Self-evidence in Ethics. From Intuitions to Emotions

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2018

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor, professor Luca Fonnesu. I would have neither started this project without his initial inputs, nor I would have finished it without the ideal combination of competence, trust and freedom which he has provided.

I want to thank all the members of the Department of Humanities of University of Pavia. For insightful exchanges, I am grateful to professor Sergio Filippo Magni and to professor Tommaso Piazza. I have also benefited from fruitful discussions with my PhD colleagues - too many to be listed – and from the excellent collaboration of the offices of the Department of Humanities of University of Pavia. Last but not least, professor Carlo Penco, coordinator of the FINO-Consortium, has provided precious organizational support during the final phase of the course.

I owe a special debt to professor Fabrice Teroni - I will be always grateful to him for insights and for the feedbacks -, to professor Julien Deonna and to all participants of the Thumos Seminar at the University of Geneva.

I wish to thank Professor Robert Audi that I was lucky to meet both in Rome and in South Bend, Indiana, during my visit at the University of Notre Dame. My huge debt toward him is evident throughout the research.

I am also very grateful to Professor Paolo Pagani, to Professor Carmelo Vigna and to all the members of the CISE seminars of the University of Venice, from whom I learned more than what they could imagine.

During the second and the third year of my Ph.D. program, I had the incredible opportunity of taking part in the activities of the Swiss *Centre interdisciplinaire of sciences affectives* (CISA) as associate member. I learned a lot not only from philosophers but from scholars of more or less related fields as well.

More personally, I am grateful to all my family, parents, in-laws and friends who have supported me during these years.

I want to dedicate this work to my wife Flavia – only those whose partner has written a PhD-thesis know how much patience and support are needed - and to my son Bernardo – born during the final stages of the writing of the dissertation.

Domodossola-Pavia, September 2018

Introduction

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". The opening lines of the United States Declaration of Independence, approved by the Congress on the 4th of July 1776, emphatically affirm that the spirt of the Declaration is based on self-evident truths. In an article published on 5 July 2016 in *The Washington Post* two hundred forty years later, John Inazu, professor of law at the Washington University in St. Louis, claims that we disagree today on these self-evident truths, as we did when the Declaration was approved. He contrasts the optimistic assertion of the Declaration with the current problems that the USA faces – that concern, for instance, the role of religion in the public life as much as the value of the life and of liberty – and that undermine the claim to an agreement on the underpinnings of the State. 'How should we approach these challenges when we think about being a nation joined together by "self-evident" truths?' wonders Inazu – 'our lack of agreement about […] Equality, Liberty, and Happiness raises significant challenges for how we identify and prioritize our common interests and shared goals'. Following the article, we can conclude that the problem for those who appeal to self-evidence is that the existence of self-evident truths is not itself self-evident.

The problem of self-evidence in ethics, a topic of much discussion in contemporary moral philosophy, is the issue with which I will deal in the present work. Specifically, I will analyze and discuss the relationship between self-evidence – to be understood as a property of propositions– and intuitions – to be understood as mental sates by which those propositions are apprehended. According to a long-standing philosophical tradition, intuitions are major routes to self-evidence. A great variety of articles and books has been published on the topic and the attention paid to intuitions and self-evidence, together and separately, has grown over the past few decades. Nonetheless, much work in this direction is still needed. The importance of the topic is due to the fact that it also plays role at a non-philosophical level. If few people know what self-evidence is, most people, or perhaps everybody, have intuitions in many aspects of their lives, especially in ethics. Clarifying what intuitions are, what self-evidence is, and how they relate to each other, therefore provides us with elements for understanding non-philosophical moral thought and our morality in general.

In the first chapter, I will present how self-evidence and intuition have been conceived within the tradition of ethical intuitionism. The aim of this

chapter is not merely reconstructive, but it will introduce some relevant theoretical tools that will be used in the course of the inquiry.

On one hand, the goal of the research is that of providing a critical framework for the current debate on intuitions and self-evidence. On the other, it will put forth arguments for defending the plausibility of self-evidence in ethics by submitting two claims. One, that will be advanced in chapter four, concerns the way in which we are entitled to believe self-evident propositions; the other, in chapter five, argues for a model of self-evidence that is compatible with, or at least not at odds to, emotions.

These two theses are rooted in the claim, that I defend in the second chapter (and partially in the first) that intuitions and self-evidence are necessarily implicated and that it is not possible to conceive the one without the other. As I will argue, intuitions are the *ratio cognoscendi* of self-evident propositions, and self-evident propositions are the *ratio essendi* of intuitions. As I said above this is a traditional thesis, held in ethics by ethical intuitionism. If the thesis is established, however, the way of demonstrating it is quite unusual: it is based on the distinction between understanding and knowledge.

Let us now consider the plan of the work in detail.

In the first part of the thesis, the first and the second chapter are devoted, respectively, to self-evidence and to intuitions, though the two are closely intertwined: considering the one is often not possible without referring to the other. In particular, the first chapter is mainly reconstructive while the second, though it presents the contemporary debate on intuitions, endorse the claim that intuitions have a double nature and that, depending on the case, they can be both beliefs or seemings.

In the first section of the first chapter (1.1) I give some introductory notions of self-evidence in ethics, I focus on the analogy between ethical and mathematical propositions and I explain why the search for certainty has been deemed so important in the history of ethics. In 1.2 I introduce ethical intuitionism, making use of the well-known taxonomy – perceptual intuitionism, dogmatic intuitionism and philosophical intuitionism – proposed by Henry Sidgwick in *The Methods of Ethics*. I shall also make use of the distinction between methodological and epistemological intuitionism formulated by John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and re-proposed by Bernard Williams in *What Does Intuitionism Imply*? (1995). However, while Williams claims that a perceptual kind of intuitionism accounts better for our moral experience than a "mathematical" kind of intuitionism based on self-evidence, I argue further that the latter claim can fit with our ethical experience. Section 1.3 presents an overview of the history of contemporary

intuitionism, from Sidgwick (1.3.1) to W.D. Ross (1.3.4), passing through G.E. Moore (1.3.2) and H. A. Prichard (1.3.3). I conclude that ethical intuitionists of the first half of the twentieth century provide a correct but incomplete framework both of intuitions and of self-evidence. In section 1.4 I outline Robert Audi's account of self-evidence In 1.4.1 I single out three categories of self-evident propositions: analytical propositions, conceptual propositions and commonsensical propositions; in 1.4.2 I emphasize the relation between self-evidence and apriori. In 1.5 I show how the self-evident and apriori character of ethical propositions does not imply their infallibility, while in 1.6 I consider an argument provided by Stratton Lake that reduce self-evidence to intuitions.

The second chapter is devoted to the nature of intuition and defends the following thesis: intuitions are nothing but mental states that target self-evident propositions. Mental states that do not target self-evident propositions and that are usually called intuitions are rather intuitive beliefs, perceptions and desires. As previously stated, it is widely known that the current debate on intuitions has been monopolized by two opposing tendencies that treat intuitions either as beliefs or as seemings. In 2.1 I argue that both reductive theories of intuitions – that tend to consider intuitions as beliefs and – non-reductive theories of intuitions that consider them as sui generis metal states provide only a partial explanation of what intuitions are because they fail to acknowledge the difference between intuitions and intuitive mental states. A great part of the chapter will be devoted to the defense of this claim. In 2.2 I examine the epistemic authority of intuitions and I distinguish between intuitions that have an epistemic weight, intuitions that play an epistemic role and intuitions that have an epistemic role. I then argue that intuitions are evidence for our beliefs, and in 2.2.2 explain in what sense intuitions can be evidence. The core of the argument comes in 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, where I argue that intuitions, due to their evidential status in the process of justification and knowledge, are seemings that target self-evident propositions. In 2.4 I introduce the difference between knowledge and understanding and argue that knowing a self-evident proposition is the final step of the process of adequate understanding and that it implies acknowledging the proposition's truth. In 2.4 I claim that intuitions have a double nature and that they can be conceived at the occurrence as episodic intuitions and as doxastic intuitions.

The third chapter considers three objections against intuitionism, each of which could be neutralized by the claim that intuitions and self-evidence are necessarily tied. In section 3.1 I consider the objection of relativity, in 3.2 the objection of disagreement and in 3.3 the objection of moral motivation. I claim that conceiving intuitions as targeting self-evident propositions – if self-

evidence is defined correctly – intuitionism could be defended against the first two objections. A reply to the third objection is more complex and requires further analysis. If our model of self-evidence can provide a plausible reply to two versions of the motivation objection – those provided by Nowell-Smith (1954) and Mackie (1977) presented in 3.3.1 and those provided by Rawls and Koorsgaard in 3.3.2 – a third version of it, formulated by Darwall, is more difficult to answer (3.3.1). Moreover, Darwall's argument draws attention on the relation between 'self-evident apriori truth' and conative states and argues that intuitionists are necessarily committed to rationalism. In section 3.4 I develop the tension between self-evidence and emotions discussing some suggestions given by emotivists. This alleged tension will be the central topic of the fifth chapter.

The fourth chapter deals with the relation between self-evidence and commons sense morality. In 4.1 I stress the fact that an appropriate way of conceiving this relation is helpful because the appeal to common sense avoids a rigorous but artificial and abstract representation of moral life, while the appeal to self-evidence prevents ethics from being a mere systematization of common sense morality. In 4.2 I show how, as early as Sidgwick, self-evidence and commons sense morality were already strongly intertwined. In 4.3 I present common sense as morality as the moral expert *par excellence*. In 4.4 I take intuitions to be evidence for default reasonable beliefs, while in 4.5 I discuss the problem of entitlement and argue that intuitions entitle us to believe self-evident moral proposition. This aspect is particularly relevant for self-evident ethical propositions because even people who do not have the capacity to have any kind of justification – such as children – are as just entitled to hold self-evident moral propositions as moral philosophers. I conclude, in a Wittgensteinian style, by arguing that we are entitled to hold self-evident ethical propositions within certain community rules.

The fifth and last chapter will be devoted to the discussion of the place of emotions in self-evident knowledge and justification. In the first section I will introduce the general problem of the alleged incompatibility between self-evident apriori knowledge and emotions. In 5.2 I claim with Williams that emotions play a relevant role in the semantic of the propositions and I explain in what sense emotions are essential elements for moral understanding. In 5.3 I focus on the role of emotions in the process of understanding self-evident propositions and claim that even though understanding does not require emotions, emotions favor the process itself. In 5.4.1 I deal with emotional knowledge, starting from the alleged parallelism between intuitions and emotions. In 5.4.2 I present and discuss some views that endorse such

parallelism and argue that emotions can be seen as seemings that, alongside with intuitions, target self-evident propositions. Paragraph 5.5 argues that we can be entitled to hold self-evident propositions on the basis of emotional seemings.

1
SELF-EVIDENCE AND INTUITIONISM

1.1 Framing the issue

The concept of self-evidence has deep historical roots. Its first formulation can probably be found in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, where the Stagirite argued that at least some knowledge must be "independent of demonstration" (*Posterior Analytics*, I.3). Also the Aquinas appealed to the concept of "*per se notum*" in many of his arguments (Dougherty, 2006) and it is well-known that the concept went through the history of modern philosophy, from Descartes up to Kant. The notion had great impact in epistemological arguments and in philosophy in general because of its purported capacity of constituting a stable and ultimate ground for our knowledge and justification. Perelman (1958) encompasses self-evidence as follows:

> There is an argument, well known in the history of philosophy, which makes all knowledge ultimately depend on some kind of intuitive or sensory immediacy. According to this argument, either the proposition itself is self–evident; or else it can be shown to follow, with the help of a chain of intermediate links, from other propositions which are self–evident. Moreover, it is this self–evidence of immediate knowledge and only this which, again speaking traditionally, sufficiently guarantees the truth of the affirmations of a science as opposed to those of various and fluctuating opinions' (Perelman 1958, 289)

As Perelman rightly remarks, those who appeal to self-evidence aim at finding out an ultimate ground for human knowledge that escapes any doubt. Roughly speaking, the idea that underpins the notion of self-evidence is that human knowledge has a stable ground and that this ground is so immediate that it appears evident in itself. Of course, not all human knowledge is self-evident but when knowledge is self-evident than it appears undoubtable, beyond the 'various and fluctuating opinions' mentioned above. In a nutshell, self-evident principles are those principles in which we are strongly confident: doubts are set aside.

To shed light into the topic consider the analogy with perceptual experiences. We normally accept that there is a lemon tree in front of us if we see it because we tend to trust our senses. We are sure about that, unless one

shows us that we are, say, under the effect of drugs or under an illusion. Moreover, the burden of the proof is on the skeptical that want us doubt that there is a lemon tree in front of us. In a nutshell, it is evident for us that there is a lemon tree in front of us if we see a lemon tree in front of us and if we have no reasons to mistrust our perception.

Now, those who claim that there is self-evident knowledge make a parallel claim. There are truths that are evident in itself as much as it is evident in itself that there is a lemon tree in front of me, given the absence of defeaters. Here, things are easier said than done. If most of epistemic subjects tend to take perceptual experience at face value, things are more complicated for self-evidence, especially if one claims that there are self-evident truths that are less trivial that "A=A".

One of the main problems concerns the way of obtaining this self-evident knowledge. Traditionally, intuitions are considered the primary way of knowing these truths. Unlike inferences and deductions, intuitions seems to grant the immediacy of the knowledge of such truths, in analogy with sensory perceptions. Nonetheless, if sensory perceptions are considered paradigm of objectivity, intuitions are conceived as subjective mental states. If self-evidence is the most stable form of knowledge, it is unclear how intuitions can lead to self-evidence. Therefore, in spite of its pretence of being a stable firm point for our knowledge, self-evidence, being dependent on intuitions, is extremely subjective. Of the two, either there are other ways of getting access to self-evident principles or, if intuitions are the only way, self-evidence is anything but a subjective feeling of certainty, perhaps influenced by cognitive capacities and personal biases.

Against these legitimate worries, in this chapter I argue that self-evidence is unknowable and unjustifiable apart from intuitions and, in the second chapter, that intuitions have a right to exist if and only if they target self-evident propositions.

In a nutshell, intuitions and self-evidence are two faces of the same coin. Every attempt of conceiving the one without the other is condemned to a fatal flaw. Paraphrasing a famous Kantian assertion, intuitions are the *ratio cognoscendi* of self-evidence, self-evidence is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law.

Notice that intuitions and self-evidence are much more disjoined than it might appear at first sight. There are works whose main concerns is for self-evidence where intuitions are only incidentally mentioned. Other tend to appeal to intuition without any exclusive commitment to self-evidence.

The focus here is mainly on self-evidence and intuitions in ethics. Granted, a relevant part of the current debate on intuitions and self-evidence develops outside the border of moral philosophy and involves related disciplines such as epistemology and philosophy of language. However, from

now on I will mainly refer to self-evidence and intuitions in ethics, leaving aside the development of the debate in other fields.

There are at least three reasons that justify our interest for intuition and self-evidence in ethics. *First*, if it is widely accepted that there are self-evident principles in logic and mathematics, it is more controversial that there are self-evident principles in ethics. Moreover - and this is the *second* reason - self-evident propositions in ethics are cases of self-evident propositions whose acceptance and rejection has great impact on our thought and our life. If few people are aware that self-evident propositions are basic underpinnings of human thought, even fewer are directly concerned with self-evident propositions in logic and mathematic (if there are any) but much more are concerned with self-evident propositions in ethics (if there are any). *Third*, focusing the attention on ethics sounds as a promising way of defending the claim that intuitions target self-evident propositions while at the same time accounting for the pervasiveness of intuitions in common human though. Few people have any notion of what self-evidence is but everyone has intuitions. Ethical intuitions, or intuitions of ethical matters, are shared also by intellectually poor people and by children. Moreover, unlike other kind of intuitions, such as those of logic, they do not require any scholastic background or intellectual training to be held. William Wordsworth's *Solitary Reaper* has no better intuitions then Socrates.

Nonetheless, as we had just affirmed, that there are self-evident principles in ethics, and what these principles are, is far from obvious. One traditional way of understanding the issue is by comparing self-evident principles in ethics and self-evident principles in mathematics. This analogy has been paradigmatically put forth by ethical intuitionist for which basic moral truths, like mathematical truths, are self-evident and known by intuition. For one of the most prominent intuitionists, W. D. Ross (1930), 'a self-evident proposition is a proposition which is evident without any need of proof just as a mathematical axiom, or the validity of a form of inference, is evident. In both cases, we are dealing with propositions that cannot be proved, but that just as certainly need no proof" (Ross, 1930). The claim that fundamental principles of ethics are self-evident supports the analogy between mathematical axioms and ethical propositions, which is central in some forms of ethical intuitionism (as will be seen with Prichard and Ross). However, as Marzio Vacatello (2004) remarks in an essay on G.E. Moore, both self-evident ethical principles and mathematical principles assume the form of axioms, but while mathematical axioms are abstract and limited in numbers, ethical axioms are numerous and concrete. Therefore, in spite of its appeal, the analogy with mathematics is problematic and easily leads to misunderstandings.

Nonetheless, as David Kaspar (2012) affirms, the main reason that lead to the analogy between self-evidence in ethics and in mathematics is the search for certainty and consensus in ethics:

> Many intuitionists have argued that if one accepts that there are self-evident necessary truths in math, then she should be inclined to accept that there are such truths in ethics. Also, it is claimed that, if intuitions are all we need to know mathematical truths, then intuitions are sufficient for knowing certain moral truths. The fact of this claim is not always favorable to intuitionism. On fact, it often invites skepticism. Some philosophers will agree that math involves self-evident propositions that we know through intuition, but that moral truths are nothing like that. Math they will say, provides a paradigm case of certainty and consensus on the truth. Ethics, in contrast, can boast of neither of these attributes. In brief, some take the position that rationalism about mathematics is well justified, while rationalism about moral truths is absurd (Kaspar 2012, 66)

That moral judgements can advance such a claim should not be taken for granted. They are often influenced by education, culture, age or, more generally, subjective preferences. Nothing seem to be so far from the idea of a certain, stable – when not universal and necessary – form of knowledge such as self-evidence claims to be.

From the historical point of view, the problem of certainty in moral philosophy has ancient roots. Following Fonnesu (2011), since the Cartesian age moral certainty has been conceived in terms of probability. For Descartes, besides mathematical and geometrical certainty – which are the paradigms of certainty – there is a weaker kind of certainty that regards the rules of human conduct. Even for those who, alongside the history of philosophy, defend the parallelism between mathematical and moral certainty (such as Leibniz and Spinoza's project of an *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata*), 'the use of the expression moral certainty corresponds to an only probable, weaker certainty, that depends on the testimony of others and may be useful in daily life: moral certainty is not an expression that designate the epistemological moral status of morality and ethics' (Fonnesu 2011, 183-184). To put it briefly, under this meaning "moral certainty" should merely be understood either as the acceptance of widespread rules that govern our life even if these rules are not ethical in the strictest sense, as it is for Descartes, or it should be understood as the attempt of providing a geometrical demonstration of our rules of conduct, as it is for Spinoza. Neither in the first, nor in the second case,

however, moral judgments are certain in the same way intuitionists pretend that basic principles of ethics are certain. In the first case, certainty is based on consensus; in a second structural sense, certainty concerns the structure of ethical knowledge and the demonstration of ethical principles and rules. On the contrary, the intuitionists way of dealing with the issue is that certainty is a property of some fundamental ethical principles and that this property derives from the self-evident character of the principles. Therefore, intuitionists would reject both the consensus view - because for a proposition to be certain, consensus is not required (even though it might be desired) - and the structural view – because there is no need to postulate a structural unity among ethical principles, principles that for many intuitionists are 'an unconnected heap of duties' (McNaughton, 1996).

Moreover, even though it is doubtless that ethical and mathematical (or logical) self-evident propositions have different contents, the intuitionists claim is that this difference does not undermine in any way their degree of certainty. To roughly outline a claim that will be broadly developed later, when self-evidence is at stake certainty can be both a state experienced by the epistemic subject that experience different degrees of certainty and a property of the proposition itself. Traditional attempts of grounding certainty on the analogy between ethics and mathematics are closer to the first sense of certainty. Contrariwise, ethical intuitionism is mainly committed to the second sense – certainty is not an epistemic state but a property of the proposition - and the first sense of certainty is merely a consequence of the apprehension of the proposition. Ethical propositions are analogous to mathematical propositions because they are self-evident and the apprehension of a self-evident proposition, upon adequate understanding, displays the feeling of certainty.

Self-evidence is the touchstone of ethical intuitionism, at least in the mainstream view that crossed the first thirty years of the last century - "the golden age of intuitionism - from the publications of Moore's *Principia Ethica* up to Ross' *The Right and The Good* (1930). However, as we will see in the third chapter, strong criticisms have been advanced against normative, metaphysical and epistemological implications of the intuitionist commitment to self-evidence.

The connection between intuition and self-evidence should not be taken for granted even in authors that are sympathetic with ethical intuitionism. Alternative forms of intuitionism without self-evidence have been recently proposed. Robert Cowan (2017), for instance, argues that we lack reasons for the claim that the principles that are standardly taken to be the paradigm of self-evident principles in ethics – like the Rossian principles – are really self-evident. In *Some Good and Bad News for Ethical Intuitionism* (2008) Pekka Väyrynen assumes that ethical intuitionism requires that there

are self-evident ethical truths' and wonders 'how is it supposed to be possible to have justification to believe substantive synthetic ethical truths solely on the basis of an adequate understanding of them? A priori intuitionists must explain how this can be so' (Väyrynen 2008, 507). Matthews S. Bedke (2008) maintains that the self-evident theory of intuitions is inadequate and that requires to be improved and amended by the intellectual seeming theory[1]. However, the self-evidence view has been put in doubt not only by those that openly deny that there is a strong between intuitions and self-evidence, such as Huemer, but also by philosophers that usually take up on behalf of self-evidence, such as Audi, affirm that "propositional intuitions need not to have self-evident objects' (Audi 2015, 66). If there is a general tendency that tend to mitigate the self-evident claim, aim of this chapter is that of going in the contrary direction. I not only claim that intuitionism should defend the tie between intuitions and self-evidence but also that it is only in virtue of this that intuitionism receives its legitimacy.

From these initial remarks, it emerges that ethical intuitionism should claim much more than what those who merely appeal to intuitions are used to claiming. One thing is to acknowledge the role of intuitions in ethics, another is to use them as central elements that grounds a theory based on self-evident moral principles. An analysis of this theory provides us with elements for testing the claim that intuitions and self-evidence are necessarily counterparts. In a nutshell, there is only one way of defending intuitionism: defending the necessary connection between intuition and self-evidence. If there is no this necessary connection, intuitionism loses much of its force. Therefore, I argue for the plausibility of this strong model of self-evidence in ethics, showing that, though appealing, the attempts of weakening the strong tie between intuitions and self-evidence, avoid using one or the other notion, reducing one to the other or simply trying to disentangle them is condemned to the flaw of conflating intuitions with other mental states, as I will argue on the second chapter.

In the first section of the chapter (1.1) I give some introductory notions of self-evidence in ethics, I focus on the analogy between ethical and mathematical propositions and I explain why the search for certainty has been deemed so important in the history of ethics. In 1.2 I introduce ethical intuitionism, making use of the well-known taxonomy – perceptual intuitionism, dogmatic intuitionism and philosophical intuitionism – proposed by Henry Sidgwick in *The Methods of Ethics*. I shall also make use of the distinction between methodological and epistemological intuitionism

[1] Bedke contrasts a 'self-evident theory' with the 'intellectual seemings theory'. In my view, as I will show in the second chapter, there is no contrast between the two views. What contrast the intellectual seeming view is, at most, the belief theory of intuitions, namely the theory for which intuitions are belief with special features (cf. Audi 1997)

formulated by John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and re-proposed by Bernard Williams in *What Does Intuitionism Imply*? (1995). However, while Williams claims that a perceptual kind of intuitionism accounts better for our moral experience than a "mathematical" kind of intuitionism based on self-evidence, I argue further that the latter claim can fit with our ethical experience. Section 1.3 presents an overview of the history of contemporary intuitionism, from Sidgwick (1.3.1) to W.D. Ross (1.3.4), passing through G.E. Moore (1.3.2) and H. A. Prichard (1.3.3). I conclude that ethical intuitionists of the first half of the twentieth century provide a correct but incomplete framework both of intuitions and of self-evidence. In section 1.4 I outline Robert Audi's account of self-evidence In 1.4.1 I single out three categories of self-evident propositions: analytical propositions, conceptual propositions and commonsensical propositions; in 1.4.2 I emphasize the relation between self-evidence and apriori. In 1.5 I show how the self-evident and apriori character of ethical propositions does not imply their infallibility, while in 1.6 I consider an argument provided by Stratton Lake that reduce self-evidence to intuitions.

1.2 What is ethical intuitionism

Providing a comprehensive account of what intuitionism is, is far from being an easy task. From the theoretical point of view, the core of metaethical intuitionism can be individuated by two claims: a *metaphysical claim*, for which moral properties are non-natural properties and the *epistemological claim*, for which there is non-inferential justification and knowledge of fundamental ethical principles. Though the metaphysical claim – the commitment to *sui generis* properties known by intuition – was a central tenets of metaethical intuitionism, so that the majority of the criticisms against intuitionism of the first half of last century targeted its untenable metaphysical nature, recent accounts do not attribute such an importance to non-naturalism. Audi clearly writes that while Sturgeon, who is not an intuitionist, shows that intuitionism and naturalism are not incompatible.

Independently of their appeal to non-natural properties, intuitionists claim that there are some beliefs that are non-inferentially justified. In this sense, as David Brink (1989) points out, intuitionism is a kind of foundationalism, that is the theory of justification that is opposed to coherentism and that affirms that a belief that p is justified if it is non-inferentially justified or if it is inferred by foundational beliefs (Brink, 1989: 101). That does not mean that for ethical intuitionism there is not any belief that is inferentially justified but only that some of them, fundamental ethical beliefs, are non-inferentially justified. Given that the defense of inferentially knowledge is shared by different conceptions of intuitionism, from perceptual

intuitionists to self-evident intuitionist, it is on this epistemological claim that our attention will be mainly focused. Kaspar (2015) writes:

> Intuitionism is the theory that claims that you know what's right. We know that lying is wrong, murder is wrong, keeping promises is required, and so on. I call these "the intuitive principles," which is the set of principles that are most intuitively convincing and are really the possession of all moral theories. It has been claimed that the most vulnerable point of intuitionism *is its epistemology***.** This is exactly backward. Intuitionism's epistemology is its strongest point. It is so strong, in fact, that no other theory comes close to it when comparing the epistemic credibility of their moral propositions against the intuitive principles (Kaspar 2015, 47)

Rawls' conception of intuitionism In *A Theory of Justice* (1971) can be considered the turning point that stared the rehabilitation of ethical intuitionism, a theory that during the middle decades of the last century came to be regarded as implausible. Rawls defines ethical intuitionism as the theory that affirms 'that there is an irreducible family of first principles which have to be weighed against one another by asking ourselves which balance, in our considered judgment, is the most just' (Rawls 1971, 30). What characterizes intuitionism is pluralism and potential conflict among principles on one hand, absence of priority rules or method, on the other. Therefore, 'we are simply to strike a balance by intuition, by what seems to us most nearly right. Or if there are priority rules, these are thought to be more or less trivial and of no substantial assistance in reaching a judgment' (Rawls 1971, 30). Nonetheless, if for Rawls intuitions play a central role in intuitionism, a mere appeal to intuitions is not enough for an ethical theory to be called intuitionist. For instance, in spite of its wide use of the notion of intuition and intuitionism, Sidgwick cannot be considered an intuitionist because of his defense of a priority rule, namely the principle of utility. Moreover, given that for Rawls intuitionism is a form of pluralism, the appeal to intuition is nothing but a consequence of pluralism joined with the absence of priority rules. In a pluralist framework and in absence of priority rules the only way for choosing a principle over another is by means of intuition.

An intuitionist theory of this kind is that put forth by J. O. Urmson in a in *A Defense of Intuitionism* (1975). Here, Urmson reminds us that when he was a student and attended Prichard's lessons, "intuitionism" was a pluralist view as opposed to a monist view, such as that of ideal utilitarianism held by

Moore[2]. Urmson raises two points to defend intuitionism: the claim that there is a plurality of first order moral principles and the absence of a high order moral principle that ranks one's principles over the other's in case of conflict.

To begin with, if the first claim is wrong, one should adopt a 'monomic' theory (nowadays we would refer to it as monistic theory) such as act utilitarianism or contractualism. Nonetheless, it is easy to find arguments against mononomic 'theories'. For instance, if for act utilitarianism there is 'only one primary reason in the moral sphere for acting in a certain way, namely that so acting would maximize general welfare' (Urmson 1975, 114), principles have moral weight only in virtue of this maximization. As Urmson suggests, intuitionism as pluralism better explains how morality works:

> The intuitionist will take into account all relevant reasons for action, worshipping none of them; the fanatical mononomist of the utilitarian persuasion would be prepared to lie, rape, steal and betray to achieve even a minimal increase in the general welfare, regarding none of these as in themselves wrong, even if he thinks it extremely unlikely that so to act would have that effect. 'Thou shalt have none other gods but me' has been with us for a long time; 'thou shalt have none other rules but me' has not even the sanctity of age. (Urmson 1975, 115)

Second, pluralist theories of morality do not have a decision-procedure. Even if it is not theoretically impossible to find one, Urmson admits that no such procedure is available for general cases. One should ponder reasons and evidences case by case before formulating a final moral judgement. Moreover, Urmson argues, moral decisions have a cost and compromise is often needed. 'It seems that we sometimes cannot act without wronging somebody; sometimes whatever one does will be unfair or unkind' (Urmson 1975, 114). Even if in principle I would at best defend, say, both general welfare and keeping promises, it often occurs that I must sacrifice one or the other. If there were a decision procedure such as in mononomic theories there would be no sacrifice if, say, I break a promise to promote general welfare.

> My main ground for scepticism about the possibility of a hierarchical moral theory is that in complex moral issues I find it impossible to believe that a decision- procedure is available. I

[2] It is worth noticing here that of Moore is a monist in his theory of obligation but a pluralist in his theory of value. In *Principia*, for instance, Moore claims that there are many things that are good and two things that are good for their own sake: beauty and human intercourses.

> am aware that the complexities do not make the existence of such a procedure theoretically impossible; but they do seem to make it unlikely that sound moral thinking unconsciously follows one (Urmson 1974-1975, 115)

Note that the defense of intuitionism is not grounded on any epistemological commitment: nowhere Urmson refers to self-evidence or the non-inferentiality character of moral beliefs. The word 'intuition' is never used. Still, Urmson's defense based on the implicit appeal to common-sense morality: what is wrong with mononomic theories and hierarchical theories is that they lead to counterintuitive conclusions. There is no direct argument against a mononomic theory such as act utilitarianism or against a hierarchical theory based on a decision-procedure. As far I can see, the only proof that Urmson gives in defense of intuitionism-pluralism is based on the feeling that a moral subject under normal conditions experiences some 'intuitive' reasons or principles are neglected. When alternative principles are wronged, they deserve commiseration, 'apology and perhaps redress' (Urmson 1974: 121). In other words, the indirect proof that such principle still holds is: we feel the need to justify ourselves.

In *What Does Intuitionism Imply?* (1995), Williams starts from Rawls characterization of intuitionism and distinguishes between methodological intuitionism, the version of intuition as presented by Rawls, and epistemological intuitionism. For Williams the relationship between methodological and epistemological intuitionism is a relation between a genus and a species. The genus, methodological intuitionism, has the merit of explaining our ethical experience works. The species, epistemological intuitionism, is a view in moral epistemology that affirms that fundamental moral principles are non-inferentially justified. This epistemological commitment is also shared by methodological intuitionists that, in addition, maintain that (ii) there is a plurality of moral principles that can conflict with one another and that (iii) there is not any method or rule of preference to solve the conflict.

