The overall aim of this research was to assess critically the agent-relativity of common sense morality. This agent-relativity comes to expression in a doctrine of negative rights, the act-omission doctrine, and the doctrine of the double effects. The first task is to understand the relations between these doctrines. My conclusion on this score has been that the two latter doctrines could be understood in terms of the doctrine of negative rights and a conception of responsibility as based upon causation.

The next step is to subject these two theories to criticism. I conclude that both the doctrine of rights and the conception of responsibility are unsound. It follows that the agent-relativity of common sense morality must be revised in the direction of an agent-neutral consequentialism whose main features are explored. I then argue that this revision of morality will render morality less authoritative because there are no practical reasons that are objective or external. This implies that in the end we have no reasons for our practical attitudes. However, I also suggest that in this respect our practical attitudes do not fare any worse than our fundamental theoretical beliefs to the effect that our perceptions correspond to an independent physical world, and that our memories and inductive inferences are reliable. It is a universal feature of human attitudes, both practical and theoretical, that in the end they cannot be justified by reasons. This conclusion, along with the analysis of the causal conception of responsibility, are my most important conclusions. My most important publication may be the reply to ‘5 Questions about Normative Ethics’, since it provides an overview of my approach to morality.

This research is planned to be published in a book with the preliminary title From Morality to the End of Reason: An Essay on Rights, Reasons and Responsibility. I have given two talks based upon material of this forthcoming book which is not contained in the papers found in the list of publications: ‘Why Identity is not Transitive with Respect to Supervenient Properties’, University of York, November 2007 and ‘External Practical Reasons and the Alignment Problem’, University of St Andrews, October 2009.
internalism. According to the resulting view, moral reasons might consist both in requiring and justified reasons. The view then specifies various ways in which these reasons can be conditional on a person’s rationalized desires. In the minimal case, a person has a justified moral reason to perform an action in so far as this would not frustrate any essential means to the satisfaction of one of her rationalized final desires. This version of internalism thereby puts a clear limit on the existence of moral reasons in terms of desires, at the same as it is compatible with an important aspect of the categoricity of moral reasons, since a person might have a justified moral reason to perform an action on this view even if this would not serve the fulfilment of any of her desires. Moreover, this view is in line with most internalist views of reasons which conceptualize them by employing the notion of rationalized desires. However, in order to for this view to constitute a full-fledged theory of reasons, several problems have to be dealt with, such as how the strength of different reasons should be understood. In a separate paper, I argue that a particularist notion of moral reasons, according to which they are radically context-dependent, is compatible with moral supervenience, in the face of an influential argument to the contrary.

The main result of my investigation of (2) is that a non-internalist, externalist, view about moral judgments can account for the practicality of moral language, i.e. the view that our use of moral language convey action-guiding attitudes. In particular, I develop a pragmatic explanation of our internalist intuitions based on Paul Grice’s notion of ‘generalized conversational implicatures’. According to this view, a person’s utterance of a moral sentence of the type ‘I ought to x’ carries a generalized conversational implicature to the effect that she wants that x is performed and is motivated to x herself under suitable conditions. As our moral utterances on this view inform our audience that we have certain attitudes towards various types of behaviour, we can use moral language to regulate other people’s actions. In contrast to existing pragmatic accounts, this view does not rest on any controversial pragmatic notion (such as conventional implicature) or any problematic assumptions about the meaning of moral sentences (such as relativism). A remaining issue which has to be addressed, however, is whether it is able to account for the fact that utterances of different types of moral sentences convey different types of attitudes. In a separate paper, I argue that externalism is not susceptible to a common objection: that it fails to account for the fact that we need not be morally motivated by the idea to do something that is morally right, but often is motivated by more mundane considerations. In reply to this contention, I develop various externalist explanations of what kind of considerations that can provide moral motivation.

Another important result is that internalists about moral judgments face a dilemma: On the one hand, a strong version of internalism cannot explain the fact that someone who is, e.g., depressed might fail to be motivated in accordance with her moral judgments. On the other hand, a weaker version of internalism cannot explain the practicality of moral language. In this context, I also argue that my pragmatic account of this notion does not encounter this dilemma. In a separate paper, I argue that expressivism is committed to strong internalism and that this view therefore is vulnerable
to the first horn of the dilemma. Expressivists have argued that they can avoid this problem by arguing that moral judgments merely motivate in ‘normal conditions’, which are thought to exclude, e.g., depression. I maintain that there is an important aspect of internalist views which has not been noticed in the debate: moral judgments and motivation can be seen either as dispositional or as occurrent mental states. There are accordingly different versions of internalism depending on how moral judgments and motivation are understood in these terms. As a consequence of this finding, I argue that expressivists are committed to strong versions of internalism that cannot be defended in the intended manner.

Finally, in what presumably is the most controversial outcome of my research, I argue that internalism about moral judgments is vulnerable to the so-called Frege-Geach problem. The starting point is that there are basically two versions of internalism about moral judgments depending on what it is about moral judgments which is thought to explain that they entail motivation: Non-cognitivist internalism, according to which moral judgments involve desires which motivate to action, and cognitivist internalism, according to which moral judgments consist in motivating beliefs. I start by arguing that non-cognitivist internalism is vulnerable to the Frege-Geach problem for the same reason as expressivism. However, I continue by arguing that cognitivist internalism also is vulnerable to this problem. The basic reason is that cognitivist internalists have to maintain that moral propositions have different linguistic meaning depending on the context in which they figure.

The most important publication generated by this part of the project is ‘A Dual Aspect Account of Moral Language’, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (forthcoming), where I defend the pragmatic account mentioned above.

In addition to this paper, and the other mentioned in the list of publications, I have written the following papers within the project: ‘Dualist Internalism and the Categoricity of Morality’. ‘An Internalist Dilemma—and an Externalist Solution’. ‘The Metaethical Myth of Moral Motivation’. ‘Internalism and the Frege-Geach Problem’. ‘Expressivism and a Distinction in Mind’ (preliminary accepted for publication).


Comment on the budget: We do not have anything to report under the heading ‘other expenses’.