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Memory and the True Self: When Moral Knowledge Can and Cannot be Forgotten

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Abstract

Why is it that forgetting moral knowledge, unlike other paradigmatic examples of knowledge, seems so deeply absurd? Previous authors have given accounts whereby moral forgetting in itself either is uniformly absurd and impossible (Gilbert Ryle, Adam Bugeja) or is possible and only the speech act is absurd (Sarah McGrath). Considering findings in moral psychology and the experimental philosophy of personal identity, I argue that the knowledge of some moral truths—especially those that are emotional, widely held, subjectively important, and contribute to social relationships—cannot be forgotten because they're too tightly tied to one's true self. Moral knowledge at the level of individual propositions, when it does not have these attributes and so is not so tied to the agent's identity, can sometimes be forgotten. I identify two such cases: (1) where the moral knowledge results partly from an emotional trigger that has been forgotten, and (2) where the moral knowledge results partly from a process of reflection that has been forgotten.

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Luke Skywalker: Ben! Why didn't you tell me? You told me that Darth Vader betrayed and murdered my father.

Obi-Wan: Your father . . . was seduced by the Dark Side of the Force. He ceased to be the Jedi Anakin Skywalker and became the Sith Darth Vader. When that happened, the good man who was your father was destroyed. So, what I told you was true . . . from a certain point of view.

—*Star Wars: The Return of the Jedi* (1983)

1. Introduction to the Puzzle

1.1 Introduction

(0) “Sorry that my sister killed your son. It’s such a shame. She’s never normally like that, and she was so embarrassed when I reminded her that murder is wrong. She’s just really forgetful generally, you see. Only yesterday, she forgot how old she was.”

Statements like the one above (0) seem fundamentally absurd. Whatever moral knowledge is, it seems like it certainly can't be *forgotten* as described in the case above. Loss of moral knowledge over time does indeed occur. A person can be, for example, corrupted, but there is something deeply odd about describing it as *forgetting*. This is the puzzle of moral forgetting: if moral knowledge can be forgotten, why does it seem so absurd? If moral knowledge cannot be forgotten, why not, and is it really knowledge?

In section 2, I consider and criticize three unsuccessful views defended in the literature. Gilbert Ryle (1958) claims that the absurdity of moral forgetting is best explained by motivational internalism and the constitutive role one's cares play in numerical identity, but I find this implausible.¹ Adam Bugeja claims that noncognitivist expressivism best explains the puzzle, but he does little to explain why desires cannot be forgotten, and his account struggles to explain the absurdity of embedded moral propositions.² Sarah McGrath, on the other hand, sees herself as diffusing the puzzle—by claiming that the absurdity is merely an artifact in first-person assertion—to defend the existence of cognitivist moral knowledge.³ I find her example problematic, and the seeming absurdity

¹ Gilbert Ryle, “On Forgetting the Difference between Right and Wrong,” in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. I. Melden (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958).

² Adam Bugeja, “Forgetting Your Scruples,” *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 11 (2016): 2889–911.

³ Sarah McGrath, “Forgetting the Difference between Right and Wrong,” in *Intuition, Theory, and Anti-Theory in Ethics*, ed. Sophie Grace Chappell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

of moral forgetting persists in third-person cases, which she predicts it does not. All of these accounts, however, are unified in that they use the absurdity of moral forgetting as a desideratum for theories of moral judgment.

In section 3, I present my own position. In short, it is that moral forgetting seems absurd because, implicitly, we consider moral knowledge necessary for numerical identity and not because of the nature of moral judgment; a person who forgets the difference between right and wrong has become so incredibly broken, so fundamentally changed, that they're no longer the same person who previously held the moral knowledge, so describing it as *forgetting* seems incorrect. This place for morality at the very core of people's conception of personal identity is admittedly very strong, but there is a wealth of empirical research into the so-called true self that supports this, which I expand on in section 3.1. When moral forgetting is described to have occurred in such a way that personal identity is not threatened, it ceases to seem absurd. If my response to the puzzle is successful, then the puzzle does not warrant either motivational internalism or non-cognitivism, and our implicit usage of moral judgment as a concept is consistent with cognitivism.

1.2 Unproblematic Moral Forgetting

First, though, it is worth clarifying the problem. There are many kinds of moral forgetting, only some of which are philosophically problematic. There are at least three ways moral forgetting can be considered unproblematic because it is not moral in the appropriate way.

First, moral terms are sometime used when making inverted commas moral judgments, and not to express our own actual beliefs.⁴ For example, a woman brought up Catholic, but who left the religion very young, could ask, “is masturbation a sin?”, forgetting the Catholic doctrine regarding masturbation, rather than her own opinion of it. When talking in such a way, moral forgetting is unproblematic, as it is not strictly speaking forgetting a moral fact, but rather forgetting a non-evaluative fact (that some system or agent holds a moral belief).

Second, unproblematic moral forgetting may occur when moral facts are parasitic to some degree on nonmoral facts which in turn *can* be forgotten. If I do not see a friend for many years, it could be that I have forgotten what a good person they are, and then am pleasantly reminded of this fact when at long last we are reunited and we again spend time together. This is, in a sense, moral forgetting: a moral property has been forgotten. What is occurring, though, is not that I have forgotten that, for example, being kind,

⁴ See R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

and selfless, and loving are all morally good attributes, but rather I had forgotten that this specific friend so fully exemplified those good attributes. Bugeja refers to this as loss resulting from nonnormative forgetting (LRNF), and this is not the type of moral forgetting under discussion here.⁵ However, if on the other hand I had remembered that that specific friend was kind, but forgotten whether being kind was a good thing, then something altogether more mysterious would be occurring. Similarly, somebody could forget whether the Doctrine of Triple Effect is a morally good principle simply because it is reasonably complex and they may have forgotten what it actually meant.⁶

Third, beliefs are often moralized. This is to say that though the belief is not about moral status, the belief itself may be considered to hold moral value or be an indicator of a person's moral deficiency. For example, believing that the Holocaust did not happen is not in itself a belief about anything's moral status, but it is typically a moralized belief, in the sense that it is a belief that people often show moral outrage toward. There is nothing puzzling or paradoxical about forgetting such beliefs.

The above cases are unproblematic because they aren't moral in the appropriate sense, but an ostensible case of moral forgetting can also be unproblematic because the sense of forgetting being used is merely rhetorical or metaphorical. Bugeja offers an example: "Through years of corporate pressures and the incessant call of the rat race, he simply forgot that other people have rights."⁷

In this case, it seems as though nothing has been literally forgotten. Bugeja claims that one way that we can identify such cases is that, though they sound reasonable in the third person, they sound absurd in the first. As we shall see, McGrath has a perhaps more compelling explanation of this distinction, and I shall not use it as a criterion.⁸ Nonetheless, I do take the above case as metaphorical, and it can be identified as such by considering the associated phenomenology and behavioral symptoms of forgetting.⁹ Could the person in the example above be *reminded* that people do in fact have rights by some friend, or could he have prevented forgetting that people have rights by writing himself

⁵ Bugeja, "Forgetting Your Scruples," 2892.

