clarify, here is a possible scenario. Imagine that the principle of morality says that doing X is permissible but not obligatory, and thus not doing X is also permissible but not obligatory. Still, there might be a scenario where the agent ought to consider what the principle of prudence says, and when the agent takes into account the principle of prudence, such principle says that doing X is obligatory and that not doing X is impermissible; and therefore, in this scenario the agent ought to do X, which the principle of morality says is permissible for the agent to do. Hence, only (1) and (2) are required for moral unconditionalism, not (3), so (3) should not be included." That is the objection. My reply to this objection is that it is not a good objection because this line of thought destroys the normative unconditionality of the principle of morality. If – in the hypothetical scenario presented by the objector – the agent thinks that doing X is obligatory and not doing X is impermissible (as it is said by the principle of prudence), then the agent is not following the principle of morality because the principle of morality says that doing X is permissible but not obligatory and not doing X is also permissible but not obligatory, which conflicts with what the principle of prudence says: the principle of morality says that not doing X is permissible but not obligatory, while the principle of prudence says that doing X is impermissible, so clearly there is a conflict here. The objector might insist that by following the principle of prudence (i.e., by doing X) the agent follows the principle of morality, since the principle of morality permits the agent to do X. However, in this scenario the agent is not following the principle of morality "even if following the principle of morality conflicts with following another normative principle" (§1.1), as demanded by moral unconditionalism. The point is that the normative unconditionality of the principle of morality makes all other normative principles normatively irrelevant, otherwise the principle of morality is not normatively unconditional: if the principle of morality says that not doing X is permissible but not obligatory, but then the agent follows the principle of prudence (which says that not doing X is impermissible), then either the agent is following the principle of prudence over the principle of morality (which destroys the normative unconditionality of the principle of morality) or the agent is following another normative principle that says that the agent ought to follow the principle of prudence in the scenarios where the principle of morality says that doing X and not doing X are both permissible but not obligatory (but then such third principle is normatively unconditional, not the principle of morality, since such third principle is normatively superior to, or more normatively sovereign than, the principle of morality). Does the principle of morality tell the agent to follow the principle of prudence in the hypothetical scenario presented by the objector? No, otherwise the principle of morality would say that not doing X is impermissible since that is what the principle of prudence says. So, the agent should not be caring about what the principle of prudence says if the agent is going to following the principle of morality unconditionally – i.e., for the principle of morality to be normatively unconditional, the agent should not be taking into consideration what the principle of prudence (or any other normative principle) says about not doing X, since the normative unconditionality of the principle of morality makes it true that agents ought to follow the principle of morality *even if* (i.e., *independently of whether*) "following the principle of morality conflicts with following another normative principle" (§1.1). All in all, contrary to the objection, for a normative principle to be normatively unconditional, it is required that all other normative principles be *normatively irrelevant*.

normatively irrelevant. To clarify further, the claim that "X is normatively unconditional" implies that "X is normatively prior to Y for every other normative principle Y", but "X is normatively prior to Y for every other normative principle Y" does not imply that "X is normatively unconditional". For instance, it is logically possible that X ought to be prioritized over Y (i.e., X has normative priority over Y), but that when X conflicts with Y and Z, the agent ought to do Y and Z rather than X; in this case, although X has more normative value than Y, and thus X ought to be prioritized over Y, the combination of Y and Z has a greater normative value than the value of X, and thus the combination "Y and Z" ought to be prioritized over X. Therefore, keep in mind that normative unconditionality entails a stronger kind of normative priority, the strongest kind possible. More specifically, moral unconditionalism entails that the principle of morality is so normatively prior to any other normative principle that the principle of morality makes any other normative principle – or any combination of other normative principles – normatively irrelevant whenever such principle – or such combination of principles – conflicts with the principle of morality.

In addition, notice that saying that "X is normatively unconditional" is more than just saying that "X ought to be followed in all states of affairs" (i.e., "X is normatively absolute"). In this dissertation I am not only interested in whether the principle of morality ought to be followed in all states of affairs; rather, I am interested in whether the principle of morality ought to be followed even if such principle conflicts with other normative principles. For example, it is logically possible that the principle of morality ought to be followed in all states of affairs, but only because it is in one's interest to follow the principle of morality in all states of affairs. In this occasion, the principle of

morality is normatively absolute but not normatively unconditional: the principle of morality ought to be followed in all states of affairs, but only because the principle of morality does not conflict with the normative principle that says that one ought to follow one's interests. In this occasion, it is only one's interests that is normatively unconditional, not morality (even though morality is normatively absolute).

Also, notice that saying that "the principle of morality is normatively unconditional" implies that "the principle of morality is normatively fundamental" (i.e., "the principle of morality is not justified by another normative principle"). This is because if the principle of morality is justified by principle Y, and thus principle Y is more fundamental than the principle of morality, then an agent ought to follow the principle of morality because an agent ought to follow principle Y; however, this would contradict moral unconditionalism, since "moral unconditionalism implies that whatever morality says is what we ought to do, and it should not matter what another normative principle says – i.e., for moral unconditionalism, all normative principles besides the principle of morality are normatively irrelevant" (§1.1). That is why Christine Korsgaard says that the unconditional normative principle (1) is a principle that is not justified by another principle and (2) is a principle that requires no justification.[4]

Up until now I have stated what moral unconditionalism is. Before I pass on to the next section, I shall clarify what moral unconditionalism is by explaining what I mean by "normative principles," "principle of morality," "morality," and "ought."

[4] As Korsgaard says: "We can keep asking why: 'Why must I do what is right?' – 'Because it is commanded by God' – 'But why must I do what is commanded by God?' – and so on, in a way that apparently can go on forever. This is what Kant called a search for the unconditioned – in this case, for something which will bring the reiteration of 'but why must I do that?' to an end. The unconditional answer must be one that makes it impossible, unnecessary, or incoherent to ask why again" (Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 33).

Normative principles are principles that state how people ought to act. Arguably one of the most popular normative principles among ethicists is *the principle of morality*, which is the principle that people ought to follow *morality* (i.e., *objective morality*). Morality is one of many normative perspectives, along with prudence, civil laws, and etiquette, to name some examples. The definition of morality – and whether it can even be defined – is a contested issue, an issue that I do not need to discuss in detail. For this dissertation, it is enough to say that by "morality" I mean a system of rules of conduct that apply to all rational beings regardless of their interests (e.g., morality says that John should not steal from others even if John is an inconsiderate person that enjoys stealing from others more than anything else; the fact that John enjoys stealing from others is irrelevant to the moral assessment of John's conduct). This means that if objective morality exists, then objective morality exists independently of any rational being, and thus objective morality is not invented by any rational being, otherwise objective morality would just reflect the interests of the being that invented such morality.

To wrap up this section, I shall now clarify what I mean by the word "ought." At first, it may seem that the word "ought" applies to all normative perspectives, whether it be morality, prudence, civil laws, etiquette, or something else. However, in contemporary philosophy it is common to refer to numerous *qualified oughts*, which are oughts that do not apply to all normative perspectives – e.g., the *moral ought* only applies to morality, the *prudential ought* only applies to prudence, the *legal ought* only applies to civil laws, etc.[5] So, an individual may say that "you morally ought to be kind to everyone," or "you prudentially ought to be kind to everyone," or "you legally ought to be kind to everyone,"

[5] The list of qualified oughts can be quite long. Other qualified oughts include the etiquettal ought, the aesthetic ought, the religious ought, the hedonic ought, and the epistemic ought.

etc. This is in contrast with the *unqualified ought*[6] (or the *practical ought*,[7] or the *ought of comprehensive practical reason*, or *ought simpliciter*,[8] or *just plain ought*[9]), which is an ought that is not relative to any normative perspective, but rather it is an ought that applies to all normative perspectives.

Some philosophers argue that there is no unqualified ought and that there are only qualified oughts. To name one example, David Copp says that "there is no fact as to what a person ought *simpliciter* to do."[10] I disagree, since I think that there is the unqualified ought. Furthermore, I think that there are no qualified oughts, and that we ought to abandon the notion of a qualified ought. In saying this, I am not saying that we ought to abandon the idea that there are many normative perspectives (such as morality, prudence, civil laws, etc.), but rather that we ought to abandon the idea that there are many "oughts" (such as *moral ought*, *prudential ought*, *legal ought*, etc.). To name an example, instead of saying "I morally ought to be kind," we ought to say that "morality says that I ought to be kind," or "morality requires me to be kind," or something along those lines. In short, I see no reason to invent a "moral ought," a "prudential ought," a "legal ought," etc., since I think that there is no good reason to believe that each normative perspective issues its own "ought." I suspect that philosophers like Copp will – or at least may – object to this, but in this dissertation I will not deal with this debate in depth. Unless I say otherwise, in

[6] John Broome uses the term "unqualified ought" in his book *Rationality Through Reasoning*, such as in Chapter 2.4.
[7] Bernard Williams uses the term "practical ought" on page 118 of his book *Moral Luck*.
[8] David Copp uses the term "ought simpliciter" in his article "The Ring of Gyges: Overridingness and the Unity of Reason", such as on page 86.
[9] Owen McLeod uses the term "just plain ought" in his article "Just plain 'ought'".
[10] David Copp, "The Ring of Gyges: Overridingness and the Unity of Reason," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 87.

this dissertation the word "ought" always refers to the unqualified ought, and never to a qualified ought.

Before I pass on to the next section, I shall quickly answer the following objection. Someone may object that what I said is strange because there is no difference between the claims "I morally ought to be kind" and "morality says that I ought to be kind" (or the like), and perhaps I am misunderstanding or misrepresenting what people like Copp say. My reply is that I am responding mainly to those philosophers who are sometimes called "normative pluralists" (e.g., David Copp, Evan Tiffany, and Mathea Sagdahl), and I think that I am not misunderstanding or misrepresenting them. To make this clearer, look at what Mathea Sagdahl – a normative pluralist – says about normative pluralists, who I criticize for complicating things without any good reason:

> To give a very rough sketch, normative pluralism posits that there are a number of normative sources each issuing its own (potentially conflicting) "oughts," and these oughts are irreducible to merely being reasons for a more fundamental and unified ought. It entails that there are several senses of "ought" but no such thing as facts about what you "just plain ought" or "ought *simpliciter*."[11]

As one can see from the above passage, Sagdahl says that normative pluralists think that there are as many "oughts" as there are normative sources, since each normative source issues its own "ought." Hence, I am not misunderstanding or misrepresenting these normative pluralists when I say that they believe that there are many "oughts" (such as *moral ought, prudential ought, legal ought,* etc.). But that is the problem. I think that we

[11] Mathea Sagdahl, *Normative Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 14.

ought to abandon the idea of there being many "oughts" because such idea is absurd. If "I morally ought to be kind" and "morality says that I ought to be kind" signify the same thing, then why do normative pluralists and I disagree on there being multiple qualified oughts, like the *moral ought*? When I say that "morality says that I ought to be kind," I am not saying that there is a qualified ought (e.g., *morally ought*, or an *ought of morality*); rather, I am only saying that there is a normative source called "morality" that says that I ought to be kind. If that is the meaning of "I morally ought to be kind," then that is fine by me, but based on what normative pluralists say, that is not what "I morally ought to be kind" means, so I am responding to them by saying that the idea of there being many "oughts" is absurd.

To clarify my point, think about the following. Joe Biden says that we ought to vote for Democrat politicians (i.e., Joe Biden requires that we vote for Democrat politicians), and Donald Trump says that we ought to vote for Republican politicians (i.e., Donald Trump requires that we vote for Republican politicians), but in this occasion we don't invent a *Bidenesque ought* and a *Trumpian ought* (e.g., we don't say that "we Bidenesquely ought to vote for Democrat politicians" and that "we Trumpianly ought to vote for Republican politicians"), and we do not say that Biden issues his own "ought" and that Trump issues his own "ought," and thus we do not say that there are two *oughts* at play (the *Bidenesque ought* vs. the *Trumpian ought*), rather, we just say that there are two normative sources (Biden and Trump) and one notion of "ought," which is not a qualified ought.

In continuation, note that morality is a normative source since it demands things from us, and thus Biden is also a normative source since Biden also demands things from

us, and likewise Trump is also a normative source, and so is any other human that demands things from us, and so is any set of civil laws that demand things from us, including civil laws of every country and organization that exists, such as countries like Ukraine and organizations like the United Nations. If we are going to follow the reasoning of normative pluralists, then we need to invent an "ought" for every human, every country, and every organization that demands things from us, just like normative pluralists are willing to invent a *moral ought* just because a normative source called "morality" demands things from us.[12] That is absurd, and likewise it is absurd to speak of multiple qualified oughts, such as *moral ought, prudential ought, legal ought,* etc. There is no need to invent qualified oughts; just say that there are different normative sources, and that instead of these sources issuing their own (potentially conflicting) "oughts," say that these sources issue their own (potentially conflicting) demands, which does not entail – and does not require – the claim that there are qualified oughts. Either way, regardless of whether qualified oughts are absurd (which I argue that they are), I will not spend any more time on this issue; rather, I will just say once more that unless I say otherwise, in this dissertation the word "ought" always refers to the unqualified ought, simply because qualified oughts are irrelevant to moral unconditionalism, which is the topic of this dissertation.

§1.2. The plan for this dissertation

[12] To make things worse for normative pluralists, technically there isn't only one *legal ought* because there are many sets of civil laws, so if normative pluralists are willing to say that a set of civil laws issues its own "ought" (this becomes the *legal ought*, or the *ought of civil laws*), then to be consistent with their reasoning normative pluralists ought to say that there are many legal oughts since there are many sets of civil laws such as one from each country, each issuing its own "ought." And just like there can be a conflict between the *legal ought* and the *moral ought*, there can be conflict between the *legal ought* of different countries, such as the *legal ought of Ukraine* and the *legal ought of Russia*, so that an individual that argues that we ought to follow the *legal ought* would have to further argue that we ought to follow the *legal ought of Ukraine*, or the *legal ought of Russia*, or the *legal ought* of some other country.

This dissertation has a total of 5 sections. In §1, I explain the purpose – and the topic – of this dissertation. In §2-4 I will criticize three major arguments for moral unconditionalism, since the purpose of this dissertation is to question moral unconditionalism, and to do that I need to criticize at least some arguments for moral unconditionalism. Finally, in §5 I will present concluding remarks, such as ideas on future research projects.