Even if most representations of intuitionism conceive it as a pluralistic theory without priority or preference rules, intuitionism can be compatible with monism and priority or preference rules as well. For Rawls intuitionism is restricted to options (ii) or (iii) while for Audi (2004) Rossian model that joins the epistemological commitment (i) with a pluralist view (ii) should be integrated with a Kantian unifying supreme principles of preference, hence resiling from (iii). For instance, for some Kantian interpreters (Paton (1946), Landucci (1994) and Potter (1997)), Kant is an intuitionist, despite his monism and the clear presence of a priority rule, the categorical imperative.

Williams claim is that "epistemological intuitionism" and "methodological intuitionism", arguing that the former is close to the latter only under one interpretation of "epistemological intuitionism": let us call it EI-1. EI-1 settles a parallelism between ethical and mathematical truths. The problem with E-1 is that it would encourage a systematization of ethics "that would be axiomatized or organized in a deductive form" (Williams 1995, 184). Such a solution would be favored by some conceptions of ethics such as, say, Spinoza's but surely rejected by methodological intuitionists. The analogy between mathematical and ethical concept – almost common-sense for intuitionism – has the advantage of providing a non-empirical model of knowledge but has the limit of working only for abstract and generally thin concepts such "good" and "right". Williams points out that ethics is mainly made of "thick" ethical concepts, such as "treachery" or "cowardice" or "promise". According to a second interpretation of intuitionism, E-2 the analogy is with sense perception. For Williams, E-2 is an intuitionist theory because is handles a variety of immediate ethical convictions that claim for objectivity. The reason why Williams favors E-2 is that it provides a model of explanation of our ethical experience that is absent in E-1.

E-2 is closer to methodological intuitionism, a version of intuitionism that Williams favor for two reasons. The first reason is that the absence of priority rules respond to our current moral experience. Williams states that 'the complex deposit' of our ethical convictions cannot be subsumed under a theory. Ethical theorists have to 'explain how, as ethical theorists seem often to assume, the theoretical structure is *already there* in our ethical thought and responses' (Williams 1995, 189). Second, in ethical thought some reasons weigh more than others, but, whatever the heavier reason is determined case by case by a judgement of importance, without any priority rules:

> There is no reason to believe that there is one currency in terms of which all relations of comparative importance can be represented. On the contrary, any such currency (satisfaction of desires, for instance) consists of some consideration about which it will make sense to ask whether, on a given occasion or more generally, it is more important than something else (Williams 1995, 190)

With respect to pluralism, that is the second reason, Williams argues that "methodological intuitionism" provides a correct picture of moral experience but he also argues that much more than that is needed to defend intuitionism. Once rightly established that our moral experience is correctly described by intuitionism, one might still wonder 'whether experience should

be left in that state' to avoid the charge of 'unreflective conservativism' (Williams 1995, 183).

If for Williams it is E-2 that best fits with the way our moral though works, I argue that there are good reasons to claim that E-1 can explain our moral thought as well. Moreover, E-1 provides us with a model of ethical justification and knowledge that E-2 is unable to provide.

The following subsections shows how intuition and self-evidence are strongly related in Sidgwick, Moore, Prichard and Ross. Though the primary aim of this subsections is mainly reconstructive, it let me move gradually closer to what I consider as the most interesting version of intuitionism and they pave the ground for the theoretical work that will follow.

1.3 Intuitions and self-evidence in ethical intuitionism

1.3.1 Henry Sidgwick: Taxonomies of intuitionism and conditions on self-evidence

From the historical point of view, intuitionism is supported by a long-lasting tradition that goes back at least to the seventeenth century but that can be found alongside the whole course of the history of philosophy. The relevance of the doctrine within the Western tradition cannot be easily overestimated. Felix E. Oppenheim (1968) identifies the intuitionist tradition with the theory of the natural law. That the precepts of the natural law are self-evident principles is claimed, among others, by the Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologica* (I-II, q. 94, a.2). Nonetheless, it is John Stuart Mill that for the first time explicitly mention intuitionism as a definite ethical theory. In *Utilitarianism* (1861) Mill refers to an 'intuitive school, which advocates two theses: first, that there is a science of morals and, second, that 'the principles of morals are evident and apriori, requiring nothing to command assent, except that the meaning of the terms be understood' (Mill 1861, 4).

However, it is probably in Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics* (1874) that the history of contemporary ethical intuitionism begins. Here, Sidgwick distinguishes two sense of the concept of "intuitionism". Considering them briefly allows me to indicate what sense of intuitionism is at stake in this inquiry and what sense should be left in the background.

In a first sense, that we could call normative, "intuitionism" is an ethical theory on the far side of consequentialism. Intuitionism is therefore characterized as a radical form of deontologism, an ethical position that, for Sidgwick, does not care about the consequences or considers it only secondarily: 'Writers who maintain that we have 'intuitive knowledge' of the rightness or wrongness of actions usually mean that the rightness is

ascertained by simply looking at the actions themselves, without considering their ulterior consequences' (Sidgwick 1874, 96).

In a second sense, that we could call epistemological, Sidgwick uses intuitionism and particularly "intuition" in a different sense. "Intuition" and "intuitive" are synonyms of self-evidence and intuitionism is, more generally, a theory which admits the existence of self-evident principles. For instance, Sidgwick's thesis is that the principle of utility is self-evident. According to what we have said so far, it is this last conception that concerns us at best.

The latter point can be deepened by distinguishing between *Perceptual intuitionism*, *Dogmatic intuitionism* and *Philosophical intuitionism*.

Perceptual Intuitionism is a widespread conception according to which particular moral acts are intuitively true or false. For instance, when we say that a man should follow his conscience, the implicit idea is that one just knows what he should do – or how he should judge – without recurring to general rules. This view goes along with the rejection of casuistry and of any attempt of systematic ethics. Therefore, there is no interest neither for general rules, nor for scientific ethics: 'The view above described may be called, in a sense, "ultraintuitional" since, in its most extreme form, it recognizes simple immediate intuitions alone and discards as superfluous all modes of reasoning to moral conclusions' (Sidgwick, 1907: 100) [3]. In this perspective, there is no ethical knowledge, except that determined on a case-by-case basis.

For Sidgwick, the autonomy of the conscience defended by perceptual intuitionism leaves us unsatisfied for three reasons. *First*, moral intuitions do not appear as indubitable and irrefragable as perceptual intuitionism demands. If perceptual intuitionism were right, we would always be able to correctly distinguish the rightness or the wrongness of an action or of a particular act. Our conscience would just know what is right and wrong but this is not the case: doubts arise in many ethical situations where our conscience does not know what to do. *Second*, dictates of conscience vary through space and time and getting them to fit is far from being an easy task. *Third*, the validity of

[3] It goes without saying that this view is currently held by 'moral particularists' *à la* Dancy (cr. Dancy, 1983, 1993, 2000a, 2004). However, it is still debatable if Sidgwick's *Perceptual Intuitionism* is more close to an eliminativist version of moral particularism - that denies the existence of moral principles - or to the abstinence view - which only considers moral principles useless. As Baldwin remarks, it is also possible to stress the difference between an epistemological particularism and moral particularism: "For the epistemological particularists who is not a moral particularist (such as Bradley), our moral consciousness is primarily exercised through our response to particular situations, but the moral judgments involved bring with them a commitment to general principles concerning the moral significance of feature of the situations in question (Baldwin, 2004: 103)

these dictates is undermined by moral disagreement: conflicting intuitions show that conscience cannot be the criteria of right and wrong.

Sidgwick concludes that the need of general rules is justified by the intrinsic limits of our conscience. People try to overcome these limits either by appealing to the common opinion of the society to which they belong, to sacred books or the advice of a priests or by putting forward 'common consent as an argument for the validity of these rules: but only as supporting the individual's intuition, not as a substitute for it or as superseding it' (Sidgwick 1874, 101). These are called by Sidgwick dogmatic intuitionists. *Dogmatic intuitionism* is the doctrine that claims that moral intuitions are underpinned, even if not substituted, by common sense: 'it is held that such general rules are implicit in the moral reasoning of ordinary men, who apprehend them adequately for most practical purposes, and are able to enunciate them roughly; but that to state them with proper precision requires a special habit of contemplating clearly and steadily abstract moral notions' (Sidgwick, 1874, 101). Also dogmatic intuitionism suffers from fatal weaknesses. For instance, it runs the risk of being 'an accidental aggregate of precepts, which stand in need of some rational synthesis' (Sidgwick 1874, 102).

Sidgwick introduces a third conception of intuitionism, *philosophical intuitionism*. This is the type of intuitionism that Sidgwick favors. Philosophers might require much more than mere coherence and order for a system to be accepted as valid. The need for a rational synthesis of the varieties of precepts can be fulfilled by the query for one or more first principles of ethics. Nonetheless, as Sidgwick points out, philosophical intuitionism does not claim that common sense morality is utterly wrong, but 'without being disposed to deny that conduct commonly judged to be right is so, we may yet require some deeper explanation why it is so' (Sidgwick 1907, 102). The "why" might be provided by a principle which is 'absolutely and undeniably true and evident', from which precepts of the conduct can be derived. Granted, common sense morality still play a central role but whereas the task of dogmatic intuitionism is that of systematizing common sense morality, that of philosophical intuitionism is to criticize and revise ordinary moral thought. Brink (1989) summarizes the core claim of Sidgwick's philosophical intuitionism as the claim that 'commonly held moral beliefs are always possible to doubt and that we must subject them to dialectical investigation to identify the moral principles that underlie them. Only after such a dialectical investigation of moral beliefs and first principles can one isolate a moral principle whose truth will be self-evident. This is Sidgwick's position' (Brink 1989, 112). Self-evidence principles of morality – and the principle of utility is the first of these principles – underpin our morality.

The idea behind Sidgwick's taxonomy is that these three method of intuitionism are not mutually exclusive but take part together in ordinary

moral thought. What is worth noticing here is that for Sidgwick intuitionism is not a theory that one can adopt or reject, but, rather, a description of the way our moral thought works.

The important thing to be noted here is that, despite having a different epistemological weight, all the three forms of intuitionism play an epistemological role in ethical knowledge. Sidgwick does present an evolution from a rough form, e.g. perceptual intuitionism, to a complex form of intuitionism, e.g. philosophical intuitionism. However, this does not imply that philosophical intuitionism – the version of intuitionism that Sidgwick favors – excludes the others forms of intuitionism. On the contrary, these three forms should be integrated. In a nutshell, people make an ethical judgement and act according to the model of perceptual and dogmatic intuitionism, but their judgements and their actions are justified by philosophical intuitionism. Perceptual intuitionism and dogmatic intuitionism are explanations of how ethical judgements are made in the actual world while philosophical intuitionism shows why they are justified. Everyone makes immediate judgements in a particular situation, everyone has the tendency to dogmatically conforming to common sense morality and everyone might, if asked, justify the immediacy of his judgements. When I am walking in the street and meet a child crying alone, I do not have to reason or remind myself the principle that I should help those in need. I immediately perceive that I should take care about him (perceptual intuitionism). Still, this perception is probably influenced by the common sense morality in which I have been raised (dogmatic intuitionism). Moreover, if someone asked me to provide reasons for that, I could point out the self-evident principles that underlie my particular judgement (philosophical intuitionism). As Sidgwick writes:

> Probably most moral men believe that their moral sense or instinct in any case will guide them fairly right, but also that there are general rules for determining right action in different departments of conduct: and that for these again it is possible to find a philosophical explanation, by which they may be deduced from a smaller number of fundamental principles. (Sidgwick 1907, 103)

To conclude, Sidgwick's taxonomy is of the utmost importance because it accounts for the pervasiveness of intuitions both in ethical knowledge and in moral life and provides a structure for the articulation of a plausible model of self-evidence in ethics. The fact that people are often unaware of the principles they are acting on, even more they are unaware that these principles are self-evidence does not prejudge that morality is grounded upon these principles. In fact, the denial of these principles is contrary to the

‘common experience of civilized men’. And these principles are grasped by intuitions, that are present in all the three models. Everyone exercises a sort of intuitional capacity when confronted with moral matter even though full justification belongs only to philosophical intuitionists. To sum up: the integration among perceptual intuitionism, dogmatic intuitionism and philosophical intuitionism accounts for how morality works and how should work for our moral belief to be justified.

Also, Sidgwick provides us with an useful insight into the nature of intuition in relation to self-evidence. He singles out three different questions: a *psychological question*, which concerns the existence of moral intuitions; a *normative question*, which concerns their validity, and a *psychogonical*’ *question*, which concerns their origin. The distinction between the psychological question about the existence of moral intuitions and the normative question that concerns their validity is here particularly helpful. One thing is to affirm the existence of intuitions by means of ‘direct introspection’ or ‘reflection’, another is to say that the intuitions have a normative force. The attribute of “intuitive” beside a moral judgement means that the judgement in question is ‘apparently known immediately, and not as the result of reasoning’. Nonetheless, after subsequent reflection the intuitive judgement might reveal to be only apparently true ‘just as many apparent perceptions through the organ of vision are found to be partially illusory and misleading’ (Sidgwick, 1907: 211). Intuitions may in fact be conflated with other mental states, namely ‘blind impulses to certain kinds of actions or vague sentiments of preference for them, or conclusions from rapid and half-unconscious processes of reasoning, or current opinions to which familiarity has given the illusory air of self-evidence’ (Sidgwick 1907: 212).

To distinguish good and bad intuitions, Sidgwick provides four conditions according to which evaluating the validity of the intuition, so to answer the normative question. In a nutshell, an intuition is valid if and only of it is self-evident. Otherwise, the intuition will be only ‘a vague sentiments of preference’, epistemologically weak and deprived of normative force.

The first condition is that of “clarity and precision”. Here, Sidgwick explicitly recalls the Cartesian warns against ‘notiones male terminatae’, namely notions that are vague and that are not adequately defined or that are erroneously defined. Some decades later, Moore will complain against the lack of precision in ethics, to the extent that difficulties in the subject are due ‘to the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely what question it is which you desire to answer’ (Moore 1903, iii).

The second condition is that of 'careful reflection'. Sidgwick warns against the principles that pretend to be self-evident because they come from authority, from tradition, or simply, from common sense morality. Intuitions must be separated from prejudices, impressions, irrational impulses or

opinions that are disguised as self-evident. Careful reflection helps in avoiding this confusion. As Roger Crisp rightly claims, "the notion of synthetic a priori also seems to be in play, in that self-evidence must be based in reflection and not, for example, on the marshalling of empirical evidence" (Crisp 2002, 71)

The third condition is 'consistency'. Intuitions shall be consistent with one another to avoid contradiction. 'Here, again, it is obvious that any collision between two intuitions is a proof that there is error in one of them or in both' (Sidgwick, 1907: 341)

The fourth is 'consensus'. Despite not being a sufficient condition for self-evidence, general and universal consensus is 'practically the only evidence upon which the greater part of mankind can rely' (Sidgwick, 1907: 341). Agreement among other minds - or, at least, among experts – does not directly increase the degree of certainty of the self-evidence of the judgments, but it indirectly gives a reason to not withhold the assent for it. If there is disagreement on the self-evidence of a judgment, the minimum required is to reconsidering our assent to this evidence.

This condition anticipates an issue that will be developed in chapter fourth. It affirms that consensus plays a relevant role for a proposition to be self-evident. That is especially valid for ethics. If in logic or mathematic a proposition can be self-evident even if most people do not acknowledge it to be so, things are different in the ethical field. If the majority of people do not acknowledge a principle to be self-evident, there are good reasons to doubt that the principle is really self-evident. Or, it might be perhaps valid theoretically (despite including an ethical content), but not practically. As far as a principle is self-evident, its validity would be undermined if very few people recognize it. Granted, "universal consensus" might be unable to acknowledge the principle to be self-evident, but it shall at least acknowledge it as valid (while experts can recognize its self-evidence as well). Therefore, Sidgwick takes the self-evident in ethics to be such that it would be recognized by common sense.

To conclude, the demand of clarity, reflection, consistency and consensus throw out a naïve conception of intuition as immediate irrational impression or bias. Examining our intuitions according to these criteria is important because in ethics 'any strong sentiment, however purely subjective, is apt to transform itself into the semblance of an intuition»' (Sidgwick, 1907: 339). Intuitions receive their legitimacy by their tie with self-evidence.

1.3.2 Moore, self-evidence and intrinsic good

G. E. Moore is commonly considered one of the most prominent figures of ethical intuitionism. In spite of that, Moore was always reluctant in

using the notion of intuition. Even more, he openly refuses to be considered an intuitionist *tout court*. In the *Preface* of his *Principia Ethica* (1903) one of the earlier steps is that of distinguishing his work from that of the tradition of ethical intuitionism. In doing this, Moore distinguishes two classes of ethical propositions: the first class concerns the kind of things that ought to exist for their own sake, while the second class includes the kind of actions that ought to be performed. Moore writes:

> I beg it may be noticed that I am not an 'Intuitionist' in the ordinary sense of the term. The 'Intuitionist' proper is distinguished by maintaining that propositions of my *second* class - propositions which assert that a certain action is *right* or a *duty* - are incapable of proof or disproof by any enquiry into the results of such actions. I, on the contrary, am no less anxious to maintain that propositions of *this* kind are *not* intuitions, than to maintain that propositions of my *first* class *are* intuitions» (Moore 1903: vi)

To avoid misunderstandings, Moore clarifies that intuitions should not be conflated with the seemingness of rightness that a particular action may have. Ethical intuitionism aims to ground a rigorous theory of moral epistemology that cannot be grounded on particular psychological intuitive judgements – such as seemings are – without losing much of its epistemological authority. On the contrary, for Moore, we have intuition of propositions that concern things that have intrinsic value. These propositions include things that ought to exist for their own sake. Concerning these propositions, Moore argues that 'no relevant evidence whatever can be adduced: from no other truths, except themselves alone, can it be inferred that they are either true or false' (Moore 1959: iv). Being true or false in virtue of themselves, propositions of the first class are not in need of external evidence. They are self-evident and what one can do is to assure that when we use them to answer questions of the first kind 'we have before our minds that question only and not some other or others' (Moore 1959: iv). In a nutshell, intuitionism of the second kind affirms that there are certain moral propositions cannot be proved - are incapable of proof or disproof - but just "intuited". These propositions are called intuitions:

> when I call such propositions 'Intuitions' I mean *merely* to assert that they are incapable of proof; I imply nothing whatever as to the manner or origin of our cognition of them. Still less do I imply (as most Intuitionists have done) that any proposition whatever is true, because we cognize it in a particular way or by the exercise of a particular faculty: I hold, on the

contrary, that in every way in which it is possible to cognize a true proposition, it is also possible to cognize a false one» (Moore 1959: vi)

In a meaningful passage of chapter V of the *Principi*a, Moore explicitly affirms that these propositions, that express the fundamental principle of ethics, are self-evident. Here, Moore specifies what self-evidence in his account means:

> The expression 'self-evident' means properly that the proposition so called is evident or true, by *itself alone*; that it is not an inference from some propositions other than itself. The expression does not mean that the proposition is true, because it is evident to you or me or all mankind, because in other words it appears to us to be true. That a proposition appears to be true can never be a valid argument that true it really is. By saying that a proposition is self-evident, we mean empathically that its appearing so to us is not the reason why it is true: for we mean that it has absolutely no reason (Moore 1959: 143)

As it emerges from this quote, a proposition is self-evident not in virtue of the consensus it raises. The impossibility of 'thinking otherwise' is not a reason for considering a proposition self-evident. As Moore subtly remarks, saying that a proposition appears as self-evident is the cause for considering it self-evident, but not the reasons why that is so.

The evidence of a proposition to us is only a reason for our holding it to be true: whereas a logical reason, or reason in the sense in which self-evident propositions have no reason, is a reason why the proposition itself must be true, not why we hold it so to be (Moore 1959: 143)

Therefore, self-evidence is different from conviction. Unlike conviction, self-evidence is neither a subjective nor a psychological state. Conviction is necessary for holding a proposition to be true, but it is not the reason for its truth.

Following Moore, three different uses of reason can be distinguished when someone affirms to have a reason for thinking a proposition to be true.

First, there is a causal psychological reason for which if a proposition appears true to me, then I have a reason for holding the proposition to be true.

Second, there is a logical reason why the proposition is true.

Third, if a proposition appears to me to be true, then I have a reason to ought to think it to be true and there is a logical reason for holding the proposition to be true.

Moore clarifies this last consideration discussing the proposition 'Pleasure is the only good'. Moore explains his intuition of the falsehood of the proposition only as a reason for holding it to be untrue, not the reason for its falsehood: 'it is untrue, because it is untrue, and there is no other reason: but I declare it untrue, because its untruth is evident to me, and I hold that it is a sufficient reason for my assertion' (Moore 1959, 144). The reason why the Hedonistic thesis is wrong is an internal logical reason. Moreover, if we have the intuition that a proposition self-evidently true or false, then we are inclined to affirm or deny the proposition. Although this is not a proof that the proposition is true or false, it is at least a *prima facie* justification for holding it to be so:

> I claimed that the untruth of this proposition was self-evident. I could do nothing to prove that it was untrue; I could, and do nothing to prove that it was untrue; I could only point out as clearly as possible what it means and how it contradicts other propositions which appear to be equally true. My only object in all this was, necessarily, to convince. But even if I did convince, that does not prove that we are right. It justifies us in holding that we are so; but nevertheless we may be wrong (Moore, 1959: 145)

To sum up what we have said so far. I hold an ethical judgement to be true *because* I have the intuition of its truth which is, in its turn, grounded on its self-evidence. In other words, intuition is simply a way of acknowledging what is self-evident, that is what is not provable. Notwithstanding, that intuition is not a substitute for reasoning: 'Nothing whatever can take the place of reasons for the truth of any proposition: intuition can only furnish a reason for holding any proposition to be true: this however it must do when any proposition is self-evident, when, in fact, there are no reasons which prove its truth' (Moore 1959: 144). Intuitions are mental states (even if Moore never uses this term) directed towards self-evident propositions, but they are not strictly speaking propositions (as a first reading of Moore's text would suggest to a careless reader). Self-evident propositions are true or false in virtue of themselves alone without additional reasons or evidence. Intuitions is not the reason why a self-evident proposition is true but it constitutes a reason for holding it to be true. Therefore, there is an authority of intuitions: having the intuition that p is true, is a sufficient but fallible reason for holding that p is true.

Once made these distinctions, it is helpful to say something more on this account of intuitions. To refer to a current, widespread distinction that will be deepened in the second chapter, it should be determined if for Moore

intuitions are beliefs, that is doxastic states, or seemings. A plausible answer is that for Moore intuitions are both. Intuitions have the double nature of seeming and belief. *On one hand*, intuitions belong to the domain of belief. That is probably what Moore wants to say, when he claims that intuitions are self-evident propositions. To be more rigorous, we could say that intuitions are beliefs on self-evident propositions. *On the other*, intuitions are seemings or appearances of truth that justify our convictions, in absence of defeaters . In this sense constitute reasons or evidences for our convictions, that is "subjective" reasons, where "subjective" does not mean arbitrary or mind-dependent, but an appearance of the truth of the propositions, that can be true or false. Intuitions are the "subjective" appraisal of self-evident propositions, which are true in themselves. Moreover, there are intuitions that can have self-evident propositions as their object and mental states that do not have self-evident propositions as their object but that are only initial appearances or seemings. These are not, strictly speaking, intuitions. For the sake of honesty, it should be noticed that Moore also admit a psychological sense of intuition. For instance, he claims that his intuition that it is false that 'pleasure alone is good as an end' contrast with Sidgwick's intuition that the proposition is true (Moore 1903, 75). One might be tempted to think that being 'pleasure alone is good as an end' a non-self-evident propositions, intuition can be also directed towards non-self-evident propositions. That seems to contrast with our claim that intuitions can only target self-evident propositions. The following chapter will be entirely devoted to the demonstration of this thesis. However, still focusing on *Principia Ethica*, it could be claimed that even if Moore seems to admit a double sense of intuitions – e.g. intuitions as merely psychological states and intuitions as attitudes towards self-evident propositions -, this duality is only apparent. In the case above, Moore is arguing, against Hedonism, that 'pleasure alone is good as an end' as Hedonism purports it to be.

After having clarified what are intuitions and how they behave in moral epistemology, it should be determined what kind of self-evident propositions are fundamental ethical propositions. As for ethical intuitionists in general, the claim that the principles of ethics are self-evident does not imply that they are mere analytical propositions. On the contrary, Moore argues that principles of ethics are synthetic. (Moore 1959: 7). The reason shall be found in Moore's famous argument that shows how good cannot be defined because there is no definition that exhausts the meaning of "good". Although it is possible to provide an arbitrary definition of "good" – settled on the basis of conventions – or a verbal definition of it– based on the use of the word – a proper definition of "good" is impossible because good is a simple property, like yellow. As far as it is not possible to provide a definition of yellow, it is not possible to provide a definition of "good":

> The most important sense of 'definition' is that in which a definition states that there are parts which invariably compose a certain whole: and in this sense good has no definition because it is simple and has no parts. It is one of those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are ultimate terms by reference to which whatever is capable of definition must be defined (Moore 1959, 10)

The proposition "x is good" is synthetic because if it were analytic, "x is good" could be shown to be true simply by referencing the meaning to the terms used (as it happens, say, with x is a triangle, x=a plain figure with three sides). The indefinability applies, however, only to the adjective "good" and not to the noun "the good". What is good, the noun, 'must be something different from that adjective itself; and the whole of that something different, whatever it is, will be our definition of the good' (Moore 1903, 9). With the "open question argument" – and its famous claim of the indefinability of good – Moore defends the autonomy of ethics against any attempts of "naturalistic" reduction. If it is impossible to reduce goodness to natural predicates, that is if it is not possible to provide an analytical definition of goodness, then there is no space rational argumentation. Therefore, intuition is the only way of knowing propositions concerning what is good for their own sake.

It is important to emphasize the fact that only fundamental principles are self-evident, while particular principles are not self-evident. This is the error committed by what he calls the Intuitional School of Moralists. Unlike traditional intuitionists, Moore claims that rules for action are not intuitively certain, that is they are not self-evident. For Moore, self-evident propositions are rather those concerning what is good in itself. Even if we often have the psychological intuition that our action is right or wrong, an inquiry into the consequences of the action can confirm or refute our intuitions. On the contrary, intuitions directed towards self-evident propositions can be confirmed or refuted only by a more adequate understanding of the propositions.

This does not exclude the possibility of disagreement. It frequently happens in ethics that not everyone agrees with our intuitions. As already said, for Moore, self-evident propositions, the object of our intuitions, are by their very nature unprovable and not in need of proof. Even if we cannot prove that our intuition is right, we expect that everybody 'unless he is mistaken as to what he thinks, will think the same as we' (Moore 1903, 145). Moreover, concerning intuition in ethics and in other fields, it is not easy to convince someone that he has made a mistake. Take the case of a man who is disputing with a madman that affirms that the chair in front of him is an elephant. How

can the madman be persuaded that his perception is wrong? The only thing one can do, writes Moore, is that of showing him that 'our view is consistent with something else which he holds to be true, whereas his original view is contradictory to it. But it will be impossible to prove that that something else, which we both agree to be true, is so; we shall be satisfied to have settled the matter in dispute by means of it, merely because we are agreed on it' (Moore 1903, 75). At the end of the chain of derivation, there should be a firm point that cannot be proved and that cannot be derived from other premises. On this point, we require agreement. The objection from disagreement is not a threat for self-evident propositions but a confirmation of their role. The problem with disagreement is not on the side of the propositions, but on the side of the intuition that targets it. Our intuitions can be wrong or misleading. This can be due to a lack of understanding in most cases, or to say, cognitive biases as in the elephant-chair case, or in a conceptual confusion as in the case of the intuition 'Pleasure is the only good', that for Moore, is the paradigm of the false intuition. Hedonists 'have never even asked themselves the question which they professed to answer. They have confused it with another question. No wonder, then, if their answer is different from ours' (Moore 1903, 145)

To conclude, the influence of Moore's atypical intuitionism on the following debate cannot be easily overestimated. However, this perspective suffers from a partiality of which Moore himself was aware. In Moore's moral thought a theory of duty, a theory of action or, more generally, a normative theory are outside the border of intuitionism as it is already clear in the *Preface* of *Principia* Ethica, where Moore writes that all he wants is to provide, in a Kantian style, the 'Prologomena of every future Ethics that can possibly pretend to be scientific' (Moore 1903, v). Therefore, to appreciate Moore's intuitionism, one has to give up the pretence of finding in this theory more than what it purports to state. In his moral epistemology, intuitions have a 'residual role' (Fonnesu 2005), that is a role restricted to grasping self-evident propositions, when rational argumentation is impossible.

1.3.3 Prichard, self-evidence and the error of philosophy

If Moore's *Principia Ethica* opened the Twentieth-century debate on intuitionism and inaugurate the season of metaethics, Prichard's *Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?* (1912) might be considered the manifesto of ethical intuitionism. As it is clear from the title, the well-known goal of the paper is that of showing the mistake upon which moral philosophy rests, namely the claim to provide proof for the duty, that is 'to supply by a process of reflection a proof of the truth of what he and they have prior to reflection believed immediately or without proof' (Prichard 1912, 2). In his article, Prichard contends against the view that the task of moral philosophy is that

of providing reasons that justify the duty; rather, it is the just intuitive that one has to act in accordance with. Thus, for Prichard, moral philosophy has a fundamental role, namely that of revealing the self-evidence of our principles of morality. In other words, the task of moral philosophy is not that of answering the question 'Is there really a reason why I should act in the ways in which hitherto I have thought I ought to act?' (Prichard 1912), but that of showing that the answer is self-evident. Prichard defines this kind of knowledge, 'not extensive, because through moral philosophy we know nothing except what we already know in an ordinary commonsense situation. We only "see" what is our duty without the need - and the possibility - of proving it.

Prichard adopts here a classical conception of self-evidence according to which a self-evident proposition is that kind of proposition whose truth, and necessity, is immediately grasped through understanding. It suffices to understand it in order to see its truth.

Despite assuming the self-evidence of the apprehension of our duty, Prichard does not affirm that we get to know it in an abstract way. On the contrary, we have to grasp our duty through an act of rational insight into a particular situation. The awareness of our duty 'lies not in any process of general thinking, but in getting face to face with a particular instance of situation B, and then directly appreciating the obligation to originate A in that situation' (Prichard 1912, 17).

There are, for Prichard, two levels of moral reasoning. The first level is that of general or non-moral thinking and aims to understand the nature of an act or of a situation (e.g. under what conditions does it occur, what are the relations involved, etc.). The second level, is that of moral thinking in the strictest sense. Once we have fulfilled the task of the first level, e.g. once we have determined the non-moral nature of the act or of the situation, the apprehension of the duty will be immediate. So, the skeptical question, "Is there really a reason why I should act in these ways?" automatically disappears. But, on the contrary, if the first level fails to be fulfilled, if we lack reasons or information for understanding it, the question still persists and it is legitimate to ask for a reason for being moral. For example, I immediately know that I should do a favor for someone (moral thinking), only after having recognized, through an act of non-moral thinking, that I am in a special relation to him or to her.

Though necessary, the act of general thinking is only a preliminary act, and neither does it substitute moral thinking, nor do constitute an argument for moral obligation 'we do not come to appreciate an obligation by an argument' (Prichard 1912, 9). As a matter of fact, different situations have different non-moral features that trigger the intuition of the rightness or

wrongness of an act. The moral subject directly appreciates, "face to face", what his actual duty is (Dancy, 2002). Writes Prichard:

> suppose we come genuinely to doubt whether we ought, for example, to pay our debts [...] The only remedy lies in actually getting into a situation which occasions the obligation, or – if our imagination be strong enough – in imagining ourselves in that situation, and then letting our capacities of moral thinking do their work (Prichard 1912, 16).

To get to know their actual duty, people should simply consider the situation and the relations in it involved in order to immediately know what their actual duty is. Nonetheless, when they have doubts about their current duty, the failure is in the general non-moral thinking.