⁶ Frances M. Kamm, "The Doctrine of Triple Effect and Why a Rational Agent Need Not Intend the Means to His End," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 74, no. 1 (2000): 21–39; Bugeja, "Forgetting Your Scruples."

⁷ Bugeja, "Forgetting Your Scruples," 2894.

⁸ McGrath, "Forgetting the Difference."

⁹ Bugeja, "Forgetting Your Scruples."

a reminder? Of course not. Such cases seem to somehow fundamentally miss the point.

Considering forgetting as a whole cluster of behaviors and phenomenology has two additional benefits: it is more likely to be directed at forgetting as a concept and not merely as a speech act; and it is more trustworthy if we are using a concept that lacks neat and tidy necessary and sufficient conditions.

1.3 Considerations within Problematic Moral Forgetting

Forgetting has, I hold it, at least two necessary features. The first and most obvious is that remembering has not occurred, that some information has been lost. The second is persistence of identity. Forgetting does not occur when one person knew something, and then a completely different person at a later point does not. It is important here to distinguish between qualitative and numerical identity. Qualitative identity is a matter of degree in similarity between two entities in the properties they hold. A mass-produced rubber ball, for example, may be qualitatively identical to another ball of the same kind, and indeed identical to thousands of such balls. Numerical identity, on the other hand, is categorical; it either obtains or does not, rather than being a matter of degree, and an entity can only be numerically identical with itself.¹⁰

Of these two, it is only numerical identity that is important for remembering and forgetting. A person may be qualitatively very different from their younger self, and loss of information is still forgetting. If numerical identity does not hold, however—if they lose whatever it is that determines who they are—then forgetting is impossible; the later person never held the information which ostensibly has been forgotten.

Previous authors, when considering the puzzle, have looked at it from different perspectives. Bugeja addresses the absurdity of forgetting moral propositions, but Ryle and McGrath address the absurdity of forgetting the difference between right and wrong, where that difference is seen as a capacity, not as a set of propositions.¹¹ According to some views, all knowledge at the level of capacities can be reduced to knowledge of propositions, but this is controversial and I certainly won't presume it here. Moral knowledge being a capacity of the right sort *could* explain why loss of knowledge of a specific moral

¹⁰ Note here that my claim is about entities; I am not claiming that anything which is forgotten can be remembered; rather I am claiming that if the knowledge cannot in principle be remembered because the knowledge is, in structure, of the wrong kind, then it cannot be forgotten either.

¹¹ Bugeja, "Forgetting Your Scruples"; Ryle, "On Forgetting the Difference"; McGrath, "Forgetting the Difference."

proposition is not a case of forgetting,¹² but it is not an explanation for why the capacity itself cannot be forgotten. As Ryle points out with the example of Latin, capacities too can be forgotten.¹³

2. Three Unsuccessful Accounts

2.1 Ryle: Cares and Identity

“What,” Ryle asks us, “is the absurdity in a person forgetting the difference between right and wrong?” Note that the question Ryle is asking is not about forgetting specific moral propositions. He considers knowing the difference between right and wrong “more a mastery of techniques, rather than a possession of information. It is a capacity.”¹⁴

Ryle’s explanation presumes an internalist view whereby moral *knowledge* necessarily includes a motivation:¹⁵ to be able to list accurately which actions are good and which are bad, but not care one jot about the difference between them is to misunderstand morality too fundamentally to obtain the status of knowledge. For Ryle, if one knows the difference between right and wrong one must at least possess (1) “a competence to label correctly” and (2) “an inculcated caring.”¹⁶ It is this second criteria upon which his argument hinges.

Though McGrath interprets Ryle differently, what I find key to Ryle’s account is his emphasis on identity: “A person who becomes less or more conscientious is a somewhat changed person, not a person with an enlarged or diminished stock of anything.”¹⁷ The point for Ryle is not that a change in cares is not a change in information held, and therefore not forgetting (though that is true); the point is that a change in cares entails

¹² Consider if I forget how to do long division, and am then presented with a mathematical question which requires long division but which I’ve never seen before. It is unfair to say that I have forgotten the answer—I have never seen it before; I have forgotten the *capacity*.

¹³ Ryle, “On Forgetting the Difference,” 149-159.

¹⁴ Ryle, “On Forgetting the Difference,” 149.

¹⁵ Although this form of internalism is uncommon in contemporary philosophy, it is entailed by the much more common motivational internalism about moral judgment. It could even be said to be preferable because it is more modest in that can also accommodate, for example, knowledge-first accounts of knowledge (Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000]).

¹⁶ Ryle, “On Forgetting the Difference,” 156.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 156.

a change in person, and therefore is not forgetting. Forgetting occurs when the agent remains constant (in a fundamental sense) and their knowledge or capacity varies. “In a testimonial,” Ryle says, “both personal qualities and equipment need to be mentioned, but the equipment is not mentioned among the personal qualities.” This, though the most direct account of his view, is cryptic: Ryle means that remembering (or “a testimonial”) has conditions on persons themselves (“personal qualities”) as well as what they can do (“equipment”), but states (such as forgetting) regarding what they can do (their “equipment”), can’t be facts about who they are (“personal qualities”).¹⁸

Ryle is a little ambiguous, and he never explicitly discusses numerical identity. I am interpreting him as taking *personal qualities* to mean those qualities that determine your personal identity. It is of course possible that he does not consider cares as part of one’s numerical identity and considers cares only as part of qualitative identity, but then it is very mysterious why it is that anything that involves cares should be impossible to forget. My ability to speak Spanish is a “personal quality” in the sense that it is about me, and part of my qualitative identity, but of course I can forget it.

We should interpret Ryle in the strongest sense, that indicating that moral knowledge is part of someone’s identity by virtue of being one of their cares. This requires a form of essentialist view of personal identity whereby all of a person’s cares are very fundamentally who they are, not just in cases of forgetting but generally. In cases where cares change, personal identity is not maintained. This is a very strong claim, given how much people’s cares typically change over the course of a lifetime (though there remains some ambiguity about how inclusive Ryle is regarding what counts as a care). Even generously using a more restrictive account of cares Ryle’s account seems to problematically overattribute loss of personal identity. Consider the following case:

(1) When Joe was a young man he was deeply in love with his boyfriend, Tomás. For Joe, part of loving Tomás was constituted by caring for him deeply. After a couple of years of dating, Tomas and Joe had a particularly nasty break up and never spoke to each other again. Suffice to say, Joe stopped caring for Tomás.¹⁹

Ryle’s account implies that Later Joe is not the same man as Earlier Joe. He lost his cares, and so became literally a different person. It would be wrong, for example, to even say of the later Joe that “he used to loved Tomás.” Later Joe is a different man. Later Joe has

¹⁸ Ibid. 156.