Before we pass on to §2, let me explain §2-4 a little more. In §2 I criticize De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument for moral unconditionalism, in §3 I criticize Evan's argument for moral unconditionalism, and in §4 I criticize Rothbard's argument for moral unconditionalism. There are two reasons why I deal with these philosophers and criticize their arguments for moral unconditionalism. First, these philosophers are popular and notable representatives of their respective ethical theories, which are major ethical theories: De Lazari-Radek and Singer are notable representatives of utilitarianism, Evans is a notable representative of divine command theory,[13] and Rothbard is a notable representative of libertarianism. Second, their arguments for moral unconditionalism have not been criticized; or if their arguments have been criticized, I think that I can criticize such arguments further. If anyone asks why I did not deal with this philosopher or with that philosopher, then my reply is that I am not aware that such philosopher has given an argument for moral unconditionalism, or that I am aware that such philosopher

[13] Note that divine command theory does not presuppose any religion or any canonical texts; rather, divine command theory just appeals to God's commands, whatever they are.

has given an argument for moral unconditionalism but that other philosophers have done enough to refute or criticize such argument.[14]

That explains why I did not deal with Christine Korsgaard, to name one example. It is true that Korsgaard is a notable representative of Kantianism, which is a major ethical theory, but I chose not to deal with her and criticize her argument for moral unconditionalism in *The Sources of Normativity* because I think that her argument has been sufficiently criticized. To summarize, Michael Bukoski accurately reconstructs "Korsgaard's Argument" in the following way:

> 1. We must act.
>
> 2. We must value some practical identity in order to act.
>
> 3. Therefore, we must value some practical identity.
>
> 4. The value we place on any other practical identity derives from the value we place (or are committed to placing) on our humanity.
>
> 5. Therefore, we must value our humanity.[15]

This is an argument that Korsgaard uses to argue for moral unconditionalism.[16] However, Bukoski thinks that premise 4 is false, and I agree with him. Below is an explanation by Bukoski:

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[14] For example, I did not deal with Hans-Hermann Hoppe's "argumentation ethics" – which tries to justify the claim that his libertarian moral system is normatively unconditional – because I believe that such argument has been sufficiently criticized by Robert P. Murphy and Gene Callahan. For more on this, see Robert P. Murphy and Gene Callahan, "Hans-Hermann Hoppe's Argumentation Ethic: A Critique," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 20, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 53-64.

[15] Michael Bukoski, "Korsgaard's Arguments for the Value of Humanity," *Philosophical Review* 127, no. 2 (April 2018): 218.

[16] I won't spend much time explaining this because Korsgaard's argument is not an argument that I deal with in this dissertation, but here is a short explanation. In her *Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard is trying to find an unconditional normative principle (pg. 33), and her answer is that such principle is to follow morality "as the Enlightenment understood it" (pg. 121), and such conception of morality – the conception of Enlightenment morality – is the Kantian conception where all humans are treated as equal members (or citizens) of the Kingdom of Ends, which gives rise to categorical imperatives that ought to be followed by all people independently of their desires.

> The problem is premise (4), according to which the value we place on any other practical identity derives from the value we place (or are committed to placing) on humanity. That premise is question-begging at this stage of Korsgaard's Argument. She is arguing that a sufficiently reflective agent must value humanity. She first argued that valuing humanity allows one to justify one's other practical identities (except for those essentially in conflict with it). As humans, we need some practical identity or other; if we value our humanity, then this need matters, and we can justify other practical identities on the grounds that they satisfy it. But then she encountered a problem: we can apparently question whether we ought to value our humanity. Until we have a satisfactory answer to that question, we cannot assume that valuing humanity is justified. And – this is the crucial point – if we cannot assume that valuing humanity is justified, then we cannot assume that the value we place on other practical identities derives from the value we place (or are committed to placing) on humanity.[17]

I will not discuss Korsgaard's argument any further since that is not needed for my dissertation. If the reader is interested in this topic, then the reader ought to read Bukoski's "Korsgaard's Arguments for the Value of Humanity".[18]

[17] Michael Bukoski, "Korsgaard's Arguments for the Value of Humanity," *Philosophical Review* 127, no. 2 (April 2018): 220-21.

[18] For more criticisms of Korsgaard's argument for moral unconditionalism in *The Sources of Normativity*, I recommend reading Mark LeBar's "Korsgaard, Wittgenstein, and the Mafioso" and Joshua Gert's "Korsgaard's Private-Reasons Argument".

I must say one more thing before we pass on to §2. I said that the purpose of this dissertation is to question moral unconditionalism and that in §2-4 I will criticize three major arguments for moral unconditionalism. To clarify, when I analyze the three arguments for moral unconditionalism – De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument, Evans' argument, and Rothbard's argument – I am not trying to show that the argument for moral unconditionalism is unsound. Instead, I am just trying to show that the argument is not clearly sound, i.e., I am just trying to show that the argument does not present a convincing justification for its conclusion because it leaves at least one of its premises open to serious doubt. Again, to clarify, the purpose of my dissertation is to question moral unconditionalism, not to refute it once and for all – or to even attempt to do so – since that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I am just trying to show that as far as I know, no convincing argument for moral unconditionalism has yet been presented, and since the absence of a convincing argument for moral unconditionalism is a reason to doubt moral unconditionalism, it follows that I am trying to show that it is rational to doubt moral unconditionalism. At the end of the day, if I can just make people question moral unconditionalism – and therefore demand an argument for it instead of taking it for granted – then this dissertation will be a success, given the intention of its author.

§2. Against De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument for moral unconditionalism

The first argument for moral unconditionalism that I will deal with is the argument given by Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer.[19] Below is a reconstruction of their argument:[20]

> P1: Either the principle of partiality or the principle of impartiality is normatively unconditional.[21]
>
> P2: The principle of partiality is subject to evolutionary debunking arguments, but the principle of impartiality is not.
>
> P3: If a principle is subject to evolutionary debunking arguments, then that principle is not normatively unconditional.
>
> P4: The principle of partiality is not normatively unconditional. (P2, P3)
>
> P5: The principle of impartiality is normatively unconditional. (P1, P4)
>
> P6: If the principle of impartiality is normatively unconditional, then the principle of morality is normatively unconditional.
>
> C: The principle of morality is normatively unconditional. (P5, P6)

[19] This argument can be found in De Lazari-Radek and Singer's "The Objectivity of Ethics and the Unity of Practical Reason", and in Chapter 7 of De Lazari-Radek and Singer's *The Point of View of the Universe*.
[20] Note that in order to keep the presentation as simple as possible, I will call all statements of an argument, minus the last statement, a "premise," even if such statement is a "sub-conclusion" (as some people call it, since such statement follows from previous statements). So, to name an example, in my reconstruction of De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument I wrote "P4" instead of "SC1": for this dissertation at least, it is not important to call it a "subconclusion" instead of a "premise"; after all, such statement is used to justify another statement, which is what a "premise" is.
[21] I could have added "but not both" to the end of P1, but I did not add it because it does not affect the argument, which is a disjunctive syllogism.

For the rest of this section I will explain the argument in more detail[22] (§2.1-§2.4) and then criticize it (§2.5).

§2.1. De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P1

In this section I will show that De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P1, and I will do this by examining seven normative principles that are presented by De Lazari-Radek and Singer. Note that I will define these principles based on how De Lazari-Radek and Singer define them. Also, it is easier for me to list all seven normative principles at once and then explain how they are relevant to P1, so that is what I will do.

First, "the principle of universal benevolence" (also called "the principle of rational benevolence" or "the principle of benevolence") is the principle that says that "I ought to maximize objective goodness for all individuals."[23] This principle entails impartiality, since this principle says that it doesn't matter if an individual is promoting objective goodness to themselves or to others.[24]

Second, "the principle of utilitarianism" is the principle that says that "I ought to maximize pleasure for all individuals," or "I ought to impartially maximize pleasure in

[22] Note that my explanation of De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument will include a discussion of Sidgwick's thoughts because De Lazari-Radek and Singer follow Sidgwick's thought process. For example, De Lazari-Radek and Singer say the following: "Our second and more significant aim is to defend utilitarianism. Sidgwick himself denied that he wrote *The Methods* for this purpose, and in one important respect, he failed to do it. We have attempted to develop his ideas in a way that overcomes some of the problems he faced, and shows how, consistently with his approach, objections to utilitarianism made since his time can also be met" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ix).

[23] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "The essence of Sidgwick's principle of rational benevolence is that we are 'morally bound' to have as much concern for the good of any other individual as we have for our own good" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 133), and "the principle of benevolence tells us to seek the greatest possible goodness impartially" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 317).

[24] Note that although this principle may be a little unclear as it stands, this lack of clarity will not be crucial for this dissertation, so we do not need to worry about clarifying this principle any further. What matters for this dissertation is that this principle entails impartiality.

the universe." In short, the principle of utilitarianism is the principle of universal benevolence combined with the view that objective goodness is pleasure.[25]

Third, "the principle of impartiality" is the principle that says that "I ought to treat all individuals equally," or "I ought to care about all individuals equally." Some examples of the principle of impartiality are the principle of universal benevolence and at least some deontological principles (like "I ought to respect the rights of all individuals"),[26] along with the principle of utilitarianism.

Fourth, "the principle of egoism" (also called "the principle of rational egoism") is the principle that says that "I ought to maximize objective goodness only for me."[27]

Fifth, "the principle of kin altruism" is the principle that says that "I ought to maximize objective goodness only for me and my kin."[28]

Sixth, "the principle of partiality" is the principle that says that "I should not treat all individuals equally," or "I should not care about all individuals equally." Some examples of the principle of partiality are the principle of egoism and the principle of kin

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[25] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "the axioms, including the axiom of rational benevolence, talk about aiming at what is 'good' for individuals, but leave untouched the question of the nature of that good. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, […] takes pleasure or happiness as the ultimate good" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 121).

[26] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "We have argued that Sidgwick's axiom of universal benevolence passes this test, but we are not claiming that it is the only principle to do so. Other principles, including deontological principles, might be equally impartial – for instance, the principle that lying is wrong, whether one is lying to strangers or to members of one's own community. Ethical principles of respect for human rights might also be thought to be impartial in the same way, but to be fully impartial, they would need to be freed from any specific association with members of our species, and instead to be reformulated as rights that are possessed by all beings with certain capacities or characteristics" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196).

[27] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say, "egoism requires one to maximize one's own happiness" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 118).

[28] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say, "Improving the prospects of one's kin surviving and reproducing is somewhere in the middle between the wider principle of universal benevolence and the narrower principle of egoism" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 193-94).

altruism. Note that although I did not include a quote from De Lazari-Radek and Singer, they implicitly refer to the principle of partiality since they refer to the principle of egoism and the principle of kin altruism, which are examples of the principle of partiality; here, I am just making this explicit.

Seventh, and finally, "the principle of prudence" is the principle that says that "in my life I should not prefer or choose a smaller present good to a greater future good."[29] Note that the good that De Lazari-Radek and Singer refer to can be "pleasure, or virtue, or the satisfaction of desires, or perhaps some combination of goods."[30]

Now that I have explained the seven normative principles as De Lazari-Radek and Singer present them, I will justify my formulation of P1 ("Either the principle of partiality or the principle of impartiality is normatively unconditional"). De Lazari-Radek and Singer go back and forth between the principles that I just mentioned, which makes reconstructing their argument a complicated endeavor. Nonetheless, I shall explain why I included the principle of partiality and the principle of impartiality when I formulated P1.

De Lazari-Radek and Singer say that "Sidgwick […] seeks a self-evident foundation on which to build a normative theory",[31] i.e., Sidgwick seeks a normative principle (or a set of normative principles) that is normatively unconditional, since this normative principle is what will justify all other normative principles. Like Sidgwick, De

[29] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say, "Sidgwick's second axiom [the axiom of prudence] is that […] we should have 'impartial concern for all parts of our conscious life' or that 'a smaller present good is not to be preferred to a greater future good'" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 126). Also, "The axiom of prudence tells us to have impartial concern for all parts of our conscious life" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 146).
[30] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 146.
[31] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), xi.

Lazari-Radek and Singer also seek a principle that is normatively unconditional. However, for Sidgwick, and for De Lazari-Radek and Singer, there seem to be two principles that are the main candidates to being normatively unconditional (call these principles X and Y; later we can worry about which principles X and Y refer to). This leads to the problem known as "the dualism of practical reason." This is a problem because X and Y conflict with one another, so it is false that both are normatively unconditional,[32] but which of these principles is normatively unconditional? De Lazari-Radek and Singer tell us that Sidgwick was unable to resolve this dualism, but that they will resolve it by arguing that X is not the principle that is normatively unconditional, so by disjunctive syllogism Y is the principle that is normatively unconditional.[33] I reconstructed this argument in the beginning of §2.

Now, what are X and Y? Based on my argument reconstruction, they are "the principle of partiality" and "the principle of impartiality," respectively. Unfortunately, De

[32] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "He [Sidgwick] cannot say that we should simply accept this dualism, because at the outset of *The Methods of Ethics* he stated that he would take as 'a fundamental postulate of ethics' that 'so far as two methods conflict, one or other of them must be modified or rejected' (*ME* 6). He also took it as 'a postulate of the Practical Reason, that two conflicting rules of action cannot both be reasonable' (*ME* 12). Now, therefore, he is left with 'a fundamental contradiction in one chief department of our thought' (*ME* 508)" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 151-52). De Lazari-Radek and Singer agree with Sidgwick.

[33] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "Sidgwick calls this opposition […] 'the dualism of practical reason'", and "Like Sidgwick, we believe that the cracks in the coherence of ethics caused by the dualism of practical reason are serious, and threaten to bring down the entire structure. We need to face them. In the next chapter, we show how this can be done" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 173). Also, De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "Our second and more significant aim is to defend utilitarianism. Sidgwick himself denied that he wrote *The Methods* for this purpose, and in one important respect, he failed to do it" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ix), since Sidgwick failed to solve the dualism of practical reason, but then De Lazari-Radek and Singer add that "On one important aspect of his overall position […], for reasons we explain in Chapter 7, we part company with him", which "allows us to provide a more complete justification of utilitarianism than he himself was able to achieve" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ix), and note that Chapter 7 is where De Lazari-Radek and Singer present their solution to the dualism of practical reason.