> For instance, we may not appreciate the obligation to give X a present, until we remember that he has done us an act of kindness. But, given that by a process which is, of course, merely a process of general and not of moral thinking we come to recognize that the proposed act is one by which we shall originate A in a relation B, then we appreciate the obligation immediately or directly, the appreciation being an activity of moral thinking (Prichard 1912, 12)

The important thing to notice here is that most of our moral thinking are made unreflectively and immediately. As for Sidgwick's perceptual and dogmatic intuitionism, Prichard claims that an 'unreflective consciousness' leads us in making moral judgment.

However, if ordinary men do not usually need proof for their duty, moral philosophers have the erroneous pretence of proving what our duty is. Prichard, who was notoriously a prominent scholar of Aristotle, observes that also the Stagirite 'does not do what we as moral philosophers want him to do, viz. to convince us that we really ought to do what in our non-reflective consciousness we have hitherto believed we ought to do or, if not, to tell us what, if any are the other things which we really ought to do, and to prove to us that he is right' (Prichard 1912, 13). For Prichard, Aristotle does not fully answer this demand, because he was aware that the demand has not really answer. Nonetheless, Prichard argues that the moral demand is inevitable until we realize 'the self-evidence of our obligations, i.e., the immediacy of our apprehension of them'. Moral knowledge is nothing but the awareness of this self-evidence

1.3.4 W. D. Ross: self-evidence and actual duty

Among the different versions of intuitionism, that proposed by W. D. Ross is usually considered the most attractive and defendable by contemporary intuitionists. Ross' intuitionism may be defined - as Stratton Lake does in his *Introduction* to *The Right and the Good* (1930) – "the pinnacle" of the intuitionist tradition in moral philosophy. It is not by chance, then, that the most prominent book of contemporary intuitionism, Audi's *The Right in the Good* (2005), develops his arguments starting from Ross' *The Right and the Good* (1930).

Ross' conception of self-evidence is quite different from that which we found in Moore. In a nutshell, if for Moore self-evident propositions are those which concern intrinsic good, for Ross self-evident propositions are propositions of a particular kind regarding the duty. Both authors disassociate themselves from an early intuitionist claim that one has an immediate self-evident apprehension of his actual duty. Where for Moore propositions about the duty are not intuitions and, thus, are not self-evident, for Ross there are propositions about the duty that are intuitions because self-evident and others that are not intuitions and that are not self-evident.

In the *Preface* of *The Right and the Good*, Ross openly acknowledges his debt towards the works of Prichard and Moore. Unlike Moore, both Prichard and Ross are deontologists for whom the concept of duty, rather than that of intrinsic good, is at the basis of ethics. Under another aspect, Ross' conception of intuition and of intuitionism differs from that of Moore and Prichard. Ross is a pluralist while Moore and Prichard are monists. But while for Moore's monism rests on the conception of intrinsic good, Prichard's monism and Ross' pluralism rests respectively on one or more duties. Moreover, Ross states a plurality of self-evident principles, whereas Moore and Prichard maintain that there is only one kind of self-evident proposition about the "good" or about the "duty".

Ross starts from the phenomenology of moral life. Consequentialism – both its rougher form, such as egoism and in its most refined form, such as ideal consequentialism – and Kantianism are opposite faces of the same coin. They provide a simple criterion – respectively, the maximization of the consequences and the respect of the duty – for what 'makes right acts right'. However, Ross writes, it is better that a theory is adherent to the facts rather than simple, and the purpose of his theory is that of accounting for the complexity of moral thought. For Ross, the advantage of his theory is that of corresponding to what we really think and to take into account the plurality of ethical principles and the different possible relations among moral agents

(debtor to creditor, son to parent, friend to friend, wife to husband and so on). The variety of these relations can be subsumed under a list of principles that Ross calls *prima facie* duty.

The notion of prima facie duty is problematic and Ross declares to be unsatisfied because it 'says at the same time too much and too little' (Ross 1939, 84). Too much because of the substantive duty. In spite of the use of the notion of duty, it is not our duty to do that which is our *prima facie* obligation but 'prima facie obligatoriness' outweighs its prima facie 'disobligatoriness' in the concrete situation (Ross 1939, 85). Too little because of the attribute *prima facie* that recalls the idea of an abstract appearance that would be discarded when the totality of the situation be considered. However, Ross carries on using it in his latest work, *Kant's ethical theory* (1954), after having rejected alternative options such as Prichard's "claim" and Carritt's notion of responsibility[4]. Beyond these terminological questions, the idea is that, as it happens for natural laws, universal moral laws have the tendency to be performed, but they are not necessarily performed. As well as a force that normally causes the motion of a body with a certain speed in the direction of the force, may also be resisted by an opposite equal or stronger force and the body be quiet, so can a prima facie duty be resisted and outweighed in the concrete situation: "For while an act may well be *prima facie* obligatory in respect of one character and *prima facie* forbidden in virtue of another, it becomes obligatory or forbidden only in virtue of the totality of its ethically relevant characteristic" (Ross 1939, 86). *Prima facie* duty is also called by Ross as conditional duty 'a brief way of referring to this characteristic which an act as in virtue of being of a certain kind (e.g. the keeping of a promise), of being an act that would be a proper duty if it were not at the same time of another kind which is morally significant' (Ross 1930; 19). Here, conditionality of the duty is not bound to the form "If x, then y", but it rather means that the conditional duty can, in an appropriate situation, become an indicative duty. Insofar that the duty remains conditional, we are not bound to perform it.

The difference between a duty that is only *prima facie* and a final or actual duty is that the latter derives from the complete nature of the situation, while the former depends on one of its aspects. For instance, if I promise to meet a friend in the evening, I have a prima facie duty to keep my promise, but this disappears in front of the prima facie duty of beneficence, say, to assist my sick son.

[4] Also the word 'claim' (used by Prichard, 1912) and the word 'responsibility' are rejected by Ross. The first because it implies a relation towards another person and prima facie duty can be also relation towards oneselves (as in the case of the 'duty of improving our charachter and intellect')

Just as a natural law, for example a law of motion, remains valid even if a body that would normally be submitted to it moves in a different direction because of another force, so a *prima facie* duty remains valid even if it is overridden by another concomitant *prima facie* duty. As Audi (2004) puts it, Rossian *prima facie* duty are 'ineradicable but overridable' (Audi 2004, 24), namely they keep constituting reasons for action even when outweighed by other duties. For instance, when we violate the *prima facie* duty that promises to be kept, we often feel disappointment for that and we try to justify ourselves and we probably feel regretful even if we believe that we have done the right thing.

It is well-known that Ross proposes a list of *prima facie* duties in chapter II of *The Right and the Good* and in chapter IV of *Foundations of Ethics*: duty of fidelity and reparation, of beneficence, of gratitude, of non-injury, of self-improvement, of gratitude. The list is neither conclusive, nor arbitrary. At least in principle, Ross allows the possibility of discovering new prima facie duties. In addition, Ross distinguishes these *prima facie* duties from other moral convictions that are 'fallible opinions' based on an imperfect knowledge. Unlike the latter, *prima facie* duties are, for Ross, self-evident as mathematical axioms and other forms of inferences.

What, for Ross, is a self-evident proposition? The central notion underlying the notion of self-evident proposition is that of a proposition whose self-evidence is not evident for everyone, but only for those who 'have reached a sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition' (Ross 1930, 29). *Prima facie* duties are not evident from the beginning of our life. The fact that these propositions are self-evident does not imply that they are obvious. There are things that are obvious but that are not self-evident – for instance, that a stone dropped outside the window will fall - and there are things that are self-evident but not obvious – such as some logical laws – for instance, the De Morgan's laws.

The merit of Ross' proposal is that of unifying pluralism, self-evidence and a theory of obligation. If Moore's intuitionism only has the preliminary function of grounding the autonomy of ethics – claiming that fundamental ethical principles are self-evident – and his theory of obligation is fundamentally utilitarian, Ross is intuitionist both from the metaethical and the normative points of view. Two points need emphasis here. First, Ross acknowledges that there is a plurality of duty, e.g. every act that is a duty, is a duty for a different reason. Second, he shows how to derive a final duty from a *prima facie* duty. Ross warns against the temptation of considering the final duty as the conclusion of a syllogism whose premises is a *prima facie* duty. Ross remarks that *prima facie* duties are not the premises of a logical syllogism whose conclusion is the particular duty. This latter is known only if we consider the whole context in which it occurs. Given the complexity and

the unpredictable nature of all things considered situations, the knowledge of our particular duty is closer to probability than to certainty: the right act is, somehow, a fortunate act.

> Our judgments about our actual duty in concrete situations have none of the certainty that attaches to our recognition of the general principles of duty. A statement is certain, i.e. is an expression of knowledge, only in one or the other of two cases: when it is either self-evident, or a valid conclusion from self-evident premises. And our judgments about our particular duties have neither of these characters, (1) They are not self-evident. Where a possible act is seen to have two characteristics, in virtue of one of which it is prima facie right, and in virtue of the other prima facie wrong, we are (I think) well aware that we are not certain whether we ought or ought not to do it; that whether we do it or not, we are taking a moral risk [...] (2) Again, our judgments about our particular duties are not logical conclusions from self-evident premises (Ross 1930: 32)

Nonetheless, the mere fact that our actual or particular duty rises in the concrete situation, does not undermine the role of self-evident *prima facie* duties. These latter are nothing but the starting point of moral reasoning, despite not being the first premises of a practical syllogism.

How can self-evident principles be apprehended? As we learn that "two plus two equals four" by observing single tokens of the summation, in the same way we learn - or, better, we *apprehend* - that a duty is *prima facie* right (or wrong). After having reflected upon the rightness or wrongness of a certain act, we conclude that every act of that kind is right (or wrong).

> What comes first in time is the apprehension of the self-evident *prima facie* rightness of an individual act of a particular type. From this we come by reflection to apprehend the self-evident general principle of prima facie duty. From this, too, perhaps along with the apprehension of the self-evident prima facie rightness of the same act in virtue of its having another characteristic as well, and perhaps in spite of the apprehension of its prima facie wrongness in virtue of its having some third characteristic, we come to believe something not self-evident at all, but an object of probable opinion, viz. that this particular act is (not prima facie but) actually right (Ross 1930: 33)

Nevertheless, Ross is aware of the difference between mathematical and ethical thought. As we have seen before, probability plays a major role in the domain of morality, whereas mathematical knowledge entails necessity. Mathematical axioms and moral acts alike often show a complexity which may also entail contradictions. An act can be morally right or morally wrong at the same time, whereas "a triangle which is isosceles necessarily has two of its angles equal, whatever other characteristics the triangle may have" (Ross 1930: 34).

Let us take, for example, the propositions 'right *means* productive of the best possible consequences' or, to use Ross' word, 'optimific'. Ross provides two different interpretations of the definition. *The first* states that the coextensiveness of the two terms of the definition might be apprehended apriori, immediately or deductively. Ross leads this interpretation back to the Moorean conception of intuition as evidence, namely the absence of proof or of disproof. *A second* interpretation, on the contrary, affirms that the definition requires an inductive inquiry to be proved. Despite the apparent plausibility of the first interpretation, for Ross, both interpretations are false. The falseness of the first is demonstrated by the institution of promises, which is one of the *prima facie* duties on Ross' list. His reasoning goes as follows: 'right' and 'optimific' would be coextensive terms if every right act were also optimific, universal and necessary. There might be reasons - such as the breaking of a promise - which render an optimific act wrong. Therefore, the rightness of an optimific act cannot be coextensive and, then, it cannot be apprehended apriori, 'the coextensiveness of the right and the optimific is, then, not self-evident' (Ross 2002, 36). The second interpretation is for its part false because it is affected by the drawback of any inductive epistemology, namely that it should consider an excessive number of consequences and, if that is not enough, to 'trace these consequences into an unending future' (Ross 1930: 37).

There is much more to be said for Rossian intuitionism as an ethical theory. For the sake of our inquiry, Ross pluralistic intuitionism allows us to specify a series of aspects, such as i) the non-obviousness of self-evident propositions that often require careful reflection and mental maturity before being apprehended; ii) the necessity of pondering our intuitions, submitting them in a process of "reflective equilibrium" *ante litteram*, reflecting carefully on them as we have already noticed with Sidgwick's four conditions; (iii) the relationship between self-evident *prima facie* duty and actual duties and the claim that only prima facie duty are self-evident, while actual duties are not self-evident; iv) the absence of direct derivation or deduction from self-evident *prima facie* principles to a particular judgements; v) the role played by the concrete situation with its non-morally and morally relevant aspects; vi) the thought-provoking fact that the apprehension of a

self-evident proposition does not occur in the abstract, but in the concrete situation through the process of intuitive induction. These last three points warn us against a too simplistic way of conceiving self-evidence in ethics. As Shafer-Landau claims:

> The classic self-evidence story, one which has us justifying our particular moral beliefs by deriving them from self-evidence principles is not the sort of tale I wish to tell. We could not hope for a tidier story. But in this case, as elsewhere, the simplest picture may not be the most accurate. Moral justification may be a messier business than any of the classical accounts have allowed for (Shafer-Landau 2003, 266)

Ross' conception of self-evidence is much more articulated than Moore and Prichard's. Ross has the undoubtable merit of having acknowledged a plurality of *prima facie* principles and of having clarified the relation between prima facie duties and actual duties. Nonetheless, Ross does not provide neither a satisfying definition of self-evidence - the claim that self-evident propositions are those which are evident in themselves is more a reformulation of the concept than a definition -, nor an articulated framework of its implications and problems.

1.4 Audi's conception of self-evidence

The most prominent account of self-evidence of the last decades has been proposed by Robert Audi (Audi 1997; 1998; 1999; 2004; 2015). If for Ross, and for a traditional characterization of self-evidence, self-evident propositions are those propositions that are evident in themselves, Audi refines this conception. Its account of self-evident undoubtedly constitutes an improvement over the past accounts that we have just considered. Writes Audi:

> I construe the basic kind of self-evident propositions as (roughly) a truth such that an adequate understanding of it meets two conditions. First, in virtue of that understanding, one is justified in believing the proposition […]. Second, if one believes proposition on the basis of that understanding, then one knows it. Thus, a proposition is self-evident provided an adequate understanding of it is sufficient both for being justified in believing it and for knowing it if one believes it on the basis of that understanding (Audi 1994, 48-49)

For Audi, self-evidence is primarily a property of propositions that share two conditions. *The first condition* states that self-evident propositions are evident in themselves, that is, they are justified on the basis of the sole understanding. Once one has understood the proposition, one is justified in believing the proposition. Moreover, as the definition points out, being justified in believing the proposition is different from actually believing the proposition. To use a term of art, understanding is not "belief-compelling" even if, as Audi rightly points out, a rational person *tends to believe* them. For Shafer-Landau, who also defends a model of self-evidence, 'if I have a standing practice of believing what my guru tells me, then his say-so in a given case may be sufficient to prevent me from believing a self-evident proposition that I understand and that I have attentively considered' (Shafer Landau 2003, 247).The *second condition*, affirms that beliefs acquired through sole understanding, entail knowledge. If one adequately understands the propositions, and if one believes the propositions that he is justified in believing on the basis of the understanding, then one knows the propositions[5].

To defend the notion against skepticism and doubts, Audi illustrates his account of self-evidence by dealing with some common misconceptions of the notion.

First, self-evident does not mean obvious (although it might be so). Self-evident propositions may be obvious at first sight or they may be obvious only after careful reflection and consideration. Examples of the former are basic principles whose truth is intuitively evident, such as A=A and "torturing children for fun is wrong". As example of the latter Audi takes a proposition like "the mother-in-law of a spouse of a person's youngest sibling is that person's own mother" (Audi 2013, 94). Clearly, the former but not the latter is obvious, but both are self-evident. Audi refers to propositions that are readily understood as *immediately self-evident* while propositions that require reflection are only *mediately self-evident*. Granted, mediately self-evident propositions can also be seen as intuitively true, and then dispose the subject to believe it, but taking time for reflection is required in order to be justified in believing the proposition. Moreover, propositions that are mediately self-evident for normal adults – such as, again, De Morgan's laws - could be immediately self-evident for advanced thinkers, such as students of logic.

Second, even if according to a traditional conception of self-evidence 'self-evident truths are incapable of proof' (Price 1969 [1758], 160), Audi claims that self-evidence is compatible with provability. Even though self-evident propositions are the paradigm of the non-inferentially justified, and therefore they do not need proof, they could be inferentially confirmed, that

[5] An analysis of the second conditions will be provided in chapter third, here we mainly focus on the first condition to which current literature has been mainly concerned.

is considerations could be made in favor of them without undermining their self-evidence[6]. Thus, concludes Audi, 'self-evident propositions, whether mediately or immediately self-evident, can not only be defended by dispelling misunderstandings but (in some cases) even argued for from premises' (Audi 1999, 223). Still, an argument is not needed insofar as we want to better clarify and defend our belief in the proposition.

Third, self-evident propositions defined as those that are justifiedly believed on the basis of the understanding are apriori, and they are justifiably apriori: 'reason alone as directed toward p is sufficient to justify believing it, at least if reason is used extensively enough and with adequate care' (Audi 1999, 211). Nonetheless, even if the notion of the apriori has been traditionally associated with that of necessity, Audi denies that necessity is entailed by his conception of self-evidence, even if there might be space for arguing that the apriori is also necessary. As he points out, his concern is for *how* a proposition is known, rather than for *what* kind of proposition this is. This is particularly helpful for an argument on the apriori that will be developed in the following chapter.

Fourth, self-evidence is an epistemic notion and proposition 'need not wear its name on its sleeve' (Audi 1999, 224). One understanding and knowing a self-evident proposition does not imply that one is aware of the epistemic status of the proposition, namely of its self-evidence. In fact, one can have a cognitive attitude towards the proposition without being aware that the proposition is self-evident, as it is clear from the fact that many people that have never heard about anything like self-evidence have still self-evident beliefs.

Fifth, Audi (2004) distinguishes between *hard* and *soft* self-evidence (a distinction which admits different degrees of hardness and softness). *Hard* self-evidence belongs overwhelmingly to mathematical and logical propositions. Propositions of this kind are 'strongly axiomatic', 'immediate', 'indefeasibly justified' and 'compelling, i.e. cognitive irresistible given an immediate comprehension of them' (Audi 2004: 53). On the contrary, soft self-evident propositions are mediate, defeasible and not belief-compelling. Self-evident moral principles are obviously expressed by self-evident propositions of the second kind: 'The propositions in question can be known independently of premises, but they are not the kind of a strong axioms that

[6] However, as Audi himself reminds in an endnote (Audi 2004, 209, n.4), this point has already been stressed by W.D. Ross, who, in article entitled *The Basis of Objective Judgement* (1927), writes that 'the fact that something can be inferred does not prove that it cannot be seen intuitively'. From this passage, Stratton-Lake draws the conclusion that 'if he [Ross] thinks that some proposition can be inferred from (justified by) other propositions and be self-evident, he clearly thinks that its being self-evident does not rule out the possibility of a proof' (Stratton Lake 2002, xlix).

cannot be known on the basis of anything deeper. They are also withholdable and even disbelievable, even given comprehending consideration' (Audi 2004, 54).

Sixth, if self-evident propositions are assumed to be non-substantive for Audi, there are self-evident principles that are substantive. Self-evident moral propositions are the paradigm of these substantive self-evident propositions. It is not obvious what substantive means, if it is the same of synthetical, of informative or simply if it is a term that indicates that self-evident principles are more than simply obvious. In the next section I single out three classes under which self-evident moral propositions could be gathered and present examples of them.

Before going on, it is important to underline the relevance of Audi's model. Whichever is the opinion one is inclined to have about the efficacy of Audi's conception of self-evidence, one has to admit that it changes the way in which philosophers think about self-evidence. That is the reason why Audi's account might represent the best candidate for starting to deal with self-evidence. Also a prominent account of self-evidence in ethics relies on Audi's conceptions under many relevant aspects: Shafer-Landau is probably the one who made the most efforts in these directions providing a though provoking defense of self-evidence as a response to skeptical worries on knowability and justifiability of moral claim (Shafer Landau 2003, 247-266)[7].

However, although the consensus on Audi's account is high, critical objections against their validity have been moved by many critical points of view (Kappel 2002, Väyrynen 2008; Fanselow 2011; Cowan, 2015, 2017). Notice that these criticisms are directed more towards the concept of self-evidence *tout court* than simply towards Audi's definition of it. In fact, it is easier to dismiss the conception of self-evidence through opposing arguments, than to propose an alternative model of self-evidence. As far as I know, there are no alternative definitions of self-evidence that can be advanced. If self-evidence in ethics has some plausibility, than the definition of self-evidence should be that proposed by Audi. This does not mean that all the work has been already done; on the contrary, even assuming Audi's definition as starting point, much more work is needed in order to defend self-evidence in ethics.

[7] 'A proposition p is self-evident = df. p is such that adequately understanding and attentively considering just p is sufficient to justify believing that p' (Shafer Landau 2003, 268). Some meaningful differences stand just immediately out of sight here. Unlike Audi, Shafer Landau (1) does not affirm that a self-evident proposition is also a truth; (2) only refers to the condition of justification, and not to the condition of knowledge. At the same time, both seem to share the "adequate understanding" requirement

1.4.1 What are self-evident propositions

Before proceeding, it is important to have an insight into what are self-evident propositions. This section aims at showing how the realm of self-evident propositions can be articulated.

One thing is defining self-evidence and sharpen its features and implications, another is to individuate what are self-evident propositions and provide example of them. In this section I present some cases of self-evidence. The cases are divided into five groups that, I hope, are comprehensive enough of the occurrences of self-evidence in ethics. After having given some provisional definition of self-evidence, singling out concrete example of self-evidence is a necessary step for the proceeding of our argument.

A. Self-evident propositions as analytical propositions

The first group gathers self-evident propositions that are supposed to be analytical. Roughly speaking, a truth is analytical if it is true in virtue of its meaning. It is well-known that conceptions of analyticity are topic of discussion and there is still disagreement on what analytical mean and even on, from Quine (1953) onwards, if it makes sense to distinguish analytical and synthetical propositions. For the sake of simplicity, I single out here two classical ways of framing analyticity and I call them Kantian analytical and, with Paul Boghossian (1996), I distinguish an epistemic analytical. Let us consider them in turn.

Kantian analytical are analytical propositions of the form "AB(x) is B". The predicate B is contained in the subject AB(x). Although B does not exhaust the semantical content of AB(x) 'I need only to analyze the concept, i.e., become conscious of the manifold that I always think in it, in order to encounter this predicate therein' (Kant 1787, CPR A7|B1). Examples of Kantian analytical moral propositions CAN BE for instance:

KA (1): promises should be kept

KA (2): debts should be paid

In *Analyticity Reconsidered* (1996) and in further works (1997; 2003) Paul Boghossian distinguishes an epistemological and a metaphysical notion of analyticity. According the former 'a statement is 'true by virtue of its meaning' provided that grasp of its meaning alone suffices for justified belief in its truth' (Boghossian 1996, 363). For the metaphysical notion 'a statement

is analytic provided that, in some appropriate sense, it owes its truth value completely to its meaning, and not at all to 'the facts' (Boghossian 1996, 364). Following Quine, and in contrast with many contemporary epistemologists, Boghossian rejects the metaphysical notion and adopts the epistemological one. Obviously, this is not the place to enter into the debate and I have any arguments neither for or against Boghossian rejection of metaphysical analyticity. However, suppose that both notion have right to exist. A moral proposition that instantiate epistemic analyticity is:

EA: Murder is a wrongful killing

while for an example of a (moral?) proposition that instantiate metaphysical analyticity consider the first commandment of the Moises law:

MA: I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before Me.

If I have rightly understood what metaphysical analyticity is and if I have rightly grasped the proposition at stake, MA is an example of metaphysical analytical proposition. It is true in virtue of its meaning, and it is true independent of the fact that God exists. MA could be reformulated as "if God exists, then you should not have strange gods before him". In fact, if you have strange god before him, it means that you do not acknowledge him as God. As Anselm of Canterbury argued against Gaunilon, God is "aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest". If there is something preferable than God, then that something is God. That God is "aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest" Kantian analytically emerges from the definition of God. Therefore, MA 'owes its truth value completely to its meaning, and not at all to 'the facts'. Someone might be tempted to considered MA a conventional analytical truth, because once established what God means, the rest will follow. Though legitimate, I think that there are conventional analytical truths but that these truths need to be framed another way.

B. self-evident propositions as conceptual propositions

Rossian *prima facie* duties are usually taken to be the paradigm o self-evident moral principles. That "We should not treat people unjustly", that "we should make amend for our wrong-doing", that "we should not lie" that we should contribute to the good of other people", that "we should express gratitude". These propositions are self-evident in a positive and in a negative sense. *Positively,* because we are justified in believing these propositions once we have considered and understood the concepts figuring in it and their

relations. In this case, the belief is non-inferential because it relies only on concepts and their relation, nothing more. *Negatively*, because denying them is far from being an easy task. Granted, to say it in a pure Rossian style, each of these principles can be overridden but none of them can be denied without falling into a kind of contradiction. The denial that "we should not lie" is not a logical contradiction, but it requires lots of reasons for supporting it, whereas the mere acceptance might be seen as intuitively true.

C. Self-evident propositions as commonsensical propositions

A second class of self-evident proposition is constituted by propositions that are commonsensical, that is that express. We can single out two subclasses of commonsensical propositions: conventional propositions and commonsensical propositions. Conventional moral propositions should not to be confused with merely semantical or lexical conventional proposition. That is wrong" is a norm valid only within a monogamous framework or within a context where the exclusiveness of sexual relationship is worth-valuing. The proposition is usually taken to be true by default – at least in the sense that, unlike defender, those who denies it are expected to provide reasons – but it is also true by convention, e.g. there are free love communities where, for several reasons, the convention does not obtain.

The other subclass of commonsensical propositions is constituted by default reasonable propositions, that is propositions that are true by default and that have default credibility, that is people tend to give assent to the truth of these propositions. For instance, that "stealing is wrong", that "happiness is a good" or that "it is wrong to lie". These are truths from the point of view of common sense, that at least in rational person do not call for explanation, they are just accepted as they are.

1.4.2 Self-evidence and apriori in the moral domain

Critics emphasized the intuitionist claim that ethical knowledge is self-evident and apriori – and its implications – as one of its most vulnerable points. For Darwall, the intuitionist ethical theory claims that 'as fundamental normative practical principles are necessarily valid a priori for every rational agent, they must be apprehensible by rational intuition' (Darwall 2002, 252). In *Moral thinking* (1952) Hare writes that 'according to naturalism, it is analytically true that if actions have certain non-moral descriptive properties, they have, in consequence, certain moral properties. According to intuitionism, this is not so. The proposition that if the actions have the descriptive properties they have the moral properties, though true, it is

synthetic, and non-empirical. It has to be known to be true by the special faculty of moral' (Hare 1981, 78). Similarly, Frankena maintains that 'an intuitionist must believe in simple indefinable properties, properties that are of a peculiar or non-natural sort, a priori or non-empirical concepts intuition and self-evident or necessary synthetical proposition' (Frankena 1973, 103). And again, 'it is very difficult to defend the belief in apriori concepts and self-evident truths in ethics, now that mathematicians have generally given up the belief that there are such concepts and truths in their field' (Frankena 1973, 103).

The downfall of ethical intuitionism and, more generally, the loss of appeal of the objectivist and cognitivist project in ethics led to a general mistrust of the possibility of obtaining a truth in ethics and even more an apriori truth that entails necessity and universality as its requirement. To use a rough schema: if, up to the thirties, objectivism and realism were leading theories within the tradition of analytical moral philosophy, since the mid-thirties subjectivist and antirealist views prevailed. Two exceptions confirmed the rule: R. M. Hare's universal prescriptivism and Rawls' constructivism were two attempts of reintroducing truth in ethics, one based on the universal function of ethical prescriptions, the other based on a wide agreement among stakeholders in the public sphere. Nonetheless, if ethics is nothing but a matter of feelings or subjective preference, or again, a mere generalization of empirically wide-accepted rules that concern our conduct, only referring to an apriori knowledge appeared old-fashioned and non-sense. The project of an apriori conception of ethics that had its touchstones in Kantian philosophy - even if, as Landucci (1994) suggests, the topic in Kant's writings is far from being clear - and in ethical intuitionism seemed to be condemned to a fatal flaw. Not by chance, one of the main factors of the recent revival of interest for ethical intuitionism is the loss of appeal of the Quinean attack against apriori knowledge. In his *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (1951), Quine attacks the analytical-synthetical distinction (one of the dogmas of empiricism, besides reductionism). Taking for granted, as it does, the empiricist view that if there is apriori justification, then it should be analytical, arguing against the possibility of analytical proposition, means also ruling out the existence of apriori justification. However, in the last decades there has been a surge of attention towards "pure" knowledge (BonJour, 1998) and apriori regained its legitimacy: 'There is, therefore, a renewed sense that we both need and have apriori knowledge. Many are still dubious that there are synthetic apriori moral propositions, but the fact that such knowledge is no longer ruled out simply in virtue of the fact that it is supposed to be synthetic and apriori means that intuitionist claim that certain moral propositions are self-evident cannot be dismissed without arguments' (Stratton Lake 2002, 25). Therefore, in the last few years there has been a surge of attention on

moral apriori, thanks to the renewal of ethical intuitionism starting from Audi's works in the mid-1990s[8]. This has surely favored a renewed interest for apriori moral justification and knowledge. To many – even outside the borders of intuitionism (among whom, Bealer, 1998; BonJour 1998; Peacocke 2000) – the appeal to intuitions seem to be the most plausible way of defending the central tenet of apriori knowledge, namely that there are self-evident propositions that are justified independently of empirical experience. However, it is intuitionism that defends this claim in the ethical field. None of them explicitly and systematically address the problem at stake here, despite its being present both in (old and new) intuitionist frames and in the objections of Ayer, (1936), Nowell-Smith (1954), Hare (1997), Darwall (2002).

Apriori justification and knowledge is highly problematic, especially in the moral domain. If it is plausible to figure out apriori principles in mathematics and logic, it is not so obvious that there are apriori principles in ethics. In fact, it seems that we cannot easily get rid of the experiential dimension. But being apriori justified means that we are justified independently of experience. Therefore, it seems to be dubious that there are apriori moral principles

As we have seen, a similar worry has been yet advanced about self-evidence. Nevertheless, it seems to be easier to accept that there are self-evident principles in ethics than that there are apriori principles. According to the language use, a principle can be self-evident, that is immediately evident, for those who belong to a definite community. For instance, the self-evidence of "low-wage workers should have the same political rights of high-wage workers" is normally accepted by the wide majority of people that live in our world. This is a kind of proposition that, as we have seen with Sidgwick's fourth condition, is based on the wide consensus. However, that "low-wage workers should have the same political rights of high-wage workers" is apriori is far less obvious. Experiential reasons seems to be crucial in determining its self-evidence. Nonetheless, a self-evidence of this kind, a self-evidence deprived of its apriori character and basically based on consensus lose much of its epistemological force. It seems to be plausible to claim that those who defend self-evident does not simply mean that there are principles that are so widely accepted to appear to be platitudes. Even though consensus play a relevant role, it is not all that intuitionist require for a proposition to be

[8] cf. AUDI (1997), *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford; ID., A Kantian Intuitionism, *Mind* 110, 2001, 601-635; ID., *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2004; ID., *Moral Perception*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2013; ID., "Intuition and Its Place in Ethics", *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, 1, 2015, 57-77.

self-evident. The proposition should also be apriori, that is independent of the contingent experience and applicable in different contexts.

Self-evident principles like Rossian principles of prima facie duty are clear examples of principles whose self-evidence should also be apriori. In fact, self-evidence without apriori constitutes merely a pragmatical agreement on a proposition, that can change through space and time. Therefore, self-evidence needs the apriori. At the same time, apriori needs self-evidence.

In this brief section I will explain why it is only through self-evidence that we can accept apriori principles in ethics. In order to develop this point, I shall deepen the conception of apriori in ethics and in ethical intuitionism.