¹⁹ Ibid. 156.

never loved Tomás. For Ryle, no person has ever fallen out of love, because to stop loving somebody is not lose your love for them, it is for the person who loved them to die and be replaced by a new loveless person. This may be poetic, but it certainly doesn't seem literally true, and I wish good luck to anybody trying to use it in divorce proceedings.

2.2 McGrath: Idiosyncratic Perspectival Blindness

McGrath's own explanation takes a slightly different approach to explaining the apparent absurdity of forgetting the difference between right and wrong.²⁰ McGrath also takes knowing the difference between right and wrong to be a capacity as it requires being "a competent judge" of it in yourself. McGrath makes no presumptions about motivational internalism, however.

McGrath claims that it is very important to distinguish between moral forgetting proper, and the speech act of asserting that you have forgotten a moral fact. In her view one *can* forget the difference between right and wrong, but that the speech act is absurd in the first person. This is due to an idiosyncratic perspectival blindness in admitting the loss of knowledge;²¹ when a person forgets the difference between right and wrong, they simultaneously lose the ability to recognize a good sense of right and wrong.

For McGrath, we can see cases where the puzzles dissolves (i.e. moral forgetting is not absurd) when the capacity being measured (person A's sense of right and wrong) differs from the standard it is being measured against (person B's sense of right and wrong). There is nothing therefore paradoxical about people asserting moral forgetting of other people or of themselves in the past. McGrath gives an example:

The Corruption of my Congressman. When my congressman first ran for elected office, I strongly supported him. That support was in part predicated on my high opinion of his moral sensibility and outlook. Based on his past behavior as a private citizen, I had a high degree of confidence in the moral judgments that he would be disposed to make about (e.g.) policies affecting the poor. In any case, I would have unhesitatingly described him as "someone who knows the difference between right and wrong." However, in the years since he assumed office, I have grown increasingly disillusioned. I now believe that his moral outlook is seriously defective in various ways. It is not that I believe that I was wrong about what his moral outlook was years ago; rather, I think his moral outlook has changed for the worse. I believe that he is no longer disposed

²⁰ McGrath, "Forgetting the Difference."

²¹ Roy Sorensen, *Blindspots* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

to make many of the correct moral judgments that he once would have made. In fact, I describe his evolution like this: “He once knew the difference between right and wrong, but somewhere along the way, he forgot it.”²²

I find this example interesting. I very strongly do not share McGrath’s intuition and very decidedly think that the congressman has *not* literally forgotten anything (though the statement makes sense by virtue of its metaphorical meaning). McGrath is quick to clarify that she does not mean the congressman is behaving in nonideal ways because of political expediency or the like, as that would only be metaphorical forgetting. Granting that, I still think that this case is not true moral forgetting, but for two reasons it is easy to mistake as such. First, it is easy to mistake LRNF for true moral forgetting; the congressman has forgotten what the best policies would be because he has forgotten many nonnormative facts about what life is like for the poor (for example, he has forgotten the material hardship, or lack of opportunity, and so on). Second, the beliefs he is likely to have forgotten (i.e., the poor lack opportunity, and so are poor through lack of effort) are often moralized. Believing that the poor are poor because they don’t work hard enough is not itself a moral belief, but it certainly is a moralized one, in the sense that it can be met with moral outrage.

To be a true example of moral forgetting in the sense we are interested in, the congressman would need to forget what kind of things are good; however, if we imagine him losing pure moral beliefs (i.e., that the poor *deserve* opportunity) then it seems bizarre to describe this as a literal case of forgetting. It makes sense to say when the congressman lost the moralized belief, that he could perhaps go work among the poor and be reminded of it (i.e., “I had completely forgotten how little opportunity there is!”) but it would seem very odd if he worked among the poor and said “I had totally forgotten that poor people *deserve* opportunity!”²³

Furthermore, even if the corrupted congressman case *does* seem like literal forgetting, McGrath’s example would predict that all third-person attributions of moral forgetting

²² Ibid.,

²³ I want to be clear that given that my explanation is of the intuition. There is variety in how people form intuitions and where they draw the line; I am open to considering that maybe McGrath may consider the congressman when they change in their pure moral beliefs (i.e. they used to believe that reducing the material hardship of those in living in poverty is morally important and then stopped) as having *forgotten* something, but I think this will be a minority intuition. As discussed in 3.1, not all moral beliefs are equally important to a person’s numerical identity. To the extent that a person considers moral forgetting in the congressman case possible it will be because they think that moral beliefs regarding policies affecting those living in poverty are not widely held, not subjectively important, not contributing to social relationships, and not emotionally formed.

are unproblematic, which is a much harder pill to swallow in other circumstances. To illustrate, let's return to statement (0) from the introduction:

(0) "Sorry that my sister killed your son. It's such a shame. She's never normally like that and she was so embarrassed when I reminded her that murder is wrong. She's just really forgetful, you see. Only yesterday, she forgot how old she was."

Regardless of whether McGrath's prediction that third-person assertions of moral forgetting are not problematic, how well does her explanation work in the case of first person? As an explanation of the absurdity of first-person assertions of moral forgetting, it is problematic also.

Firstly, the absurdity of recognizing that you yourself have forgotten something only applies in cases where a person's accurate moral sense is replaced by a faulty moral sense. If a person forgets the difference between right and wrong, and is left merely with uncertainty (as in Ryle's example), then there is no paradox of assertion. There is nothing paradoxical about believing "I used to believe something, but I don't know what to believe now, because I have forgotten." Consider a nonmoral parallel: there is nothing contradictory about a person being aware that they used to know Spanish but now have forgotten it, because where before they used to be able to conjure up words upon trying, now when they try nothing comes to mind.

Secondly, it is possible for an agent to introspectively assess their own capacity as incorrect without any external measure. This is because, even by measures available internally, it can be obviously faulty—for example, if it is inconsistent or self-contradictory. A person's intellectual capacity to give an answer is separate from that person also endorsing that answer. Consider the following statement:

(2) I used to be able to do long division, but I think that I've forgotten how. I keep on trying to do this same question and get a different answer every time.

McGrath's diffusion therefore of the problem seems to fail. Closer inspection of third-person attributions of moral forgetting seem equally absurd, against McGrath's prediction, and even in first-person cases would only apply to the subset of cases of where the forgotten moral sense has been replaced by a faulty but internally coherent moral sense.

2.3 Bugeja: Noncognitivist Moral Knowledge

Bugeja aims his discussion of forgetting at the level of knowledge of moral propositions,

rather than the capacity in general.²⁴ However if his noncognitivist explanation is successful about propositions, it thereby functions also at this deeper level.