Lazari-Radek and Singer are not clear on this: sometimes X is the principle of prudence, the principle of egoism, or the principle of partiality, while Y is sometimes the principle of universal benevolence, the principle of utilitarianism, or the principle of impartiality.

For example, look at the passage below:

> This passage [by Sidgwick] is followed by one that comes very close to suggesting that the principle of prudence, interpreted not merely as requiring equal concern for all parts of one's own existence, but as supporting rational egoism, is an axiom with the same standing as the axiom of rational benevolence.[34]

Is the conflict between the principles of prudence and of universal benevolence, or between the principles of egoism and of universal benevolence? Note that De Lazari-Radek and Singer admit that the principle of prudence does not necessarily entail the principle of egoism.[35]

Now look at the passage below:

> Although Sidgwick thought that utilitarianism could be grounded on self-evident axioms [i.e., self-evident fundamental principles], he was troubled by the fact that the axiom of benevolence is in conflict with a different

[34] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 151.

[35] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "The axiom of prudence tells us to have impartial concern for all parts of our conscious life, but does not tell us how to balance concern for our own conscious life against concern for the conscious lives of others; […] the principle of rational benevolence does answer this question, by telling us to have as much regard for the good of others as we have for our own good" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 146). Also, "As we saw in the last chapter, what he [Sidgwick] calls the 'axiom of prudence' can be interpreted as leaving open the question whether one should aim at one's own good in preference to the good of others" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 150). Furthermore, "Here we are in agreement with Mariko Nakano-Okuno, who sees rational egoism as a distinct principle and not the 'axiom of prudence'" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 118).

principle that seemed to him difficult to deny, namely that, for every individual, 'his own happiness is an end which it is irrational for him to sacrifice to any other'. This principle, Sidgwick saw, led to egoism, and so practical reason seems to endorse both egoism and utilitarianism.

Sidgwick held that this 'dualism of practical reason' showed that reason cannot, after all, be a complete guide to what we ought to do. Moreover, if we always have sufficient reason to do what is in our own interests – so that acting in our own interests would always be rational, but not rationally required – then that seems to sharply diminish the importance of an ethical theory like utilitarianism, based as it is on the idea of acting with impartial concern for others. Sidgwick's inability to overcome the dualism meant that he was unable to conclude that utilitarianism is the only rationally defensible way of deciding what we ought to do. Egoism survives as an unattractive, but still possible, alternative.

[…]

If we can overcome the dualism of practical reason we are left with the axiom of universal benevolence that tells us to maximize the good, impartially.[36]

[36] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), xi-xii.

Is the conflict between the principles of egoism and of utilitarianism, or between the principles of egoism and of universal benevolence?[37] If overcoming the dualism of practical reason leaves us with the axiom of universal benevolence, then why did De Lazari-Radek and Singer say that practical reason seems to endorse "both egoism and utilitarianism" instead of both egoism and universal benevolence? Is Y meant to be the principle of utilitarianism or the principle of universal benevolence? Because, as I already explained in this section, "the principle of utilitarianism is the principle of universal benevolence combined with the view that objective goodness is pleasure," so the principle of universal benevolence is broader than – and thus different from – the principle of utilitarianism. The same confusion is repeated in the passage below:

> That still leaves us with the two remaining theories: can we reconcile egoism and utilitarianism? In practice, we often can. […] But on some occasions, this harmony fails. If I have to choose between my own happiness and the happiness of others, is it rational for me to choose one rather than the other? Sidgwick regarded this – the relation of rational egoism and rational benevolence – as 'the profoundest problem of ethics' (*ME* 386 n. 17).[38]

Now look at the passage below:

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[37] Even other writers present confusing answers because De Lazari-Radek and Singer's writing is confusing. For example, in his book review Bart Schultz says that the dualism of practical reason is the "philosophical stand-off between rational benevolence and rational egoism" (Bart Schultz, Review of *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics*, by Katarzyna De Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/he-point-of-view-of-the-universe-sidgwick-and-contemporary-ethics/), while in his book review Ole Martin Moen says that the dualism of practical reason involves a conflict "between egoism and utilitarianism" (Ole Martin Moen, Review of *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics*, by Katarzyna De Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *Utilitas* 27, no. 1 (March 2015): 115).

[38] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 149-50.

> Since the claim that egoism is rational clashes with the principle of universal benevolence, we have precisely the situation described in the previous section […]. If the rationality of egoism can thus be put in doubt, we can tentatively conclude that all reasons for action are impartial, and the dualism that led Sidgwick to fear 'an ultimate and fundamental contradiction in our apparent intuitions of what is Reasonable in conduct' can, at least on the level of rationality, be dissolved.[39]

Is the conflict between the principles of egoism and of universal benevolence, or between the principles of egoism and of impartiality? Because, as I already explained in this section, the principle of universal benevolence is just one example of the principle of impartiality, so the two principles are not the same. Furthermore, casting doubt on egoism does not permit us to tentatively conclude that all reasons for action are impartial, since the principle of kin altruism is neither egoistic nor impartial, so why didn't De Lazari-Radek and Singer say "If the rationality of partiality can thus be put in doubt" instead of "If the rationality of egoism can thus be put in doubt"? The same confusion is repeated in the passage below:

> [Sidgwick] ended *The Methods* in despair over another problem – an apparent conflict between rational egoism and universal benevolence, which he called the 'dualism of practical reason.' Drawing on Sidgwick, we show that […] the dualism of practical reason can be resolved in favor of impartiality.[40]

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[39] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197.
[40] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, "The Objectivity of Ethics and the Unity of Practical Reason," *Ethics* 123, no. 1 (October 2012): 9.

Now look at one last set of passages, where the conflict is between the principles of partiality and of impartiality:

> We argue that Sidgwick's defense of objectivity in ethics survives Street's restatement of the argument, but we will then add that this same understanding of evolution suggests that practical reason, freed from some specific distortions that derive from our evolutionary origins, ceases to be divided between partial and impartial modes of reasoning. Thus, we make use of Sidgwick's own argument to defend a claim that goes beyond anything Sidgwick himself suggested […]: the dualism of practical reason can be resolved in favor of impartiality.[41]
>
> [P]artial reasons can be debunked and […] we have overriding reasons to aim at it [the good] impartially.[42]
>
> [W]hen one of two possible acts would make things go impartially better, that is what we have decisive normative reason to do.[43]

After looking at all the passages that I mentioned above, the question that we need to tackle is as follows: what are the two principles that the dualism of practical reason refers to, such that De Lazari-Radek and Singer argue that one of them is not normatively unconditional, and thus the other principle is normatively unconditional via disjunctive syllogism? My answer to that question is that the two principles are the principle of partiality (i.e., the principle that says that "I ought to not treat all individuals equally")

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[41] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, "The Objectivity of Ethics and the Unity of Practical Reason," *Ethics* 123, no. 1 (October 2012): 11.
[42] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196.
[43] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 199.

and the principle of impartiality (i.e., the principle that says that "I ought to treat all individuals equally").

Here is why I picked the principle of partiality and the principle of impartiality to be part of De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument for moral unconditionalism. I picked the principle of impartiality over the principle of universal benevolence because De Lazari-Radek and Singer seem to be more concerned about opposing the principle of partiality than opposing other impartial principles (e.g., deontological principles). If De Lazari-Radek and Singer were mainly concerned about arguing for the principle of universal benevolence, then they would have been equally concerned about opposing the principle of partiality and principles of impartiality other than the principle of universal benevolence, but they ignore those other impartial principles (e.g., deontological principles).[44] Thus, De Lazari-Radek and Singer care more about justifying the principle of impartiality than the principle of universal benevolence (and the principle of utilitarianism, since the principle of utilitarianism is just an example of the principle of universal benevolence).

Lastly, insofar as one of the two principles in the dualism of practical reason is the principle of impartiality, it is most plausible that the other principle is the principle of partiality. Although De Lazari-Radek and Singer focus on the principle of egoism multiple times, they seem to be more opposed to egoism because of its partiality than

[44] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "We have argued that Sidgwick's axiom of universal benevolence passes this test, but we are not claiming that it is the only principle to do so. Other principles, including deontological principles, might be equally impartial" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196). This is confirmed by Guy Kahane, who says the following: "De Lazari-Radek and Singer concede that UB [the principle of universal benevolence] may be on a par […] with other unqualifiedly impartial moral views. To simplify the discussion, I will follow them in setting this aside in what follows" (Guy Kahane, "Evolution and Impartiality," *Ethics* 124, no. 2 (January 2014): 328).

because of its egoism. Besides, De Lazari-Radek and Singer are equally opposed to other partial principles, like the principle of kin altruism. Finally, remember that the principle of prudence does not necessarily oppose the principle of impartiality, since "The axiom of prudence […] does not tell us how to balance concern for our own conscious life against concern for the conscious lives of others; […] the principle of rational benevolence does answer this question, by telling us to have as much regard for the good of others as we have for our own good."[45] Therefore, I picked the other principle to be the principle of partiality instead of the principle of egoism or the principle of prudence.

This ends my explanation of why P1 ("Either the principle of partiality or the principle of impartiality is normatively unconditional") includes the principles of partiality and of impartiality instead of any of the other principles. I also believe that picking the principles of partiality and of impartiality makes P1 more plausible than picking any other combination that involves two of the seven normative principles that I discussed above.

§2.2. De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P2, P3, and P4

In this section I will show that De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P2, P3, and P4, but before I do that, P2 and P3 talk about a normative principle being subject to evolutionary debunking arguments, so it is important to explain what that means. When someone says that principle X *is subject to evolutionary debunking arguments*, that means that there is a plausible explanation that says that acceptance of principle X is caused by evolution and for reasons that are not truth-related.

[45] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 146.

Now I will show that De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P2, P3, and P4. First, De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P3 ("If a principle is subject to evolutionary debunking arguments, then that principle is not normatively unconditional"), and thus they accept P2 ("The principle of partiality is subject to evolutionary debunking arguments, but the principle of impartiality is not") and P4 ("The principle of partiality is not normatively unconditional") since P3 is a premise that connects P2 to P4. However, it is important to keep in mind that technically, De Lazari-Radek and Singer do not claim that if P2 is true then P4 is *true*, period, but rather that if P2 is true then P4 is *credible*, or at least more credible than the negation of P4. More specifically, De Lazari-Radek and Singer believe that intuition supports both the principles of partiality and of impartiality,[46] but what makes the principle of impartiality a more reliable intuition is that the principle of impartiality is not subject to evolutionary debunking arguments, which is something that cannot be said for the principle of partiality. For De Lazari-Radek and Singer, evolution does not track objective normative truths, at least not reliably, so "we have grounds for supporting the intuition for which there is no evolutionary explanation rather than the one for which there is an evolutionary explanation."[47] All of this is confirmed by the passage below (although as I have explained in §2.1, the reader ought to substitute "egoism" with "partiality" and "universal benevolence" with "impartiality"), which shows that De Lazari-Radek and Singer connect P2 to P4, as made explicit by P3

[46] For example, De Lazari-Radek and Singer agree with Sidgwick's concern in the following passage: "Although Sidgwick thought that utilitarianism could be grounded on self-evident axioms, he was troubled by the fact that the axiom of benevolence is in conflict with a different principle that seemed to him difficult to deny, namely that, for every individual, 'his own happiness is an end which it is irrational for him to sacrifice to any other'. This principle, Sidgwick saw, led to egoism, and so practical reason seems to endorse both egoism and utilitarianism" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), xi).

[47] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197.

(although as I have explained just now, the connection is one that just states that P4 is credible, or at least more credible than its negation):

> Now that we have prepared the ground, it is not difficult to see the implications of our argument for the problem of the dualism of practical reason which we discussed in the previous chapter. As we saw there, it is, Sidgwick believes, 'in accordance with common sense to recognize […] that the calm desire for my "good on the whole" is authoritative; and therefore carries with it implicitly a rational dictate to aim at this end'. This may indeed be […] in accordance with common sense, but here common sense seems likely to have been formed by the evolutionary influences we have been discussing. Since the claim that egoism is rational clashes with the principle of universal benevolence, we have precisely the situation described in the previous section, and we have grounds for supporting the intuition for which there is no evolutionary explanation rather than the one for which there is an evolutionary explanation. If the rationality of egoism can thus be put in doubt, we can tentatively conclude that all reasons for action are impartial, and the dualism that led Sidgwick to fear 'an ultimate and fundamental contradiction in our apparent intuitions of what is Reasonable in conduct' can, at least on the level of rationality, be dissolved.[48]

Note that De Lazari-Radek and Singer say "we can tentatively conclude" because they admit that their argument can be refuted if it is shown that there is an evolutionary

[48] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197.

explanation for acceptance of the principle of impartiality (or for acceptance of impartial principles like the principle of universal benevolence), which may occur in the future. As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say prior to the passage above:

> In correspondence on an earlier version of this chapter, Tersman agreed that, as far as Sidgwick's principle of rational benevolence is concerned, 'we presently don't have a fully satisfactory and well-established (evolutionary) debunking explanation of it'. He indicated that such a debunking explanation might, in time, emerge. We accept that this is possible. Tersman added that the line of argument we have developed in this chapter is 'vulnerable to possible falsification by future empirical results and empirical theorizing'. We agree, but we also think Tersman is correct when he goes on to say that, although this vulnerability to future possible falsification should motivate some humility, on the part of both sceptics and non-sceptics, about their conclusions, it is not a drawback or fault. On the contrary, as Tersman puts it: 'more philosophers should try to articulate their positions in a way that makes them vulnerable in this way'.[49]

§2.3. De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P5

I will now show that De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P5 ("The principle of impartiality is normatively unconditional"). P5 follows from P1 and P4, and since De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P1 and P4 (as I have shown above), it is not a surprise that De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P5. As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say:

[49] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 194-95.

"[Sidgwick] ended *The Methods* in despair over another problem […], which he called the 'dualism of practical reason.' Drawing on Sidgwick, we show that […] the dualism of practical reason can be resolved in favor of impartiality."[50]

§2.4. De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P6 and C

In order to finish presenting textual evidence for my reconstruction of De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument for moral unconditionalism, in this section I will show that De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P6 and C.

First, De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P6 ("If the principle of impartiality is normatively unconditional, then the principle of morality is normatively unconditional") since they assume that the principle of impartiality is a principle of objective morality.[51] Indeed, De Lazari-Radek and Singer are utilitarians, and they associate impartiality with morality and partiality with anti-morality, so for them it is true that if we should be impartial, then we should be moral (and vice-versa), and if impartiality is normatively unconditional, then morality is normatively unconditional (and vice-versa).