Although the notion of *apriori* plays a relevant role in contemporary epistemology, much less attention has been devoted to the development of the concept in the moral domain.[9]. To get to the heart of the matter, we shall consider the entry "Apriorism in Moral Epistemology" (2016) of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Hicks and De Paul posit here a distinction between a *standard* and a *non-standard view* on the apriori. Despite their relevant differences, the *standard view* and the *non-standard view* characterize apriori negatively as "independent of experience" and positively as "pertaining to self-evident propositions".

The phrase "independent of experience" should not be trivially conceived. Indeed, as Wood (1999) points out, 'the definition of a priori as "independent of experience" is opaque because it tends to suggest the quite absurd picture of your closing your eyes, stopping your ears, shutting yourself off from all external input - and precisely thereby acquiring some knowledge (which is all the purer for being untainted by sensory information)' (Wood 1999, 56). The term "experience" is quite vague and presents a challenge to philosophical analysis, especially when it is used in the definition of apriori. Of course, it is beyond dispute that "experience" includes the five ordinary senses: sight, touch, taste, smell and sound. "Experience" is mainly but non-exhaustively constituted by these senses, though it is debatable that a quasi-bodily act, like proprioception - roughly, the direct inner awareness of our body - is the kind of experience that an apriori view should be afraid of. Still, one might wonder whether introspection, memory, testimony, even revelation of God, should be included in the concept of "experience".

[9] One of the latest overview on this topic is Hicks and De Paul (2016)'s entry "A Priorism in Moral Epistemology" of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*[9]. Prior to that, attention to the issue was paid by Dancy (2007)'s *Necessity, Universality, and the A Priori in Ethics*, by Tropman (2012) *Self-Evidence and Apriori Moral Knowledge*, by Smith (1994; 2004) *Ethics and the Apriori*[9]. As far as I know, these are some of the few works openly devoted - as the titles themselves suggest - to moral apriori in current literature. Granted, as we will see, the topic is scattered in many recent inquires (among others, Audi 2004; 2015; Copp, 2007; Huemer, 2005; Shafer-Landau, 2005).

Here the discourse is applied to propositions. In general, saying that a proposition (and its content) is independent of experience means that in order to understand that proposition (and its content), one need not further experience except that which grounds the knowledge of the elements of the propositions. The simplest case is that of analytical propositions. For example, I know apriori, that "All bachelors are unmarried" if, and only if, I know what "bachelors" or "unmarried" mean by simply looking into an English vocabulary, or, maybe, by testimony. The only experience I need is that through which I understand the proposition at stake. Once I master the terms of the proposition and their relation I do not need any further experience. This is what De Paul a Hicks call *standard view on the apriori*.

The standard view holds that *a priori* propositions are justifiedly held independently of experience, with the exception of the experience required for understanding the relevant terms of the proposition. These propositions are therefore justified for any person who understands them.

> If a person believes a self-evident proposition solely on the basis of understanding it, the person will be doxastically justified in believing it. Such propositions are often referred to as *a priori*, which should be taken to mean that it is possible for one to be *a priori* justified in believing them (De Paul and Hicks, 2016)

The things to be noticed here is that if we consider apriori as intertwined with the notion of self-evidence that we have presented so far, most of the difficulties that concerns of the acceptance apriori in ethics disappear. Apriori is no more a sui generis kind of justification and knowledge that belongs to a metaphysically weird region but a way of affirming that some basic truth can be apprehended by solely considering them carefully. Therefore, in the course of our inquiry we will use the words apriori and self-evident as interchangeably terms. If the notion of apriori has some plausibility, then this plausibility depends on the plausibility of self-evidence.

1.5 Self-evidence and fallibility

We have seen in the previous section that self-evident propositions have a positive characterization, that is they are true in virtue of the sole understanding, and a negative characterization, that is they are independent of experience. We have claimed that an adequate understanding of a self-evident apriori proposition is sufficient to be justified in believing it. However, if *there* the question was 'what can justify a self-evident moral proposition?', *here* the question is 'what can defeat a self-evident moral

proposition?'. If, *there*, we noticed that, in spite of its self-evidence, a self-evident apriori proposition requires more than mere understanding to be justified, *here*, we wonder whether a self-evident apriori proposition can be falsified.

At least at first sight, it seems that propositions that are self-evident and apriori cannot turn out to be false. The apparent indefeasibility of this kind of propositions seems to depend on the fact that self-evident propositions are true in virtue of the concepts involved and their relation. Nothing external to the propositions can confirm or disconfirm the propositions, as it would happen if the propositions were not self-evident. Therefore, if propositions are really, and not only apparently, self-evident, then they should also be true.

Consider here two scenarios.

The first scenarios includes the possibility of self-evident propositions that are considered to be so because of a lack of understanding. In fact , it might happen that someone holds a proposition to be self-evident and true even though this proposition is not really self-evident. Self-evident propositions can be falsified also because their self-evidence and their truth have been acknowledged in virtue of some misleading understanding of the propositions. But, once the adequate understanding has been established, we do not have any reason to consider them self-evident and true anymore.

The second scenario is more relevant for our inquiry.

We have seen with Ross that self-evident propositions cannot be considered in an abstract way. This may mean that when we formulate intuitive judgements we have to consider the whole situation. Or, it might also mean that it is not possible to formulate a judgement that is at odd with the context into which it is has been formulated. Not by chance the tradition of ethical intuitionism has always paid attention to the context into which moral judgements are formulated. We can call this moral context "common sense morality". Now, the role played by common sense in a theory of intuition and self-evidence will be considered at length in the fourth chapter. For now, it suffices to notice that self-evident moral judgements, though apriori, should take into account common sense morality. More precisely, self-evidence and common sense should be related in a way that avoids considering self-evidence as a "cold" kingdom of logical or semantic and ineffective truths and common sense as the kingdom of prejudices and unwarranted assumptions**.** On the contrary, self-evidence and common sense should be strongly intertwined and receive mutual support. On one hand, self-evident principles can systematize and correct common sense morality. On the other, it may still be the case that common sense systematizes and corrects the principles.

One way of doing this – especially valid for morality - is by showing that the principles at stake are too much at odd with common sense. In this

case, they would be correct but useless because unable both to explain and to bear on our conduct. However, this is a sort of pragmatic reason that can leave one unsatisfied. One might here reply that even if a moral principle contradicts common sense, that does not mean that it is false. If an error occurs it is more probable that it occurs in the common sense with all the cognitive and practical mistakes that common men perform, that in principle, particularly if the principle is self-evident.

There is however a subtler way of explaining how common sense morality can disconfirm self-evident propositions. This way starts from the definition of apriori as independent of experience.

In *Modest Apriori Knowledge* (1991) Donna Summerfield draws a relevant distinction between two ways of conceiving apriori as independent of experience:

> the apriorist's claim that X has some beliefs that are warranted independently of their relations to experience is ambiguous as between (1) At t, X has some warranted beliefs whose warrant does not, at r, depend on, in the sense that it derives from, the warrant of any empirical belief(s) X has at t or the warrant provided by any experiences X has at or before t, and (2) X has some warranted beliefs which would (other things equal) remain warranted no matter what other empirical beliefs X forms and no matter what other experiences X undergoes (Summerfield 1991, 47)

In *Common Sense and Apriori Epistemology* (1998) Noah Lemos reclaims Summerfield's distinction. The starting question of the paper is, 'can one consistently accept both an apriori epistemology and a commonsense approach to the theory of knowledge?' (Lemos 1998, 473).

For Lemos, common sense approaches are theories which take common sense beliefs as criteria of evidence and knowledge. According to these approaches common sense beliefs are just the ultimate data of our ordinary thought. Beliefs that conflict with our commonsense beliefs shall be rejected. Three points are emphasized by "commonsense philosophers". *First*, ordinary beliefs (e.g. "I have two hands") and epistemic beliefs (ex. "I know I have two hands") are taken as our evidence and ultimate criteria of truth. *Second*, these beliefs are taken as data without proof. They are in fact 'the starting points of philosophical inquiry and not the premises from which one might seek to prove them' (Lemos 1998, 476). *Third*, despite assigning great importance to commonsense belief, commonsense philosophers do not hold that their commonsense beliefs are exempt from revision.

Lemos wonders whether one can maintain that commonsense beliefs – that are aposteriori contingent beliefs - are the ultimate data of our knowledge and meanwhile holding that there are general principles apriori.

In providing an answer, Lemos introduces two ways of conceiving the apriori: '(a) human beings can have *a priori grounds or reasons* for accepting substantive epistemic principles, and (b) human beings can be justified in believing or know substantive epistemic principles *a priori*' (Lemos 1998, 474).

There is a difference between the two options. The first is less demanding than the second. It only affirms that substantive epistemic principle might be accepted on the basis of a priori reasons, that is reasons independent of experience. The second requirement is more demanding - it maintains that we can be justified in believing epistemic principles which are apriori. Still, Lemos claims that an apriori theory of knowledge should account both for principles that are substantive and apriori and for the apriori reasons on the basis of which we accept such principles.

Nonetheless, Lemos points out the fact that we can have apriori reasons for knowing substantive epistemic principle does not imply that these reasons are certain and infallible. Moreover, apriori reasons can be compatible with a common sense approach.

In explaining how it can be possible, Lemos singles out two models of apriori justification.

The first model is the axiomatic model, as it has been presented by Roderick Chisholm (1989). For Chisholm apriori justification is a sort of axiomatic justification. In fact, he maintains that 'S has basic a priori justification for believing *p* iff *p* is axiomatic for S. Let us say that *p* is axiomatic for S iff (i) S accepts *p* and necessarily (ii) *p* is true and (iii) for every x, if x accepts *p*, then *p* is certain for x' (Lemos 1998, 477).

Lemos argues that Chisholm's requirements are too demanding. What is axiomatic is certain by definition and, therefore, indefeasible. Not only because they require that what is certain for one person should be also certain for another person, but also because if *p* is apriori, and if apriori means axiomatic, then if S believes p then he should necessarily be justified in believing p: 'provided that S believes what is axiomatic for him, there is nothing that he can know or believe that will make him not justified in believing it' (Lemos 1998, 478).

For Lemos it is not possible to endorse both an axiomatic conception of apriori and at the same time accepting a commonsensical approach to the theory of knowledge. As we have already observed, for commonsense approaches epistemic principles are defeasible and when they contradict our common sense beliefs they can be rejected, in absence of further reasons.

Therefore, in order to conciliate an apriori epistemology to a commonsense approach, a modest view of apriori justification is needed. This "modest" view, entails that apriori propositions are, or can be, defeasible and 'less than certain' (Lemos 1998, 481). In fact, there are epistemic principles

that can be justified apriori and at the same time be open to be defeated by empirical considerations. These principles - let us call them *modest apriori principles* - have apriori justification because they are not justified by empirical propositions - e.g. common sense propositions – although their apriori justification can be defeated by common sense propositions:

> We may hold that our justification for believing these principles is apriori in the sense that our justification for believing them does not positively depend upon our being justified in believing various contingent commonsense epistemic propositions. But we may allow that our justification for believing these principles negatively depends on our not being justified in believing contingent commonsense propositions that would defeat our justification for accepting those principles (Lemos 1998, 480)

To sum up, common sense propositions have a twofold task: on the one hand, they may justify - or at least support – self-evident epistemic principles, which have non-apriori justification; on the other hand, they can defeat self-evident epistemic principles which have (modest) a priori justification.

Lemos refers to apriori justification in general; at this stage, considering what I have been claiming so far, his argument also is helpful also for apriori justification and knowledge in ethics. In fact, if there is something like apriori moral justification, this will be in the guise of "modest" apriori. If apriori justification is in principle fallible, even more fallibility belongs to apriori moral justification. Moreover, if for Lemos modest apriori justification is compatible with a common sense approach, even more morality should be compatible with common sense morality. Therefore, Lemos' claim that apriori and common sense can be compatible is particularly helpful for the apriori in the moral domain. If there could be apriori justification and knowledge in ethics, it should be a modest kind of apriori justification.

Chapter four will be devoted to the discussion of the relation between self-evident propositions and common sense morality.

1.6 Reducing self-evidence to intuitions

In *Intuition, Self-Evidence and Understanding* (2016) Philipp Stratton-Lake proposes to reduce self-evidence to intuitions. Despite acknowledging the progress made in the comprehension of the notion of self-evidence, Stratton-Lake maintains that it would be better if ethical intuitionists get rid of this notion: 'once we have a good understanding of this notion we can see that it plays no distinctive epistemological role. Since the idea that certain moral propositions are self-evident is so controversial, I

suggest that intuitionists do best to avoid this notion' (Stratton Lake 2016, 48). The paper targets Audi's conception of self-evidence, particularly the claim that adequately understanding a self-evident proposition is sufficient justification for believing it. For Stratton Lake, this last claim is too demanding. if for self-evident proposition we mean more than mere analytical propositions. In that case, Audi's definition would be correct, but ethical intuitionism (and moral philosophy in general) requires much more than analyticity. For mere understanding of a synthetical proposition is not sufficient to believe them justifiedly, of the two one: either synthetical propositions are not self-evident or self-evident synthetical propositions are justified by more than mere understanding. According to what Stratton-Lake calls the 'evidential criterion of justification' to be evidence, a justifier must be a link to the truth of the justified. In the case of synthetical propositions, understanding cannot be evidence for the truth of the proposition which has been justified. Moreover, evidence rises the (epistemic) probability of the truth of the proposition for which it is evidence. Therefore, it is clear that if analytical propositions are true in virtue of their meaning, (1) merely grasping that meaning is sufficient to track the truth of the proposition and (2) understanding alone is sufficient to grasp the meaning of the proposition. Stratton Lake concludes that even though synthetical propositions are apriori, they are not true in virtue of their meaning and then Audi's merely understanding requirement is not comprehensive enough for self-evidence.

Once it has been established that understanding does not provide evidence for synthetical analytical propositions, so continues Stratton Lake's argument, we should determine what does provide such justification, and intuitions are plausible candidates for this role. Here Stratton-Lake follows Bealer in the claim that intuitions are intellectual seemings. Only conceiving intuitions as intellectual seemings can grant the evidential role of intuitions: if intuitions were beliefs, as Audi claims, they could not justify the belief in the self-evident propositions: 'unlike Audi's account of intuitions, Bealer's account at least makes sense of the idea that intuitions are the sort of thing that can justify beliefs with the same content' (Stratton Lake 2016, 37). On the contrary, intuitions as seemings justify beliefs with the same content. On these grounds, Stratton-Lake proposes an alternative account of self-evidence:

> Self-evident propositions are truths such that (a) a clear intuition of them is sufficient justification for believing them, and (b) believing them on the basis of a clear intuition of them entails knowing them (Stratton Lake 2017, 38)

As Stratton Lake points out, this model acknowledges a role to the

understanding, without taking it to be a justifier. Rather, understanding provides the right sort of explanation for the seemingness of truth revealed by intuition. In absence of understanding, intuition will be reduced to hunches or clairvoyance, losing its epistemic force. Though provoking, it seems to me that Stratton Lake demonstrates less than what he purported to.

First of all, it is doubtful that the amended definition of self-evidence that Stratton-Lake gives is *really* different from Audi's definition. I am not saying that they are one and the same. I might also admit that Stratton-Lake's observation on the nature of intuitions (that they are seemings and not beliefs) might improve Audi's definition. However, as we have seen above, one of the Audi's four conditions of intuition is that 'intuitions must be formed in the light of an adequate understanding of their propositional objects' (Audi 1997, 41). Audi could substitute the "clear intuition" of Stratton-Lake's definition with the condition just mentioned. To be clear, intuitions "must be formed in light of adequate understanding". Hence, the two definitions could be seen as interchangeable or at least as advancing quite similar claims. Thus, the difference between Stratton-Lake and Audi must be found in the notion of intuition and not in the notion of self-evidence. However, what is most surprising is the conclusion:

> The right conclusion would be that intuitionists should give up talk of self-evident moral propositions. I think that once the notion of self-evidence is properly understood, we can see that it has no important epistemic role to play. Once we learn that it is our intuition of some self-evident proposition rather than our understanding of it that justifies us in believing it, we can see that all of the epistemic work is done by moral intuitions (Stratton Lake 2016, 32)

Strictly speaking, Stratton-Lake does not eliminate the notion of self-evidence itself; rather he affirms that self-evidence is entirely made of intuition. Remarkably, he compares this conception to Scanlon's (1998) 'buck passing account', where the property of goodness of a thing disappears in favor of the reason that causes a pro-attitude towards that thing (Scanlon 1998, 95-100). The same happens for self-evidence: 'Similarly, my account of self-evidence does not say that there is no such thing as self-evidence: there are just intuitions. It says, rather, that there is such a thing as self-evidence, and this is to be understood in terms of intuitions' (Stratton Lake 2016, 32).

Despite being appealing, there are two main reasons to reject Stratton-Lake's eliminativist proposal. *First*, the conclusion that 'abandoning self-evidence as a significant epistemic category would mean that an intuitionist moral epistemology would not have to claim both that moral intuitions justify,

and that certain substantive moral propositions have the special epistemic status of being self-evident and so engage a different sort of justifier. All they need defend is the first claim, and that the justification provided by some intuitions is sufficient to ground knowledge' relies on the assumption that the nature of intuitions is less controversial than the nature of self-evident propositions. It is evident from the sharp debate in current philosophical literature, that this is not the case. It is even more evident in the ethical case. Even though the seeming-like view of intuitions has recently gained a prominence over the belief-like view, there is still disagreement on what a seeming is and what it implies (compare, for instance, Huemer's view, Bedke's (2008) view and, *si parva licet*, my view advanced in the first chapter).

Second, even though Stratton-Lake is right in claiming that the notion of intuition is less controversial than that of self-evidence, the conception of intuitions he adopts cannot fulfill his purpose. For Stratton Lake, intuitions as intellectual seemings have the same legitimacy, in absence of defeater, of perceptual seemings. We will argue in the next chapter that intellectual seemings and perceptual seemings cannot be compared because, unlike the latter, the former need an epistemic base, unless they target self-evident propositions. In other words, Stratton-Lake's argument would work if intuitions were seemings of self-evident proposition. This is what Stratton-Lake denies:

> We can call a subclass of intuitive propositions self-evident, but once we get clear on what that means, all we are saying is that that proposition is such that an intuition of it justifies us in believing it, and provides a strong enough justification to ground knowledge. But all of that could be said without using the term "self-evidence." We do not learn that there is something else that provides a distinctive sort of justification for belief—namely, an appropriately rich understanding—but merely report that our intuition of that proposition provides a strong justification for believing it. All of the justificatory work is done by the same thing that does the work in non-self-evident intuitive propositions—namely, our intuition of them (Stratton-Lake 2016, 43)

Here, Stratton-Lake's line of reasoning seems to be the following: intuitions provide justification both for self-evident propositions and for non-self-evident intuitive propositions. Having the same justifier, there is no real difference between self-evident and non-self-evident propositions. Adequate understanding plays no relevant role here. On the contrary, the difference is

between propositions that are justified by intuitions and propositions that are not justified by intuitions. Propositions that are non-self-evident can be justified by intuition, if intuitive. However, it is not clear what the gain of reducing self-evidence to intuitions is. The opposite tendency, that of defending a self-evident model of ethics without any appeal or even any reference to intuitions, would be incomplete as well. That is even more true in the ethical case. In fact, very few people are aware that there are self-evident principles of ethics. But everyone has intuitions. Intuitions are the main pathway to self-evidence. Granted, self-evident propositions can be believed by other means, such as faith and testimony, but only intuitions provide justification for the beliefs.

To conclude, both disjoining intuitions and self-evidence and reducing one to the other lead to conceptual confusion. On the contrary, intuitions and self-evidence should be kept as distinct elements and they should be necessarily related. This is what I am going to demonstrate in the next chapter.

1.7 Conclusion

In the present chapter I have presented a wide framework of self-evidence, starting from an historical insight into the topic and showing how the concept of self-evidence has been recently developed and refined. I assume that Audi's conception of self-evidence is the most complete account of self-evidence available today. Therefore, it constitutes an obligatory starting point for our inquiry. Scope of this reconstructive chapter is that of paving the way for the theoretical work that will follow.

2
THE STRONG TIE BETWEEN SELF-EVIDENCE AND INTUITIONS

2.1 Framing the issue

Intuitions are central elements in our lives and their deliverances are often trusted so that they regularly influence our thoughts and our actions. They may enrich our intellectual and moral lives. They are resources shared by people of different ages, cultures, upbringings and education. They may provide us with reasons and motives for judging and for acting. They may let us know things more readily or they may lead to a hasty bias. However, although everyone has intuitions of different sorts, finding out what an intuition is, is far from obvious. In this chapter I will deal with two questions: first, what is the role of intuitions in the process of justification and knowledge; second, what are intuitions and what is their nature.

Over the last decades, much work has been done in this direction within the philosophical debate, especially in epistemology, philosophy of language and ethics. I will not try to give an exposition of the current state of understanding of the problem. That would be far too large a task to undertake. However, though excellent, many of the works on intuitions share the tendency to provide an account of what intuitions are, before determining what kind of role, if any, intuitions play. This trend clearly emerges in Elijah Chudnoff's worry that the question about what intuitions are should be posited in the first place: 'Depending on what intuitions are, they might or might not be reliable, they might or might not possibly justify beliefs about abstract matters, they might or might not be embarrassed by recent experimental studies, and they might or might not be coherently foresworn' (Chudnoff 2011, 625). However, I think there are reasons to doubt that arguing in this direction – from the nature of intuitions to their epistemological role - is fruitful enough to be pursued.

If in many fields, any attempt of answering questions, without having determined beforehand what questions should be answered often constitutes a source of error - as noticed by George Edward Moore in the thought-provoking opening of *Principia Ethica* (1903) -, things seem to be different in the case of intuitions. The assumption that there are intuitions cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, my plan is that of discussing the role of intuitions in epistemology as first - namely questioning whether intuitions are or are not sources of justification and knowledge – and as second providing an account of the nature of intuitions.

First and foremost, we should establish what role intuitions play in epistemology and, *consequently*, what intuitions are. The emphasis put on the adverb "*consequently*" reveals how I will deal with this problem: what intuitions are is a consequence of the epistemic role they have. Therefore, only after having determined the place of intuitions in reasoning, if any, one can put forth a hypothesis on the nature of intuitions. Here is in outline the strategy of the chapter.

I start by the commonly accepted psychological fact that intuitions are mental states. The set of mental states is typically constituted by beliefs, desires, perceptions, thoughts, images and memories so that one can wonder whether there is any need of adding intuitions to this set. The first questions to be answered are these: is there an empty space within the set of mental states that only intuitions can fill or may that space be filled by more widely acknowledged (and less problematic) mental states? Can these more widely acknowledged (and less problematic) mental states play the role traditionally attributed to intuitions so that any appeal to intuitions will be made useless or redundant? What is the role that intuitions are assumed to play?

From the epistemological point of view, intuitions have a right to exist if and only if they play a role in the process of justification and knowledge[10]. If they do not have such a role or if their role can be pursued by other more widely acknowledged (and less problematic) mental states, then intuitions have no right to exist anymore [11]. Thus, Ockham's razor principle that *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* compels us to demonstrate that the place of intuitions in the set of mental states cannot be occupied by any other mental state. Otherwise, intuitions would be conceptually redundant and it would be better to give up with the "intuition-talk"[12]. In this case, determining the nature of intuitions would be no more than a mere semantical dispute concerning the definition of the concept.

[10] Later on, I will weaken this position, claiming that if, as I think there are good reasons to claim, some intuitions are moral emotions (Dancy, 2014), intuitions may have a right to exist even if they are not sources of justification and knowledge.

[11] This is the thesis defended by Cappelen in *Philosophy Without Intuitions*. Cappelen wonders whether when entertaining philosophical arguments, philosophers rely on intuitions and his answer is that, no, philosophers do not make any appeal to intuitions, also in cases where intuitions are explicitly referred to. Cappelen discourse concerns the role of intuitions in the philosophical method, while our focus is on the role of intuitions in epistemology and, as it will be specified soon, in moral epistemology. Nonetheless, it is not obvious that accepting Cappellen's argument will influence our argument, and vice versa. Even though intuitions are not used in the current philosophical debate, that does not imply that intuitions have no role in the process of justification and knowledge.

[12] Intuition talk is a term of art, frequently used in literature (e.g. Cappelen, 2011; Williamson, 2007), to refer to philosophical arguments that rely on intuitions.

If intuitions have a role in the process of justification and knowledge – and I will demonstrate in the chapter that this is the case - two claims are possible here: either i) intuitions are *sui generis* mental states whose function cannot be executed by other mental states, or ii) widely accepted mental states can do the function attributed to intuitions, and "intuitive" will become a mere attribute - like weak, strong, defeasible, etc. – of other mental states. In a nutshell, the problem is that of determining whether intuitions are *irreducible* or *reducible* to other mental states.

Looking at the contemporary debate on intuitions, one proposal is that of reducing intuitions to beliefs, perceptions and conations. Let us gather these different views on the nature of intuitions under the catch-all label of *reductive theories of intuitions*. For David Lewis (1983), intuitions are simply opinions, while for W. D. Ross (1930), intuitions are anything but the convictions held by well-educated people. Timothy Williamson (2007) denies that there is such a thing as *sui generis* intuition (unless we use it as a synonym of disposition to believe) and philosophers would do better to give up with the intuition talk, while for Joshua Erlenbaugh and Bernard Molyneux (2009), they are a 'subclass of inclinations to believe'. Alternatively, intuitions can be reduced to conations – as in Hugh McCann's (2011) 'conative intuitionism' – or to perceptions. What these different views have in common is that intuition is the name that other mental states such as beliefs, desires and perceptions, take when they seem true in themselves and justified non-inferentially. In this sense, it is possible to refer to intuitive perceptions, intuitive beliefs and intuitive desires.

As for the *non-reductive theories*, intuitions are *sui generis* mental states that cannot be reduced to other mental states without losing too much of what they are. For example, conceiving intuitions as beliefs would undermine their core features. The reduced mental states would be deprived of the essential character of intuition, that is of what makes an intuition an intuition. The paradigmatic non-reductive models are those put forth by proposers of the seeming accounts of intuitions. For these authors (Bealer 1998; Pust 2000; Huemer 2005; Chudnoff, 2011; 2013; Bengson 2015) "intuition" is the name taken by a peculiar kind of mental state, usually dubbed as seemings or, less frequently, appearances. Roughly said for now, for this view we have an intuition when things appear or seem true at first sight, in absence of defeaters.

In this second chapter, I defend the thesis that most of those mental states that are usually dubbed 'intuitions' can effectively be reduced to, or be explained in terms of, other mental states such as beliefs, thoughts, desires, perceptions. Only a few of them are not reducible and I call these few intuitions. Therefore, I will argue for the thesis that there are intuitions,

that intuitions should be meant to be as *sui generis* mental states, that intuitions are that kind of seemings that target self-evident propositions.

After this preliminary framework, it is time to go into the details. The plan of the chapter is the following. In 2.2, I will examine the *epistemic authority* of intuitions. This authority is displayed by their capacity of yielding justification and knowledge or by the role that they play in confirming or disconfirming theories. Framing this issue leads to wonder whether intuitions are, or are not, evidence for our beliefs. I argue that although many mental states that are usually called intuitions do not provide evidence for beliefs, intuitions are evidences. In 2.2.1, I will explain in what sense intuitions can be evidence. Clarifying this issue will pave the way for our account of the nature of intuitions. In 2.3, I will outline reductive and non-reductive theories of intuitions, putting forth critical considerations. In 2.3.1 I put forth reasons for not considering intuitions mental states that are usually considered intuitions. In 2.3.2, I will present my account of intuitions: intuitions are seemings that target self-evident propositions. This account follows the evidential status of intuitions in the process of justification and knowledge. Given that intuitions are necessary conditions of evidence for our beliefs that p, where p is a self-evident proposition, and given that seemings capture the phenomenology of intuitions at best, I will conclude that intuitions are seemings that target self-evident propositions. In 2.4, I will mitigate this claim by putting forward a model of intuitions that unifies the belief view and the seeming view and defends the double nature of intuitions, conceived at the occurrence as episodic intuitions or as doxastic intuitions.

2.2 The authority of intuitions[13]

That everyone has intuitions seems to be a statement of fact rather than an epistemological claim. Whatever we might think about their role, that intuitions play a p*sychological role* is beyond dispute. As a matter of fact, intuitions are often taken at face value in ordinary thought. Even though few people could provide a definition of intuition, most of them have experienced what it is like to have an intuition (even before thinking of and knowing what intuitions are). In spite of the vagueness of the term, intuitions are supposed to be part of our psychological life as much as emotions, beliefs, desires. Psychological literature on intuitions is vast and psychologists are used to appealing to intuitions in their experiments. From

[13] In these first pages, I use intuition in a colloquial and commonsensical term. Along the chapter, I will progressively specify my view.

a psychological perspective, 'intuition denotes ideas that have been reached by sensing the solution without any explicit representation of it' (Zander, 2016).

Things become much more complicated if we want to shift from the descriptive psychological realm to the epistemological realm. Let me introduce the differences between *having an epistemic weight*, *playing an epistemic role* and *having an epistemic role*.

Having an *epistemic weight* basically means that intuitions have a relevance for our justification and knowledge and that their presence cannot be ignored in our reasoning. For example, in order to decide between two competing theories, the weight of an intuition might tip the scale in favor of one or of the other theory. Here, even if the mere fact that intuitions have an epistemic weight does not necessarily provide a final justification for the theory. The higher intuitiveness of a theory over the other generally counts at least as a heuristic reason, even though not always an epistemic reason, in favor of the theory.

Intuitions have epistemic weight, both when they play an epistemic role and when they have an epistemic role. Intuitions play an epistemic role when, independently of being, or not, sources of justification and knowledge, they play *as if* they were so. Intuitions have an epistemic role if they are sources of justification and knowledge.

We have affirmed that intuitions *play an epistemic role* even if they are not sources of justification, namely if they do not have any epistemic role. Let me explain this point. Roughly speaking, with playing an epistemic role, I mean that intuition often behaves as source of justification and knowledge, even when they are not such source. That is, intuitions have an epistemic weight, that is, they are relevant for our reasoning, even if they do not have any epistemic role. People are generally disposed to trust their intuitions, at least *prima facie*, as sources of justification and knowledge. On the basis of an intuition, someone might formulate the judgement that the two lines in the Müller-Lyer's illusion are of the same length, he might drop a yogurt because of the rotten smell or he might feel indignation based on the intuition that the action in front of him is, say, a case of violence performed on an innocent person. Granted, the same person can later realize that the two lines are of equal lengths, that the sour smelling yoghurt is not rotten but Greek, and that the person suspected of being injured and his persecutor are actually two friends playing a game of role-play. Even if all these intuitions later disappear, and even if they do not play any epistemic role anymore, at the moment *t* when they are entertained, intuitions are taken to be evidence. When entertained in t1, the intuition that p plays the role *as if* p. This is true even if the intuition is misplaced and p does not obtain. In this case, in a second moment t2, p will not be entailed anymore.

Nevertheless, in t1 p *plays* an epistemic role, a role that it does not *have*, because at the subsequent moment t2 the intuition that p does not obtain anymore. For example, the intuition that I am assisting a wrongdoing at t1 may lead me to intervene in defense of the alleged victim. If at t2 I realize that what I am assisting is not a wrongdoing anymore, my previous intuition at t1 is neutralized. Nonetheless, at t1 the intuition plays a role and undoubtedly has an epistemic weight.

Claiming that intuitions play an epistemic role, even without having it yields their fallibility, without depriving them of epistemic weight. Even if intuition that p is false at t2, intuition that p at t1 has the same weight as if it obtains. To explain this point, let us borrow and modify an example proposed by George Bealer (1998) to make a different claim. Someone driving in the countryside has been observing what looks like a herd of sheep. His intuition is that an unspecified number of sheep is in front of him and this intuition occurring at t1 justifies his judgement that there are sheep in front of him. Unfortunately, in t2 the alleged herd of sheep end up being a herd of poodles. Thus, the intuition reveals to be false and ceases to play an epistemic role as well. However, when entertained, the intuition played an epistemic role. We can also say that the judgement that "there are sheep in the hills" has a certain degree of justification, although it is not correct to judge that "there are sheep in the hills". Intuitions playing an epistemic role have an epistemic weight even when they are mistaken.