Bugeja is explicit in refusing to commit himself to many claims often associated with noncognitivism—such as that moral judgments are not beliefs and cannot be true, factive, or representational—in order to leave open a deflationary account of these concepts. Moral judgments, on Bugeja’s specific form of noncognitivism, are a special kind of desire-like attitude that is noncognitive by virtue of lacking informational content.²⁵ There is one possible view, discussed by McGrath, whereby moral knowledge is said to not exist because all knowledge can be forgotten, something which does not obtain in the moral case. Bugeja, to be clear, is *not* doing this. Given the way Bugeja uses the term *moral knowledge*, it is fair to assume that he categorizes himself as alongside “most non-cognitivists (who) will want to say that some of our desire-like attitudes constitute knowledge.” He is *not* trying to diffuse the paradox of moral forgetting by claiming that moral knowledge does not exist; rather, he is claiming that it is predicated on a kind of mental state whose loss is not forgetting because it lacks information.

Bugeja does admit that other noncognitivist states, such as intentions,²⁶ *can* be forgotten, but that the main advantage of such a view (accounting for disagreement) is overstated. It is not exactly clear why Bugeja thinks that desires specifically cannot be forgotten. Perhaps it is because desires do not convey information, but intentions do (though he provides no argument for this).

Even in the very example that he uses, of going to the shops and forgetting that you intended to buy milk, one natural way of understanding the forgetting of intentions would be to cast it in terms of forgetting desires—I forgot that I intended to buy milk *because* I forgot that I wanted milk. Though on some accounts intention does reduce to some set including desires in a simple and straightforward way,²⁷ in most contemporary accounts it does not, so this analysis would be problematic. Nonetheless we can find cases where desires are decidedly not part of an intention and yet have been forgotten. Consider this statement:

²⁴ Bugeja, “Forgetting Your Scruples.”

²⁵ Bugeja says this in response to the threat articulated against such views by James Dreier (“Meta-Ethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 [2004]: 23–44).

²⁶ See Allan Gibbard, “Thinking How to Live,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 72, no. 3 (2006): 729–44.

²⁷ Neil Sinhababu, “The Desire-Belief Account of Intention Explains Everything,” *Noûs* 47 (2013): 680–96. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0068.2012.00864.x

(3) In recognition of Ramadan, Mo fasted from sun-up to sun-down. Throughout the day, Mo was very hungry and thirsty and desired to eat and drink, but, of course, had no intention of doing so until sundown. Whilst he was at work however, he had a particularly hectic day, and was so busy that he forgot he was hungry, though his hunger caused him to be unusually tired and grumpy.

In this case, it seems as though Mo has forgotten about his desire, though not lost the desire itself. He was just too busy to recognize it. This is problematic for Bugeja, because if desires are forgettable, then identifying moral judgments with desire-like attitudes does not explain why forgetting moral knowledge seems so absurd.

Of course, not all expressivists identify moral judgments with desires or intentions, and on some views it seems much more reasonable to claim that their loss does not constitute forgetting. Expressivist views generally however face a further problem. Even granting that an expressivist analysis explains the absurdity of forgetting moral judgments, the absurdity of moral forgetting extends to beliefs about moral judgments. Consider a pair of sentences:

- (4) Anna forgot that random violence was morally bad.
- (5) Anna forgot that she believes that random violence is morally bad.

Insofar as case (4) seems absurd, I take it that case (5) also seems absurd; both seem like conceptual mistakes. On a standard cognitivist reading, the content of both case (4) and case (5) is the same: Anna used to believe that random violence was bad, but then lost that belief through forgetting. This does not explain why moral forgetting seems absurd, but note that cognitivism makes no distinction between the pair; any successful explanation will apply to both. On an expressivist reading, however, the content of these two statements is different; the content of case (4) is that Anna had a special kind of expressivist attitude against random violence; the content of case (5) is that Anna *believes* she has a special kind of expressivist attitude against random violence. The noncognitivist therefore has given no reason why case (5) seems absurd, and furthermore seems absurd in the same way as case (4). To explain the absurdity of case (5), the noncognitivist will have to posit some further explanation as to why beliefs can't be forgotten when they're about moral knowledge, at which point the whole motivation for being a noncognitivist has been lost.

3. My Account

3.1 When Moral Knowledge Cannot Be Forgotten: The True Self

Although I disagree with Ryle that one's cares are too fundamental to one's identity to be

forgotten, I do agree with his general point. I can forget to take my keys to work when I leave in the morning, I can forget my partner's birthday, I can in certain circumstances forget who I am and what I want from life. In short, I can forget knowledge of every single fact *about* myself. What I cannot forget, however, is the very knowledge by which I *am* myself. If in losing some knowledge I literally cease to be the person I was, then I have not *forgotten* anything because the person who held the information previously was not me.

This requires, admittedly, a very strong link between moral knowledge and personal identity. My claim is not that all moral propositions known by an agent are tied to one's identity in this very strong form, nor is it that moral identity is entirely constitutive of one's identity, but that loss of moral knowledge can lead to loss of identity.

There is ample evidence that people typically think of themselves as moral, and that this is central to their own self-concept.²⁸ Indeed this self-conception is fundamental to most cases of cognitive dissonance²⁹ and can even motivate the forgetting of moral rules.³⁰ Making people believe or at least increase the salience of a link between morality and an identity they hold is typically a good way to alter their moral behavior.³¹ General moral deterioration is taken to constitute a larger change than other comparable psychologi-

²⁸ Karl Aquino and Americus Reed, "The Self-Importance of Moral Identity." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83, no. 6 (2002): 1423–40.

²⁹ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, Vol. 2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962).

³⁰ See Lisa L. Shu, Francesca Gino, and Max Bazerman, "Dishonest Deed, Clear Conscience: When Cheating Leads to Moral Disengagement and Motivated Forgetting," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37, no. 3 (2011): 330–49; and Lisa L. Shu and Francesca Gino, "Sweeping Dishonesty under the Rug: How Unethical Actions Lead to Forgetting of Moral Rules," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 6 (2012): 1164–77. To clarify, in these studies it is taken that participants engage in motivated forgetting of moral rules when they break them, but it is unclear how much they identify with the rules being forgotten (they could remember the rules but not agree with them), and furthermore they're not forgetting if the rules are true, but rather which rules the moral code ascribed to (i.e. participants could believe in the principle, but not remember that they were part of the code they were told to remember).

³¹ This effect exists when they believe that they are good people in the abstract. Making people consider their own recent, concrete moral behaviors can lead to a licensing effect, which leads to less prosocial behavior (see Paul Conway and Johanna Peetz, "When Does Feeling Moral Actually Make You a Better Person? Conceptual Abstraction Moderates whether Past Moral Deeds Motivate Consistency or Compensatory Behavior," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38, no. 7 (2012): 907–19). For a review, see Steven G. Hertz and Tobias Krettenauer, "Does Moral Identity Effectively Predict Moral Behavior? A Meta-Analysis," *Review of General Psychology* 20, no. 2 (2016): 129–40.

cal traits³² and specifically a deterioration in moral values is taken to constitute a larger change than a loss of memory or narrative self, even when an agent's moral change was the result of that agent's decision.³³

Though all this does show that morality is typically linked to identity, it does not itself demonstrate that losing moral knowledge is taken to pose a challenge to a person's numerical identity. Interestingly, when asked about a more modest link between morality and identity, many of the participants were very willing to assign some kind of moral core this stronger determinative role:

“His moral code and personality is what made him who he was. If that changes then the person changes with it.”³⁴

“Our moral conscience, our moral compass, is a huge component of what makes up our identity and our soul.”