[50] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, "The Objectivity of Ethics and the Unity of Practical Reason," *Ethics* 123, no. 1 (October 2012): 9. Also, "we make use of Sidgwick's own argument to defend a claim that goes beyond anything Sidgwick himself suggested […]: the dualism of practical reason can be resolved in favor of impartiality" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, "The Objectivity of Ethics and the Unity of Practical Reason," *Ethics* 123, no. 1 (October 2012): 11), "partial reasons can be debunked and […] we have overriding reasons to aim at it [the good] impartially" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196), and "when one of two possible acts would make things go impartially better, that is what we have decisive normative reason to do" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 199).

[51] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say, "This may also hold for some of our moral beliefs. One such moral truth could be Sidgwick's axiom of rational benevolence: 'each one is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as his own, except in so far as he judges it to be less, when impartially viewed, or less certainly knowable or attainable by him'" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 183), and the "axiom of universal benevolence gains credibility from the fact that, unlike many other intuitively plausible moral principles, it can withstand evolutionary debunking arguments" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 266).

Second, and finally, C ("The principle of morality is normatively unconditional") follows from P5 and P6, and since De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept P5 and P6 (as I have shown in the above section and in this section), it is not a surprise that De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept C. Still, to confirm that De Lazari-Radek and Singer accept C, note that they say that "Sidgwick calls this opposition between prudence and benevolence, which underlies the opposition between egoism and utilitarianism, 'the dualism of practical reason'",[52] and De Lazari-Radek and Singer say that objective morality promotes utilitarianism, so for them the battle between prudence and benevolence, or between egoism and utilitarianism, is a battle between prudence and objective morality; hence, by arguing that we ought to unconditionally follow what utilitarianism (or benevolence) says, De Lazari-Radek and Singer argue that we ought to unconditionally follow what the principle of morality says, which is the same as arguing for C.

§2.5. Against P2

In the sections above I presented textual evidence for my reconstruction of De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument for moral unconditionalism. In this section I shall criticize such argument for moral unconditionalism. One can criticize P1 by saying that neither the principle of partiality nor the principle of impartiality is normatively unconditional, rather some other principle is normatively unconditional, so P1 presents a false dilemma. Also, one can criticize P2 by saying that the principle of partiality is not subject to evolutionary debunking arguments, or by saying that at least one principle of partiality (e.g., the principle of egoism) is not subject to evolutionary debunking

[52] Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 151.

arguments,[53] or by saying that the principle of impartiality is subject to evolutionary debunking arguments. In this section I will criticize P2; more specifically, I will argue that the principle of partiality is not subject to evolutionary debunking arguments. Here, I shall grant, for the sake of argument, the following: there are objective normative principles (including objective moral principles),[54] the principle of impartiality is not subject to evolutionary debunking arguments, and intuition supports the principles of partiality and of impartiality.

My criticism is as follows. Even if we assume that there is at least one plausible explanation that says that acceptance of the principle of partiality is caused by evolution and for reasons that are not truth-related, it is possible that acceptance of the principle of partiality is also caused by non-evolutionary reasons or by reasons that are truth-related (e.g., it is possible that our rationality gives us access to objective normative truths, one of which is the principle of partiality). So, to show that the principle of partiality has less reliability than the principle of impartiality it is not enough to show that there are non-truth-related evolutionary reasons for accepting the principle of partiality; rather, it must

[53] As De Lazari-Radek and Singer say: "Crisp accepts that universal benevolence is not vulnerable to debunking based on an understanding of our evolutionary origins, but he thinks that this is equally true of the principle of egoism, because it too is contrary to kin altruism, which is what evolutionary theory would lead us to expect" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 193). Also, as Ole Martin Moen says in his book review: "Quite possibly, egoists could provide a similar argument in favour of their own position: They could argue that we have evolved tendencies to sacrifice ourselves for larger groups, such as our families, but that in fact everyone has an ultimate reason to be concerned only with his or her own well-being" (Ole Martin Moen, Review of *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics*, by Katarzyna De Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *Utilitas* 27, no. 1 (March 2015): 116).

[54] Note that as Kahane says, all evolutionary debunking arguments, not just De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument, "presuppose the truth of *objectivism*" (Guy Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," *Nous* 45, no. 1 (March 2011): 112), otherwise it makes no sense to say (as is implied in evolutionary debunking arguments) that evolution does not track moral truth, for example. The assumption that there are objective moral truths is questionable, and it makes evolutionary debunking arguments only applicable to those who already accept moral objectivism; thus, for example, "An anti-utilitarian such as Bernard Williams who rejects objectivism has no reason to be impressed by the [pro-utilitarian] debunking arguments of Greene and Singer" (Guy Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," *Nous* 45, no. 1 (March 2011): 113).

also be shown that there are no other justified reasons for accepting the principle of partiality. For example, imagine that our acceptance of the Pythagorean Theorem is caused by the fact that we always inhale a certain chemical while we are alive on this planet. Even then, this would not be enough to undermine the plausibility of the Pythagorean Theorem, because we have mathematical proofs for the Pythagorean Theorem, even if our belief in it were also caused by inhaling a certain chemical. It may be rationally unjustified to accept the Pythagorean Theorem just because we always inhale a certain chemical while we are alive on this planet, but that is not enough to undermine the plausibility of the Pythagorean Theorem. Likewise, even if our acceptance of the principle of partiality is caused by evolution and for reasons that are not truth-related, and even if it is rationally unjustified to accept the principle of partiality just because of such non-truth-related evolutionary reasons, that is not enough to undermine the plausibility of the principle of partiality. Rather, all that shows, at most, is that the individual in question ought to find another reason to justify her acceptance of the principle of partiality. Besides, there may be other reasons for accepting such principle, and such reasons may be rationally justified and truth-related.

What I said applies to all evolutionary debunking arguments, not just De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument. As Jonathan Egeland says, "debunking arguments rely on aetiological [i.e., causal] explanations demonstrating that a target belief fails to satisfy some necessary condition for doxastic justification, but without in any way showing or purporting to show that the content of the target belief is false (on pain of committing the genetic fallacy)."[55] So, debunking arguments, including evolutionary ones, only attempt

[55] Jonathan Egeland, "The Epistemology of Debunking Argumentation," *Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (January 2022): 850.

to "undermine the justificatory status of the target beliefs."[56] Egeland's model says that the conclusion of debunking arguments is "S's belief that *p* is unjustified"[57] (where S is any subject, and *p* is any proposition), while Kahane's model says that the conclusion of debunking arguments is "We are not justified in believing that p."[58] However, that is an ineffective enterprise, because even if we are not justified in believing that p for reason R_1, we could be justified in believing that p for reason R_2. So, even if we are not justified in believing that p because one reason why we have such belief is that evolution causes us to have such belief, we could still be justified in believing that p because we have acquired such belief from some other method that is reliable. And note that De Lazari-Radek and Singer cannot say that their evolutionary debunking argument shows that all intuitions are unreliable (or that the faculty of intuition is unreliable), since their acceptance of the principle of impartiality is also based on intuition.[59] In §2.1, I showed that for De Lazari-Radek and Singer both the principles of partiality and of impartiality are intuitive, and are therefore plausible to at least some extent. It is just that for De Lazari-Radek and Singer the principle of impartiality is based on an intuition that is (most likely) not caused by evolution, and this is supposed to make accepting the principle of impartiality more justified than accepting the principle of partiality. But as I just

[56] Jonathan Egeland, "The Epistemology of Debunking Argumentation," *Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (January 2022): 846.
[57] Jonathan Egeland, "The Epistemology of Debunking Argumentation," *Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (January 2022): 846.
[58] Guy Kahane, "Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," *Nous* 45, no. 1 (March 2011): 111.
[59] For example, De Lazari-Radek and Singer say that "we have grounds for supporting the intuition for which there is no evolutionary explanation rather than the one for which there is an evolutionary explanation" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197), and that the "axiom of universal benevolence gains credibility from the fact that, unlike many other intuitively plausible moral principles, it can withstand evolutionary debunking arguments" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 266).

explained, this is an unconvincing project because there can be another reason that makes accepting the principle of partiality more justified than accepting the principle of impartiality, even if acceptance of the principle of partiality is caused by evolution and acceptance of the principle of impartiality is not.

Perhaps in this dissertation it is enough to point out that there can be another reason that makes accepting the principle of partiality more justified than accepting the principle of impartiality, even if acceptance of the principle of partiality is caused by evolution. However, instead of just saying that, I will present one example of a reason that someone can give to justify the claim that accepting the principle of partiality is more justified than accepting the principle of impartiality. The example that I will present is a Hobbesian reason,[60] which is as follows: we ought to be partial instead of impartial because we ought to promote our welfare and survival as much as possible. Here is the Hobbesian argument, which will be enough to explain such Hobbesian reason: (1) we ought to promote our welfare and survival as much as possible (this is a goal that ought to never be sacrificed for anything else); (2) however, to promote our welfare and survival as much as possible, we need to care about ourselves or our insider group more than we care about others or outsider groups, and perhaps we need to not care about outsider groups at all; (3) therefore, from (1) and (2), it follows that we ought to care about ourselves or our insider group more than we ought to care about others or outsider groups. This conclusion is consistent with the principle of partiality and contrary to the principle of impartiality. De Lazari-Radek and Singer admit that there is scientific evidence to (2), i.e., they admit that there is scientific evidence to the claim that kindness

[60] This reason can also be attributed more generally to political realists, such as Thucydides and Machiavelli, along with Hobbes.

towards members of one's own group and cruelty towards members of outsider groups is more conducive to one's welfare and survival than being kind towards both insiders and outsiders,[61] so De Lazari-Radek and Singer admit that it is justified to accept (2). Hence, to refute the Hobbesian argument, De Lazari-Radek and Singer need to refute (1): they need to prove that we should not promote our welfare and survival as much as possible, and that we ought to sacrifice our welfare and survival for the sake of being equally kind towards insiders and outsiders, as is demanded by impartiality. For example, De Lazari-Radek and Singer need to prove that, in a state of affairs where acting impartially will cause Sarah to suffer terribly, but acting egoistically will produce a good life for her, Sarah ought to choose the impartial option. In short, someone can argue that (1) is rationally justified because it is plausible that an individual should promote their welfare and survival as much as possible. What I have said in this paragraph is enough to give one example of a reason that someone can present in order to justify the claim that accepting the principle of partiality is more justified than accepting the principle of impartiality.

To summarize, my criticism is that, even if it is plausible that acceptance of the principle of partiality is caused by evolution and for reasons that are not truth-related, it is

[61] See pages 185-187 of De Lazari-Radek and Singer's *The Point of View of the Universe*. For example, De Lazari-Radek and Singer say the following: "After all, that axiom [the axiom of universal benevolence, which implies impartiality] contradicts the very evaluative attitudes that Street offers as examples of judgments that are likely to lead to reproductive success, such as 'We have greater obligations to help our own children than we do to help complete strangers.' Evolutionary theorists have long had difficulty in explaining how pure altruism is possible. They tend to explain it in terms of more limited forms of altruism, such as altruism toward kin, which can be explained because it favours the survival of those with whom we share genes, and reciprocal altruism, which can be explained because it enables the development of mutually beneficial cooperative relationships. Some theorists also accept the possibility of altruism toward one's own group. It is, however, difficult to see any evolutionary forces that could have favoured universal altruism of the sort that is required by the axiom of universal benevolence. On the contrary, there are strong evolutionary forces that would tend to eliminate it" (Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer, *The Point of View of the Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 185-86).

possible that acceptance of the principle of partiality is caused by non-evolutionary reasons and that those reasons are rationally justified. To name one example, it is possible that our rationality gives us access to objective normative truths, and that one of these truths is the principle of partiality. Hence, the fact that acceptance of the principle of partiality is caused by evolution and for reasons that are not truth-related is not enough to undermine the plausibility of the principle of partiality. De Lazari-Radek and Singer must also show that there are no other justified reasons for accepting the principle of partiality, but De Lazari-Radek and Singer have not shown that.

All in all, P2 of De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument is problematic, since their claim that the principle of partiality is subject to evolutionary debunking arguments is problematic, as I have explained. At the very least, De Lazari-Radek and Singer need to justify it further. This is enough to make their argument for moral unconditionalism an unconvincing argument.

§3. Against Evans' argument for moral unconditionalism

The second argument for moral unconditionalism that I will deal with is the argument given by C. Stephen Evans.[62] Below is a reconstruction of his argument:

P1: Humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands.

P2: God's commands are identical to moral obligations.

P3: Humans ought to unconditionally follow moral obligations. (P1, P2)

P4: If humans ought to unconditionally follow moral obligations, then the principle of morality is normatively unconditional.

C: The principle of morality is normatively unconditional. (P3, P4)

For the rest of this section, I will present textual evidence for Evans' argument for moral unconditionalism (§3.1), and then I will criticize the argument (§3.2).

§3.1. Textual evidence for Evans' argument for moral unconditionalism

In this section I will present textual evidence for Evans' argument for moral unconditionalism. I will start with P3, and then I will deal with P2, P1, and P4.

§3.1.1. Textual evidence for P3

Although P3 follows from P1 and P2, I will nonetheless present textual evidence for P3, which shall later serve to confirm even further that P1 and P2 are accepted by Evans. P3 says that "Humans ought to unconditionally follow moral obligations." Evans accepts P3. For example, Evans says the following: "moral obligations […] are […] overriding, and allow us to bring deliberation to closure",[63] "A moral obligation therefore is something that has the function of bringing reflection to closure",[64] "A person may

[62] This argument can be found in Evans' *God and Moral Obligation*.
[63] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 181.
[64] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13.

have many reasons for performing or not performing an action, but moral obligations are reasons that trump other kinds of reasons (or at least ought to do so)",[65] "when I speak of moral obligations I am speaking of them as […] [making] it possible to bring reflection on action to closure and make a decision about the action by providing a decisive reason for action",[66] and "One of the features of moral obligation that I discussed in Chapter 1 is the overriding character of the moral 'ought'."[67] This implies that humans ought to unconditionally follow moral obligations, because only an unconditional obligation is overriding and brings deliberation to closure. For example, imagine that Mary is deliberating about whether to do X or Y, and eventually she believes that God commands her to do X, and then, because she believes that God commands her to do X, she brings deliberation to a closure by believing that she ought to do X. In this occasion, Mary believes that she ought to unconditionally follow God's commands, since she believes that she ought to do X even if following God's commands conflicts with following other normative principles.