Let us now consider whether intuitions *have an epistemic role*. Intuitions have an epistemic role when they justify judgments or beliefs. Intuitions can justify belief and judgement in two ways: from the point of view of evidentialism and from the point of view of reliabilism. According to evidentialism, belief that p is justified by the evidence that p. Intuitions, like perceptions, are candidates for being evidence also for those that do not endorse evidentialism (Bealer, 1998). According to reliabilism, belief that p is justified if it is generated by reliable processes and intuitions could be a type of this reliable process. For the purpose of space and to avoid needless complications, I will not go into the details of evidentialism and reliabilism. I do, however, discuss whether the contribution of intuitions to evidential justification and to reliable justification cannot be supplied by any other mental states. In other words, I will ponder whether there is an empty space in both evidentialism and in reliabilism that only intuitions can occupy or if other mental states do the work that intuitions are supposed to perform.

First of all, we shall consider the hypothesis that intuitions have an epistemic role, that is that they justify, when they are evidence. In order to make this point clearer, let us introduce a distinction that at least partially overlaps, that between playing an epistemic role and having an epistemic role: the claim that intuitions play an evidential role and the claim that

intuitions are evidence (Earlenbaugh and Molyneux, 2009; Molyneux, 2014). The two distinctions overlap only partially. Every intuition that plays an evidential role also plays an epistemic role. But there are intuitions that play an epistemic role without playing an evidential role. Likewise, every intuition that is evidence also has an epistemic role. But there are intuitions that play an epistemic role without playing an evidential role. These epistemic, non-evidential intuitions play, or have, a heuristic function that will be examined in the fifth chapter. For now, let us consider how intuitions are evidence and how evidence can be considered the leading epistemic role that intuitions have.

Intuitions can play an evidential role in two senses. *In a first sense*, intuitions that are plainly false – e.g., the intuition that the movement of the wind on Christmas Night is due to the movement of Santa Claus' sleigh – might play an evidential role– e.g. for children waiting for their presents. Despite being mistaken, this intuition plays a role in supporting the children's belief that Santa Claus does exist. *In a second sense*, intuitions play an evidential role when they are initial appearances or mere clues prior to inference or reasoning. The appearance might obviously reveal to be false, but in this case, intuitions are starters of a chain of reasoning. Starting from these intuitions, one can progressively come to formulate a claim that can agree with or contradict the initial intuitions.

Both in the first and in the second sense intuitions are taken to be evidence, without being evidence. Having an intuition that p may support the conclusion that p and can provide fallible reasons for holding that p because the intuition is considered as evidence for the belief that p. The initial intuition of wrongness can be assumed to be evidence for my conclusion that what I have assisted is a wrongdoing even if what I have assisted at is not a wrongdoing but, let us say, a funny joke between two friends.

However, intuitions not only play an evidential role but they can also be evidence. In this case things are more complicated. To explain this point, let us recall Matthew S. Bedke's (2008) difference between the *intuitions as conditions view* and the *intuitions as evidence view*. Bedke remarks how "intuitionists rather uniformly deny that intuitions have evidential status" (Bedke 2008, 23). For instance, Huemer (2005) argues that intuitions (like experiences and memories) are *conditions* and not e*vidences* because it is impossible to infer p from the intuition that p. If, as Huemer claims, intuitions are intellectual seemings, the seeming that p does not count as evidence that p. As Bedke summarizes the two positions, for the *intuitions as evidence view* ('the natural way of thinking'), 'evidence that p is a consideration that epistemically supports p and provides some reasons to believe that p'. But, if for the *intuitions as conditions view*, 'intuitive

seemings that p are not evidence that p, then intuitive seemings that p do not epistemically support the belief that p and they do not provide some reason to believe that p' (Bedke 2008, 24). Therefore, for the *intuitions as conditions view*, 'intuitions are necessary conditions on intuitive justification without actually contributing to intuitive justification by supporting propositions and providing reasons to believe in those propositions' (Bedke 2008, 24). Bedke presents two arguments in defense of the *intuitions as evidence view*. I will consider them in turn because a rejection of them helps me in putting forth my claim.

The first argument is this: if it looks like there is a glass of water on the table, then I have a reason to believe that there is a glass of water on the table. Bedke argues that 'when one justifiedly believes the glass is there on the basis of the seeming, it is not just that the belief is justified, but that the seeming justifies the beliefs" (Bedke 2008, 265). On this ground, Bedke concludes that 'reflection on particular cases supports the evidential view of seemings'.

The second argument is presented with the following example.

> It seems to Anne that a glass of water is on the table (via a visual perception) but Anne is on the phone with her usually trustworthy roommate, and the roommate tells her that there is no glass of water on the table (because he remembers clearing a glass on the table earlier that day). On the basis of the roommate's testimony Anne believes that there is no glass on the table. If the intuitions as conditions view is right Anne's seeming is not itself evidence, and she has no evidence in conflict with her roommate's testimony, and no reason to believe anything inconsistent with the roommate's testimony. Plainly, that is not right. Anne has reason to reject her roommate's testimony, viz., it looks like there is a glass on the table (Bedke 2008, 266)

On this basis, Bedke concludes that if the conditions view was right, the seeming that P does not count as a reason to believe p. In the case above, for the conditions view there would be nothing wrong if Anne does not believe p, even if she has the seeming that p: 'if some particular seeming that P is not evidence that P, and so no reason to believe that P, it is hard to see why there would be anything epistemically wrong when one fails to believe that P in the face of seeming, ceteris paribus of course' (Bedke 2008, 266). A conclusion that for Bedke is highly counterintuitive. Pace *Bedke*, I

believe that there are good reasons to adopt the intuitions as conditions view. The reasons for my disagreement with Bedke's arguments are the following.

As for the first argument, Bedke writes (1) that one justifiedly believes that there is a glass on the table on the basis of the seeming and (2) that the seeming justifies the belief that there is a glass on the table. According to his view, this would intuitively show that seemings are evidence and that the conditions view is wrong. Though valid, the argument is wrong because it is based on the wrong premises. Even if it is true that (1) obtains, that is the seeming that the there is a glass on the table is evidence that there is a glass on the table, and that Anne justifiedly believes that there is a glass on the table on the basis of the seeming, it is a mistake to claim that it is the seeming that justifies the belief. A belief is justified independently of the seeming because it would be justified even if no one in the world had the seeming that P. What the seeming justifies is not the belief but my believing it. If it seems to Anne that there is a glass on the table, she is defeasibly justified in holding the belief that there is a glass on the table, though, in case there is no glass on the table, the belief is not justified even if the seeming justifies Anne in believing it. The seeming is only a reason for holding the belief to be true, but not what justifies the belief. The belief is justified by the epistemic base, namely perception.

If things stand this way, the second argument fails as well. Even if seeming that p counts as a reason to believe that p, intuitions are not evidence that p but only conditions, or, as the conditions view affirms, "necessary conditions". Intuitions are "necessary conditions" because Anne cannot justifiedly hold the belief except by intuition. But the mere fact that Anne has the seeming that there is a glass on the table is not evidence that there is a glass on the table. The mere seeming cannot count as a reason for the truth of the belief but only as a reason, or a condition, for believing it to be true.

However, in his arguments Bedke presents intuitions in terms of perceptual seemings. Nonetheless, if Bedke's argument sounds appealing at first sight, it is because he uses perceptual seemings as examples of intuitions. Simply said, what determines the appeal of the evidential view in Bedke's argument relies on the evidential appeal of perceptions, and not of the seemings. Rather, conceiving intuitions as intellectual seemings and not as perceptual seemings will undermine his claim. To explain this point, let us recall that intuitions are mental states that can have either a propositional or a non-propositional content. Mental states are attitudes or modes under which a content is instantiated. As an example, consider the judgement that "there is a yellow truck parked near Smith's house" and suppose that the following options apply: A) Smith is in the house; he looks outside the window and sees the yellow truck. His perception of the yellow truck

provides justification for the judgement; B) Smith is not in the house; however, when driving to work, he heard the noise of a car in the background and it seemed to him that this noise was that of the of yellow truck that is often parked in front of his house. Therefore, he now has the intuition that the truck is parked in front of his house.

A and B represent two cases that apparently constitute evidence that there is a yellow truck parked in front of Smith's house. The difference between A and B, however, is that if the first mental state A is evidence for the judgement that "there is a yellow truck parked near Smith's house", B is different for the following reason. Unlike the statement in A, case B undergoes the 'why question'. What is it the reason for that? Simply said, A is a case of intuitive perceptions that have a direct and immediate seemings that "there is a yellow truck parked near Smith's house", while B is a case of intuitive beliefs that "there is a yellow truck parked near Smith's house". A and B are both intuitive but only A is evidence and it is evidence because it is a perception – namely, it is evidence because perceptions are usually supposed to be evidences. In the case of B, it is an intuitive belief. Here, the intuition is only a condition and not an evidence for the judgement that "there is a yellow truck parked near Smith's house" because, unlike perceptions, beliefs are usually not considered evidence. That is, it would be odd to ask someone why he claims to perceive something the way he does.. On the contrary, it is legitimate to ask someone that has an intuitive belief why he has that belief.

Unlike other mental states, such as perceptions, intuitions need an epistemic base and this epistemic base can be made up of by perceptions, beliefs, memories. It is the epistemic base that determines whether the seeming is evidence or not. This also emerges from the phenomenology of intuition. Intuitions cannot constitute direct awareness of external things. Rather, their awareness is somehow mediated by their epistemic bases. Whatever example of intuition we take, we cannot detect intuitions except by their epistemic bases. These epistemic bases determine the evidential status of intuitions, namely intuitions are evidence if their epistemic bases are evidential. In other words, claiming that intuitions are evidence means that the epistemic base of those intuitions is evidence, as in the case of perceptions (Bealer, 1998). Claiming that intuitions are not evidence, but only conditions, means that the epistemic base of those intuitions does not constitute evidence, as in the case of beliefs. To know quickly whether an intuitive state constitutes evidence or not, one should simply ask "why". If the question sounds odd, then the intuitive state is evidence.

We have argued that intuitions are not directly evidence, but only conditions of other cognitive states that can be evidential or not. Nonetheless, if intuitions are not evidence their epistemic status will be

undeniably undermined. Given that the evidential status of their bases is determined whether or not intuitions are evidence, we can conclude that intuitions are not evidence by themselves but in virtue of other mental states. Therefore, intuitions do not have any proper evidential role. That is, the justification they are supposed to confer, if any, is conferred by other mental states, and intuitions are nothing but a mode of presentations of those mental states. One might be tempted to conclude that there is no space for intuitions as distinct mental states within the set of mental states.

Granted, as considered above, evidence is not the only way of conferring justification. For reliabilism, justification conferred by a reliable process makes belief justified. Without going into details, even in this case, intuition is dependent on the mental states upon which it rests. That is, if what we have argued so far is correct, intuitions are anything but perception modes of memory. Hence, their reliability depends once again on the reliability of the contents of which they are modes.

If we are right, it seems that intuitions occupy a very restricted space in the process of justification and knowledge. However, both evidentialists and reliabilists get along without intuitions, or at least might appeal to them as being modes of other mental states.

2. 2. 1 Intuitions and self-evidence

Nonetheless, there is a last chance for intuitions to have an epistemic role in the process of justification and knowledge that cannot be given by other mental states. Here I am focusing on a specific kind of intuitions, intuitions that have a self-evident proposition as their content[14]. These intuitions should be set apart from the intuitions which were referred to above. Unlike the latter, these intuitions do not rely on other mental states but immediately target their content. That is, they are not modes of other epistemic attitudes but have the same function as those in the previous cases: that of being evidence and not only conditions for other evidential states. Moreover, the beliefs that are generated by them are reliable in virtue of themselves alone and not in virtue of the reliability of the other mental states.

First of all, we have to determine what self-evident means and what kind of propositions are self-evident. For Audi (1999; 2004, 2013):

> Self-evident propositions are truths such that (a) in virtue of adequately understanding them one has justification for believing them (which does not entail that all who adequately

[14] I assume here that intuitions are propositional. However, in the second chapter I argue for the possibility of non-propositional intuitions.

> understanding them, do believe them) and (b) believing them on the basis of adequately understanding them entails knowing them (Audi 2013, 94)

As already observed in the first chapter, Audi's definition is not only that self-evident propositions are justifiedly believed in virtue of understanding alone, but also that beliefs are not necessarily entailed by the act of the understanding:

> Adequate understanding of a proposition is more than simply getting the general sense of a sentence expressing it, as where one can parse the sentence grammatically, indicate, through examples, something of what it means, and perhaps correctly translate it into another language one knows well. Adequacy here implies not only seeing what the proposition says but also being able to apply it to (and withhold its application from) an appropriately wide range of cases, and being able to see some of its logical implications, to distinguish it from a certain range of close relatives, and to comprehend its elements and some of their relations (Audi 2015)

Moreover, not everyone that understands a self-evident proposition believes it. How can one come to believe a self-evident proposition which he is justified in believing upon adequate understanding? I cannot conceive any other answer than by intuition[15]. To explain this point, consider Bealer's well-known example of De Morgan's laws.

> when you first consider one of de Morgan's laws, often it neither seems true nor seems false; after a moment's reflection, however, something happens: it now just seems true (Bealer 1996, 5)

Let us suspend for now the judgement on the opportunity of conceiving intuitions in terms of seemings, an issue that I will address in the following paragraphs of this chapter. Now I take for granted that whenever I have an intuition, it seems to me that something is true or that something has been obtained. In the quoted passage of Bealer's *The Autonomy of Philosophy* (1996), it emerges that even though de Morgan's laws are self-evident – notably, even though they are tautologies – they are not at all obvious. If self-

[15] Some authors are used to referring to rational intuitions as opposed to, say, empirical intuitions (see for instance Ludwig, 2010: 430). I assume that all intuitions are rational and that differences among intuitions have to be found in the content.

evident logical laws such as the principle of identity are obvious for most people, de Morgan's laws are obvious for a minority of people and they are surely not obvious for people lacking basic notions of logic[16]. Understanding a self-evident proposition might be immediate or might require time and hard reflection. However, sooner or later, one realizes that the proposition is true. The acknowledgment of the truth of the proposition is independent of the acknowledgment of the self-evidence of the proposition. Acknowledging the truth of the proposition means that after having entertained the proposition one *suddenly* sees that the proposition is true. To borrow Bedke's (2008) term, the intuition is like a "click" put on a self-evident proposition. Once one has clicked on the proposition he gets its truth. Having the intuition that p implies here possessing evidence for believing that p, that is, the intuition is a mental state that presents p as being true and constitutes evidence for the belief that p. Intuitions constitute a path to belief – despite not necessarily leading to belief - and have evidential status. In this particular case, intuitions are evidence for our beliefs in the same way as perceptions are evidence for our beliefs. Likewise, intuitions are reliable in the same way that perceptions are reliable.

Both in case A of the yellow truck examples and in this case, intuitions are evidence. Nonetheless, the nature of the two evidences changes. The differences between the two is as follow.

The former is only an intuitive perception and it is factive because the mental state that has the attribute "intuitive" – e.g. the perception - is factive and thus constitutes evidence. If it were an intuitive belief, as in the case B of the yellow truck, it would be not-factive, therefore not constituting evidence.

The latter is, properly speaking, an intuition. If the intuition targets a self-evident proposition, it is factive: having the intuition that p, implies p. Nonetheless, even though both intuitive perception and intuition are factive, there are relevant differences between them. I adduce here two reasons.

First, as previously considered, unlike the perceptual seemings, intuitions can be subjected to "why" question. Granted, both support non-inferential knowledge but self-evident beliefs, unlike perceptual beliefs, can be the result of a non-inferential, careful consideration of the terms involved in the proposition and they can so provide a legitimate answer to the "why question". Following Audi (2004; 2013), we can call this non-inferential, careful considerations *conclusions of reflection* 'which are properly so called because they conclude or wrap up a matter on which one has reflected but are non-inferential' (Audi 2013, 96)[17]. Conclusions of reflection arise after

[16] Audi has often insisted on the disanalogy between self-evident and obvious (cfr. Audi, 2013: 95). However, I will consider again the disanalogy in the second chapter.

[17] For Audi (2004, 45), thinking that intuitions have self-evident propositions as their object is 'unduly narrow' and comes from the tendency of conceiving intuitions as apprehension

having taken the object of the reflection without any external inference, as it happens when, for instance, to conclude that de Morgan's laws are true, someone would try to figure out the elements of the law as if they were real objects.

> Conclusions of reflection may come only after much thinking or minute observation, but may be epistemically as direct as a master conductor's concluding verdict, concerning a violinist playing in a mediocre way at an audition, that the violinist should not be engaged. The conductor may have to listen for several minutes, but the intuitive conclusion may be based on an overall response, not on such premises as that the violinist rushed through the delicate passage in the middle – there may indeed be no such premises in the judge's mind. A piece played without mistake is not thereby played well. A performance having only parts that are beautifully played, like a painting composed only of beautiful parts, may fail to be beautiful (Audi 2013, 96)

Second, we have claimed that intuitions are evidence for self-evident propositions. Self-evident propositions have been characterized as those truths that are justifiedly believed on the basis of the sole understanding. Being true in virtue of their concepts and their relation without any need of external experience, these self-evident propositions are apriori. As Kirk Ludwig (2010) puts it:

> Intellectual intuitions, in the context of a priori inquiry, are conceived of as apprehensions of a priori truths, and, thus, of conceptual truths. It is our competence in the deployment of concepts, a condition on our possessing them, and so having beliefs and other attitudes involving them in their contents, that puts us in a position to say in principle whether a proposition is validated solely by the contained concepts and their mode of combination. The linguistic parallel is the possibility of identifying analytic truths, sentences true in virtue meaning, on the basis of competence in the use of the contained words and their mode of combination. It is only if a judgment is solely an

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of logical and mathematical truths. Notwithstanding, In the second chapter I claim that conceiving intuitions as self-evident is not as narrow as Audi maintains. Moreover, the narrowness is an unavoidable consequence r; it might be unpleasant, but on the basis of what we have argued so far on the place of intuitions in the process of justification and knowledge, true.

> expression of one's competence in the contained concepts and their mode of combination that it counts as an apprehension of a conceptual or an a priori truth (Ludwig 2010, 432)

Insofar intuitions are apriori they cannot be perceptions. Still, their role is necessary in order to provide evidence that justifies the belief in this proposition. In this case, evidence cannot be empirical evidence. Still, consider now three options: (1) there is no evidence for believing self-evident propositions, *or* (2) understanding and evidence coincide *or* (3) intuition is the evidence that is needed for being justified in believing (and, consequently, in knowing) the proposition.

If option (1) obtains either there are no self-evident propositions at all or self-evident propositions are not justifiedly believable. I will deal with this skeptical-style option in the second chapter.

Option (2) may obtain in a very simple case of self-evidence, as for instance in the case of A=A. In a case like this, understanding and intuition coincide. However, claiming that understanding justifies is only a quick but improper way of framing the issue. Understanding cannot be evidence for our belief because it is a psychological process and not a mental state.

Option (3) is what normally happens when we entertain non-obvious, self-evident propositions. To understand the point, let us consider the relevant difference between the standard and non-standard view on self-evidence. In general, saying that a proposition (and its content) is self-evident means that in order to understand that proposition (and its content), one need not further experience anything other than that that which grounds the knowledge of the elements of the propositions[18]. The simplest case is that of analytical propositions. For example, I am justified in believing that "All bachelors are unmarried" in virtue of understanding of the terms of the propositions and their relation. Once I master the terms of the proposition and their relation I do not need any further experience. Positing a co-implication between self-evidence and apriori, De Paul and Hicks (2016) call this position *standard view on the apriori*.

> The standard view holds that *a priori* knowledge is justified independently of experience, where this means experience beyond the experience required to understand the relevant

[18] In this sense the self-evident is characterized as apriori. I will develop an account of the apriori in the second chapter. For now, suffices to take a priori to be what is independent of empirical experience, namely independent of the five senses.

> proposition. There are certain special, self-evident propositions that are propositionally justified for any person who understands them. If a person believes a self-evident proposition solely on the basis of understanding it, the person will be doxastically justified in believing it. Such propositions are often referred to as *a priori*, which should be taken to mean that it is possible for one to be *a priori* justified in believing them. By extension, propositions are also *a priori* if they can be deduced from self-evident premises via steps that are self-evidently valid. A person who believes such a proposition on the basis of such a proof will be *a priori* justified in believing it. It is also possible to be empirically justified in believing an *a priori* proposition, but one cannot be *a priori* justified in believing empirical propositions (De Paul and Hicks, 2016)

The *non-standard view* makes things more complicated. In this view, understanding alone is not sufficient for being justified in believing the self-evident proposition, but an additional experience is needed, at least in some cases. Consider testimony as a case in which I do not see the truth of anything by myself but through others eyes. According to the non-standard view if I believe the truth of a mathematical, self-evident proposition because I trust the person who teaches it to me, without seeing that it is self-evident by myself, I am not, strictly speaking, justified in believing the self-evident proposition. Even if the proposition is self-evident and even if I can in principle understand it, I am not justified in believing that proposition to be true unless I see its truth by myself:

What happens in such cases? Understanding alone does not seem to justify you in believing. To be justified in believing the proposition —in a way that does not depend on testimony—you need to "see" it for yourself. Such "seeing" has various names, e.g., "intuition", "rational insight", "clear and distinct perception". But whatever it is called, it is hard to deny it is an experience. So the standard view faces a problem: there is a distinctive kind of experience apparently required for justifiedly believing self-evident propositions: intuition is a candidate for being such an experience and it is in this sense that intuitions are evidence.

> This leads to implementing the standard view with the addition of a further experience, that is usually called intuition. In other words, understanding a proposition is a necessary, but not always sufficient, condition for being apriori justified and having a priori knowledge. In many cases, an additional intuition is needed. Notwithstanding, this non-empirical

> experience does not undermine neither the apriori character of our justification, nor the essential role assigned to the understanding: 'understanding an *apriori* proposition is the only *prerequisite* for rational insight into its truth; understanding the proposition does not guarantee that one will attain such insight, but it is the only thing that is necessary' (De Paul and Hicks, 2016)

To conclude, intuitions are evidence if and only if they target self-evident propositions. Either intuitions are evidence and they are evidence only under the aforementioned conditions of self-evidence, or they are only conditions. To be *sui generis* mental states, intuitions should be conceived as evidence; contrariwise if intuitions are only conditions, then they can be reduced to other mental states and there is any need of postulating sui generis entities.

2.3 Theories of intuitions

After having shown that intuitions have a role in the process of justification and knowledge and what that role is - namely that of being evidence for self-evident propositions - let us now deal with the second of our starting questions: what are intuitions and what is their nature.

To better understand how intuitions are framed in the philosophical debate we should look at contemporary theories of intuitions. Theories of intuitions may be divided into intellectual seeming-like theories, where intuitions are intellectual seemings, and belief-like theories where intuitions are beliefs. In the following paragraphs, I will reconstruct these two theories in detail and I will argue that both provide only a partial explanation of what intuitions are. Even though they are not totally mistaken, they need integration. The point to defend is that these two mainstream views on intuitions, if taken as "out-and-out" explanations of what intuitions are, run two symmetrical risks, respectively losing the specificity of intuitions (the belief view) and considering as intuitions mental states that are not intuitions at all (the seeming view).

2.3.1 Intuitions as beliefs

The belief model is the paradigm of reductive models of intuitions. Reducing intuitions to beliefs might serve the purpose of 'ontological parsimony' (Pust, 2017) or it could be considered a simpler and clearer way

of figuring out the status of intuitions. Supporters of the belief-model say that indeed understanding intuitions in terms of belief would take off the aura of vagueness that the notion of intuition still has. Scope of this paragraph is that of singling out what should be accepted and what should be rejected of the model.

For the sake of simplicity, different versions of the model need to be unified under a general model. Looking at contemporary literature, conceiving intuitions as beliefs leads to a threefold division:

A) intuitions have more epistemic weight than normal beliefs
B) intuitions have the same epistemic weight of normal beliefs
C) intuitions have less epistemic weight than normal beliefs

If for "normal belief" we mean 'the attitude we have, roughly, whenever we take something to be the case or regard it as true' (Schwitzgebel, 2015), Peter Van Inwagen (1997) seems to swing between option A and option B. The authority of intuitions looks but as an appearance under which beliefs are guised:

> Our "intuitions" are simply our beliefs - or perhaps, in some cases, the tendencies that make certain beliefs attractive to us, that "move" us in the direction of accepting certain propositions without taking us all the way to acceptance. (Philosophers call their philosophical beliefs intuitions because "intuition" sounds more authoritative than "belief") (Van Inwagen 1997, 309)

Robert Audi (1997) seems to lean towards option B. In his opinion, intuitions are beliefs with particular features: 'I mean, of course, 'intuition' in the cognitive sense, a psychological state like (and perhaps a kind of) belief' (Audi 1997, 39). According to Audi, intuitions are a special kind of belief that share four requirements: *the directness requirement*, for which intuitions are beliefs that are directly apprehended, without being inferred from other premises; the *firmness requirement*, for which intuitions are firmly held beliefs; the *comprehension requirement*; for which intuitions are formed in the light of, and adequate understanding of, the proposition; the *pre-theoretical requirement*, for which intuitions are not theory-laden. If beliefs comply with those requirements they are classified as intuitions.

David Lewis is more inclined to option C. He downgrades intuitions as 'simply opinions'. They can be 'commonsensical' or 'sophisticated', 'general' or 'particular', more or less 'firmly held' and the goal of philosophy is 'to bring them into equilibrium' (Lewis 1983, x). John Rawls' conception of intuitions as "considered judgments" that should be processed by reflective

equilibrium is also a case of intuitions as weak belief [19].Option C is also adopted by those who claim that intuitions as beliefs are strongly rooted in our context and dependent on the cultural background of knowledge. According to some empirical psychologists, intuitions depend on social and cultural groups and social situations. In two papers, Weinberg, Nichols and Stich (2001) and Machery, Mallon, Nichols and Stich (2004) address the variation of intuitions between Westerners and Eastern Asians in thought experiments. The idea is that intuitions vary from culture to culture. Jonathan Haidt (2001) underlies the social and cultural influences on intuitions with the purpose of overcoming the rationalist model of intuition and moral reasoning. In these points of views, intuitions are biased beliefs that are strongly intertwined within a context. In this sense, even if it is perhaps impossible to conceive a totally unbiased moral belief, the beliefs indicated by intuitions are closer to prejudices than to normal beliefs. Notice that the thesis at stake here is not that cultures have different beliefs, but that people of different culture tend to have different immediate beliefs when faced with unprecedented situations for the first time. This leads to a view of intuitions as relative and weak biased beliefs.

Following this line of thought, I argue that most of our intuitions can be reduced to beliefs. What option A, B, C have in common is that intuitions are taken to be intuitive beliefs, that is, beliefs that have particular features.

We have claimed above that intuitions are modes of presentations of other mental states that stand in as epistemic bases. In this view, the alleged intuitions (that is the adjective intuitive plus the epistemic base) are attitudes taken towards a content that can be propositional or non-propositional. In general, attitudinal theories claim that mental states are attitudes taken toward a content. Now, the difference between two different mental states should be found either in the attitude or in the content. If supporters of the belief model claim that intuitions are beliefs, no difference would be found between intuitions and beliefs. At most, intuitions and beliefs should be distinguished by the mode of presentations of the attitude. But they should not display substantial differences either in the attitude, or in the content.

To explain this point, consider two beliefs that according to the belief model are candidates for being intuitions.

[19] The idea of a plurality of intuitions and the need of bringing them into equilibrium has probably its most notorious theorist in Rawls (1971) and its first proposer in Goodman (1955).

(1) If the wine in a bottle of Porto tastes like Barolo, I have the intuition that this is not a Porto but Barolo and I *suddenly* have the intuition (1) "this is Barolo!"

(2) If I see a person violently shouting at another, I have the intuition that what I am assisting is a wrongdoing and I *immediately* think (2) "that is wrong"

Now, consider two beliefs that are not considered intuitions, but only beliefs:

(1*) Porto wine and Barolo wine taste different

(2*) Violently shouting at another person is a kind of wrongdoing.

Now, (1) and (1*) and (2) and (2*) share the same content, respectively the different taste of the two bottles and the act of violently shouting at another. Moreover, they may lead to one and the same judgement: both (1) and (1*) lead to the judgement that "If the wine in a bottle of Porto tastes like Barolo, then this is not a Porto, but Barolo" and both (2) and (2*) may lead to the judgement that (2) "If I a person violently shouts at another, then this person has committed to a kind of wrong doing". No relevant difference between the two has been found at the level at the content.

Let us now consider the attitude. Notoriously, different attitudes can share the same content. I can hope, believe, imagine and doubt that Golden States Warriors will win the NBA finals. The content is independent of the attitude and survives the attitude change. In this simple case, what distinguishes a belief from, say, an act of hope, is that in the first case it is taken to be the case that Golden States Warriors winning the NBA, while in the second case that Golden States Warriors win the NBA is only hoped for. Even though the content remains the same, hope and belief are clearly distinct attitudes. What about (1) and (1*) and (2) and (2*)? Are they one and the same attitude? It appears that this is the case. At best, the difference between the two cases is that (1) and (2) are occurent beliefs (as witnessed by the emphasis put on the adverbs immediately and suddenly), while (1*) and (2*) are only dispositional beliefs. Nonetheless, the attitude is the same. (1) and (1*) and (2) and (2*) are all beliefs because they claim that something is the case and they may lead to judge that something obtains, although under

different modes of presentation, say one immediately, the other reflectively or unconsciously.

If things stand this way, there is no need to add new mental states to the set. Intuitions of this kind are just occurent beliefs. Therefore, there seems to be good reason to consider intuitions as beliefs of a special kind and not as *sui generis mental* states.

However, reducing the class of *intuitions* to the class beliefs might appear as a too simplistic way of framing the issue. Instead, considering the class of *intuitions* as a subset of the set of beliefs is likely to be a promising path. A provisional conclusion would be that – despite not providing knockdown arguments against the possibility of conceiving *sui generis* mental states – at least some of these observations give us good reasons for accepting a reductive model of intuition (and the same line of reasoning applies if we want to reduce intuitions to other mental states, such us desires). Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that intuitions are nothing but beliefs with proper features, that could be gathered under the catch-all label adjective of "intuitive".

2.3.2 Intuitions as intellectual seemings

If the belief model explains intuitions in terms of belief with special features, thus positing no new mental states called intuition nor *sui generis* mental state, the seeming model is an improvement of our understanding of the specificity of intuitions. In what follows I suggest an alternative account of intuitions as seeming that restricts intuitions to seemings that target self-evident propositions.

Bealer was the first to capture the nature of intuition in terms of *intellectual seemings*: when S has an intuition that p, it seems to S that p. For Bealer, intuitions should not be confused either with mysterious entities or inner voice, or with thought experiments, guesses, hunches, commonsensical judgements and so forth. Moreover, intellectual seemings are different from physical seemings because the content of the intuition is presented under the mark of the necessity.

> We have a physical intuition that, when a house is undermined, it will fall. This does not count as a rational intuition, for it does not present itself as necessary: it does not seem that a house undermined will fall; plainly it is possible for a house undermined to remain in its original position or, indeed, to rise up. By contrast, when we have a rational intuition – say, that if

> P then not P – it present itself as necessary: it does not seem to us that thing could be otherwise; it must be that if P then not not P (Bealer 1996, 9)

For Bealer, both physical (in general, perceptual seemings) and intellectual seemings present a 'modal tie' to the truth of the proposition but while the modal tie of the perceptual seemings is that of possibility – the house could possibly fall – the tie that characterizes intuition is that of necessity.