“The surgery resulted in Jim losing his moral conscience and his ability to empathize with the sufferings of others. These are essential aspects of personal identity so I concluded that in a profound way Jim is no longer himself after the surgery.”³⁵

The target of interest here is specifically the factors that constitute *numerical* identity, the facts that you are you, not the amount of similarity, or *qualitative* identity. Few authors use the terminology of numerical identity when discussing the true self.³⁶ Some of the research is ambiguous. For example, people discussing real-life friends or family suffering neurodegenerative diseases were most likely to say that they no longer knew them, that they felt like a stranger, that they were no longer the same person underneath, and the change was deeper in cases of moral—compared to other kinds of psychological—

³² Nina Strohminger and Shaun Nichols, “The Essential Moral Self,” *Cognition* 131, no. 1 (2014): 159–71; Sarah Molouki and Daniel M. Bartels, “Personal Change and the Continuity of the Self,” *Cognitive Psychology* 93 (2017): 1–17.

³³ Jesse J. Prinz and Shaun Nichols, “Diachronic Identity and the Moral Self,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the Social Mind*, ed. Julian Kiverstein (New York: Routledge, 2016).

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ Strohminger and Nichols, “Essential Moral Self,”

³⁶ Though some very explicitly do; see, for example Larisa Heiphetz, Nina Strohminger, and Liane L. Young, “The Role of Moral Beliefs, Memories, and Preferences in Representations of Identity,” *Cognitive Science* 41, no. 3 (2017): 744–67.

deterioration;³⁷ these statements, like the quotes above, can be taken to point toward numerical identity, but certainly don't prove it. However, many of the proxies used to ask about the true self are more directly measures of numerical identity: for example, asking which attributes would survive reincarnation, would swap bodies if a person's soul moved bodies, and determine if a hypothetical Jim is still Jim after brain surgery. When asked in these ways, people gave the same response as when they were asked directly about people's true self: moral deterioration was a greater challenge to identity persisting than loss of perceptual capacities, desires, (nonmoral) cognitive capacities, personality, memory, or experiences.³⁸ There are other reasons to think that people are using the true self to mean numerical identity. For example, misanthropes with very negative explicit beliefs about people still believe that the true self is good, which would be obviously contradictory if they're using the true self to mean qualitative identity. Similarly, the fact that the true self is seen as immutable and generally essentialist³⁹ is bizarre if they're describing qualitative identity, as qualitative identity obviously changes dramatically over a lifetime. Indeed, the only group who systematically dispute that the true self is good are not those with different beliefs about people, but rather those with a psychopathic attitude toward morality itself.⁴⁰

The claim is not that a person's fundamental identity is entirely determined by their moral core generally. But moral deterioration does seem to threaten the persistence of identity especially. Compared to moral improvements or morally neutral changes, moral deterioration is considered quantitatively more of a change to identity⁴¹ and a change at much more fundamental level of identity.⁴²

³⁷ Nina Strohminger and Shaun Nichols, "Neurodegeneration and Identity," *Psychological Science* 26, no. 9 (2015): 1469–79.

³⁸ Strohminger and Nichols, "Essential Moral Self."

³⁹ Andrew G. Christy, Rebecca J. Schlegel, and Andrei Cimpian, "The Essence of the Individual: The Pervasive Belief in the True Self Is an Instance of Psychological Essentialism," preprint, submitted October 24, 2017. Retrieved from psyarxiv.com/k3jba.

⁴⁰ Nina Strohminger and Shaun Nichols, "Psychopathy and the Moral Self," unpublished manuscript, 2016.

⁴¹ Molouki and Bartels, "Personal Change"; Strohminger and Nichols, "Essential Moral Self"; Prinz and Nichols, "Diachronic Identity."

⁴² George E. Newman, Paul Bloom, and Joshua Knobe, "Value Judgments and the True Self," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (2014): 203–16; Kevin Patrick Tobia, "Personal Identity, Direction of Change, and Neuroethics," *Neuroethics* 9, no. 1 (2016): 37–43; Strohminger and Nichols, "Essential Moral Self."

Most of these studies have taken moral deterioration to be a singular entity, counting together changes in moral judgment which could be considered loss of moral knowledge (i.e., from egalitarian to racist) with moral changes in behavior, which may be accompanied by no change in moral judgment (i.e., from monogamous to promiscuous), and in a couple of cases even changes in moralized nonnormative beliefs (i.e., from skepticism to belief in global warming). Usefully for our purposes here, some have separated these more rigorously, and have equally found that deterioration in moral belief (and so loss of moral knowledge) is typically more likely to be seen as a change in numeric identity than an improvement in moral belief⁴³ (Newman, Bloom and Knobe, 2013) or changes in other comparable psychological traits.⁴⁴

The conception of people's true self as good seems remarkably stable. There is no significant difference in its belief when made about hypothetical third parties or the self,⁴⁵ and it is believed regarding out-group members, even out-group members who are considered stereotypically aggressive.⁴⁶ This suggests that it is not reasoning motivated by a desire to protect positive images of loved ones.

But what is it that is perceived to be happening in cases of moral deterioration? People switch relatively regularly between behaving morally and immorally within their lives. The idea here is not that they are performing a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde routine, where their selves are entirely split between two personalities, their good true self and another evil self. It is that only good behavior *stems* from their true self. A man who says that $2+2=5$ because he is commanded to say so when under hypnosis has not forgotten that $2+2=4$; rather, his assertion that $2+2=5$ does not truly reflect him.

The emphasis used to test loss of moral knowledge in these studies has emphasized loss of knowledge of moral propositions (though not exclusively), but if loss of knowledge of moral propositions constitutes change in identity, then so does loss of the capacity to form moral knowledge. After all, moral knowledge of propositions is formed by an appropriate ability to form knowledge, so if loss of the former constitutes loss of self, so should the latter. Admittedly the evidence doesn't directly demonstrate this, but *how* a moral judgment is formed is taken to be fundamental to its legitimacy. Therefore, approaching it in an inappropriate fashion can cause outrage regardless of the judgment

⁴³ Newman, Bloom, and Knobe,

⁴⁴ Strohminger and Nichols, "Essential Moral Self"

⁴⁵ Prinz and Nichols, "Diachronic Identity."

⁴⁶ Julian De Freitas and Mina Cikara, "Deep Down My Enemy Is Good: Thinking about the True Self Reduces Intergroup Bias," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 74 (2018): 307–16.

reached.⁴⁷ It is, I think, reasonable to assume that somebody who used to know the difference between right and wrong, and then lost this capacity, would be fundamentally a different person even if they had a string of lucky guesses on moral questions or continued to often behave morally out of self-interest.