§3.1.2. Textual evidence for P2

P2 says that "God's commands are identical to moral obligations." The passage below shows that Evans accepts P2:

> There are also many different types of views that could properly be described as divine command theories of moral obligation, but the kind of view I find most attractive is the type defended by Robert Adams. Adams sees moral obligations as identical to the commands of a good and loving

[65] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14.
[66] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.
[67] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 71.

> God, or the commands of God understood as essentially good and loving.[68]

Note that by "identical" Evans means "metaphysically identical," not "conceptually identical."[69] As Evans says:

> On Adams' view, the obligations that arise from this particular relation turn out to be identical to our moral obligations. The claim is not that "moral obligation" and "divine command" have the same meaning, for clearly they do not. Rather, the claim is that the two expressions refer to the same reality. The primary reason for thinking this is the case is simply that viewing moral obligations as divine commands makes more sense of these obligations than any alternative account.[70]

§3.1.3. Textual evidence for P1

P1 says that "Humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands." The following quote shows that Evans accepts P1: "If God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and tells us that all human persons must be considered our neighbors, then we have powerful and overriding reasons to consider the good of others when acting."[71] Evans is saying that God's commands ought to override everything else, which entails that humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands, since only an unconditional reason is overriding when all other reasons are taken into account.

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[68] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26.
[69] For example, "water" and "H_2O" are metaphysically identical but not conceptually identical. The distinction between metaphysical identity and conceptual identity is present in Mark Murphy's *An Essay on Divine Authority*. In that book, Murphy refers to the former view as "reduction DCM" and the latter view as "analysis DCM," where "DCM" means "divine command metaethics." For example, Murphy says that "According to analysis DCM, the concept of *being obligatory* is identical to the concept *being commanded by God*" (Mark C. Murphy, *An Essay on Divine Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 77).
[70] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.
[71] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 73.

Although the above quote shows that Evans accepts P1, here is further confirmation. In §3.1.1, I have shown that Evans accepts P3 ("Humans ought to unconditionally follow moral obligations"). Now, in his book Evans justifies P3 by arguing that moral obligations are grounded in God, i.e., God has the authority to issue moral obligations. So, Evans believes that God's commands have unconditional authority, otherwise God's commands could not ground the unconditional authority of moral obligations. The passages below shows that Evans accepts P1 by grounding the unconditional authority of morality on the unconditional authority of God (and God's commands):

> This book began with an exploration of the distinctive features of moral obligations as most people experience them, seeing them as […] verdict-like, overriding […]. I then argued in Chapter 2 that seeing moral obligations as divine commands makes it possible to give a powerful explanation of all those features.[72]
>
> [A] transcendent law-giver, a divine being who has genuine authority, is necessary to have genuine moral obligations.[73]
>
> I shall try to show the advantages of basing moral obligations on divine authority […]. A key part of this task will be arguing that God does indeed possess the required kind of authority.[74]

§3.1.4. Textual evidence for P4

[72] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 155.
[73] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.
[74] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22.

I am not aware of any section in Evans' book where he explicitly endorses P4 ("If humans ought to unconditionally follow moral obligations, then the principle of morality is normatively unconditional"). However, P4 is true because following moral obligations is identical to following what morality commands, which is what the principle of morality tells us to do.[75] Hence, saying that humans ought to unconditionally follow moral obligations is nothing other than saying that humans ought to unconditionally follow the principle of morality, which is to say that the principle of morality is normatively unconditional.

§3.2. Against Evans' argument for moral unconditionalism

Evans gives an argument for moral unconditionalism, as I showed above. His argument is valid, P3 follows from P1 and P2, and P4 is true. So, to successfully criticize his argument one must criticize P1, P2, or both. Many philosophers – including theists and nontheists – criticize P2 by saying that God's commands are not identical to moral obligations, even if God (more specifically, the God that Evans accepts) exists.[76] In this section I will not criticize P2, rather, I will only criticize P1 ("Humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands"); I will argue that, even if we grant that the God that Evans accepts is real (e.g., even if we grant that there is a God that "is essentially good and loving"[77]), I am not convinced that it is true that humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands. This is important because many philosophers take P1 for granted,[78] since many philosophers assume that if God exists, then humans

[75] Remember that the principle of morality is the principle that people ought to follow morality (§1.1).
[76] For example, although Murphy is a Catholic, on pages 82-92 of his *An Essay on Divine Authority* he criticizes P2 by saying that God's commands are not identical to moral obligations.
[77] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.
[78] Evans and Murphy are among the few philosophers that do not take P1 for granted. For example, although Murphy is Catholic, he criticizes P1 throughout his book *An Essay on Divine Authority*.

ought to unconditionally follow God's commands. For example, Evans says that "most religious believers, and even many non-believers, have thought that if there is a God, such a being would have authority"[79] (note that as it is evident from the quotes in §3.1.3, when Evans says that God has authority, Evans means that God has unconditional authority, such that humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands). Also, Murphy says the following:

> One tendency to dismiss the problem of divine authority results from philosophers thinking not only that the claim 'God is authoritative' is commonly affirmed, but also that this claim is *true by definition*. God is, by definition, such that each created rational being has decisive reason to obey God.[80]

All in all, many philosophers take P1 for granted, but Evans does not. In his *God and Moral Obligation*, Evans presents three ways to justify P1.[81] I shall call them the "gratitude" justification, the "fellowship with God" justification, and the "God's ownership" justification. In §3.2.1-3.2.3, I will explain and criticize each of these three ways, and I will thereby show that Evans' argument for moral unconditionalism is unconvincing. Finally, in §3.2.4 I will show that the Bible does not say that P1 is true even if the Bible does not say that P1 is false; this means that the Bible does not justify P1, so no one (including Evans) ought to use the Bible to justify P1.

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[79] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.
[80] Mark C. Murphy, *An Essay on Divine Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 2.
[81] For example, Evans says the following: "there must be some reasonable answer to the question, 'Why should a human being obey the commands of God?' There are several (not mutually exclusive) principles that could explain or justify divine authority. One is the principle of gratitude […] A second possible way that divine authority could be justified is to appeal to the goodness of a relation to God. A third possible normative principle that might justify divine authority is the claim that God […] has a rightful claim to be the owner of that created world and everything in it" (C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64-5).

§3.2.1. The "gratitude" justification

One of the ways in which Evans justifies P1 ("Humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands") is by saying that humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands, because humans ought to be grateful to God "for God's good gifts."[82] As Evans explains:

> For a DCT to be plausible there must be some reasonable answer to the question, "Why should a human being obey the commands of God?" […] God as Creator is the giver of every good that any humans have, including their very existence. It seems plausible then that the debt of gratitude humans owe to God vastly exceeds the gratitude they owe to parents or any human benefactor. In fact, the gratitude owed to God must always be far greater than that owed to any human person or even to all human persons to whom one owes gratitude. Since God is the creator and sustainer of those human benefactors, all the goods given by those human benefactors, including parents, are also gifts of God.[83]

The main problem with this "gratitude" justification is that this justification says that humans ought to follow God's commands because humans ought to be grateful to God. However, it is neither impossible, unnecessary, nor incoherent to ask "why should humans be grateful?", but to find an unconditional principle it must be true that questioning such principle is impossible, unnecessary, or incoherent in some way. As Korsgaard says:

[82] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.
[83] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64.

> We can keep asking why: 'Why must I do what is right?' – 'Because it is commanded by God' – 'But why must I do what is commanded by God?' – and so on, in a way that apparently can go on forever. This is what Kant called a search for the unconditioned – in this case, for something which will bring the reiteration of 'but why must I do that?' to an end. The unconditional answer must be one that makes it impossible, unnecessary, or incoherent to ask why again.[84]

But again, it is neither impossible, unnecessary, nor incoherent to ask "why should humans be grateful?"; rather, that question demands an answer. As a matter of fact, a plausible answer to such question is that we ought to be grateful because being grateful is beneficial to the grateful person and being ungrateful is harmful to the ungrateful person, so people ought to be grateful because such attitude is beneficial for themselves. That's it. Basically, gratitude radically increases one's chances of survival and welfare: ungrateful people are not liked by others, and thus are not helped by others and cannot enter cooperative associations with others, so ungrateful people do not flourish. As Spinoza says, "[h]e who has conferred a benefit on anyone from motives of love or honour will feel pain, if he sees that the benefit is received without gratitude."[85] A similar reasoning applies to gratitude towards God. Being grateful to God radically increases one's chances of survival and welfare, more so than being grateful to other humans, since such gratefulness permits humans to have fellowship with God and thereby attain salvation, which is the greatest good that a human can possibly have. If humans are not grateful for

[84] Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 33.
[85] Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, ed. Tom Sharpe (Project Gutenberg, last updated December 11, 2017), pt. III, prop. XLII, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3800/3800-h/3800-h.htm.

Jesus' death on the cross, for example, then humans will not appreciate Jesus' death on the cross and will not care about following Jesus (their savior), and so humans will miss the chance to be saved.

All in all, the gratitude justification that applies to gratitude towards other humans also applies to gratitude towards God, so it is plausible that humans ought to be grateful to God's good gifts because such gratitude is beneficial to humans; but in that occasion, humans ought to follow God's commands because doing so is beneficial to them. This negates P1 (i.e., the claim that humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands), since the claim that humans ought to follow God's commands out of gratitude is conditioned on whether following God's commands is beneficial to humans (e.g., if it were not beneficial to follow God's commands out of gratitude, then it would be false that humans ought to follow God's commands, and so it would be false that humans ought to *unconditionally* follow God's commands). In short, given that it is plausible that humans ought to be grateful because being so is beneficial to them, it is false that humans ought to follow God's commands out of gratitude even if following God's commands conflicts with following other normative principles, like "I ought to do what is beneficial to me"; i.e., it is false that humans ought to follow God's commands out of gratitude unconditionally.

§3.2.2. The "fellowship with God" justification

Another way in which Evans justifies P1 ("Humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands") is by saying that humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands because fellowship with God is the greatest good for humans. As Evans explains:

> A […] possible way that divine authority could be justified is to appeal to the goodness of a relation to God. Aquinas, for example, holds that a relation with God is the highest good possible for a human person. The ultimate happiness of a human person is the knowledge of God that is described as the "beatific vision." Obviously if this is so, humans have very good reasons to do what is necessary to achieve such a relation. Why might this give good reasons for humans to obey God's commands? Well, one always has some reason to satisfy someone one wants to have a good relation with. However, in this case, given some plausible assumptions about God and his commands, those reasons for trying to please God are decisive. […] If the purpose of God's commands is a transformation that enables us to flourish and achieve true happiness, then humans have powerful reasons to obey God.[86]

In summary, here is what the "fellowship with God" justification says: humans ought to follow God's commands because humans ought to have fellowship with God, and humans ought to have fellowship with God because having fellowship with God is beneficial to humans; therefore, humans ought to follow God's commands because following God's commands is beneficial to humans. However, this is contrary to moral unconditionalism, since it is false that humans ought to follow God's commands even if following God's commands conflicts with following other normative principles, like the principle that says "I ought to do what is beneficial to me." The justification that we ought to do X because doing so is more beneficial to us is what a prudential

[86] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64-5.

unconditionalist says, not a moral unconditionalist. In the well-known philosophical battle between morality and prudence, the "fellowship with God" justification is on the side of prudence, not on the side of morality, since it is the prudential unconditionalist, not the moral unconditionalist, who says that humans ought to prioritize what is beneficial for themselves, and the "fellowship with God" justification is saying that humans ought to prioritize what is beneficial for them. E.g., a perfect example of a moral unconditionalist is Immanuel Kant, who says that we ought to follow morality regardless of the consequences of doing so (e.g., Kant says that we ought to follow morality even if doing so is not beneficial to us or does not bring about the best consequences for us).

All in all, I agree with Evans that divine authority could be justified by appealing to the goodness of a relation to God, that humans have very good reasons to do what is needed to achieve such a relation (i.e., fellowship with God), that one always has some reason to satisfy someone one wants to have a good relation with, and that those reasons for trying to please God are decisive. However, all of that is what is a prudential unconditionalist would say, not a moral unconditionalist. Hence, the "fellowship with God" justification is incompatible with showing that moral unconditionalism is true; and if the "fellowship with God" justification is true, then P1 is false because humans ought to *conditionally* follow God's commands, since the benefits of having fellowship with God is the condition that justifies humans following God's commands.

§3.2.3. The "God's ownership" justification

A final way in which Evans justifies P1 ("Humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands") is by saying that humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands because God completely owns humans. As Evans explains:

> A third possible normative principle that might justify divine authority is the claim that God, by virtue of his creation of humans and the natural world, has a rightful claim to be the owner of that created world and everything in it, including human beings. Many natural law theorists have held that there is a natural right to property. […]
>
> If theism is true, then God has brought into existence the whole of the created order solely through his power. Hence if anything like Locke's principle of natural ownership is true, God has a natural claim to own the whole of the natural world, including humans. Nor is there any need to qualify God's ownership in the way Locke suggests human ownership must be qualified, for there is no preexistent material God does not own, and there are no potential rival claimants to the property. The owner of property is the one who has the right to decide how that property should be used. If humans are God's property, then God surely has the right to establish rules for how humans should conduct themselves.[87]

I have two criticisms of this justification.[88] My first criticism of Evans' "God's ownership" justification is that Evans contradicts himself when he says the following:

> It will be recalled from Chapter 2 that it is only the commands of a God who is essentially good that can create moral obligations. The commands of an all-powerful being who had no concern for the good would fail to

[87] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 65-6.
[88] Another criticism, which I will not focus on, is that "rational beings are just not the kind of thing that can be property" (Mark C. Murphy, *An Essay on Divine Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 102).