This account follows what we have argued concerning the evidential role of intuitions. If I am right that intuitions target only self-evident propositions, and that intuitive states that target non-self-evident propositions are only improperly called intuitions, and if I am right in figuring out intuitions as the acknowledgement of the truth of the self-evident proposition, it is easy to understand why I endorse Bealer's conception of intuition. Moreover, not be surprising that I reject two alternative ways of conceiving intuitions as intellectual seeming without any commitment to self-evidence: thought experiments and Huemer's account of intuitions. Let us consider them in turn.

When used in thought experiments, intuitions are conceived as starting points of the process of reasoning or as a way of showing that we are sometimes disposed to giving up our currently held beliefs when faced with a particular situation. For instance, our intuitions in "trolley cases" are starters for arguing in favor of utilitarianism or deontologism, whereas intuitions in the Organ Harvest case show that utilitarians weaken their commitment to utilitarianism when faced with the situations as the following:

> Five mortally ill patients are in care at a hospital, all of whom will soon die. At the same time, a sixth man is undergoing a routine checkup at the same hospital. A transplant surgeon in residence finds that the only medical means of saving the five ailing patients would be to slay the sixth and transplant into them his healthy organs. Legal ramifications and other peripheral matters disregarded, is it morally right to do so? (Foot 1978)

This thought experiment leads to one of the most common objections to the doctrine of utilitarianism. In spite of their commitment to a better consequence-based doctrine, utilitarians generally refuse to accept to sacrifice the sixth man for saving the other five. They have the seeming that the act facing them is wrong. From what I have explained above it should be clear that these alleged intuitions are not intuitions in the strictest sense but only intuitive beliefs, that is beliefs that display immediacy as their mode of presentations but that have the same attitude of beliefs (e.g. that something is

the case) and that instantiate a content that is common to other non-intuitive beliefs.

Like Bealer, Huemer defends the thesis that intuitions are anything but appearances or seemings of truths. This thesis is rooted in the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, an epistemological thesis according to which seemings are notable sources of epistemic justification unless one has convincing reasons against them (for instance, if one is aware that he is undertaking a hallucinatory state): "If it seems to *S* that *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, *S* thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that *p"* Huemer (2007: 30). In a nutshell, intellectual seemings or appearances are mental states that have propositions as their objective and that assume the disguise of truth or that have the "feel of truth" (Tolhurst 1998, 298):

> Appearances have propositional contents - things they represent to be the case - but they are not beliefs, as can be seen from the intelligibility of, 'The arch seems to be taller than it is wide, but I don't think it is'. Nevertheless, appearance normally lead us to form beliefs. Appearance is a broad category that includes mental states involved in perception, memory, introspection, and intellection. Thus we can say 'This line seems longer than that one', 'I seem to recall reading something about that', 'It seems to me that I have a headache' and 'It seems that any two points can be joined by a single straight line'. All of those statements make sense, using the same sense of seems (Huemer 2005, 99)

To single out Huemer's account of intellectual seemings, consider the case of ethical intuitions, the kind of intuitions with which he is mainly concerned. For Humer, ethical intuitions are intuitions with evaluative propositions as their content. These propositions are intuitions because they seem true at first sight, prior to entertaining reasoning. Interestingly, Huemer points out that propositions like "Enjoyment is better than suffering" or "If *A* is better than *B* and *B* is better than *C*, then *A* is better than *C*", "It is unjust to punish a person for a crime he did not commit", "Courage, benevolence, and honesty are virtues", "If a person has a right to do something, then no person has a right to forcibly prevent him from doing that thing", while "The United States should not have gone to war in Iraq in 2003", "We should privatize Social Security", "Abortion is wrong" are not intuitions because they depend on other beliefs or on other theoretical assumptions (Huemer 2005, 102). Also, that they are not intellectual seemings emerges from the fact that the former but not the latter are true at first sight for most people. Nonetheless, Huemer fails to acknowledge *why* propositions of the first set are intuitions

and *why* propositions of the second set are not intuitions. In fact, if 'intuitionists hold *at most* that *some* moral truths are self-evident', Huemer's form of intuitionism 'holds only that some moral beliefs are rendered *prima facie* justified by intuitions' (Huemer 2005, 106). Although Huemer explicitly denies that intuitions are committed to self-evidence, he provides examples of intuitions that, following the aforementioned definition of self-evidence, are self-evident[20]. Moreover, if his claim that intuitions provide prima facie justification for some moral beliefs without these beliefs being self-evident is correct, then examples should be beliefs of the kind of those of the second set. They are clearly non-self- evident beliefs that can be justified by the Principle of Phenomenal Conservativism. On the contrary, the appeal to the Principle of Phenomenal Conservativism is misplaced in case of propositions of the first set, those that Huemer rightly dubs intuitions. Unlike propositions of the first set, these propositions are not justifiedly believed in virtue of the Principle of Phenomenal Conservativism but are justifiedly believed on the basis of mere understanding. If we take each one of the propositions, we can justifiedly believe them on the basis of mere understanding. As Huemer rightly points out, many general propositions are not intuitions. Notwithstanding, general propositions that are intuitions are such because they are self-evident. For instance, compare the belief "abortion is unjust" – a proposition that for Huemer is not an intuition – and "killing an innocent is unjust" – a proposition that Humer would probably consider an intuition[21]. The latter is an intuition because it can be justifiedly believed in virtue of mere understanding.

To conclude, Huemer cannot defend his seeming account without referring to self-evident propositions as the object of the intellectual seemings. This clearly emerges from the examples of intuitions and of non-intuitions presented. If intellectual seemings in thought experiments are only intuitive beliefs – as could be intuitively believed that "abortion is wrong" -, intellectual seemings in Huemer's account are fully-fledged intuitions.

There are further considerations to be made here. Seemings should be distinguished between seemings that rest on other mental states and that can be reduced to them and seemings that rest on themselves and that cannot be reduced to other mental states. Only the latter are properly called intuitions. These seemings cannot be reduced to other mental states because, unlike the

[20] I am aware that the notion of intuition is controversial. As already mentioned, I will deeply analyze the concept in chapter two. Here, let us assume for the sake of the argument that Audi's definition of self-evidence is true and exhaustive. If this is the case, Huemer's examples of intuitions can be taken to be self-evident.

[21] I take this intuition to be similar to that provided by Huemer: "It is unjust to punish a person for a crime he did not commit",

former, not only do they provide non-inferential justification, but they are also non-inferentially justified. The only intellectual seemings that justify non-inferentially and that are non-inferentially justified are those which target a self-evident proposition. Those seemings provide both non-inferential justification and are, in turn, non-inferentially justified because what justifies them is a self-evident proposition. To distinguish one from the other, one should look both at how intuitions justify and at how intuitions are justified. If these mental states justify by means of the principle of Phenomenal Conservativism, then we are in front of intuitive mental states and not in front of intuitions; if these mental states are justified not by themselves, but inferentially, being an impression that something obtains, they are intuitive beliefs, perceptions, desires, etc. but not, strictly speaking, intuitions. Intuitions are those mental states that have an internal justification, a justification that comes from the inside and that provides non-inferential justification.

Still, the seemings view rests on the analogy with perceptions and considers intellectual seemings to be a kind of intellectual perception (even though intuitions are not perceptions). For the seeming account, intellectual seemings provide justification for our beliefs as much as something's seeming yellow may justify us in believing that it is yellow. Nonetheless, a clear difference emerges. Consider a case where it seems to me that I see a yellow car in front of me. Is the belief that there is a yellow car in front of me justified? Apparently, it is. If someone asks me "why" I see a yellow car, I would be surprised. I would be less surprised if someone asks me why it seems to me that I am seeing the yellow car, although my reply that it seems to me that I am seeing a yellow car because I am seeing a yellow car in front of me is probably redundant. It seems that there is a yellow car in front of me because I acknowledge, that in front of me there is a yellow car, something that I apprehend by sensory means. Still, our perception provides non-inferential justification for our belief that there is a yellow car. Our perceptual seeming rests on this perception.

Things seem to be different for intellectual seemings. If the intellectual seeming did not target a self-evident proposition, it would not be so odd to entertain "why" questions. If one is asked why, say, it seems to him that "abortion is wrong", he will probably be willing to provide arguments and reasons in defense of his thesis or he will reluctantly admit that has none. If one is asked why, say, it seems to him that "killing an innocent is unjust", he will find the question either silly or provoking. In other words, the feeling of being faced with a redundant question will arise, if and only, if the propositions are self-evident. Granted, as we have claimed, many propositions that are self-evident might be acknowledged as neither true nor self-evident at first sight. However, once we have the intuition that the

proposition is true (independently of the acknowledgement of its self-evidence), the why question will be redundant.

To sum up, for a seeming to provide non-inferential justification: either the seeming is a perceptual seeming or the seeming is an intuition, that is a seeming that targets a self-evident proposition. Therefore, if both intuitions and perceptual seemings justify non-inferentially, many other intellectual seemings cannot provide non-inferential justification. These seemings are those states that are often called intuitions, but that can effectively be reduced to, or be explained in terms of, other mental states such as beliefs, thoughts, desires, perceptions.

Before concluding this section, let us draw some final conclusions on intuitions. For a subject S to have the intuition that p (whereas p is a self-evident proposition), two additional conditions should be added to the fact that p is a self-evident proposition. The first condition is that S should *understand* p. In fact, S could know p by other means, e.g. by testimony or by faith. Nonetheless, mere understanding of the terms and their relation in the proposition p is necessary to have the intuition that p. Necessary, though not sufficient, because one can understand the terms and their relation and still not have the seemingness of the truth. This is the second additional condition. To have the intuition that p, p should be a self-evident proposition, S should know it on the basis of mere understanding and, as a consequence of this mere understanding, S should acknowledge p to be true. If only these conditions are lacking, we do not have any intuition at all, but perhaps intuitive beliefs, memories, testimonies. To conclude, intuition is the occurent acknowledgment as true of a self-evident proposition. In this sense intuition is an episode (or, to quote Bedke again, a "click" put on a self-evident proposition). If the proposition was not self-evident, the outcome of the process of understanding could be the acknowledgement of the proposition as true or false. But being self-evident the proposition should be necessarily acknowledged as true and it cannot be considered *understood* unless one acknowledges the truth of the proposition or, at worse, unless one discovers that what was supposed to be self-evident is not self-evident at all.

The following schema presents Nec1- Int(p), Nec2 - Int(p), Nec3 - Int(p), three necessary conditions for intuition. All together, they constitute a sufficient condition Suf – Int (p) for S having the intuition p.

It will be useful in the next chapters as well:

- Nec1- Int(p)= S has the intuition that p, iff p is a self-evident proposition
- Nec2 - Int(p) = S has the intuition that p, iff p is a self-evident proposition and S understands p

- Nec3 - Int(p) = S has the intuition that p, iff p is a self-evident proposition, S understands p and S acknowledges p to be true
- Nec3 - Int(p) = Suf – Int (p)

2.4 Understanding and Knowing

We have, on many occasions, emphasized that the process of understanding requires reflection and careful observation, as observed by Ross. For Audi, reflection on mediately self-evident propositions is not an inferential kind of reflection – that is it does not require singling out premises from which drawing inferences towards the proposition – but it might require drawing inference of a particular kind, that he classifies internal inference. Unlike external inference, from a premise to a conclusion, internal inference aims at clarifying the proposition, without drawing inference: 'For the proposition that it is prima facie wrong to pay people unequally for equal work, there might be inferences about what it means to do equal work and about one pays for, say a material product or a commitment to doing a certain kind of job if the situation demands it' (Audi 2004, 51). This process of adequate understanding is sufficient and a necessary condition for being justified in believing a self-evident proposition. Once one has adequate understanding, he is justified in believing the proposition. Still, he has this sort of justification even in the case he is unaware of being justified. Let us call this kind of justification *dispositional*. Being dispositionally justified implies that one has the capacity of understanding without displaying such. To have occurent justification, one should in addition to understanding being aware of that understanding and consequently acknowledging the proposition, being self-evident, is true. If the acknowledgement of the truth, that is the seeming of truth of a self-evident proposition that we call intuition, is the final outcome of the adequate understanding, a process of understanding cannot be complete unless one has realized such a seemingness of truth.

Nonetheless, one can have knowledge of a self-evident proposition even in the absence of understanding. For instance, many people know and acknowledge as true self-evident principles in spite of the lack of adequate understanding. Many virtuous people keep promises even when they lack adequate understanding of the truth of the principles. In cases like this, people could lack both dispositional and occurent justification, namely not only they do not have occurent understanding of the proposition, but they could also lack the ability of understanding the principle. Still, the proposition is justified and, as we will see later and in chapter four, they are entitled to hold to the principle.

These considerations lead us to draw a distinction between

understanding and knowledge. The distinction is of the utmost importance for our inquiry and it constitutes the keystone of my inquiry. In explaining the difference I outline an account found in the work of Allison Hills (2009; 2016)

In her work Hills (2009) enlists at least five conditions for understanding:

> 'The grasp of the reasons why *p* that is essential to understanding involves a number of abilities: to understand why *p*, you need to be able to treat *q* as the reason why *p*, not merely believe or know that *q* is the reason why *p*.
> (i) follow an explanation of why p given by someone else;
> (ii) explain why p in your own words;
> (iii) draw the conclusion that p (or that probably p) from the information that q;
> (iv) draw the conclusion that p′ (or that probably p′) from the information that q ′ (where p′ and q ′ are similar to but not identical to p and q);
> (v) given the information that p, gives the right explanation, q;'
> (Hills 2009, 102).

In addition, Hills warns against the temptation of believing that understanding that p is equivalent to knowing why p plus other additional pieces of knowledge. Indeed, one can have all the additional pieces of knowledge of p without acquiring understanding of p. To defend her point, Hills explains how moral understanding is praiseworthy for four main reasons.

First, moral understanding is the only route to reliably doing right. Moral decisions are often complex and only sometimes we can trust our moral instincts or ask someone advice. In many complex situations, a good moral understanding helps with making 'accurate judgments in new circumstances', beyond any contingent, moral luck. *Second*, moral understanding is useful in order to give justification to others; without it, one cannot provide the others with reasons that justify his action. 'Giving a justification involves giving the reasons why what you did was right. If you do not understand why your action was right, you are in a very awkward position' (Hills 2009, 107). *Third*, virtuous people are those who have moral understanding because even if one can think that virtuous p are those that have good motivations, only those that are responsive to reasons have 'authority into what is right', namely they can be virtues by themselves without relying too much on the authority of others.

Consequently, and this is the *fourth* reason, only moral understanding enables morally worthy action. Even people that are not virtuous can perform morally virtuous actions. Briefly said, Hills reminds us that the right action is

different from the morally worthy action. Even though the two actions are apparently analogue, only the morally worthy action is performed as a response to moral reasons. Notice that having a good motivation is not sufficient to be responsive to moral reasons. Being responsive to moral reasons implies that one has moral understanding that reveals and manages what those moral reasons are.

Hills agrees with models that separate understanding from knowing under some relevant aspects. For these non-reductive views (Kvanvig, 2003, 2009; Pritchard, 2008; Hills 2009) knowing that p is different from understanding p. Knowledge might indeed be obtained through testimony. A reductive view is defended by Paulina Sliwa (2014; 2016). Sliwa challenges Hills and others non reductionist views by claiming that knowledge is both sufficient (sufficiency claim) and necessary (necessity claim) for understanding For Sliwa and reductivists about understanding and knowledge in general 'knowledge is all there is to understanding; there is no need to stipulate a novel cognitive state that goes over and beyond knowledge. Reduction- ism thus makes a metaphysical claim. Just as physicalists about the mental say that every mental state is constituted by a physical state, so reductionists about understanding say that every instance of understanding is constituted by an instance of knowledge' (Sliwa 2016, 526).

Here, I will not discuss the two positions, but I think that, restricting our focus to self-evident propositions, it is possible to put forth a hybrid model. I suggest that understanding a self-evident proposition can be fully reduced to knowledge of that proposition, but that knowledge cannot be fully reduced to understanding.

That moral understanding should be reduced to knowledge is a keystone of reductionism. For Sliwa's "Moral Knowledge Account" 'an agent has moral understanding if and only if (and to the degree to which) she has the ability to acquire moral knowledge' (Sliwa 2016, 546). I propose to restrict the "Moral Knowledge Account" to self-evident principles or situation. Indeed, one can understand a situation and its relation and yet not know whether what happened is right or wrong. The lack of the final acknowledgement does not undermine the fact that the situation has been understood. If having moral knowledge means knowing the right from the wrong it is conceivable that one has perfectly understood a situation in all its relevant implications without knowing if it is right or wrong. Take the case of abortion. One can consider all the several moral and non-moral implications of abortion, drawing inferences and reaching conclusions, but still not knowing if abortion is right or wrong. In other words, moral understanding does not compel moral knowledge. On the contrary, one cannot claim to have understood promises unless he recognizes that promises "should be kept" (and consequently that the principle is true). In general, as

previously observed, one cannot claim to have understood a self-evident proposition unless one sees it as true. An agent understands why p, where p is a self-evident proposition, if and only if she knows that p. Therefore, absent of the knowledge that the principle is true, one cannot claim to have understood the principle. Thus, in this sense reductionism is true.

However, having knowledge is not sufficient for understanding. Knowledge is not sufficient for understanding because one can know principles by other affordable means (such as testimony), without understanding it, namely without having the abilities enlisted above. Understanding is not necessary for knowledge, even though a minimum degree of understanding is required for our knowledge to be justified. And in this sense, reductionism is false.

Therefore, if knowledge is necessary for understanding self-evident propositions, one can have knowledge of a self-evident proposition without having understanding of it. Here, there are two possible scenarios. First, one does not have understanding because he does not have the capacity of understanding the proposition. Second, one does not have understanding because he is not focusing on the proposition at that moment.

One way of framing the issue is that of introducing the duality of intuitions.

2. 5 The double nature of intuitions

We have demonstrated that there is a class of mental states that cannot be reduced to other mental states and that these mental states are legitimately called intuitions. We have also shown that propositions that are usually called intuitions are not, strictly speaking, intuitions, but mental states with the attribute of "intuitive". I have refused to adopt an account of intuitions that conceives them solely in terms of beliefs or solely in terms of seemings. I have also shown how intuitions are occurent mental states that apply to self-evident propositions. In this section I will deal with the following issue: although intuitions are occurent, they have an epistemic role even when no one currently entertains them. Claiming that intuitions are simply beliefs, or alternatively, simply seemings, does not account for the rich phenomenology of intuitions. That is, if it is true that intuitions are seemings, there is a sense according to which intuitions are a kind to beliefs. Hence, intuitions as seemings view and intuitions as beliefs view are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can be integrated with one another. A solution in this direction is that proposed by Audi in *Intuition and its Place in Ethics* (2015).

Audi distinguishes between *doxastic intuitions* (intuitions as a kind of belief) and *episodic intuitions* (intuitions as intellectual seemings). Audi's

proposal is that of unifying the two concepts. Once we have clarified their relation, they can work together. The starting question is 'whether, although intuitive seemings do not entail believing their propositional objects, doxastic intuitions nonetheless depend on intuitive seemings'. As Audi wonders: 'Can we have doxastic intuitions without ever having episodic intuitions - intuitional experiences - with the same content?'(Audi 2015, 62).

On one hand, there are dispositional *doxastic intuitions* that are not occurrences or episodes because they can be present in the mind without being currently manifested. They can support other beliefs, either consciously or unconsciously. For example, the intuition that "promises should be kept" is doxastic and can support causally related beliefs; for instance, the belief that "adultery is wrong". This judgement is sustained by the dispositional doxastic intuitions that "promises should be kept" (in this case, adultery is wrong because "marriage promises" have been broken).

On the other hand, there are *episodic or occurent intuitions*. Episodic intuitions are occurrent and manifested in consciousness. They are seemings. They often entail inclinations to believe but analogously to sense perception, whose accuracy one doubts, they do not necessarily lead to beliefs. For instance, if I am seeing a toddler walking along a traffic lane, I have the intuition that, in absence of defeaters, he needs to be rescued from danger.

For Audi, there is a historical relationship between episodic and doxastic intuitions: we cannot have a doxastic intuition that p without ever having had an episodic intuition that p. Episodic intuitions are, hence, the basic kind of intuitions. The relationship obtains even for non-propositional intuitions: an objectual intuition (e. g. of a property) can be occurrent, when in front of the object apprehended, or dispositional, when the object is absent or remains in the background.

> A unified account centered on episodic intuitions, in rough outline, goes as follows. Doxastic intuitions embody a disposition to have episodic intuitions with the same content and normally have a basis in the latter, whether that basis is contemporaneous or developmental (Audi 2015, 63)

A special emphasis is put on justification. Episodic intuitions play a central role in the process of justification because they can deliver justification without needing justification. Intuitional experiences as episodes provide *prima facie* justification of doxastic intuitions:

> A doxastic intuition, as a belief, may be justified not only by appeal to the episodic intuition likely available to its possessor and commonly basis for it; but also by argument from premises.

> An episodic intuition, as an experience, does not stand in need of justification and might confer it. Like sense experience, it is only a fallible indicator of truth; but as much as we cannot navigate the physical world without sense experience, we cannot adequately pursue truth in ethics or elsewhere without intuitions (Audi 2015, 65)

There are good reasons to take intuitions as beliefs and intuitions as intellectual seemings not as rival views, but as complementary allies in the process of ethical justification and knowledge. It is worth taking a deeper look at this issue, so consider the Rossian styled self-evident proposition that 'promises should be kept'. This is a candidate for being a doxastic intuition. Even though its truth is apprehended by intuition, people can have the proposition I mind when they make judgements.

Supporters of the doxastic conception of intuitions can be asked to clarify why this is a *doxastic* intuition and not simply a belief. A plausible answer can be that this belief is an intuition because it is justified by the mere understanding. I justifiedly believe that 'promises should be kept' as I justifiedly believe De Morgan's laws: by mere understanding. This special kind of belief can be manifested or not manifested in consciousness. As previously stated, even when it is not manifested, it can do causal work on other beliefs or on other intuitions. The difference between this doxastic intuition and a belief is that the former is a proposition that is non-inferentially justified, while the latter is inferentially justified by other premises. Or, better, what provides non-inferential justification for the doxastic intuition is the occurent intellectual seemings that, if I am right, are the only mental states that can be dubbed intuitions.

2.6 Conclusion

I have shown that intuitions have a right to exist as autonomous mental states if and only if they target self-evident propositions. They play a central role in the acknowledgement of the truth of self-evident propositions, though this acknowledgement should be conceived as the outcome of the process of understanding. That is to say that much more than intuitions is needed in order for someone to adequately understanding a self-evident proposition. Nonetheless, the distinction between understanding and knowing is the touchstone of our account of self-evidence and it will be broadly re-used in the following chapters.

3
THREE OBJECTIONS TO ETHICAL INTUITIONISM

3.1 Framing the issue

Since its inception, ethical intuitionism has been one of the most contested ethical theories. The major traditional objections against intuitionism can be grouped into three classes, which will be examined in this chapter. The underlying thesis of the chapter is that responses to criticism against intuition and self-evidence succeed if and only if intuitions and self-evidence are taken together.

The first class includes all the objections that focus on the relativity of intuitions. In this perspective, intuitions are subjective, incommunicable and private mental states that lead to subjectivism and relativism; two untenable outcomes for a theory that, like ethical intuitionism, is committed both to objectivism and cognitivism. According to this claim, which I will examine in 3.1, intuitions are relative to cultures: different upbringings in different social and cultural contexts lead to different intuitions. Therefore, for this criticism, intuitionism is an implicit form of subjectivism and relativism.

The second class includes the objections of disagreement. As a matter of fact, people disagree about moral truths. This is a problem for every form of moral realism but, even more so, for ethical intuitionism and its claim that moral truths are self-evident; if basic moral propositions are self-evident, why is there so much disagreement concerning ethical matters? This objection is examined in section 3.2.

The third class includes the objections of motivation. Intuitionism has been traditionally conceived as a form of rationalism and intuition as a rational intuition. Here, the worry, raised canonically by Hume and by Humeans, is that reasons are inert and that passions or emotions are needed to move the will. Intuitionists would meet this challenge by showing that 'reason is in itself practical', as Kant yet argued, and that intuition grants the practicality of reason. The mere appeal to self-evidence is not enough to meet the challenge. Even if adequately understanding a proposition implies or compels belief in it, it is one thing to believe a proposition to be true; quite another to act accordingly. A belief can be followed by an action only if the agent has either reason or desire, or both, to bring his belief and action to accord. Merely acknowledging the self-evidence of a principle might still not be enough for ethics to lead action. My focus in section 4.3 will be on explaining how this objection can be met.

All three objections would be valid and powerful, if intuitions were such as those described by critics of intuitionism. If intuitions were private

sui generis mental states, they would lead to a radical form of subjectivism and relativism; if intuitions were indefeasible apprehensions of the truth, one could not explain the variation in intuitions among different people and thus disagreement would be unavoidable. But as we have seen in the first two chapters, intuitions are neither private *sui generis* nor indefeasible mental states. On the contrary, I have been demonstrating that intuitions are the acknowledgement of the truth of self-evident propositions that follows from the process of adequate understanding.

In the present chapter I claim that an adequate understanding of what a self-evident moral principle is can avoid both the three objections. Starting from the objection of motivation I will introduce a problem that arises from the relation between apriori moral knowledge and emotions and to which I shall return in the final chapter.

3.1 The objection of relativity

In *Sorting out Ethics* (2007), Hare develops a criticism of intuitionism based on his taxonomies of ethical theories. For Hare, ethical theories are divided into descriptivist theories and non-descriptivist theories. The main difference between the two theories concerns the meaning of moral assertions: for descriptivism, they are wholly determined by syntax and truth conditions; for non-descriptivism syntax and truth conditions do not entirely determine the meaning of ethical propositions. Intuitionism and naturalism are for Hare the two main descriptivist theories, while non-descriptivism includes emotivism and the rationalist form of non-naturalism. If we take the descriptive side of Hare's taxonomy, we notice that from 'naturalism' derive two forms: objectivist and subjectivist naturalism. Nothing directly derives from intuitionism; but, indirectly, Hare draws a dotted line from intuitionism to subjectivist naturalism. That is no small thing for a doctrine which, as we have seen, claims that fundamental moral propositions are self-evident and apriori. Hare's argument can be summarized as follows.

Given that intuitionism denies that moral properties can be described fully in natural terms, one might be tempted to admit that there is a *sui generis* faculty that distinguishes right from wrong actions. Hare gives the following example:

> I have just filled up at a fuel vice petrol (gas) station that has no automatic machine to exact the cash before one fills up, and am wondering whether to go and pay the cashier for my petrol, or just to drive away without paying. The cashier is not looking, nor is anybody else. If I am like most people, when I contemplate doing this, I get a quite easily recognizable experience. Let us call it the thought (even

> the conviction) that it would be wrong to do it. So here, at any rate, we seem to have a clear case of recognizing a (proposed) act as wrong. So an intuitionist might claim that there is this faculty by which we can recognize wrong acts (Hare 1997, 84)

The fuel-station case is quite obvious, but as Hare rightly remarks, most moral cases are far from being so clear-cut. Deciding whether to eat meat and defending the right of abortion are cases where different people have different thoughts and feelings. How can one know what is right and what is wrong? The intuitionist, who denies that to distinguish between the right and wrong one can appeal to natural properties, namely to a naturalistic description of the object, is somehow compelled to appeal to a faculty of moral intuition. Notwithstanding, one person's intuition may differ from another's. Thus, there is no rational way of deciding which of the two intuitions is right. Being a subjective experience, one is compelled to refer to his own intuition and this seems to be a fatal flaw for objectivist theories. Hare presents and rejects two possible lines of defence provided by intuitionism to explain that the fact that of differences in intuition does not lead to a form of subjectivism, according to which one has his own private and perhaps incommunicable intuitions.

The first line of defence assumes that our intuitions tend to converge within a given context. Individual upbringing dictates the common sense morality to which one tends to conform; intuitions are only relative to cultures, not to individual subjects. Namely, intuitions tend to conform to objectivity within a given context. This line is easily dismissed and, as far as I can see, no intuitionist has ever resorted to it. Cultural relativism is the closest implication of the assumption that 'although I go on saying that the truth conditions of moral statements are that acts, etc. should be perceived by me as right or wrong, what is perceived by me as right or wrong will change, to become more like what other people call right or wrong' (Hare 1997, 86). This argument falls, for Hare, into a vicious circle. If two parts have different intuitions, there is no way of establishing what the true intuition is, except by appealing to a third intuition and so on. If, for instance, I claim that from two intuitions I have to choose the true one, what I have to know is to what intuition belongs a 'well-educated person' and, to do that, I need yet more intuitions. Moreover, the appeal to consensus is not a criterion of the truth on intuition because it prevents any attempt towards moral reformation. If one contended against a commonly held intuition, he would be silenced by the common consensus.

The second line of defence that Hare mentions seems to be more in line with the intuitionist claim that there is apriori moral knowledge. Here, the thesis is the following: moral beliefs are innate and there is a common

form of morality that belongs to all cultures – as it is for Chomsky's (1965) universal grammar – and this common form explains why, for instance, every culture condemns homicide. Hare replies that intuitionism probably aims to affirm more than that: that what is common is not only the form of morality, but also the content. But even admitting that a common form of morality leads one to infer similar content, it is plausible that it is reason and inferences, and not intuition, that lead to common content. On the contrary, intuitions are private subjective states that depend on what kind of man we are and on what kind of culture we belong to.

> Intuitions are relative to cultures. As I have said, I do not deny for a moment that intuitions will be found which are common to most or even to nearly all cultures, like that forbidding murder (though, as I also said, murder is not defined in the same way in all cultures). But even if this is so, if anybody *were* to challenge this consensus, we could not rule him out of court by appealing to the consensus. True, most people have the intuitions, and we say that those who do not have them were not well brought up. But we say this only because we ourselves have been brought up in the way that we have been. If we had been brought up in a different way, we might have agreed with the dissident. Perhaps, if he is successful in his moral reform, future generations may be brought up in his way rather than in ours. This is unlikely to happen with murder, because there are good *reasons* (not based on intuition) for condemning murder. How we should reason about such questions, I shall be explaining later. But the good reasons do not consist in the fact that there is a consensus (Hare 1997, 89)

There is no difference, then, between an intuition, an attitude or a feeling of approval and disapproval. With a Quasi-Cartesian observation, Hare writes that the most certain thing is that when we experience an intuition, an attitude or a feeling, we experience that which we experience. This would inevitably lead to subjectivism:

> The trouble is that such experiences are something subjective. If I have this experience, then I have it; there is absolutely nothing that can be appealed to, outside the experience itself, which could show whether it was really so or not. If I have this experience, I cannot be mistaken in thinking that I have it. This, indeed, is the attraction, in one way, of the intuitionist theory, just as it was the attraction of the sense-datum theories that used to be so popular in epistemology. Here is something that cannot be disputed: I have the experience called 'an intuition that a certain act would be wrong', and that is all there is to be said. Whatever may happen to anybody else, I have this experience,

> and, on the strength of it, according to the intuitionists, I am entitled to say that the act would be wrong (Hare 1997, 93)

Hare's criticism will be rejected for two reasons.

First, the fact that intuitions target self-evident basic moral propositions avoids what Hare is afraid of. Hare's criticism would be true in two cases: if intuitions were 'simply opinions' (Lewis, 1986) or if intuitions were intellectual seemings (Huemer, 2005). In these cases, intuitions would be dependent on our upbringing, education, social and cultural background. Our opinions and our feelings depend on who we are and in what kind of context we have grown up (Street, 2008).

Second, self-evidence is a property of the proposition rather than a mental state of the subject. Hare confuses evidence and self-evidence and conceives intuitions as psychological evidences, a view that we denied in the first chapter.

Conceiving the matter in this way prevents intuitions from the critics of the vicious circle provided above. The chain of intuitions is stopped when we reach a self-evident proposition and when we acknowledge it to be so.

Therefore, when Hare refers to intuitions he targets a conception of intuition that is different from what intuitionists have meant by intuition. No intuitionist has ever claimed, as Hare writes, that 'the mere occurrence of the experience guarantees the truth of the moral statement' (Hare 1997, 94). On the contrary, intuitions are true because they target self-evident propositions. If they do not target self-evident propositions, then they are intuitive beliefs that can be true or false.