Of course, when it comes specifically to the question of forgetting the difference between right and wrong, McGrath discusses the idea of it requiring some specific threshold of accuracy in moral beliefs. It is of course possible that if one considers a very high level of accuracy as a requirement for knowing the difference between right and wrong (one that is higher than the accuracy required to affect conceptions of selfhood) then there may be cases of intuitively reasonable moral forgetting (because the moral loss is too minor to threaten the True Self). It is important not to get too tied up in the question of specifically how accurate the capacity need be;⁴⁸ the key point is that the structure is integral to one's identity, and to the extent that it is lost or damaged, the stability of an agent's fundamental identity is challenged, which can preclude forgetting.

Taken together, all this suggests that insofar as any meaningful concept of persistent identity exists, morality and moral knowledge are key to it, such that their loss can constitute a change in identity. Importantly though, not all kinds of moral judgment contribute equally to the true self. Newman, Bloom, and Knobe found that (though by far truth of moral belief was most important) there was also a slight tendency to consider emotional moral judgments as more reflective of the essential self than rational ones.⁴⁹ Heiphetz, Strohminger, and Young found three main factors which affect whether moral changes are important or not:⁵⁰ changes in widely held moral beliefs were seen

⁴⁷ Alan Page Fiske and Philip E. Tetlock, "Taboo Trade-Offs: Reactions to Transactions That Transgress the Spheres of Justice," *Political Psychology* 18, no. 2 (1997): 255–97; Jonathan Baron and Mark Spranca, "Protected Values," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 70, no. 1 (1997): 1–16; Tetlock et al., "The Psychology of the Unthinkable: Taboo Trade-Offs, Forbidden Base Rates, and Heretical Counterfactuals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78, no. 5 (2000): 853–70.

⁴⁸ I suspect that precisely how morally accurate one need be to be considered "knowing the difference between right and wrong" is deeply subjective and not really worthy of philosophical discussion.

⁴⁹ Newman, Bloom, and Knobe, "Value Judgments."

⁵⁰ Heiphetz, Strohminger, and Young, "Role of Moral Beliefs." The authors seem to imply that the measure they use is of numerical identity, comparing it to the concept of identity used widely in social psychology. They asked people to rate from 0 ("remain the same person as before") to 100 ("completely different now") the amount of change undergone. I think that this measure, though not a measure of social identity, is at best ambiguous as numeric identity because it can easily be seen as qualitative identity. Given that participants in other studies emphasized the same features when asked about it in this ambiguous way as when asked about direct measures of numerical identity, we have good reason to suspect that the features

to represent a more significant change to identity than changes in controversial moral beliefs (which were not even significantly more linked to changes in identity than loss of memory); changes that were subjectively important to the people undergoing them were seen as more significant by participants than changes that were not subjectively important; and finally, moral changes that affected social relationships were seen as changing identity more than changes that didn't affect social relationships.

3.2 When Moral Knowledge Can Be Forgotten: Two Cases

The next task, therefore, is to try to find cases where moral knowledge can be forgotten. Moral knowledge is varied and complexly formed, and my claim here is that it sometimes (at least in part) is the result of various processes that can fail to obtain due to forgetting (in ways that do not challenge the true self). Therefore moral knowledge, I take it, can be forgotten. I give two examples of moral knowledge being forgotten, and explain the structure of them: (1) when moral knowledge requires remembering an emotional trigger, and (2) when moral knowledge requires remembering a conclusion justified through lengthy reflection. Both of these processes, we have strong reason to believe, play some causal role in the formation of moral judgments, at least sometimes, which I explain. I do not believe that these two structures are the only ways of forming moral knowledge where moral forgetting can be said to occur, but they are the strongest cases I can think of.

I have endeavored as far as possible to make both examples cases where the moral knowledge is not emotionally formed, widely held, subjectively important to identity, or affecting social relationships to ensure that the true self is not threatened and forgetting is possible. This has the unfortunate effect that my examples of moral knowledge (veganism and luck egalitarianism) may be disputed by readers as being true, but being *controversial* moral truths is an unfortunate necessity. For what it is worth, though, both examples I use are drawn from first-person experience.

My first case is the following:

(6) Kim has always known that eating meat causes the death and pain of animals, but had never considered it immoral to eat meat. Many of her friends are vegan but most are not, so socially speaking, being vegan or a meat eater is relatively easy either way. One day Kim visited a slaughterhouse and, for the first time, actually saw a live pig be killed for meat. There's no new fact which Kim learned, and Kim struggled to explain it logically, but somehow actually seeing an animal die in front of her own eyes changed her perspective, and she

found in this study are central to numerical identity.

decided that she must become vegan.

The next morning, however, Kim awoke, and performed her normal Sunday morning ritual of going with her flatmates for a fry-up. Instinctively she ordered her habitual full English breakfast replete with bacon and eggs. One of her friends turned to her and said, “I thought going to the slaughterhouse made you vegan.” In a sudden rush, embarrassed, Kim remembered seeing the pigs die the day before and hurriedly changed her order.

It is, I think, implausible to claim that Kim had forgotten that bacon is made from pigs, nor that pigs feel pain. She had not forgotten the fact; she had forgotten the emotional trigger. That emotional trigger caused her to have an emotional response that caused her to reach a conclusion on the moral status of eating meat. In my experience, the case above is actually very common; most vegans and vegetarians (including myself) have forgotten that they think meat is immoral at some point, typically when they first started changing their diet, and there are plentiful examples online that explicitly refer to this moral epistemic loss as forgetting.⁵¹

This labeling presumes that emotion can play a causal role in forming moral judgments. I think we have very good reason to believe this. For example, when considering highly emotionally evocative cases, people often are completely unable to articulate a justification for their moral beliefs, though they consider one appropriate.⁵² Priming and manipulation of emotions, particularly disgust, have a strong influence on moral judgments.⁵³

⁵¹ Nina Marinello, “I Almost Forgot . . . I’m a Vegetarian” timesunion (blog), August 17, 2010. Retrieved from <https://blog.timesunion.com/healthyprofessor/i-almost-forgot-im-a-vegetarian/249/>; [Martinez \[AU: Please create a reference list entry for Martinez 2016 and complete this note.\]](#)

⁵² Haidt, Jonathan, Fredrik Björklund, and Scott Murphy. “Moral Dumbfounding: When Intuition Finds No Reason,” unpublished manuscript, University of Virginia, 2000; Jonathan Haidt and Matthew A. Hersh, “Sexual Morality: The Cultures and Emotions of Conservatives and Liberals,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 31, no. 1 (2001): 191–221; Edward B. Royzman, Kwanwoo Kim, and Robert F. Leeman, “The Curious Tale of Julie and Mark: Unraveling the Moral Dumbfounding Effect,” *Judgment and Decision Making* 10, no. 4 (2015): 296–313; Uhlmann, Eric L., and Luke [Lei] Zhu, “Acts, Persons, and Intuitions: Person-Centered Cues and Gut Reactions to Harmless Transgressions,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 5, no. 3 (2014): 279–85.