> create any moral obligations in humans, even if humans were created by this being.[89]

Evidently, Evans contradicts himself because he says that the commands of an evil all-powerful being would not count as moral obligations, even if this evil all-powerful being, like the good theistic God, completely created us and everything else in the universe, i.e., even if (1) this evil all-powerful being has brought into existence the whole of the created order solely through his power, (2) there is no preexistent material that this evil all-powerful being does not own, and (3) there are no potential rival claimants to the property. That contradicts Evans' justification that "humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands because God completely owns humans," since by the same logic such an evil all-powerful being would have as much ownership rights as the good theistic God, and this would thereby make it true that humans ought to unconditionally follow the commands of such an evil all-powerful being, yet Evans denies this. Perhaps Evans may reply by saying the following: "the commands of an evil all-powerful being would be obligations, but not moral ones; for a command to be a *moral* obligation, the command must be the command of a *good* all-powerful being." However, even then, if Evans insists that ownership by a good God creates moral obligations, then I reply that it is the property of goodness that is responsible for the creation of moral obligations, not the property of ownership, because once again, the evil all-powerful being has as much ownership as the good God, yet by Evans' own account, ownership by such evil all-powerful being does not create any moral obligation. So, by Evans' own account,

[89] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 62.

ownership is irrelevant to creating moral obligations, and thus the "God's ownership" justification fails.

My second criticism of the "God's ownership" justification is that even if God originally owned us by virtue of his creation of humans, God could have (at least partially) transferred that ownership to us, and thus we would not be God's property anymore even though we were originally. In his book, Evans does not present any reason to show that God has not transferred such ownership, and it doesn't seem implausible that God could have transferred that ownership to us. For example, look at the passage below by Evans:

> [I]t would seem possible for God to communicate commands that would be perceived as authoritative and binding without necessarily making it obvious to all recipients that he is the source of the commands. For example, God might communicate that an act is forbidden through conscience, which could be understood as a faculty that directly perceives the wrongness of certain acts. Conscience could here be understood in various ways, as operating through the intellect or through emotions, or some combination of the two. God could give humans such a faculty without necessarily making it evident to all that he is the source of conscience.
>
> Why might God do this? […] [A] possible reason is this: If God makes the source of his commands somewhat obscure, this may alleviate the guilt of those who disobey those commands. […] [I]f I violate what I perceive to be my obligations, I have done wrong. However, if I do so knowing that

> those obligations are divine commands, I may be guilty in a deeper way for I have failed to show gratitude to the one who created me and gave me every good I have. A God who knows that humans will often disobey might then have reason to hide the source of his commands, and thereby lessen the guilt of those humans.[90]

It is also plausible to believe that to lessen the guilt of humans God gave us (complete or partial) ownership of ourselves. Here is why. First, it is plausible to think that all humans prioritize the satisfaction of their own desires. It could even be plausibly argued that all humans necessarily and always think that way; i.e., it could even be plausibly argued that it is impossible for a human to not think that way (e.g., everyone who is committed to following morality believe that following morality is overall more conducive to the satisfaction of their desires than not following morality). Someone may say that there are good individuals, like Mother Teresa, who sacrifice their desires for the sake of morality. That is false. Mother Teresa didn't sacrifice her desires, she just sacrificed some of her desires (e.g., her desire for comfort) for another desire, namely, her desire to follow morality by doing missionary work, which was a stronger desire than her desire for other things (e.g., comfort); so, Mother Teresa was just attempting to satisfy her desires as much as possible, which entails satisfying the stronger desire when there is a conflict between two desires. In that, she is no different than Ted Bundy or any other criminal. Both Mother Teresa and Ted Bundy – both the good and the bad – necessarily attempt to satisfy their desires as much as possible, which entails satisfying stronger desires over weaker desires. All of this is plausible. Second, it is plausible that ought implies can: if

[90] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114-5.

people ought to do something, then they can do it. Therefore, since (1) it is plausible that for all humans it is impossible to do something without prioritizing the satisfaction of one's own desires, and since (2) it is plausible that ought implies can, it follows that (3) if God demands that humans unconditionally follow God's commands (and thus humans ought to prioritize God's commands over the satisfaction of their own desires), then God will demand something that is impossible for all humans to fulfill, which will increase the guiltiness of all humans. For example, John will follow God's commands because he believes that following God's commands is more beneficial to himself than not following God's commands, and John cannot help but follow God's commands with a view to benefit himself; but then John is not following God's commands unconditionally, rather, John is following God's commands for the sake of the benefits. So, if God demands that John ought to follow God's commands unconditionally, then John is guilty of performing an imperfect action (namely, doing the right thing for the wrong reason). So, to lessen John's guilt, God can – and plausibly would – transfer the ownership rights of John to John himself, and thereby make it true that John should not follow God's commands unconditionally since God does not have full ownership of John anymore, rather, John ought to follow God's commands because doing so is beneficial to John.

All in all, even if God originally owned us by virtue of his creation of humans, it is plausible to believe that God transferred that ownership to us, and so we are not God's property (at least not completely) anymore even though we were originally. In his book *God and Moral Obligation*, Evans does not present any reason to show that God has not transferred such ownership, and as I explained above, it is not implausible that God would have transferred that ownership to us. In fact, Murphy believes that it is good for

humans to not be under God's ownership and authority from the very beginning, but to rather have the opportunity to put themselves under God's ownership and authority.[91] In summary, the "God's ownership" justification fails because it is implausible that God would demand that humans follow God's commands unconditionally, since (1) it is impossible for a human to follow any command without a view to benefit themselves, and (2) ought implies can is a plausible principle, so (3) to demand that humans be unconditionally obedient to God is to demand the impossible.[92] A loving God does not demand the impossible, just like a loving parent does not demand the impossible from their child.

§3.2.4. The Bible does not say that P1 ("Humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands") is true, even if the Bible does not say that P1 is false

In the three sections above (§3.2.1-§3.2.3) I criticized the three justifications for P1 that Evans presented. In this section I will finish my discussion of Evans by arguing that the Bible does not justify P1, so no one (including Evans) ought to use the Bible to justify P1. I am including this section because I think that some Christians are (at least implicitly) motivated to accept P1 (or to argue for P1) because they believe the Bible

[91] As Murphy says, "One thing that we necessarily lack if we are God's property is the opportunity to place ourselves under divine authority, to submit entirely to God, to make ourselves God's own. This strikes me as a very important good […] And this is a good that created rational beings would lack by God's having an initial entitlement over all. So there is one very important way that such beings could be worse off by not being initially unowned by God. This gives us some reason to think that this revised no-loss clause is not satisfied: for if one is not initially owned by God, one can gain the relevant benefits of being owned by God by submitting to God, while also enjoying the goods involved in this submission itself. One might say: this assumes that one will recognize the importance of submission and have the will to act on it. But one who cannot recognize or cannot act upon the good of being under divine authority by submitting would be similarly unlikely to be able to recognize one's given status as under divine authority or to be able to act on the fact that one has that status. We do not have reason to believe that there is no loss involved in being naturally owned by God" (Mark C. Murphy, *An Essay on Divine Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 103).

[92] Note that this reasoning does not imply that it is impossible for people to follow God's commands; rather, this reasoning implies that it is impossible for people to *unconditionally* follow God's commands.

justifies P1, so I want to make it clear that I find such belief to be false, just in case Evans (and other Christians) accept such belief at least implicitly. Also, keep in mind that I am aware that even if the Bible does not teach anything that implies that we have an unconditional obligation to obey God's commands, some Christians may have other sources of authority that do commit them to that view. Still, in this dissertation I at least want to address the Bible, since the Bible is an important source of authority for most Christians.

There are three possibilities: first, the Bible says that P1 is true; second, the Bible says that P1 is false; third and finally, the Bible neither says that P1 is true nor that P1 is false, so the Bible is neutral on whether P1 is true or false. In this section I will argue that the first option is false. This means that Evans – and any other Christian – should not use the Bible to justify P1 because the denial of P1 is at least compatible with the Bible.

I know that there are many philosophers who are not Christians, or who do not take the Bible to be authoritative. Perhaps the reader is one of these people. Still, I am including this section because I want to make it clear to all Christians – including Evans – that, if someone argues, for example, that "humans ought to unconditionally do what is most beneficial to them" (and thus, "humans ought to do what is most beneficial to them even if doing so is opposed to God's commands"), then no Christians ought to object to that claim by saying that "such claim is anti-biblical or anti-Christian because humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands, as stated by P1." The claim that humans should not unconditionally follow God's commands is neither anti-biblical nor anti-Christian, because either the Bible says that P1 is false, or the Bible neither says that P1 is true nor that P1 is false.

Evans says the following:

> If we look at the actual commands God gives to his people as recorded in the Bible, we find that one of the more frequently expressed commands is that "God's people should obey all his commands." For example, in a long list of specific commands given in Leviticus 19 we encounter this one: "Keep my decrees" (v. 19). In several chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses repeatedly represents God as commanding the Israelites to "be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you" (Deuteronomy 5:32).[93]

However, none of the above verses – or any other Bible verse for that matter – justify P1, or contradict the claim that humans shouldn't unconditionally follow God's commands. Let's look at each verse.

First, here is what is said in Leviticus 19:19: "Keep my decrees."[94] Likewise, in Leviticus 19:37, it says "Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord."[95] So, Leviticus 19:19 (and Leviticus 19:37) says that in all scenarios all humans ought to obey all commands of God. However, that is compatible with the belief that, for example, in all scenarios all humans ought to promote what is beneficial to themselves even if doing so is opposed to a command of God. For example, imagine that (1) in all scenarios all humans ought to promote what is beneficial to themselves even if doing so is opposed to a command of God; and (2) in all scenarios, for a human to promote what is beneficial to herself, the human must obey all commands of God. In this occasion, it is still true that in all scenarios all humans ought to obey all commands of

[93] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 101.
[94] Leviticus 19:19, New International Version.
[95] Leviticus 19:37, New International Version.

God, as it is said in Leviticus 19:19. So, in this occasion, Leviticus 19:19 does not oppose the claim that in all scenarios all humans ought to promote what is beneficial to themselves even if doing so is opposed to a command of God, which is a claim that conflicts with P1 of Evans' argument. This means that Leviticus 19:19 does not oppose the negation of P1, and thus Leviticus 19:19 does not support P1.

Second, let's look at Deuteronomy 5:32, which is the other verse that Evans mentions in the passage above. Here is what it is said in Deuteronomy 5:32: "So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left."[96] So, Deuteronomy 5:32 says that in all scenarios all humans ought to obey all commands of God, just like in Leviticus 19:19. Hence, what I said about Leviticus 19:19 applies to Deuteronomy 5:32. As with Leviticus 19:19, Deuteronomy 5:32 does not oppose the claim that in all scenarios all humans ought to promote what is beneficial to themselves even if doing so is opposed to a command of God, which is a claim that conflicts with P1 of Evans' argument. This means that Deuteronomy 5:32 does not oppose the negation of P1, and thus Deuteronomy 5:32 does not support P1.

Interestingly, here is what it is said in Deuteronomy 5:33: "Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess."[97] Notice that Deuteronomy 5:33 says that the people of God ought to obey God *because doing so is beneficial to themselves* (e.g., the people of God ought to obey God because doing so will permit the people of God to live and prosper). This entails that humans ought to follow God's commands *because doing so is beneficial for us humans*. If P1 were true, then we ought

[96] Deuteronomy 5:32, New International Version.
[97] Deuteronomy 5:33, New International Version.

to follow God's commands independently of whether doing so is beneficial for us (i.e., we ought to follow God's commands even if doing so is the most harmful option to us). However, there is no verse in the Bible that says that we ought to follow God's commands independently of whether doing so is beneficial for us, i.e., there is no verse where the Bible says that we ought to follow God's commands unconditionally; e.g., there is no Bible verse that says that "humans ought to follow God's commands, period," or "humans ought to follow God's commands even if doing so makes humans utterly miserable," or the like. Meanwhile, like Deuteronomy 5:33, all Bible verses that give a reason why humans ought to follow God's commands say that humans ought to follow God's commands because doing so is beneficial for us humans. For example, below are other examples besides Deuteronomy 5:33:

> Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.[98]
>
> Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.[99]
>
> The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.[100]

[98] Exodus 20:12, New International Version.
[99] Deuteronomy 4:1, New International Version.
[100] Deuteronomy 6:24, New International Version.

Perhaps these verses are not enough to lead to the conclusion that the Bible says that P1 is false.[101] However, the fact that there is no verse where the Bible says that we ought to follow God's commands unconditionally is enough to lead to the conclusion that it is false that the Bible says that P1 is true; and, if it is also false that the Bible says that P1 is false, then the Bible is neutral on the question "should humans unconditionally follow God's commands?"

All in all, there are three possibilities: first, the Bible says that P1 is true; second, the Bible says that P1 is false; third and finally, the Bible neither says that P1 is true nor that P1 is false, so the Bible is neutral on whether P1 is true or false. In this section I argued that the first option is false, since there is no verse where the Bible says that we ought to follow God's commands unconditionally. Hence, either the second option is true or the third option is true, and if the second option is false, then the third option is true. This means that Evans (a Christian) shouldn't use the Bible to justify P1 because the denial of P1 is at least compatible with the Bible, if not also promoted by the Bible. Once again, I included this section because I want to make it clear to all Christians – including Evans – that if someone argues, for example, that "humans ought to unconditionally do what is most beneficial to them" (and thus, "humans ought to do what is most beneficial to them even if doing so is opposed to God's commands"), then no Christians ought to object to that claim by saying that "such claim is anti-biblical or anti-Christian because humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands, as stated by P1." The claim

[101] For example, someone can argue that it could turn out that humans ought to follow any of God's commands no matter what, but also that humans ought to follow God's commands because it is beneficial for them to do so. To put it differently, someone can argue that reasons for following the divine commands could be overdetermined. If so, then what these Bible verses say is compatible with the claim that humans ought to unconditionally follow God's commands, as stated by P1.

that humans should not unconditionally follow God's commands is neither anti-biblical nor anti-Christian, because either the Bible says that P1 is false, or the Bible neither says that P1 is true nor that P1 is false. A Christian can reject P1 without being incoherent, or heretical, or the like.

§4. Against Rothbard's argument for moral unconditionalism

The third argument for moral unconditionalism that I will deal with is the argument given by Murray Rothbard.[102] Below is a reconstruction of his argument:

P1: Humans have absolute natural ownership rights.

P2: If humans have absolute natural ownership rights, then humans ought[103] to unconditionally not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human.

P3: Humans ought to unconditionally not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human. (P1, P2)

P4: If humans ought to unconditionally not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human, then the principle of morality is normatively unconditional.