3.3 The objection of disagreement

That of moral disagreement is one of the most powerful objections raised against ethical objectivism. I cannot provide here a wide analysis on this topic, so the problem shall be explored only in its relation to self-evident beliefs. The problem is narrower here than in moral realism or in ethical objectivism, for which the existence of moral fact would lead, at least in principle, to an agreement (once one has reached a sufficient knowledge of the moral fact). Even if for intuitionism there are moral facts as well, the objection against self-evident moral principles can be placed on a neutral level. This is one advantage of claiming that basic moral principles are self-evident. It is commonly held that for a non-self-evident principle to be true, a fulfillment of the truth-condition outside the principle itself is required. For a self-evident principle to be true, no external criteria are needed, because the principle is self-justifying.

Nonetheless, the objection of disagreement might also be directed against the view that intuitions are self-evident propositions. Certainly, the objection can also be directed toward Lewis' view of 'intuitions as (simply) opinions' view and toward the view of 'intuitions as intellectual seemings'. However, a defense can be arranged on the basis of the argument provided in the previous section: the objection works if intuitions are 'simply opinions' or if they are intellectual seemings but, as we have argued, intuitions are neither. Therefore, the most powerful objection is that directed against the self-evidence view. Providing an exhaustive response to the disagreement challenge is obviously beyond the scope of this section. In what follows I will present some observations for showing that the objection is far less compelling than it appears at first sight.

The objection can be reformulated as follows. If self-evident propositions were those that are believed by people that have an adequate understanding of them, then those people should agree on them. But it is matter of fact that disagreement persists. Hence, so the objection would conclude, those propositions are not self-evident; if they were, an agreement would be possible. It is, however, a matter of fact that people often disagree on the truth of a self-evident moral proposition.

Disagreement might concern the truth of a proposition or its self-evidence. A self-evident proposition can be erroneously acknowledged as false, or it can be accepted as true without being acknowledged as self-evident. Let us consider these two possibilities in turn.

There could be disagreement about the truth of self-evident ethical propositions, as there can be disagreement about the truth of mathematical propositions. Kaspar (2013), argues that as for some people 1/4+1/2=1/3 rather than 1/4+1/2=3/4, the same goes for ethical propositions. There can be either common mistakes of adding fractions or of evaluating ethical principles. Kaspar concludes that even if there are self-evident moral propositions known by intuition (as there are self-evident mathematical propositions), moral disagreement is still possible. However, such analogy cannot meet the challenge of moral disagreement. The problem with 1/4+1/2=1/3 is not a lack of agreement with those who claim that 1/4+1/2=3/4, but a lack of adequate understanding. So it is for the ethical case where say, one denies that the fact that an act is a promise implies that it should be kept or it is at least a *pro tanto* reason for keeping it. In both cases people do not agree because they do not adequately understand. If both had adequate understanding they would have reached the same conclusions.

However, even in the case of agreement on the truth there could be disagreement concerning epistemic status of the proposition. As we have already observed, it should not be evident that a proposition is self-evident. So even if people in the previous case have reached the same conclusions, it

might happen that the two parts do not acknowledge the mathematical proposition 1/4+1/2=3/4 as self-evident. In this case, there is agreement about the result of the sum, but not about the status of the proposition. So one can agree that the fact that an act is a promise implies that it should be kept or it is at least a *pro tanto* reason for keeping it. Still, he could deny that this is self-evident, that is he can claim that it is not justified by mere understanding but also for empirical reasons. One might miss the acknowledgement of the self-evidence of a proposition because he has not thought about the proposition with sufficient attention or because he lacks the concept of self-justification.

In these cases, disagreement on the truth of self-evident proposition or on their self-evidence is due to a lack of understanding or to an absence of careful reflection. Once these abilities are reestablished, so one can go on, dissenters should acknowledge both the truth and the self-evidence of the proposition.

However, things would be too easy, it they really stand this way. One can reject a self-evident proposition both because of a lack of understanding or because of strong countervailing reasons to believe that the proposition is false. Therefore, explaining disagreement by simply appealing to the absence of adequate understanding in one or both of the subjects, though it might sometimes be the case, it is too naïve. For Stratton Lake it would be implausible to claim that 'Sidgwick or Moore showed a lack of understanding when they denied the truth of certain deontological principles' (Stratton-Lake 2016, 32). Analogously, for Bedke, it would be equally implausible that the disagreement between Kant and Bentham is due to a failure of grasping moral concepts (Bedke 2008, 261). What supporters of the disagreement objection claim is that even when the two subjects have adequate understanding, have carefully reflected on the matter and are trained enough to manage with moral matters, they can still disagree on fundamental moral issues, as in the case of Kant *versus* Bentham.

This issue is often framed in the ethical literature by discussing the notion of the *epistemic peer*. Roughly speaking, epistemic peers are those that have the same evidence as me concerning a definite question in a given situation. Notice however that for the disagreement to be meaningful it is not necessary that it should be peer disagreement. Consider the case of scholar in whatever field you like that strongly defends a thesis P. She defends P on the basis of adequate understanding, after having carefully reflected on it and perhaps after a long academic trial made of conferences, papers published on high-ranking journals and successful books. She has competent command of the thesis and knows how to demonstrate it step by step and how to defend it against objections. Suppose that a scholar with a strong analogous academic background challenges her view and claims that not-P. In this case she cannot

simply rebuff him by appealing to his lack of understanding. To be intellectually honest, she should at least take his point into consideration. Now, two cases are possible here: either two contenders have the same evidence and thus we are in front of a case of peer disagreement or, though the two contenders have both a strong intellectual academic background, they do not have the same evidence. They have both rich and strong evidence for their theses, but their evidence differs. Let us call this kind of disagreement expert disagreement. There is *expert disagreement* when the two contenders have strong but differing evidence. There is another kind of *expert disagreement* when, despite having the same evidence, the two contenders have different cultural background as when 'two people can be equally rational and consider the same evidence for p, but differ in the background cognitions and conceptions they bring to the assessment of that evidence. Such background elements may also include religious convictions or theoretical commitments' (Audi 2008, 489). To sum up:

Peer disagreement. S and R have the same evidence and the same background cognitions, conceptions and theoretical frameworks

Expert disagreement. S and R have different evidence but reliable background cognitions, conceptions and theoretical frameworks

Expert disagreement*. S and R have the same evidence but different background cognitions, conceptions and theoretical grounds and theoretical frameworks.

The case that concerns me most here is that of Expert disagreement*. It seems to me that is the most frequent case that occurs when self-evident propositions are involved. Peer disagreement, as we have defined it above, occurs in the case of non-self-evident propositions. For instance, it is very frequently that two epistemic peers disagree on a non-self-evident moral proposition such as "abortion is wrong". Their disagreement could persist even when they agree on the nature of the fact. We say in this case that we are in front of a disagreement on values. However, it is highly implausible that there could be peer disagreement concerning self-evident propositions. If S and R have "the same evidence and the same background cognitions and conceptions and theoretical frameworks" it is implausible that they might disagree on a self-evident proposition such as "promises should be kept". Furthermore, Expert disagreement seems not to be appropriate for self-evident propositions. When people contend on the proposition that "promises should be kept", either one or both must be non-

experts, and the pair cannot be peers. If they are experts, they should share the same evidence. We are left then with Expert disagreement*.

Consider now the typical case of dispute between and deontologists consequentialists, roughly the former claim that the right action is the one that fulfills our duty while the latter claim that that the right action is the one that maximizes the good. When considering the proposition "promises should be kept" a Kantian scholar and a utilitarian could have the same evidence but, while the Kantian accepts the judgement as true and self-evident, the utilitarian does not. Their difference relies here on a different of background cognitions, conceptions and theoretical grounds and theoretical frameworks rather than on different evidence or, even less, on a difference of understanding.

There are four cases that are exposed to the disagreement challenge. Two parts S and R, after having carefully thought about a proposition P, disagree about its status. Let us distinguish the following cases:

(1) For S, P is not self-evident but valid; for R, P is not self-evident and non-valid
(2) For S, P is self-evident and valid; for R, P is not self-evident and valid.
(3) For S, P is self-evident and valid; for R, P is not self-evident and not valid
(4) For S, P is self-evident and valid; for R, P is self-evident but not valid

First of all, it is worth noting here the use of the notion of validity rather than the notion of truth. This terminological choice has been made for dealing with those who deny that there is an ethical truth, but who will probably concede that there are moral rules which, though not as true as empirical or logical propositions, are nonetheless valid within a given context or, following Wittgenstein (1935), within a given language game. This aspect of self-evident propositions will be further explored in section 4.5 of the following chapter.

The case of disagreement in (1) is similar to the fractions case above and, among the four, the less interesting for the task of our inquiry. The kind of disagreement involved here can be extended to a non-intuitionistic form of objectivism as well. Both S and R deny that P is self-evident but whereas for S, P is valid, for R, P is not valid. The two parts might disagree about a particular judgement, for instance a judgement on using animals to test new medicines on. How can they solve the disagreement? They can try to clarify the elements of the situation involved and reach a consensus on the fact. For instance, if P agrees on the doing tests on animals and R disagrees, and if the

disagreement of P is due to the fact that he is convinced that tests imply suffering for the animals, R can revise its judgements once he is persuaded by a trustworthy source that animals do not suffer because of the tests. Certainly, the disagreement can persist even when the two parties agree on the fact. P can endorse the testing practice because he considers it extrinsically good to using animals as means in order to improve human life; R can reject the testing practice because he asses as intrinsically evil using animals as such means. This is not any more a conflict of facts, but a conflict of values.

Disagreement in (2) – for S, P is self-evident and valid; for R, P is not self-evident and valid – can be solved by providing a better understanding of the status of P: either P or R can revise their own judgement. Here, the disagreement is here only on the epistemic status of the proposition. However, the case is less dramatic than it seems at first glance. In the absence of distractors – biases, prejudices, cognitive limits and errors – if the principle is really self-evident, then an agreement on the self-evidence of P is possible, at least in principle. If the principle is not self-evident - either because there are not self-evident propositions at all or because it is P that it is not self-evident – then that is just too bad for self-evidence.

Now, consider again a case of disagreement between a Kantian and a utilitarian, in this case on the fact that the utility principle is self-evident. Of two solutions, one states that either P is *really* self-evident, or it is only *apparently* self-evident. If the principle is *really* self-evident, it is possible, at least in principle, for the Kantian to acknowledge it after having reached adequate mental maturity, for self-evidence is a property of the proposition, independent of the mental state of the epistemic agent that entertains it. If the principle is only apparently self-evident then the disagreement can be solved once the utilitarian understands it to be so. In both cases, the fact that there is disagreement is not a reason against the self-evidence of the proposition involved. As Moore points out, the self-evidence of a proposition lies in itself, not in our conviction of it (Moore 1903, 144). Therefore, those who claim that disagreement is a reason against conceiving basic moral principles as self-evident conflate self-evidence with the conviction of self-evidence. As I explained in the second chapter, both are usually dubbed 'intuitions', but only the former is that which intuitionists appeal to as intuitions (with the exception of Ross, who uses the term 'conviction' for self-evident proposition). Therefore, the presence of disagreement is not a reason to deny that some propositions P are self-evident, because disagreement is on the side of the subject, while self-evidence is on the side of the object, that is the proposition.

The same goes for the disagreement in case (3) – for S, P is self-evident and valid; for R, P is not self-evident but not-valid – with the

difference that if the disagreement is solved in favor of the non-self-evidence of P, we come back to case (1), if the disagreement is solved in favor of the self-evidence of P, we are in case (4)- for S, P is self-evident and valid; for R, P is self-evident but not valid.

In case (4) S and R agree on the self-evidence of P, but disagree about its validity. They disagree on whether P is valid in the situation. For instance, both S and R can acknowledge that a principle P, say 'Promises shall be kept', is self-evident, but for S, P is valid in the context C1 and for R, P is not valid. This case is particularly significant because it is this case of disagreement that persists even in the presence of an agreement about the self-evidence of the principle. Consider the proposition that "we should not lie" and let us turn back to case (3). S is a Kantian, R is a utilitarian. S believes that "we should not lie" is self-evident, R denies it. Suppose, for the sake of the argument, that "we should not lie" is really self-evident. Suppose also that, by means of arguments (that as we have seen do not undermine the non-inferentiality of the self-evident propositions), S might convince R that the principle is self-evident. Therefore, R acknowledges that mere understanding suffices for justified belief in the proposition. However, as Audi (2008) also remarks, adequately understanding a proposition does not require believing it, although it implies at least a disposition to believe. Now, one can follow the disposition to believe that "we should not lie" upon adequate understanding, as S does. Alternatively, one could decide, even in the presence of the disposition to believe that "we should not lie", not to follow the disposition. Then, suppose that R, despite admitting to S the disposition to believe that "we should not lie" upon adequate understanding, still does not believe that "we should not lie". He acknowledges "we should not lie" as a self-evident proposition but he does not believe it. In a nutshell, what case (4) contemplates is that R and S can agree on the fact that "we should not lie" is self-evident but S accepts its validity while R does not. How can R do that without being irrational? R could endorse the following claim:

R-promises. "promises should be kept" if and only if not lying maximizes the good.

We are still in case of Expert disagreement*. S and R have the same evidence but different theoretical backgrounds. If they take "we should not lie" as a single phrase and if "we should not lie" is the evidence in front of them, they agree that "we should not lie" is true once one has understood the meaning of promises. Nevertheless, differences in the background lead R to hold that "promises should be kept" is valid only if it maximizes the good, while S acknowledges "promises should be kept" as intrinsically valid:

S-promises. "promises should be kept" for their own sake.

If I am right, what (4) shows is that, contrary to what is commonly held, disagreement does not consist of what propositions are self-evident or on whether there are self-evident propositions at all, but on the validity of these propositions. The validity of the proposition is not self-evident even though these propositions are self-evident and, consequently, true. Therefore, the disagreement is between those who endorse *R-promises* and those who endorse *S-promises*. Notice that neither *R-promises* nor *S-promises* are self-evident.

Therefore, though self-evident propositions are non-inferentially justified, their validity depends on the context. A similar claim is defended by Fanselow (2011) who proposes to replace the traditional foundationalist linear model of justification with a coherentist non-linear model: 'instead of looking at a building as the appropriate model for the structure of justification, we should look to a spider's web' (Fanselow 2011, 14). Put briefly, Fanselow argues that 'every justified belief is supported by further beliefs' (Fanselow 2011, 14) within a web of beliefs that support one another.

What I claim here is that if the self-evidence of the proposition is due to the concepts that take part in the proposition and the relations among them, the validity of the proposition depends on the context into which we found it. In the next chapter I will claim that that common sense morality is the context into which self-evident propositions can be understood.

3.4 The objection of moral motivation

The problem of moral motivation concerns how moral judgements can motivate individuals and their decisions. What distinguishes normative judgements from other kinds of judgements, such as, for instance, empirical or aesthetical judgments, is that the former, but not the latter, tend to motivate us to act accordingly. For instance, the main difference between judging that "I ought to do p" and "p is red" is that when a person utters the first judgement, she is somehow expected to act in accordance with her judgement. If she affirms "I ought to do p" and behaves otherwise, one can think that either she was insincere when uttering the judgement or that she suffers from weakness of will.

When we act in accordance with a judgement, we do this either because we acknowledge the judgement is itself motivating, and entertaining it is a sufficient reason to act accordingly, or because motivation comes from an external source, such as the desire of being praised or the fear of being blamed. These two views are called, respectively, *internalism* and *externalism* in moral judgement. Internalism in the theory of moral motivation is the view

that moral judgements are intrinsically motivating. The second view, externalism, is the view that moral judgements are not intrinsically motivating and that an additional motivating force is needed.

The problem of moral motivation is one of the most discussed in moral philosophy and considering it in its entirety goes beyond the purposes of this section. Rather, I aim to explain how the problem affects intuitionism. Among the several objections that have been raised against intuitionism, that of moral motivation is the most dangerous. In the previous sections, I have shown how the objection of relativity and the objection of disagreement can be, if not avoided, at least mitigated if we take intuitions to be self-evident propositions.

In contrast to the previous two objections, the objection of moral motivation cannot be met simply on the basis that intuitions target self-evident propositions. Moreover, the objection works, not in spite of this fact intuitions target self-evident propositions, but by virtue of it. Let us consider now some versions of this objection.

3.4.1 Nowell-Smith, Mackie and moral motivation

A well-known version of the objection is provided by Nowell-Smith in *Ethics* (1954). Nowell-Smith acknowledges that intuitionism is right in its criticism against ethical naturalism and in defending the autonomy of ethics on the grounds of Hume's law, on which Moore formulates his famous open question argument. For Hume's law, 'moral distinction' cannot be 'deriv'd from reason': the fallacy committed by many traditional ethicists is that they start with statements of facts from which they infer judgements of value.

> Freely translated into modern terminology, what Hume means is this. In all systems of morality we start with certain statements of fact that are not judgements of value or commands; they contain no moral words. They are usually statements about God or about human nature, that is to say about what men *are* and *in fact do*. We are then told that *because* these things are so we ought to act in such and such a way; the answers to practical questions are deduced or in some other way derived from statements about what is the case. This must be illegitimate reasoning, since the conclusion of an argument can contain nothing which is not in the premises, and there are no 'oughts' in the premises (Nowell-Smith 1954, 37)

The mistake of intuitionism is its pretense of both defending Hume's law and, at the same time, being committed to descriptivism. Intuitionism demands both that ethics be autonomous and that moral facts are perceived as if they were natural facts. We saw in chapter 2 that basic moral principles are self-evident propositions. What Nowell-Smith contends here is that it is

possible to infer from a proposition that we have to act accordingly. For instance, the passage from the premise P1 *I know that p is good* to the conclusion C that *p ought to be done* can be justified by introducing a minor premise P2: *what is good, ought to be done*. The inference is an enthymeme because it lacks the minor premises. The problem remains even if we take P1 as an 'ought' statement. That is what intuitionists such as Prichard and Ross have tried to do. The intuitionist claim that 'the demand for a bridge, for an argument connecting 'ought' to 'is' is senseless because we are directly confronted by oughts' (Nowell-Smith 1954, 38) only begs the question. For example, Ross affirms that only after having judged that an act has certain features do we feel approval or disapproval for that act. This evaluative act simply follows from the apprehension that the action in question has some characteristics. Therefore, an emotion of obligation follows the intuition that one has that the act in question has some determinate features. It is not possible to experience the emotion of obligation without having noticed the features of the act.

> But suppose all this has taken place. I have noticed the right- making characteristic and the rightness; and I feel the emotion of obligation. Does it follow that I ought to do the action towards which I feel the emotion? If Hume's argument is valid at all, is it not equally valid against this deduction? It cannot be evaded by merely calling the characteristic and the emotion 'non-natural'; copious use of this epithet serves only to disguise Hume's gap, not to bridge it (Nowell-Smith 1954, 40)

As Nowell-Smith points out, even if one feels the obligation, she might still wonder if she ought to do the action towards which she feels the obligation. If Hume's law prevents the derivation of a prescription from a description, the intuitionist that wants to respect this law cannot claim that he ought to do what he considers right even if in the presence of an emotion of obligation. What is wrong with intuitionism is the thesis that the realm of value and norm can be represented and described as it were the world of mathematical or empirical objects. Even in front of a fully exhaustive knowledge of this moral world, I can still doubt that I must act accordingly.

> A new world is revealed for our inspection; it contains such and such objects, phenomena, and characteristics; it is mapped and described in elaborate detail. No doubt it is all very interesting. If I happen to have a thirst for knowledge, I shall read on to satisfy my curiosity, much as I should read about new discoveries in astronomy or geography. Learning about 'values' or 'duties' might well be as exciting as learning about spiral nebulae or waterspouts. But what if I am not interested?

> Why should I *do* anything about these newly-revealed objects? Some things, I have now learnt, are right and others wrong; but why should I do what is right and eschew what is wrong? (Nowell-Smith 1954, 41)

This skeptical question does not make sense for an ordinary man, given that he assumes that the question 'why should I do what is right?' is absurd. But things are different in intuitionism. For as it is not possible to deduce an 'ought' from an 'is', so it is not possible for the intuitionist to claim that from the fact that the action x is right, it follows that the action x shall be performed or is my duty. Therefore, what is wrong with intuitionism is its descriptive conception of moral statements: for they led intuitionism either to abandon cognitivism or to violate Hume's law, thus rejecting the autonomy of ethics.

Is Nowell-Smith's attack on intuitionism a serious threat? I do not believe so. The merit of Nowell-Smith's position is that of distinguishing the practical discourse from the theoretical discourse. Nevertheless, he overestimates the analogy put forward by intuitionists between the practical and the theoretical discourse. In fact, Nowell-Smith objection rests on the mistake that every critic of intuitionism has made: the mistake of conceiving intuitionism as a doctrine that postulates a world made of values, a world revealed by a mysterious faculty called intuition. I have already claimed that this grotesque picture of intuitionism has never been held by intuitionists. What intuitionism claims is that basic moral principles are self-evident, neither that there are objective values, nor that the meaning of ethical terms are merely descriptive. Intuitionist objectivism rests on self-evidence of propositions, not on the alleged reality of moral properties. Moreover, Nowell-Smith blunders in drawing his comparison between objectivism and descriptivism. From the objectivist claim of intuitionism – an objectivism that mean self-evidence – he infers that for the intuitionist all ethical judgements are descriptive. But, as Mackie points out, there is a subtle difference between objectivism – which is an ontological theory – and descriptivism – a theory about the meaning.

In *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977), Mackie defends an *error theory*. He argues that ethical terms and statements refer to moral properties which are objective and that putatively take part in the fabric of the world. Nonetheless, there are no such properties and the moral language rests on the mistake of referring to these properties as though they exist. In other words: although moral properties are not objective, the language of morals is. Therefore, the propositions of the language of morals are all false. Mackie's criticism is directed not only against intuitionism, but against objectivism in general. Objectivism is for Mackie the leading theory of Western philosophy

and – despite the differences among Aristotle, Plato, Clarke, Hutcheson, Kant Price and Sidgwick – the mainstream of moral philosophers has held in general that values are prior to and logically independent from all such activities as 'valuing, preferring, choosing, recommending, rejecting commending and so on' (Mackie 1977, 30). Moreover, Mackie points out that the objectivist tradition in ethics combines two views: on one hand, that there are values or objective properties; on the other hand, that there are moral judgements that are partly prescriptive and partly action-guiding:

> Values in themselves have been seen as at once prescriptive and objective. In Plato's theory the Forms, and in particular the Form of the Good, are eternal, extra-mental, realities. They are a very central structural element in the fabric of the world. But it is held also that just knowing them will not tell men what to do but will ensure that they do it, overruling any contrary inclinations. The philosopher-kings in the Republic can, Plato thinks, be trusted with unchecked power because their education will have given them knowledge of the Form. Being acquainted with the Forms of the Good and Justice and beauty and the rest they will, by this knowledge alone, without any further motivation, be impelled to pursue and promote these ideals. Similarly, Kant believes that pure reason can in itself be practical, though he does not pretend to be able to explain how it can be so. Again, Sidgwick argues that if there is to be a science of ethics – and he assumes that there can be, indeed he defines ethics as the science of conduct – what ought to be must in another sense have objective existence: it must be an object of knowledge and as such the same for all minds; but he says that the affirmation of this science 'are also precepts' and he speaks of happiness as 'an end absolutely prescribed by reason' (Mackie 1977, 24)

Mackie is usually considered a critic of intuitionism. Nonetheless, I believe that Mackie is in fact against objectivism and that his account is compatible with the account of intuitionism that I am presenting. Mackie's criticism attacks intuitionism as a theory that affirms that there are objective ethical properties. Mackie develops two arguments against objectivism: the argument of relativity and the argument of queerness.

The argument from relativity is based on the relativity of moral judgements among cultures. The variety of moral judgments implies that there are not objective truths. For Mackie, the fact that moral codes and moral beliefs differ between social groups, cultures and periods are more a matter of anthropology than a matter of moral philosophy. However, disagreement in ethics must be properly conceived. In contrast to disagreement in natural sciences such as history, biology and cosmology, which is due to 'speculative inferences or explanatory hypothesis based on inadequate evidence',

disagreement in moral issues results in 'people's adherence to and participation in different ways of life' (Mackie 1977, 36). Mackie makes the example of monogamy: it is because people live in a monogamous society that they approve of monogamy, if they lived in a polygamous society they would approve of polygamy. It is their way of life that shapes moral truths and moral codes, not a perception of objective values. On the contrary, values are shaped on practiced ways of life.

Mackie prevents a possible response of the objectivist, one that appeals to the claim that objectivity does not belong to 'specific moral rules or codes' but rather to 'very general basic principles which are recognized at least implicitly to some extent in all society' (Mackie 1977, 37), whether they are the principle of universalizability or the utilitarian principle and the like. In this view, particular moral judgements are right or wrong only derivatively and contingently. For Mackie, on the contrary, 'people judge that some things are good or right, and others are bad or wrong, not because – or at any rate not only because – they exemplify some general principles for which widespread implicit acceptance could be claimed, but because something about those things arouses certain responses immediately in them, though they would arouse radically and irresolvably responses in others' (Mackie 1977, 38). Therefore, moral judgements are direct and non-inferential.

However, I believe that these considerations are not a serious challenge to ethical objectivism. To clarify this point let us consider the following hypothetical case, that Sterling (1994) addresses against Mackie's claim:

> Frieda is walking down the road when she sees a dog lying by the roadside in great pain, apparently having been hit by a passing car. At some inconvenience to herself, Frieda takes the animal to a nearby veterinarian's office for treatment. It is true that if we ask her why she did what she did, she may reply "Because it was the right thing to do", or some such, and it may appear from her response that on this case her ethical intuition was immediate, underivative and specific. Ask her why she thought it was right, and she may reply "Because the dog was in pain". But she will surely agree that it was not anything about this dog, as opposed to any other, which grounded the rightness of her action. Nor was it the fact that it was a dog, as opposed to (for example) a cat or deer or human being. Indeed, without much difficulty we may be able to get Frieda to assent to the claim that the ground of the rightness of her action was merely the fact that she could prevent pain in another sentient creature without excessive self-sacrifice, or some such similar account. Is it not possible, then, that what seems like an immediate, non-inferential moral judgement was

> in fact derived unconsciously from a more general moral principle? (Sterling 1994, 63-64)

I advanced a view similar to that of the objectivists' reply in the second chapter. We have seen that for Ross the fact that they are derived does not undermine the objectivity of particular judgement. In the Rossian account, the relation of derivation is not an inference from a general premise to a particular conclusion. Rather, the relationship between basic and particular principles is not a relation of derivation but a relation of 'intuitive induction' (Ross 1939, 170-179). Namely, self-evident basic moral principles, I have argued, are the lens through which we understand the concrete act. Concrete acts are first in the order of apprehension, but not in the order of justification. It is true, as Mackie claims, that moral judgements arise from an immediate response to some feature of the act and that this response is not an inference. However, this does not undermine the objectivity, because the particular act is a case that is understood under the basic self-evident principle.

The argument of queerness is even less compelling. As Mackie writes:

> If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary way of knowing everything else. These points were recognized by Moore when he spoke of non-natural qualities and by intuitionist in their talk about a 'faculty of moral intuition' (Mackie 1977, 38)

This observation, that introduces the argument of queerness, would be true if intuitions were those which are described by Mackie. Unfortunately for Mackie, neither Moore nor any other of the intuitionists we have been considering so far has ever theorized a faculty called intuition 'different from our ordinary way of knowing everything else'. On the contrary, as we have already underlined in chapter 2, Moore explicitly denies that intuition is 'a particular way', or the exercise of 'any particular faculty' (Moore 1903, vi).

The pivotal thesis of intuitionism is not that there are objective values 'of a strange sort' but that basic moral principles are propositions that are self-evident. Even when Moore refers to non-natural qualities, he does not imply that there are metaphysical properties, 'utterly different from anything else in the universe'. On the contrary, as we have seen, the thesis that there are non-natural properties is apparently metaphysical, but it is substantially a semantic thesis on the meaning of good. Therefore, Mackie's argument of queerness cannot undermine intuitionism as it purports to.

Nevertheless, a point of Mackie's argument deserves attention here because it concerns the motivating power of moral judgements, in particular judgements, about goodness. In ethical discourse, it is often affirmed that goodness is a magnetic property, namely it does not only concern cognition, but it is also supposed to attract the will that is somehow moved by this property. Moreover, as Mackie points out, goodness should move the will not only contingently, but necessarily:

> The Form of the Good is such that knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells us the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it. An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be- pursuedness somehow built into it (Mackie 1977, 40)

Mackie quotes Hume's famous claim that reason can never move the will, unless a contingent desire is present. Here the objectivist cannot reply that the difference between ethical judgements and natural judgements is such that the former, but not the latter, concern properties that automatically draw the will, as though they were intrinsically motivating. In this case, given that this would be a feature only of moral properties and given that it is not clear what the difference is, if any, between such properties and other natural properties, one is compelled to postulate queer entities that, for Mackie, have no reason to exist. This observation should also be rejected. As will be argued in chapter 5, it is possible to conceive self-evident moral propositions that move the will necessarily and not only contingently without positing any queer property. Drawing the distinction between objectivism and descriptivism, Mackie reveals the mistake made by Nowell-Smith. Nowell-Smith confuses descriptivism and objectivism and thus he argues that intuitionism is compelled to violate Hume's law. What intuitionism claims is that good cannot be defined, not that good is not intrinsically normative. Mackie accepts descriptivism but denies objectivism. But the argument against objectivism does not affect the version of intuitionism I have presented. I argue in section 4.1 against the argument of relativity; conceiving intuitions as self-evident propositions prevents them from being charged with queerness. In principle, there is no reason not to accept that moral judgements are objective and intrinsically motivating. It is descriptivism and not objectivism that raises the problem of moral motivation. In the next chapter, I will argue further that descriptivism is itself not a problem for intuitionism because, as I will explain, intuitionism is not a descriptive doctrine at all, even if it is an

objectivist doctrine. However, if, as we have argued, intuitionism conceives objectivity in terms of self-evidence, it is there that the challenge of moral motivation is met.

3.4.2 Constructivist objections: Rawls and Korsgaard

For Rawls, if intuitionism is true in claiming that there are self-evident principles, then the acknowledgement of these principles should make people agree on their judgements. These self-evident truths concerns 'good reasons' that are independent of 'our conception of the person and the social role of morality' (Rawls 1980, 557). On the basis of his constructivist reading of Kant, intuitionism is for Rawls a heteronomous doctrine. Though the appeal to a rational intuition might make intuitionist principles autonomous, Rawls argues, these principles are heteronomous because they are not 'affected or determined by the conception of the person' (Rawls 1980, 559). Granted, the constructivist interpretation of Kant does not undermine the claim that first principles are individuated by procedures that are apriori. Nonetheless, despite being a priori, these procedures should be founded on practical reason, or, more exactly, on notions which characterize persons as reasonable and rational and which are incorporated into the way in which, as such persons, they represent to themselves their free and equal moral personality (Rawls 1980, 560). This conception of the person, individuated by a procedure of justice as fairness, is underestimated by the intuitionists that consider epistemic subjects as merely 'knowers' that grasp self-evident apriori principles.

For Rawls, the intuitionistic idea is that self-evident principles are essentially normative and essentially motivating and that once this rational knower grasps these principles by intuition, he is consequently moved by this knowledge. In other words, Rawls explains moral motivation in intuitionism as the desire caused by the acknowledgement of the first principles as true 'to act from them for their own sake' (Rawls 1980, 560). Therefore, intuitionism is satisfied with a mere epistemic conception of the self as rational knower, without needing any deeper conception of the person. Principles are independent on the knower and he can simple grasping these principles.

On the contrary, according to the Rawlsian view, there are no principles except those that are construed by a procedure. According to this constructivist procedural conception of justice 'it is up to the parties in the original position to decide how simple or complex the moral facts are to be, that is, to decide on the number and complexity of the principles that identify which facts are to be accepted as reasons of justice by citizens in society. There is nothing parallel to this in rational intuitionism' (Rawls 1980, 560).