⁵³ Schnall et al., “Disgust as Embodied Moral Judgment,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34, no. 8 (2008): 1096–1109; Thalia Wheatley and Jonathan Haidt, “Hypnotic Disgust Makes Moral Judgments More Severe,” *Psychological Science* 16, no. 10 (2005): 780–84; Kendall J. Eskine, Natalie A. Kacinik, and Jesse J. Prinz, “A Bad Taste in the Mouth: Gustatory Disgust Influences Moral Judgment,” *Psychological Science* 22, no. 3 (2011): 295–99; Simone Schnall, Jennifer Benton, and Sophie Harvey, “With a Clean Conscience: Cleanliness Reduces the Severity of Moral Judgments,” *Psychological Science* 19, no. 12 (2008):

Emotional deficits have long been associated with systematically different patterns of moral judgment⁵⁴ and brain areas associated with emotional processing are associated with moral judgment (Blair, Marsh, Finger and Blair).⁵⁵ Reduced emotional salience is thought to explain why systematically different moral judgments are made when working in a second language (Hayakawa, Tannenbaum and Costa, 2017).⁵⁶

Two people may know the exact same facts, and even agree about what moral conclusions should be drawn from facts of that kind in the abstract, but come to different conclusions in practice, because moral knowledge can rely on the causal influence of an emotional response, and the trigger for that response can be forgotten.

However, just because moral judgement is often emotional in nature does not mean that it is never reflective. My second example emphasizes this:

(7) Gavin strongly believes that criminals ought to be very heavily punished, though he has never interacted with anybody in prison and has no desire to do so. Gavin hears on the news one day the case of a convict who was hospitalized in prison by beatings by other inmates. Gavin feels some natural sympathy for the man who was hurt, but does not think that it's unfair—prison is a

1219–22; Piercarlo Valdesolo and David DeSteno, “Manipulations of Emotional Context Shape Moral Judgment,” *Psychological Science* 17, no. 6 (2006): 476–77.

⁵⁴ R. J. R. Blair, “A Cognitive Developmental Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath,” *Cognition* 57, no. 1 (1995): 1–29; for a review, see Mario F. Mendez, “The Neurobiology of Moral Behavior: Review and Neuropsychiatric Implications,” *CNS Spectrums* 14, no. 11 (2009): 608–20.

⁵⁵ Blair, J., Marsh, A. A., Finger, E., Blair, K. S., & Luo, J. (2006). Neuro-cognitive systems involved in morality. *Philosophical Explorations*; Jean Decety, Kalina J. Michalska, and Katherine D. Kinzler, “The Contribution of Emotion and Cognition to Moral Sensitivity: A Neurodevelopmental Study,” *Cerebral Cortex* 22, no. 1 (2011): 209–20; Michael Koenigs et al., “Damage to the Prefrontal Cortex Increases Utilitarian Moral Judgements,” *Nature* 446, no. 7138 (2007): 908–11; Liane Young and Michael Koenigs, “Investigating Emotion in Moral Cognition: A Review of Evidence from Functional Neuroimaging and Neuropsychology,” *British Medical Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (2007): 69–79; Joshua D. Greene et al., “An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment,” *Science* 293, no. 5537 (2001): 2105–8; Joshua Greene and Jonathan Haidt, “How (and Where) Does Moral Judgment Work?” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 6, no. 12 (2002): 517–23;

⁵⁶ Costa, A., Foucart, A., Hayakawa, S., Aparici, M., Apesteguia, J., Heafner, J., & Keysar, B. (2014). Your morals depend on language. *PloS one* (2014): e94842; Hayakawa, S., Costa, A., Foucart, A., & Keysar, B. (2016). Using a foreign language changes our choices. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 20 (11), 791-793; Hayakawa, Sayuri, David Tannenbaum, Albert Costa, Joanna D. Corey, and Boaz Keysar. “Thinking more or feeling less? Explaining the foreign-language effect on moral judgment.” *Psychological science* 28, no. 10 (2017): 1387-1397.

punishment so it is appropriate that it is a dangerous and horrible place to be. His friend, Victoria, says that this is bad, that it's important that all crimes be punished equally. Gavin agrees but says that part of the punishment of prison is the equal *risk* of violence by other inmates. This sparks a long debate about luck egalitarianism. When considering other cases Gavin strongly feels like having an equal chance at something which is determined by luck is not true equality—for example, it would not be true that all children have an equal chance to succeed in life if, completely randomly, some schools are excellent and some are terrible. Considering a variety of such cases, and because Gavin wants to be consistent, he decides, in line with his natural sympathy, that the beating the hospitalized inmate took was unfair, and that prison being such a violent place is not fair. Nonetheless, he maintains that protecting the rights of convicted criminals is not a moral priority.

Two weeks later, Gavin is listening to the news on the radio, and hears about a pedophile being killed in prison by the other inmates. At first, he thinks that this is fine, because after all prison is supposed to be an awful place. He has forgotten his discussion with Victoria, as well as his resultant moral belief that prisoners harming each other is morally undesirable. Victoria says that the death is an injustice, and Gavin is instantly reminded of the conclusion he reached after discussion with Victoria.

In the above case I think that it is fair to say that Gavin forgot some moral knowledge. The conclusion he reaches on reflection is unobvious in that it differs from his immediate reaction to the question, so it can be forgotten. Despite all the evidence presented that emotion can play a role in forming moral judgments, it is worth noting that immediate emotion does a poor job as a comprehensive explanation. For example, while it is impressive that in Wheatley and Haidt some participants gave negative moral evaluation to entirely morally neutral behavior because of hypnosis-induced disgust,⁵⁷ it is important to remember that the vast majority felt disgust and yet did not give such an evaluation. Similarly, though some studies have found that generalized emotional priming affects moral judgment,⁵⁸ in other situations it appears that the emotion has to have been elicited in an appropriately relevant way.⁵⁹ Clearly, the impact of emotion on moral judgment reached is being moderated somehow.

⁵⁷ Wheatley and Haidt, “Hypnotic Disgust.”

⁵⁸ Schnall et al., “With a Clean Conscience.”

⁵⁹ Daniel C. Wisneski and Linda J. Skitka, “Moralization through Moral Shock: Exploring Emotional Antecedents to Moral Conviction,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 43, no. 2 (2017): 139–50.

There is also—as one would expect if moral judgments are sometimes formed through reflection—a well-noted effect of time naturally used to make a decision on a moral judgment. People naturally have different reaction times depending on their moral judgment,⁶⁰ and moral judgment can be manipulated by altering time available.⁶¹ Though early accounts that explained this in terms of utilitarian versus deontological responses may be mistaken, and the driving factor is resolution of intuition conflict,⁶² the fact that the time taken to form a moral judgment affects its outcome is not under dispute. Directly applying cognitive load to impair reflection also systematically changes moral judgments,⁶³ and the tendency toward more reflective decision making generally is associated with making different kinds of moral judgments.⁶⁴

It also seems like people try to correct their own moral judgments for biases. Something as simple as consciously telling participants to be more “rational” as opposed to “intuitive” leads to different moral judgments.⁶⁵ And though people’s moral judgments are often affected by factors they themselves consider irrelevant, when presented with

⁶⁰ Greene et al., “An fMRI Investigation.”