C: The principle of morality is normatively unconditional. (P3, P4)

For the rest of this section I will present textual evidence for Rothbard's argument for moral unconditionalism (§4.1) and then I will criticize the argument by criticizing P1 (§4.2).

§4.1. Textual evidence for Rothbard's argument for moral unconditionalism

§4.1.1. Textual evidence for P1

[102] This argument can be found in Rothbard's *For a New Liberty* and *The Ethics of Liberty*. Note that although Rothbard is well known as an economist, he is also an accomplished political philosopher, so his work and argument is philosophically relevant. For instance, throughout his works Rothbard references many philosophers, such as when he references Aquinas and Locke while discussing (and accepting) natural law and natural rights (e.g., see Chapter 4 of *The Ethics of Liberty*).

[103] Note that someone may wonder whether Rothbard's notion of "ought" refers to a "qualified ought", such as the "moral ought" or the "ought of justice". However, it is more plausible to believe that Rothbard's notion of "ought" refers to the "unqualified ought", since nowhere in his works does Rothbard mention any "qualified ought".

The passages below show that Rothbard thinks that humans have natural rights that are ownership rights and absolute, and that is enough to show that Rothbard accepts P1 ("Humans have absolute natural ownership rights"):[104]

> The most viable method of elaborating the natural-rights statement of the libertarian position is to divide it into parts, and to begin with the basic axiom of the "right to self-ownership." The right to self-ownership asserts the absolute right of each man, by virtue of his (or her) being a human being, to "own" his or her own body; that is, to control that body free of coercive interference.[105]
>
> The central core of the libertarian creed, then, is to establish the absolute right to private property of every man: first, in his own body, and second, in the previously unused natural resources which he first transforms by his labor. These two axioms, the right of self-ownership and the right to "homestead," establish the complete set of principles of the libertarian system. The entire libertarian doctrine then becomes the spinning out and the application of all the implications of this central doctrine.[106]
>
> The libertarian creed can now be summed up as (1) the absolute right of every man to the ownership of his own body; (2) the equally absolute right to own and therefore to control the material resources he has found and transformed; and (3) therefore, the absolute right to exchange or give away

[104] Note that in §4.1.3, which is where I present textual evidence for P4, it will be made clear that these natural ownership rights are moral rights. In P1 and P2, it is not needed to point out that these natural ownership rights are moral rights.
[105] Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 33-4.
[106] Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 47-8.

> the ownership to such titles to whoever is willing to exchange or receive them.[107]
>
> *We thus have a theory of the rights of property*: that every man has an absolute right to the control and ownership of his own body, and to unused land resources that he finds and transforms.[108]

§4.1.2. Textual evidence for P2 and P3

Below is a passage from Rothbard's *For a New Liberty*:

> It so happens that the free-market economy […] is by far the most productive form of economy known to man […]. This is a fortunate utilitarian result of the free market, but it is not, to the libertarian, the *prime* reason for his support of this system. That prime reason is moral and is rooted in the natural-rights defense of private property we have developed above. Even if a society of despotism and systematic invasion of rights could be shown to be more productive than what Adam Smith called "the system of natural liberty," the libertarian would support this system. Fortunately, as in so many other areas, the utilitarian and the moral, natural rights and general prosperity, go hand in hand.[109]

The passage that I quoted shows that Rothbard – a libertarian – thinks that humans should not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human even if doing so were more productive (which is what the principle of utilitarianism cares about), and a similar

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[107] Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 85.
[108] Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 60.
[109] Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 48-9. Note that this quote says that the principle of libertarianism (namely, that humans ought to not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human) is a moral principle, so Rothbard's argument is an argument for moral unconditionalism.

reasoning extends to any other competing principle. This means that Rothbard thinks that humans should not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human even if doing so conflicts with any other principle, which is to say that Rothbard thinks that, as P3 says, "humans ought to unconditionally not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human." Hence, that passage that I quoted shows that Rothbard accepts P3. Furthermore, on the same passage, Rothbard says that the reason why humans ought to unconditionally not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human is because humans have absolute natural ownership rights. Hence, the same passage shows that Rothbard accepts P2 ("If humans have absolute natural ownership rights, then humans ought to unconditionally not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human").

To confirm what I just said, note that Rothbard says the following:

> The central thrust of libertarian thought, then, is to oppose any and all aggression against the property rights of individuals in their own persons and in the material objects they have voluntarily acquired.[110]

The passage that I just quoted is additional evidence that Rothbard accepts P3 because in his book *For a New Liberty* Rothbard argues that we ought to oppose any and all aggression against the property rights of individuals, period, so he is against the view that we ought to oppose any and all aggression against the property rights of individuals only if doing so does not conflict with another normative principle. This shows that for Rothbard, the libertarian moral principle that we ought to oppose any and all aggression against the property rights of individuals is not normatively conditional, and thus is normatively unconditional. Finally, note that when Rothbard refers to property rights, he

[110] Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 55.

is referring to the natural ownership rights discussed in §4.1.1, which are the absolute natural ownership rights that are referred to by P1, thus indicating that Rothbard is using P1 – the fact that humans have absolute natural ownership rights – to infer P3. This is enough to show that Rothbard accepts P2.

§4.1.3. Textual evidence for P4

P4 is a conditional proposition that has P3 as its antecedent and C as its consequent. Now, the principle of libertarianism (which is stated in P3) is equivalent to the principle of morality in Rothbard's libertarian perspective. For example, Rothbard says:

> While opposing any and all private or group aggression against the rights of person and property, the libertarian sees that throughout history and into the present day, there has been one central, dominant, and overriding aggressor upon all of these rights: the State. In contrast to all other thinkers, left, right, or in-between, the libertarian refuses to give the State the moral sanction to commit actions that almost everyone agrees would be immoral, illegal, and criminal if committed by any person or group in society. The libertarian, in short, insists on applying the general moral law to everyone, and makes no special exemptions for any person or group.[111]

And what is such "general moral law" that the libertarian applies to everyone? The nonaggression axiom, i.e., the principle that says that humans should not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human, which is the fundamental principle of

[111] Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 28.

libertarianism.[112] Hence, an argument for P3 ("Humans ought to unconditionally not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human") is an argument for the normative unconditionality of the principle of libertarianism (i.e., the principle that says that humans should not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human), and the principle of libertarianism is equivalent to the principle of morality in Rothbard's libertarian perspective; so, Rothbard's argument for P3 leads to an argument for C (i.e., an argument for moral unconditionalism), which is enough to show that Rothbard accepts P4.

§4.2. Against P1

In the section above I gave textual evidence for Rothbard's argument for moral unconditionalism (§4.1). In this section I will criticize such argument by criticizing P1.

There are multiple ways to criticize P1 ("Humans have absolute natural ownership rights"). For example, one could argue that there are no natural ownership rights (or at least not the set of natural ownership rights that Rothbard accepts, or that such natural ownership rights exist but are not absolute. I will criticize P1 by presenting an example where it is plausible that a human individual ought to violate the natural ownership rights of another human, and thus an example that attempts to show that such natural ownership rights are not absolute.

Imagine that Mark owns a boat, and that he acquired such boat in a just manner, i.e., in accordance with the rules set forth by Rothbard in his *The Ethics of Liberty*. Now,

[112] As Rothbard says, "The libertarian creed rests upon one central axiom: that no men or group of men may aggress against the person or property of anyone else. This may be called the 'nonaggression axiom.' […] [N]o man may aggress against another; […] in short, everyone has the absolute right to be 'free' from aggression" (Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 27).

if John ought to unconditionally not violate the natural ownership rights that Mark has over that boat, then John ought to unconditionally not ride the boat without Mark's permission. However, imagine that John fell in the river, is very tired from swimming, and is almost drowning, but then he reaches Mark's boat, which is the only thing nearby that John can hold onto. John knows that this is Mark's boat, that Mark has acquired this boat in a just manner, and that Mark has natural ownership rights over this boat. Nonetheless, with the very little energy that John has, John decides to climb onto the boat to prevent himself from drowning because of how exhausted he is. Also, the boat's key happens to be on the boat, and John turns on the boat and uses it to reach a health station to help John recover, since while swimming, John got bit by a venomous sea snake, and thus he has a limited amount of time to receive help before he dies from the venom. In this occasion, John has violated the natural ownership rights that Mark has over the boat, since John entered and used Mark's boat without Mark's permission. Should John have done this? My answer is yes, John ought to have entered and used Mark's boat, even though Mark has natural ownership rights over that boat. I believe that "yes" is a more plausible answer than "no," and thus it is more plausible to think that P1 is false (i.e., it is more plausible to think that Mark's natural ownership rights are not absolute).

Now, Rothbard's reply to this example (and to similar examples) can be found in Chapter 20 of Rothbard's *The Ethics of Liberty*, where he discusses "lifeboat situations." Rothbard says the following:

> [Lifeboat situations are intended to disprove] any theory of absolute property rights, or indeed of any absolute rights of self-ownership whatsoever. It is claimed that since any theory of individual rights seems

> to break down or works unsatisfactorily in such fortunately rare situations, therefore there can be no concept of inviolable rights at all. In a typical lifeboat situation, there are, let us say, eight places in a lifeboat putting out from a sinking ship, and there are more than eight people wishing to be saved. Who then is to decide who ought to be saved and who ought to die? And what then happens to the right of self-ownership?[113]

This is the kind of scenario that I presented above in this section.

Rothbard replies in the following manner:

> In the first place, a lifeboat situation is hardly a valid test of a theory of rights, or of any moral theory whatsoever. Problems of a moral theory in such an extreme situation do not invalidate a theory for normal situations. In any sphere of moral theory, we are trying to frame an ethic for man, based on his nature and the nature of the world — and this precisely means for normal nature, for the way life usually is, and not for rare and abnormal situations. […] We are trying to frame an ethic for the way men generally live in the world; we are not, after all, interested in framing an ethic that focuses on situations that are rare, extreme, and not generally encountered.[114]

I am not convinced. I am not interested in assessing the claim that a certain normative principle – including Rothbard's principle of libertarianism – ought to be followed only in "normal situations", or "situations that are rare, extreme, and not generally encountered." Instead, I am interested in assessing the claim that a certain normative

[113] Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 149.
[114] Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 149.

principle (e.g., Rothbard's principle of libertarianism) ought to be followed unconditionally, which is the claim that a normative principle ought to be followed in all situations – including abnormal situations – even if following such normative principle conflicts with following another normative principle. If Rothbard is not interested in presenting a principle that works all the time without exceptions, then he should not say that natural ownership rights are "absolute" or "inviolable," or at least he ought to say that such rights are "absolute" only in normal situations. So far, Rothbard is being inconsistent: he treats the principle of libertarianism (namely, that humans should not violate the natural ownership rights of any other human) as absolute, as something that all humans ought to unconditionally (and thus always) follow, yet as soon as that claim leads to a conclusion that seems implausible, he neither admits that a human shouldn't unconditionally follow the principle of libertarianism, nor bites the bullet by defending such conclusion despite it seeming implausible; instead, he says that he is not trying to discover a normative principle that ought to be followed unconditionally. Further evidence of Rothbard's inconsistency is evident by what Rothbard says in the rest of Chapter 20,[115] since he ends up biting the bullet after all. We shall see this eventually.

In continuation, Rothbard says:

> Most people would concede the principle that "it is ethical for a parent to save his child from drowning." But, then, our lifeboat skeptic could arise and hurl this challenge: "Aha, but suppose that two of your children are drowning and you can save only one. Which child would you choose? And doesn't the fact that you would have to let one child die negate the

[115] For example, Rothbard says "To sum up the application of our theory to extreme situations" (Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 153).

> very moral principle that you should save your drowning child?" I doubt whether many ethicists would throw over the moral desirability or principle of saving one's child because it could not be fully applied in such a "lifeboat" situation. Yet why should the lifeboat case be different in the sphere of rights?[116]

There are at least two problems with Rothbard's response. First, the parent is *unable* to save his second child from drowning, whoever the second child ends up being. Meanwhile, in lifeboat situations, the individual is *able* to not violate another individual's natural ownership rights, yet the individual ought to violate another individual's natural ownership rights. For example, John is *able* to not violate Mark's natural ownership rights, yet John ought to violate Mark's natural ownership rights, such as by entering the boat and using it to reach a health station.

The second problem is that no one – at least no one that I know – is saying that the principle "a parent ought to save their child from drowning" is a principle that ought to be unconditionally followed. Meanwhile, Rothbard says that his principle of libertarianism (i.e., the principle of libertarianism that he accepts) is a principle that ought to be unconditionally followed. However, if a principle ought to be followed unconditionally, and thus always, then it ought to be possible for the principle to always be followed (i.e., the principle ought to apply in all occasions). For example, the utilitarian principle that "an individual ought to maximize overall happiness" is a principle that can always be followed, because even when the individual is unable to ensure that everyone is completely happy, the individual is still able to promote happiness

[116] Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 150.

as much as possible (i.e., the individual is still able to maximize happiness), regardless of the situation that she is in, whether it is a "normal" situation or an "extreme" (or "lifeboat") situation.

Moreover, Rothbard applies his libertarian theory to lifeboat situations (hence, it turns out that Rothbard believes that his libertarian theory applies to lifeboat situations after all, not just to "normal" situations):

> In a lifeboat situation, indeed, we apparently have a war of all against all, and there seems at first to be no way to apply our theory of self-ownership or of property rights. But, in the example cited, the reason is because the property right has so far been ill-defined. For the vital question here is: who owns the lifeboat? If the owner of the boat or his representative (e.g. the captain of the ship) has died in the wreck, and if he has not laid down known rules in advance of the wreck for allocation of seats in such a crisis, then the lifeboat may be considered – at least temporarily for the emergency – abandoned and therefore unowned. At this point, our rules for unowned property come into play: namely, that unowned resources become the property of the first people possessing them. In short, the first eight people to reach the boat are, in our theory, the proper "owners" and users of the boat. Anyone who throws them out of the boat then commits an act of aggression in violating the property right of the "homesteader" he throws out of the boat. After he returns to shore, then, the aggressor becomes liable for prosecution for his act of violation of property right (as well, perhaps, for murder of the person he ejected from the boat).

> […]
>
> A far clearer outcome of the lifeboat case occurs where the owner or his representative still survives or has laid down rules for allocation in advance. For, in that case, our theory states that the right to allocate spaces in the lifeboat belongs to the owner of the boat. He may choose to carry out that allocation in various ways: whether by first come-first served, women and children first, or whatever. But though we may disagree with the morality of his criteria, we must concede his right to make the allocation in whatever way he wishes. […] Our theory of absolute property right is therefore the most satisfactory – or, at the very minimum, the least unsatisfactory – way out of the tragic lifeboat example.[117]

My reply is that I don't think that this is a satisfactory answer, since an individual shouldn't surrender his life to preserve someone's natural ownership rights. It is more plausible that this situation ought to be seen as a "war of all against all" where everyone has the natural right to do whatever it takes to preserve themselves. A human's natural right to promote their own survival ought to override anyone's natural right to ownership.

Rothbard has a reply to my objection:

> It may well be objected to our theory as follows: that a theory of property rights or even of self-ownership is derivable from the conditions by which man survives and flourishes in this world, and that therefore in this kind of extreme situation, where a man is faced with the choice of either saving himself or violating the property rights of the lifeboat owner (or, in the

[117] Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 150-51.

> above example, of the "homesteader" in the boat), it is then ridiculous to expect him to surrender his life on behalf of the abstract principle of property rights. Because of this kind of consideration, many libertarians who otherwise believe in property rights gravely weaken them on behalf of the "contextualist" contention that, given a choice between his life and aggressing against someone else's property or even life, it is moral for him to commit the aggression and that therefore in such a situation, these property rights cease to exist.[118]

I am inclined to disagree with the contextualist answer, since I am inclined to believe that instead of these property rights ceasing to exist, these property rights are simply overridden and shouldn't matter as much as one's right to preserve oneself. However, regardless of whether we accept that answer or the contextualist answer, we can use major ethical theories to justify the claim that property rights shouldn't matter as much as one's right to preserve oneself. For example, from a consequentialist perspective, such as a utilitarian perspective, it seems plausible to say that it is more beneficial for the individual to preserve his own life than for an individual to preserve his property in things, since death is more damaging to an individual than being stolen from, such as having one's objects (e.g., a boat) be used by someone else; so, from a consequentialist perspective, it is more beneficial for the right to preserve oneself to override the right to not have one's boat be used without permission, and thus for consequentialist reasons the former right ought to override the latter right. We can construct a similar argument from a deontological perspective, where it is plausible to say that the duty to protect life (at least

[118] Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 152.

generally) is weightier than the duty to protect property in things, so the right to have one's life be protected ought to be overridden by someone's right to not be stolen from. Having said that, Rothbard says that John's act of entering Mark's boat and using it "is at the very least an act of invasion of property right for which the aggressor [John] may be repelled on the spot, and for which the aggressor would later be liable for prosecution [by Mark]."[119] Rothbard and I disagree with each other, but I believe that Rothbard's conclusion is less plausible than mine. In short, I don't agree that Mark ought to be permitted to repel John at the spot,[120] and I don't agree that John ought to be liable for prosecution. Even if natural ownership rights ought to matter, they should not be decisive; this is contrary to Rothbard's theory, which gives too much power to Mark and implausibly entails that he ought to be permitted to prosecute John for "invading" his boat even in such an extreme situation.[121] I believe that this is an example where – contrary to P1 and contrary to what Rothbard says – it is plausible that a human individual ought to violate the natural ownership rights of another human, and the owner should not be permitted to prosecute such "aggressor."

[119] Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 151.
[120] For the sake of simplicity, we can assume that Mark knows that John has good intentions, that John is genuinely about to drown, and that John has been bitten by a venomous sea snake. In real life, Mark could believe that John is faking all of this. But we can put these worries aside for the sake of our analysis.
[121] Contrary to what I say, Rothbard says that "The right of property continues, then, to be absolute, even in the tragic lifeboat situation" (Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 153).

§5. Conclusion

One of the most important normative questions is whether an agent ought to prioritize morality. To put it differently, if an agent encounters a state of affairs where she can either follow morality or do something else, but not both, then which option should the agent choose? It is common for philosophers to side with morality, and to think that all agents ought to follow morality even if doing so prevents the agent from doing something else. This view is known as moral unconditionalism, which is the view that the principle of morality ought to be followed even if following the principle of morality conflicts with following other normative principles (§1.1). In this dissertation I questioned moral unconditionalism by criticizing three arguments for it: De Lazari-Radek and Singer's argument, Evans' argument, and Rothbard's argument. I hope that my criticism has shown that moral unconditionalism is neither as justified nor as obvious as many people think it is, and that people ought to try to argue for moral unconditionalism instead of taking it for granted.

Nonetheless, this dissertation is not a complete project, but rather this dissertation is a contribution to a larger project, which is the project of resolving the normative unconditionality problem. In the rest of this concluding section I will explain what the normative unconditionality problem is (§5.1), I will present the possible solutions to the normative unconditionality problem (§5.2), and finally I will mention three things that need to be done in order to resolve the normative unconditionality problem (§5.3).

§5.1. What is the normative unconditionality problem?

The main question of this dissertation is "is moral unconditionalism true (or at least adequately justified)?", but that question is part of a bigger problem, a problem that

I refer to as *the normative unconditionality problem*. In this section I will explain what the normative unconditionality problem is.

There are multiple normative principles (i.e., there are multiple principles that state how people ought to act), some of which may conflict with one another, and some of which may normatively outweigh another. However, is there any normative principle that always has normative priority over all other normative principles combined and is therefore normatively unconditional?[122] To put it differently, is there any normative principle that we ought to follow unconditionally, i.e., is there any normative principle that we ought to follow even if doing so conflicts with another principle? To ask this question is to encounter the normative unconditionality problem. As Christine Korsgaard says, the normative unconditionality problem "is what Kant called a search for the unconditioned."[123]

§5.2. Possible solutions to the normative unconditionality problem

In contemporary philosophy – and in society in general – there are two normative principles that are the main candidates to being a normative principle that is normatively unconditional: the principle of prudence (which says that we ought to do whatever is in

[122] Note that normative priority is not identical to normative unconditionality, and that principle X being normatively prior to principle Y is not enough to entail that principle X is normatively unconditional. Normative unconditionality entails a stronger kind of normative priority, the strongest kind possible. More specifically, by saying that a principle is normatively unconditional, I am saying that such principle undercuts all other principles, thereby making them irrelevant. For example, if the principle of morality is normatively unconditional, then the following is true: if the principle of morality says that we ought to do X, then we ought to do X, period, even if doing X conflicts with any other normative principle, so any – and every – other normative principle is normatively irrelevant.

[123] Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 33.

our best interests) and the principle of morality.[124] Therefore, to be as simple as possible, in the rest of this section I shall assume that the principle of prudence and the principle of morality are the only two candidates to being a normative principle that is normatively unconditional, given that in contemporary philosophy those principles are the two main candidates to being a normative principle that is normatively unconditional.

To solve the normative unconditionality problem it is needed to discover whether there is at least one normative principle that is normatively unconditional. To put it differently, to solve the normative unconditionality problem it is needed to discover whether there is at least one normative principle that an agent ought to follow even if

[124] Perhaps someone may present the following objection: "I agree that many people think that the principle of morality ought to be followed unconditionally, but very few people think that the principle of prudence ought to be followed unconditionally." My reply is that this objection is false. First of all, if there isn't such a fierce battle between moral unconditionalism and prudential unconditionalism, or between the primacy of the principle of morality and the primacy of the principle of prudence, then why is morality and prudence pitted against one another so consistently in ethical writings? For example, just look at the title of Mathea Sagdahl's book called *Normative Pluralism: Resolving Conflicts between Moral and Prudential Reasons*. And there are so many other works like that, so much that whenever different normative sources are discussed by ethicists, morality and prudence are by far the two normative sources that are focused on – not civil laws, etiquette, or any other normative source besides morality and prudence, rather, those other normative sources are usually mentioned in passing, nothing more. And second, there are many philosophers who think that there is no "morality" (or "objective morality"). These people cannot, and do not, argue that morality is normatively unconditional since they don't believe that morality exists in the first place. And practically every one of these people who deny the existence of morality often build their normative theory around prudence (i.e., people's interests). Even religious people like divine command theorists can, and do, build their theories around prudence, such as when Evans says (as I discussed in §3.2.2) that a divine command theorist can say that we ought to follow God's commands because doing so is needed for us to have fellowship with God, which is the greatest good, and since we desire (or at least ought to desire) the greatest good, we ought to follow God's commands because it is in our interest to do so (this is what a prudential unconditionalist says). Even natural law theorists – like Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas – argue that we ought to be moral because being moral is needed for us to be happy, and we desire to be happy more than anything else, so being moral is just a means to being happy, which is what we have an ultimate interest in – only a prudential unconditionalist says that, not a moral unconditionalist. I can mention many other examples, but Robert Louden sums it up well when he says that "From the beginning and up to the present, the most frequently given answer to the question 'Why should I be moral?' is 'because it is in my self-interest.'" (Robert B. Louden, "Why Be Moral? A New Answer to an Old Question," in *Why Be Moral?*, ed. Beatrix Himmelmann and Robert B. Louden (De Gruyter, 2015), 47), and in that same article Louden mentions diverse theories and theorists that give such an answer, including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, and traditional religious sources. I just mentioned a few examples, but the list of examples goes on, and on, and on. All in all, contrary to the objection, throughout all of human history prudential unconditionalism is the most popular – and *by far* the most popular – answer to the normative unconditionality problem, and prudential unconditionalism is still popular today, especially among the common folk, which make up a much larger population than the population of "philosophers."

following such principle conflicts with another normative principle. *Normative conditionalism* says that there is no normative principle that is normatively unconditional (i.e., all normative principles are normatively conditional instead of normatively unconditional). Meanwhile, *normative unconditionalism* says that there is at least one normative principle that is normatively unconditional.

If we accept normative unconditionalism, then we can say that either there is only one normative principle that is normatively unconditional or that there are at least two normative principles that are normatively unconditional. The former view is *normative monistic unconditionalism*, and the latter view is *normative pluralistic unconditionalism*.

Since in this section I will only focus on the principle of prudence and the principle of morality, if we accept normative monistic unconditionalism, then we can say that the only normative principle that is normatively unconditional is the principle of prudence, or that the only normative principle that is normatively unconditional is the principle of morality. The former view is *prudential unconditionalism*, and the latter view is *moral unconditionalism*. We can also accept *prudential and moral disjunctive unconditionalism*, which says that it is permissible to follow either the principle of prudence or the principle of morality (in this occasion, the only normative principle that is normatively unconditional is the principle "it is permissible to follow either the principle of prudence or the principle of morality").[125]

[125] Note that a normative principle dictates whether an action is obligatory, impermissible, or permissible but not obligatory. "X is obligatory" if and only if "not-X is impermissible," and "X is permissible but not obligatory" if and only if "not-X is permissible but not obligatory." In the case of prudential unconditionalism it is obligatory to follow prudence, and in the case of moral unconditionalism it is obligatory to follow morality. But in the case of prudential and moral disjunctive unconditionalism it is obligatory to follow either prudence or morality, and thus it is permissible but not obligatory to follow prudence and permissible but not obligatory to follow morality.

Finally, since in this section I will only focus on the principle of prudence and the principle of morality, to accept normative pluralistic unconditionalism is to accept *prudential and moral conjunctive unconditionalism*, which says that the principle of prudence and the principle of morality are the only normative principles that are normatively unconditional (in this occasion, the principle of prudence and the principle of morality are the two normative principles that are normatively unconditional).

Below is a summary of the possible solutions to the normative unconditionality problem:

1. *Normative conditionalism*: there is no normative principle that is normatively unconditional.
2. *Normative unconditionalism*: there is at least one normative principle that is normatively unconditional.
    2.1. *Normative monistic unconditionalism*: there is only one normative principle that is normatively unconditional.
        2.1.1. *Prudential unconditionalism*: the principle of prudence is the only normative principle that is normatively unconditional.
        2.1.2. *Moral unconditionalism*: the principle of morality is the only normative principle that is normatively unconditional.
        2.1.3. *Prudential and moral disjunctive unconditionalism*: the principle that says that it is permissible to follow either the principle of prudence or the principle of morality is the only normative principle that is normatively unconditional.

2.2. *Normative pluralistic unconditionalism*: there are at least two normative principles that are normatively unconditional.

2.2.1. *Prudential and moral conjunctive unconditionalism*: the principle of prudence and the principle of morality are the only normative principles that are normatively unconditional.

§5.3. Three things that need to be done in order to resolve the normative unconditionality problem

So far, in this section I have explained what the normative unconditionality problem is (§5.1) and I presented the possible solutions to the normative unconditionality problem (§5.2). Now I will mention three things that need to be done in order to resolve the normative unconditionality problem.

First, if there are more arguments for moral unconditionalism, then they need to be addressed, especially if they are arguments that are given by philosophers from other ethical traditions. For example, it would be beneficial to see how Kantians argue for moral unconditionalism. Korsgaard is a Kantian that has argued for moral unconditionalism in *The Sources of Normativity*, but – as I have already explained in §1.2 – I chose not to deal with her and criticize her argument for moral unconditionalism because I think that her argument has been sufficiently criticized. Still, I wonder if there are other Kantian arguments in favor of moral unconditionalism, and if there are, then those arguments need to be analyzed. One way to find more arguments for moral unconditionalism is to look at the literature that is devoted to the question "why should I be moral?"

Second, it would be beneficial to analyze arguments for prudential unconditionalism, since prudential unconditionalism is the strongest opponent of moral unconditionalism. It is not enough to address the arguments of one side – e.g., even if we refute all arguments for one side, or at least show that they are unconvincing, that does not automatically mean that the other side is correct. At that point, all we have is a deadlock, i.e., neither side is more justified than the other. So, to resolve the normative unconditionality problem in favor of prudential unconditionalism, it is required to present an argument for prudential unconditionalism, and if such an argument has been presented, then it is required to analyze its strength. In this dissertation I have not analyzed any argument for prudential unconditionalism, but that is something that needs to be done if we want to resolve the normative unconditionality problem in favor of prudential unconditionalism.

Third and finally, to resolve the normative unconditionality problem it is required to analyze other options besides prudential unconditionalism and moral unconditionalism. For example, I think that it is important to analyze prudential and moral disjunctive unconditionalism, which is a view stated above that I did not analyze in this dissertation.

All in all, in this dissertation I have not resolved the normative unconditionality problem, which is a major ethical issue to resolve. However, I hoped that I contributed to the topic by showing that moral unconditionalism should not be taken for granted.

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