⁶¹ Renata S. Suter and Ralph Hertwig, “Time and Moral Judgment,” *Cognition* 119, no. 3 (2011): 454–58; Denise Dellarosa Cummins and Robert C. Cummins, “Emotion and Deliberative Reasoning in Moral Judgment,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 3, no. 3 (2012): 10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00328.

⁶² Jonathan McGuire et al., “A Reanalysis of the Personal/Impersonal Distinction in Moral Psychology Research,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45, no. 3 (2009): 577–80; Jonathan Baron and Burcu Gürçay, “A Meta-analysis of Response-Time Tests of the Sequential Two-Systems Model of Moral Judgment,” *Memory and Cognition* 45, no. 4 (2017): 566–75.

⁶³ Joshua D. Greene et al., “Cognitive Load Selectively Interferes with Utilitarian Moral Judgment,” *Cognition* 107, no. 3 (2008): 1144–54; Bastien Trémolière, Wim De Neys, and Jean-François Bonnefon, “Mortality Salience and Morality: Thinking about Death Makes People Less Utilitarian,” *Cognition* 124, no. 3 (2012): 379–84; Bastien Trémolière and Jean-François Bonnefon, “Efficient Kill-Save Ratios Ease Up the Cognitive Demands on Counterintuitive Moral Utilitarianism,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, no. 7 (2014): 923–30; Paul Conway and Bertram Gawronski, “Deontological and Utilitarian Inclinations in Moral Decision Making: A Process Dissociation Approach,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 104, no. 2 (2013): 216–35.

⁶⁴ Edward B. Royzman, Justin F. Landy, and Robert F. Leeman, “Are Thoughtful People More Utilitarian? CRT as a Unique Predictor of Moral Minimalism in the Dilemmatic Context,” *Cognitive Science* 39, no. 2 (2015): 325–52; Joseph M. Paxton, Leo Ungar, and Joshua D. Greene, “Reflection and Reasoning in Moral Judgment,” *Cognitive Science* 36, no. 1 (2012): 163–77; Joseph M. Paxton, Tommaso Bruni, and Joshua D. Greene, “Are ‘Counter-intuitive’ Deontological Judgments Really Counter-intuitive? An Empirical Reply,” *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 9, no. 9 (2013): 1368–71.

⁶⁵ David A. Pizarro, Eric Uhlmann, and Paul Bloom, “Causal Deviance and the Attribution of Moral Responsibility,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 39, no. 6 (2003): 653–60.

the dilemmas in such a way that this fact becomes obvious they form more consistent judgments.⁶⁶

The very least that can be drawn from this is that formation of moral judgment is not entirely an immediate and direct process. It is often mediated by reflection. Some dual process theories emphasize that this is a higher-level so-called System 2 rational process,⁶⁷ while others claim that it is merely resolution of conflict of intuitions;⁶⁸ while others still deny this dichotomy.⁶⁹ What is not in doubt, however, is that moral judgment, and therefore moral knowledge also, can involve reflection. This is important because reflections can be forgotten—we can forget the conclusions of reflective processes, we can forget even to reflect at all in the first place—and in this we have another way in which moral knowledge can be lost.

I leave it as an open question whether the knowledge Gavin has forgotten is formed by weighing and considering new intuitions or by some more complex reasoning process, but in either case, moral knowledge was forgotten.

It is important that in both cases (Vegan Kim in 6 and Luck Egalitarian Gavin in 7) that the agent forgot the moral knowledge and then remembered it after being reminded. This is important because of the presence of other behavioral phenomena associated with forgetting allows us to be more confident in believing the case is truly one of forget-

⁶⁶ Tania Lombrozo, “The Role of Moral Commitments in Moral Judgment.” *Cognitive Science* 33, no. 2 (2009): 273–86; Eric Luis Uhlmann, David A. Pizarro, David Tannenbaum, and Peter H. Ditto, “The Motivated Use of Moral Principles,” *Judgment and Decision Making* 4, no. 6 (2009): 476–91; Bartels, Daniel M. “Principled Moral Sentiment and the Flexibility of Moral Judgment and Decision Making.” *Cognition* 108, no. 2 (2008): 381–417.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Fiery Cushman, Liane Young, and Joshua D. Greene, “Our Multi-System Moral Psychology: Towards a Consensus View,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Psychology*, edited by John M. Doris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47–71; and Fiery Cushman, “Action, Outcome, and Value: A Dual-System Framework for Morality.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 17, no. 3 (2013): 273–92.

⁶⁸ See Jonathan Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment,” *Psychological Review* 108, no. 4 (2001): 814–34; and Jonathan Haidt and Fredrik Björklund, “Social Intuitionists Answer Six Questions about Morality,” in *Moral Psychology*, Vol. 2, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, 118–218 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

⁶⁹ See Chelsea Helion and David A. Pizarro, “Beyond Dual-Processes: The Interplay of Reason and Emotion in Moral Judgment,” in *Handbook of Neuroethics*, ed. Jens Clausen and Neil Levy (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2015), 109–25; and Andreas Glöckner and Cilia Wittman, “Beyond Dual-Process Models: A Categorisation of Processes Underlying Intuitive Judgement and Decision Making,” *Thinking and Reasoning* 16, no. 1 (2010): 1–25.

ting and not merely the metaphorical use of language. It is also worth noting that in both cases the process that fails to obtain through forgetting is one which is causally *part of forming the moral judgment*. Kim and Gavin did not forget a nonnormative belief used to reach a moral conclusion or merely a moralized belief. The beliefs that have been forgotten are themselves true moral beliefs (eating meat is wrong, and prisoners should not be harmed by each other).

Fundamentally the point is this: moral judgments do not seem to be formed so unusually, so the structure would be an unlikely explanation of the absurdity of their being forgotten. Most of the previous literature on moral forgetting has focused on extreme examples of moral forgetting (i.e., forgetting the difference between right and wrong, forgetting that infidelity is immoral) that they threaten the numerical identity of the agent holding the belief. But when we control for the threat to the true self by considering less extreme cases of moral forgetting we find cases where moral knowledge can be forgotten. Previous authors have taken the puzzle of moral forgetting to support or challenge various views about the nature of moral judgment, but broadly, our intuitions regarding moral forgetting's absurdity are responding to our implicit attitudes about identity, not illuminating anything about the nature of moral judgment. Insofar as the intuitive absurdity of moral forgetting is taken to be a desideratum regarding the truth of meta-ethical theories, neither moral cognitivism nor motivational externalism is challenged.

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