This is of course not the place the deepen the Rawlsian conception. Still, the fact remains that our first principles arise from a procedure and are not simply given. More precisely, the procedure individuates principles that are responsive to the 'conception of the person most likely to be held, at least implicitly, in a modern democratic society' and to a prefigured moral order. Being respondent to the needs of the person, these principles have a degree sufficient for being motivated to act according to the principles. Rational intuitionism, with his restricted conception of knower, cannot provide the degree of motivation that is granted by the person that Rawls has in mind.

Christine Korsgaard, in *The Source of Normativity* (1992) also deals with the problem of motivation in intuitionism. In particular, she discusses the intuitionist claim that the search for reasons must find an end to avoid infinite regress, arguing that this end should be found in what is 'intrinsically normative', and that 'is supposed to forbid further questioning' (Korsgaard 1992, 34). Nonetheless the problem with intuitionism, as with other kinds of substantive moral realism, is that it does not provide answers to the normative question. We have seen in the first chapter that for Prichard, whose intuitionist claims are the main target of Korsgaard's analysis, the mistake on which moral philosophy rests is the pretense of answering the normative question, that is providing justification for an obligation, which is immediately grasped by intuition. Prichard argues that there are two possible answers to the question "Why should I be moral?": you should be moral because it is your duty, or you should be moral because it is convenient to be moral, e.g. morality is happiness-conduciveness. Both answers are unsatisfying: the first is circular, the other only 'makes us *want*' to be moral without providing any justification for it. That is, it provides us with a motive, but the motive does not depend on the intrinsically normative force that the intuitionists presume that self-evidence has, but – as in the case of happiness – it is extrinsic.

> And that is the problem with realism: it refuses to answer the normative question. It is a way of saying that it cannot be done. Or rather, more commonly, it is a way of saying that it need not be done. For of course if I *do* feel confident that certain actions really are required of me, I might *therefore* be prepared to believe that those actions are intrinsically obligatory or objectively valuable, that just is a property they have. Just listen to what Samuel Clarke says: "These things are so notoriously plain and self-evident, that nothing but the extremest stupidity of mind, corruption of manners, or perverseness of spirit, can possibly make any man entertain the least doubt concerning them." Well, obviously *he* isn't worried. But suppose you are?

> Perhaps his confidence will make you take heart, but it is hard to see how else this could help (Korsgaard 1996, 41)

For Korsgaard, the problem with moral realism is that it conflates the normative question with other questions. Prichard for instance confuses the normative question with a question that concerns the correct application of the concept, as does Moore.

> Why do we use normative concepts like good, right, reason, obligation? According to the substantive realist, it is because we grasp that there are things that have normative properties. Some things *appear* normative, and there is no reason to doubt that they are what they seem. We have normative concepts because we've spotted some normative entities, as it were wafting by (Korsgaard 1996, 45)

To sum up, for Korsgaard intuitionists cannot do anything except insisting that their beliefs are self-evident and, therefore, true.

However, failing to provide an account of why we should be moral is a general problem that goes beyond the borders of intuitionism, but that concerns all the theories that Korsgaard calls 'substantive moral realisms', namely those forms of realism 'for which that there are answers to moral questions *because* there are moral facts or truths, which those moral questions ask *about*'. Korsgaard contrasts this kind of realism with what she calls 'procedural moral realism', exemplified by Kantian constructivism. According to procedural moral realism, the answers to moral questions do not depend on independent and intrinsically normative moral facts but on the procedures that provide those answers:

> As long as there is some correct or best procedure for answering moral questions, there is some way of applying the concepts of the right and the good. And as long as there is some way of applying the concepts of the right and the good, we will have moral and more generally normative truth. Statements employing moral concepts will be true when those concepts are applied correctly (Korsgaard 1996, 37)

Let us pause a little on this point. If I understand Korsgaard correctly, her reasoning is that procedural moral realism succeeds in providing answers to moral questions because the answer comes from a procedure that respects us as 'autonomous moral animals' (Korsgaard 1996, 108). For Korsgaard, autonomy is the source of obligation from which derives

the normativity of values. It is worth noticing that the autonomy requirement is bound to the ability of the subject to endorse the procedure autonomously.

Now, if ethical intuitionism is a doctrine that simply posits intrinsically normative duties or goods then Korsgaard succeeds in arguing that it fails to answer the normative question. Korsgaard's overwhelmingly reference to Prichard's and Moore's intuitionism legitimately lead to this conclusion. So far, we have presented a different picture of self-evidence in intuitionism and we have seen that intuitionism does not simply affirm that some basic principles are self-evident, but also provides us with a procedure to reach this conclusion. Such a procedure is the process of understanding that results in the intuition.

In other words, Korsgaard's concern would hit the target if intuitionism claimed that we simply apprehend self-evident truths by intuition. However, we have argued in the second chapter that what distinguishes intuitions in ethical intuitionism from the use of intuition outside intuitionism is that the intuition that p, where p is a self-evident principle, is reached throughout the understanding of p. If intuitions were not as such, if intuitions where what we have dubbed intuitive beliefs or if they were something like intellectual seemings, as Huemer conceives them, then Korsgaard would be right in this claim that intuitionism simply assumes self-evident principles as valid without offering a rationale per these principles. This is exactly what our version of intuitionism denies. Intuitions of self-evident propositions are not dogmatic feelings of certainty of the truth of the proposition but rather rational apprehensions that are the outcome of the process of understanding. Granted, as we will see in the next chapter, one can be entitled to know p without understanding that p. This is actually what many people do, especially in moral thought. As will be explained in the chapter, this is one of reason why I find intuitionism so attractive. Nonetheless, the mere fact that some people claim to know principles without having understood them does not imply that self-evident principles cannot be known through a procedure that is valid for every rational agent *qua* rational.

3.4.3 Darwall on intuitionism and motivation

In *Intuitionism and the Motivation Problem* (2002), Darwall wonders how principles that are self-evident and apriori can move the will. Darwall mainly targets the claims of eighteenth-century intuitionists, but the discourse can be extended, with the due differences, to intuitionism in general. In his conception, intuitionism is distinguished by ultimate basic premises that are self-evident, apriori universally and necessarily valid for every rational being.

These features might posit a problem for intuitionism, a problem that Darwall discusses starting with some considerations on Hume's challenge against rationalism:

> Moral features could be cognized by reason, Hume argues, only if they were either matters of fact apprehensible through empirical investigation or 'relation susceptible of certainty and demonstration'. If the rationalists are to defend the latter alternative, he says, they face two formidable tasks. They must first identify some certain or demonstrable relations that hold just where moral relations do. And they must then 'prove apriori, that these relations, if they really existed and were perceived, would be universally forcible and obligatory', that is, that their perception would move the will. However, daunting the first task might prove, Hume remarks that the second will be more difficult still (Darwall 2002, 249)

Hume's challenge is directed towards the rational version of motivational internalism. However, not all intuitionists were internalists. For instance, apart from the early Prichard, twentieth-century intuitionists are mainly externalists. A typical internalist position in intuitionism was held, in the eighteenth-century, by Richard Price, who claimed that 'it is not conceivable that a person perceiving that an action ought to be done might remain uninfluenced or want a motive' (Darwall 2002, 250). As we have stated, internalism claims that there is a connection between moral judgments and motivation. Once one has acknowledged these judgements as 'relations susceptible of certainty and demonstration', his will should be necessarily drawn by this acknowledgement. Certainly, motivational internalism is not necessarily bound to rationalism. For example, on certain aspects (Brown, 1988), Hume himself is more committed to internalism than would usually be expected. However, the relation between judgement and motivation is of a psychological nature: namely, is contingently bound to sympathy and sentiments. The task is more difficult for the rationalist because he has to explain how the will is moved necessarily and apriori. Darwall writes:

> Because moral ideas are simple and irreducible to non-normative notions, they must be apprehensible immediately, without reliance on reasoning from further premises. And because moral truths are 'eternal and immutable', this immediate apprehension cannot be a direct perception of any contingent sense or sensibility. It followed, the intuitionists argued, that fundamental moral truths must be apprehensible as self-evident a priori by some form of rational intuition. But why would such an apprehension necessarily move the will? Why did the intuitionists believe, as Price put it, that it was not conceivable that someone might perceive an action and yet remain

> uninfluenced or want a motive? And how did they think that Hume's challenge could be met? (Darwall, 2002: 258)

As we can see in this quotation, Darwall identifies two main theses of intuitionism. The first thesis affirms that moral truths are apriori and immediately and non-inferentially apprehended by necessity and not by contingency, as occurs in moral sense theories *à la* Hutcheson and Hume or in sensibility theories *à la* Wiggins and McDowell. In contrast to these theories, for which moral truths are perceived as secondary qualities dependent on human sensibilities, intuitionists consider the apprehension of ethical truths in analogy to the apprehension of primary qualities, namely qualities that exist before and independent of this same apprehension. The second thesis claims that this very apprehension necessarily moves the will.

Darwall singles out a common feature of the different varieties of intuitionism, namely their anti-reductionism or non-naturalism. In this respect, he settles an analogy between the argument used by eighteenth-century intuitionists against voluntarism and Moore's open question argument: both defend the autonomy of ethical truths against any reduction, whether it is theological, empirical or metaphysical. Therefore, the autonomy of ethics is a touchstone of old and new intuitionism. For intuitionism, moral properties are immediately intuited because they cannot be reduced to natural properties. Moreover, as we also argued in chapter 2, the autonomy of ethics is strongly co-implicated with the apriori and self-evident character of basic moral truths. It is on this specific point that Darwall's argument focuses. Is it possible to reconcile the autonomy of ethics and, at the same time, provide a plausible account of moral motivation? For Darwall, the answer is negative.

First of all, Darwall notices how ethical intuitionism relies on the analogy between beliefs and the will.

> If it is the nature of the will to track rectitude or moral good, as it is intrinsic to belief to track the truth, then just as acknowledging evidence of p's truth necessarily tends to give rise to a belief that p, so perhaps might acknowledging that A would be right or morally good necessarily tend to motivate a person to will A. Just as we do not count mental states that generally meet the former of these conditions' beliefs, so also might we not count states that generally fail to meet the latter as states of will, intentions and volition (Darwall 2002, 259)

We are compelled to believe p if the intuition presents us the evidence of p's truth. In the same way, if we apprehend something as good (or right) we are necessarily moved to do it. On the contrary, Darwall focuses the attention on a disanalogy between belief and the will.

Let us consider them in turn. Concerning belief, Darwall distinguishes a normative *formal aim* that can be expressed by the claim that "we ought to believe what we ought to believe" or "we ought to believe whatever is reasonable to believe", and a substantive aim – which concerns the truth of p. Now, that which leads me to rationally believe that p is not the formal, but the substantive aim. I believe that I ought to believe P because I acknowledge that p is evident and the normativity of the belief rests upon this evidence: 'According to the rationalists, what leads rationally to a belief that p is seeing convincing evidence of p's truth, not apprehending that p is something we ought to believe. In our terms, we are moved directly to a belief, not by seeing that so believing would achieve belief's formal aim, but by seeing that it would achieve belief's substantive aim' (Darwall 2002, 260).

Let us now consider the will. Here, as in the case of beliefs, the formal aim is expressed by the claim that "We ought what we ought". The problem concerns the substantive aim. As we have just seen in the case of belief, it is this latter substantive non-normative aim which tracks the truth. The normativity of belief is grounded upon the non-normative substantive aim.

Similarly, if for the sake of the argument the intuitionist claims that the will has also a substantive aim, he is compelled to admit that the principles of morality are grounded on non-normative properties or propositions, precisely what Cudworth's aforementioned argument against voluntarism and Moore's open question argument seek to avoid. Following Darwall's argument, this would imply a fatal threat for non-naturalism, the pivotal tenet of old and new intuitionism:

> Suppose that the rationalists were to try to press the analogy and say that the will has a substantive aim, like belief. They would then have to accept that determining what we ought to will (what would satisfy will's normative formal aim) can be accomplished by determining what would achieve the will's non-normative substantive aim. This would put the rationalists in the difficult position of having to accept that, just as normative epistemology can be effectively reduced to the theory of evidence and probability, so also can normative ethics be reduced to something whose subject is not explicitly normative (Darwall 2002: 261)

In order not to reduce ethics to a tautological discipline, intuitionists are compelled to ground their normative and formal claims upon something which is explicitly non-normative. The same occurs for beliefs, whose normativity is reduced to the theory of evidence and probability. Although this is not a problem for beliefs, things are different for the will, because in this case, rationalists 'would no longer be in a position to argue that moral axioms must be immediately apprehensible because they are irreducibly

normative' (Darwall 2002, 261). Consequently, Darwall concludes that intuitionists should give up on non-naturalism if they want to preserve the intrinsically normative force of moral proposition.

What can be said in response to Darwall? Following our line of reasoning, one might be tempted to reply that being fundamental moral principle self-evident the autonomy of ethics is preserved because, through the self-justification of self-evident propositions, formal and substantive aims might coincide. Darwall prevents this possible reply by discerning that it is one thing to affirm that intuitions of self-evident propositions tend to raise a tendency to believe them, but quite another to claim that those intuitions can move the will. To explain this point, consider that merely acknowledging the self-evident proposition that "promises should be kept", does not move the will without any aid from the outside, such as that provided by the desire to do what I acknowledge as self-evident or as true.

If self-evident propositions are not intrinsically motivating, what is the place of motivation in internalism? Intuitionism seems to be committed to externalism, that is, it is compelled to introduce motivation from the outside. As a matter of fact, one can truly apprehend a self-evident moral proposition but at the same time lack the desire for it. What is wrong with this solution is that 'it seems to make ethics into just another classificatory schema rather than something essentially concerned with action guiding. And it makes moral goodness into something approaching a fetish rather than a property for a moral integrated person' (Darwall 2002, 265).

To continue in this direction, Darwall notices that intuitionism can only provide a *de dicto* desire, but not a *de re* desire to act. 'Morally good people don't care about doing whatever is right but they have also concerns for things that are right' (Darwall 2002, p. 266). He also remarks how a possible solution would be to adopt a sensibility theory, like McDowell's, which instantiates a connection between perception of moral properties and motivation. Nonetheless, such a response-dependent theory would conflict with the intuitionist claim that moral principles are necessary and apriori. As we have already noted in chapter 2, here rests the disagreement between Price's intuition and Hutcheson's moral sense. This is because sensibility theories - such as those in question - are bound to sensibility, which is contingent and aposteriori:

> We have, in fact, theories of moral judgement that fit this model, but they are no help to the intuitionist. For a sensibility theory, like McDowell's, for example, there is a conceptual connection between the response-dependent features that correct moral perception defects and the motivation-laden form of sensibility necessary for this apprehension. [...] But a sensibility theory explains practicality of

> moral judgement by response-dependence, and intuitionists are bound to reject this as inconsistent with their central claim that fundamental moral truths are necessary and *apriori* (Darwall 2002: 268)

Darwall suggests that it would be better for intuitionists to adopt a Kantian account of practical reason. That would preserve the apriori and synthetical character of moral truths while providing an explanation of *de re* concerns through the requirement of the categorical imperative. Darwall is however aware that this would be too burdensome for ethical intuitionism because it would have to give up with one of its central tenets, namely that fundamental moral principles are apprehended by an immediate intuition and not as a result of practical moral reasoning. Therefore, he concludes:

> To the extent that its irreducibility claim is grounded in the thesis that ethical though and discourse is essentially action-guiding, intuitionism will owe us some (presumably a priori) account of how intuitive judgement can move the will. But it is unclear what resources, if any, intuitionism has to meet this challenge (Darwall 2002, 270)

To conclude with a different line of argument, Darwall's criticism recalls Nowell-Smith's charge that intuitionism would either violate Hume's law or fail to motivate it. I have claimed above that Nowell-Smith's argument misses the point; here I do the same with Darwall, even if Darwall is in a better position in criticizing intuitionism. In fact, despite Darwall shedding light on some issues that are central to my inquiry, I believe that his criticism to intuitionism is not convincing for the following reasons.

First, I am not sure that the comparison between beliefs, on one hand, and will, on the other hand, works. On the corresponding moral side of beliefs, generally conceived, there would be moral beliefs rather than will. However, I think that before settling the analogy, it would be better to ask whether moral beliefs behave like other beliefs or if they are *sui generis* beliefs. *Second*, one might also distinguish between two different objections that for Darwall are strongly related: the first concerning motivation, the second non-naturalism. In order to provide an account of moral motivation – Darwall argues – we should give up with non-naturalism because *de re* desires arise from the substantive and non-normative dimension, and *de re* desires are what motivate us. Darwall's argument seems to miss the point. His argument succeeds if one accepts the distinction between formal and substantive aims. However, it is by no means certain that intuitionists would accept such a distinction. Intuitionism claims that substantive ethical propositions are self-evident. For instance, it is substantively self-evident that "promises shall be

fulfilled". It follows that I ought to keep premises (a formal aim) because it is self-evident that "promises shall be fulfilled " (a substantive aim).

What seems interesting is the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* desires. From a Kantian point of view, Darwall stresses as obvious that morally integrated people intrinsically desire to do what is right. Still, the problem is that, in so far as I have only the desire to do what is right *de dicto*, without any desire to do it *de re*, I seem to be lacking in important elements of moral character: 'There will be a solution to this problem, however, only if the apprehension of moral rightness itself involves (or engages) desires to do what is right *de re*' (Darwall 2002: 266).

How can this desire to do what is right *de re* be pursued without losing the apriori character of ethics, namely without reducing ethics to sensibility or to a mere psychological experience? In other words, is it possible to defend the autonomy of ethics from experience and simultaneously maintain a plausible account of how a morally integrated person thinks and acts morally?

Before proceeding in answering these questions, a clarification is needed. As we have already identified, intuitionism has been classified as an internalist position – as for Price – or as an externalist position – as for Prichard and Ross. Neither externalism nor internalism are knock-out problems for intuitionists, as Stratton Lake points out in *Why Externalism is not a Problem for Ethical Intuitionists* (1999).

As has been noted, for internalism there is a necessary internal connection between moral judgements and motivation. For externalism there is no such necessary connection and motivation comes from the outside: from emotions, desires, or, to use a general and comprehensive term, from conation. The thesis that conation is necessary in order to motivate the will is shared both by internalists and externalists. Internalists - who often support a non-descriptive theory of meaning for which moral judgements are not description but expressions of attitude, desires and dispositions – claim that one cannot sincerely utter a moral judgement without feeling motivated to act accordingly. Expressing a moral judgment is like expressing a desire. Externalists - who usually hold a descriptive theory of meaning for which moral judgements are description and not expressions of emotions, attitude, desires and dispositions – believe that it is possible to express a moral judgement without feeling motivated to act accordingly. Therefore, moral judgements are not intrinsically motivating, and an external conation is needed to move the will. The idea behind both positions is that there is a distinction between beliefs – inert and passive mental states with a mind-to-world direction of fit – and desire – active mental states with a world-to-mind direction of fit. Granted, not everyone accepts the dichotomy. Nagel and McDowell, for instance, are descriptivists for which moral judgements are beliefs that provide motivation: beliefs and reasons based on them are enough

for the will to act without the concourse of the conative dimension. However, my intention is not that of proposing a solution to the dispute between internalism and externalism in the theory of moral motivation. Rather, I draw the attention of the role played by the conative dimension in the process of knowledge, with specific attention to emotions.

As we have seen, Darwall opposes self-evidence and apriori and motivation, claiming roughly that where there is one, the other is absent. My purpose in the final part of the inquiry is to meet Darwall's challenge at one of its core claims, namely the alleged opposition between apriori rational intuition on one hand, and aposteriori sensible and conative dimension on the other. In other words, I aim to reconcile Ross and Hutcheson, intuitionism and moral sense theories. I argue that it is possible for intuitionism to encompass the dimension of sensibility without losing the apriori character of ethics. Independent of where the conation comes from, which can come from the outside or from within the moral judgements, does conation affect the apriori character of ethics?

3.5 An emotivist argument against self-evidence

According to a long-lasting and multifaceted tradition, ethics is a matter of emotions rather than a matter of reason. We are used to referring to this tradition as emotivism, a label that denotes a range of different theories united by the prominent role attributed to emotions in morality. If for Hume (1739) and Blackburn (1998), among others, emotions (in this case, "passions") shall lead to reason, others have argued that ethics is nothing but a "Boo and Hurray theory" (Ayer 1936), an issue of sole expression, without any representative function and cognitive commitment[22].

From historical standpoint, emotivism reached its zenith after the downfall of ethical intuitionism in the middle of the thirties of the last century. Emotivists seemed to have condemned ethical intuitionism - with its apriori objectivist and realist pretenses - to oblivion. According to these views, intuitionism suffered from the same fatal flaw of any theory committed to the defense of aprioricity in ethics. For critics, intuitionism cannot defend itself against two radical objections: that it is able to account neither for moral disagreement nor for moral motivation. Thus, the

[22] This views are usually antirealist, namely they deny that moral properties are mind-independent (for a quick overview, cf. Joyce (2015)'s SEP entry *Moral Antirealism*). This is plainly an ontological perspective, opposed to moral realism. In the course of my inquiry I will rather refer to the epistemological distinction cognitivism-non cognitivism and to the semantical distinction naturalism-non naturalism.

problem I am submitting in this research has its roots in emotivist suggestions.

In one of the most well-known *pièce* of emotivism, *The Emotive meaning of ethical terms* (1937), Charles Leslie Stevenson identifies a prevailing feature of moral discourse, that of *magnetism*: '"goodness" must have a magnetism. A person who recognizes X to be "good" must *ipso facto* acquire a stronger tendency to act in its favor than he otherwise would have had' (Stevenson 1937, 16). Unlike other emotivists, Stevenson acknowledges that besides the descriptive character of ethical judgement, there is a more significant function: that of being magnetic, or creating influence: 'Instead of merely describing people's interests, they change or intensify them. They recommend an interest in an object, rather than state that the interest already exists' (Stevenson 1937, 17-18). To summarize, Stevenson's argument rests on the concept of emotive meaning (which should be distinguished from other apparently similar kinds of meaning, such as preference). Given that ethical propositions have a dynamic use that prevails over the descriptive use, the emotive meaning fits with the first. The function of ethical terms, and of ethical propositions, is that of influencing and persuading others. Stevenson himself acknowledges that his definition is neither exhaustive, nor complete. Notwithstanding, only emotive meaning is intelligible; conceiving goodness this way is the only way to avoid the confusion of an alleged apriori moral knowledge: 'I strongly suspect, indeed, that any sense of "good" which is expected both to unite itself in synthetic apriori fashion with other concepts, and to influence interests as well, is really a great confusion' (Stevenson 1937, 31).

Beyond the merit of Stevenson's argument, a point deserves emphasis here: the refusal of accounting for both synthetic self-evident apriori knowledge and the human and interest. It is worth noticing that in his paper, Stevenson does not reject synthetic apriori knowledge *tout court*, but refuses a self-evident apriori conception of ethics because of its incapacity to take the emotive dimension into consideration. The challenge for ethical apriorism is that of keeping its independence of experience without giving up on the task of creating influence and persuasion within the human sphere. Still, the only argument here against apriority comes from the lack of the emotive aura required for moral assertions.

On the one hand, I disagree with Stevenson, but on the other hand I agree with the emphasis he puts on the emotive dimension in ethics, a dimension that, it goes without saying, is not occasional. Granted, the performative character of ethical judgement can be fulfilled without any emotive experience. Reason alone can motivate to action without emotional commitment. This view is usually called reason internalism and

concerns a use of reason that, together with Kant, I call practical. Thus, in this line of argument, Stevenson's suggestion can be resisted. If the main function of ethical proposition is that of influencing, this task can be fulfilled without the emotive aura.

This is not the only argument against apriori moral knowledge. For instance, the Swedish philosopher Alf Ross in *On the Logical Nature of Proposition of Value* (1945) argues:

> Propositions of value are incontestably synthetic and it must be regarded as proved by logical empiricism that *no synthetic judgments can occur a priori,* That a judgment is a priori means that it is analytical. Hence the propositions, being synthetic, cannot possibly be valid a priori (Ross 1945, 178)

On behalf of logical positivism, Alf Ross advances many objections to apriori moral knowledge. The underlying argument is the following. If a proposition is a priori, then it is analytical. Propositions of value are not analytical, but rather synthetical. Thus, propositions of value cannot be apriori. *Pace* Kant, synthetic apriori propositions cannot be a priori because they are verified – or, I would say, justified – by experience. In conclusion, the only legitimate apriori propositions are tautologies that, to use Ross' words, 'cannot be disputed but, on the other hand, they say nothing' (Ross 1945, 179)

I firmly believe that Alf Ross' objections should be resisted. I have already demonstrated that such objections, and many others directed towards apriorism in ethics, simply miss the point. At this stage, I merely underline how the rough definition of derivately apriori given above – a definition that will be broadly refined throughout the research – can meet, for instance, a challenge such as the following:

> Sense observation too is sometimes called intuition, seeing that, as experience, it has a spontaneous character. In so far empiricism may also be said to be based on intuition. But the *intellectual intuition* of apriorism differs from this in that it is not a single atomical state of affairs which is perceived in it ("this is red"), but a general state of affairs expressed by a *general proposition,* e.g. ("pleasure is what is good in itself") (Ross 1945, 180).

Actually, my conception of the apriori affirms just the opposite. General apriori propositions are justified and grasped through the sole use of the understanding, without any appeal to intuition. Rather, intuition plays an alleged justifying role within the domain of particular propositions. Nonetheless, besides intuitions, emotions play a constitutive

role in the process of moral knowledge that almost parallels the role of intuitions in intuitionism.

Moreover, I shall pay attention to another point underlined by Ross. From the conclusion – provided by a classical neo-positivist argument that I cannot consider here – that propositions of value are not intersubjectively verifiable, that they are not 'assertions', it follows that they have a function different from that of asserting a cognition. Uttering a judgement of value implies more than making a description of a state of affairs. Uttering a judgement of value implies expressing an attitude and inviting others to feel this attitude too. Here, a problem clearly emerges with an apriori conception of ethics (Ross refers to ethical non-naturalism, but I assume that apriori moral knowledge – also in a naturalist guise – is the real target of his criticism). In principle, Ross argues it would not be untenable to affirm both an objective apprehension of value and its normativity. Nonetheless, this would raise the following paradox.

> If goodness is defined as an objective quality without relation to human aspiration, ethics will merely be a theoretical description of the surrounding world. If goodness is defined as that which is actually aspired to, ethics will be a description of human aspiration. In no case will it be categorically normative. Now the idea of a normative cognition implies that these possibilities which mutually exclude one another are combined (Ross 1945, 181)

The alleged contradiction is that in order to be objective, "goodness" must be deprived from – or at least conceived without – the actual subjective interest for it (adopting Ross' words, 'human aspiration'). However, in order to have "normative significance" goodness should include the actual subjective interest. "Goodness" is at the same time determined with and without relation to human aspiration. Ross' solution is to resolve the contradiction by removing the first part, arguing that goodness (and other value qualities) is not objective and propositions of value are non-logical and even less apriori. Shall I remove the second part in order to defend my concern for apriori moral knowledge? The answer is no; rather than choosing between one or the other option, I accept both and I argue that, if adequately understood, they do not exclude one another.

If I am right, we all have excellent reason to relate emotions and apriori self-evident moral propositions, even if emotions would be in this case committed to a self-evident model of knowledge that is apparently at odds with emotivism as the aforementioned criticisms point out. I will explore the relationship between self-evidence and emotions in the last chapter.

4

SELF-EVIDENCE AND COMMON SENSE MORALITY

4.1 Framing the issue

At the beginning of *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (2007) Timothy Williamson describes philosophy as an armchair discipline and argues that the method of philosophy, unlike the method of natural sciences, is essentially apriori:

> The traditional methods of philosophy are armchair ones: they consist of thinking, without any special interaction with the world beyond the chair, such as measurement, observation or experiment would typically involve [...] the current methodology of natural sciences is aposteriori; the current methodology of philosophy is apriori. What should we make of this difference? (Williamson 2007, 1)

According to Williamson, philosophers, included those that endorse a radical form of empiricism, end up committing to apriorism. Indeed, it is not only 'crude rationalists' that defend apriorism, but also 'crude empiricists', who 'still philosophize in the grand manner, merely adding naturalism to their list of apriori commitment' (Williamson 2007, 2). In this sense, philosophy is like mathematics. Even if experiments can be useful and relevant for proving a mathematical theory, mathematics can do without them and be done in an armchair. The same goes for philosophy. Despite the temptation of appealing to empirical psychological experiments and data to prove philosophical theories, 'the method of conducting opinion polls among non-philosophers is not very much the best way of answering philosophical questions than the method of conducing opinion polls among non-physicists is to be the best way of answering the philosophical questions' (Williamson 2007, 7).

However, if scientific and philosophical theories – be they Berkeley's idealism or quantum mechanics – can be highly counterintuitive and totally disjoined by the commonsensical picture of the world, things seem to be more complicated for moral theories.

Here, if not by opinion polls, a central role is played by common thought. Since the inception of ethics as a doctrine, from Aristotle onwards, it has been a basic assumption that every ethical theory aiming to achieve a considerable degree of plausibility must engage with what ordinary men really think. In a famous passage of the *Critique of the practical reason* (1788) Kant replies to those who accused him of failing to state any new principle of morality, rhetorically wondering whether anyone could be foolish

enough to be willing to introduce a new principle of morality. Therefore, much more than other fields of philosophy, moral philosophy should take account of common-sense morality. Of course, taking something into account is not the same as approving it. If it is true that ethical theories cannot be entirely made in the laboratory, it is also true that they cannot be reduced to mere empirical records of contemporary moral thought.

Is common sense morality therefore a criterion of the truth of ethical propositions? To what extent can moral philosophy be considered an apriori discipline? What is the role of common sense morality in ethical intuitionism? Can we justifiedly hold our moral convictions or our intuitions on the basis of the morality of common sense?

This chapter will provide answers to such questions, focusing on the relation between self-evident moral principles and common sense morality. However, the problem extends beyond the narrow borders of the theory of self-evidence in ethics and concerns, more broadly, the relation between ethical theory (whether it is self-evident or not) on one hand and common sense morality on the other.

Two options are possible. *On the one hand*, ethical theory should revise or reject common sense morality. Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) is probably the most radical attack against common sense morality; to remind a milder position in *Reason and Persons* (1984) Derek Parfit explicitly argues that common sense morality is self-defeating and that it should be revisited. In *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (1979), Richard Brandt argues that aim of the ethical theory is that of evaluating our tradition 'from the outside' (Brandt 1979, 12). *On the other hand*, it is common sense morality that constitutes the criteria for the validity of an ethical theory. If the theory is at odds with common sense morality, then it is the theory that should be revised. In this sense the theory is only a refined theoretical formulation of what we as ordinary moral agents experience in our lives. A classic example is the so-called Scottish school of common sense. One of the leading figures of this school, George Campbell, noticed that there are truths that do not come from reason but that constitute a necessary step for acquiring knowledge (*Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1776). As Lewis (1986) puts it, 'common sense is a settled body of theory – unsystematic folk theory – which at any rate we do believe; and I presume that we are reasonable to believe it. (Most of it.)' (Lewis 1986, 134).

For many, ethical intuitionism is a theory of the second kind. As Kaspar points out:

> Intuitionism begins by looking at our moral thought and moral experience. What we really think about morality is something to be investigated, not dismissed. On the basis of our genuine

> moral thoughts, intuitionism holds that, in general, we know what's right (Kaspar 2013, 11)

Needless to say, intuitionism has been accused of moral conservativism and naivety from its earliest origins (not by chance was the reformist Mill one of its first critics) because of the attention paid to the convictions and the opinions of ordinary men. For Alasdair McIntyre, 'all intuitionist writers suffer from one difficulty: they are, on their own view, telling us only about what we all know already. That they sometimes disagree about what it is that we all know already only makes them less boring at the cost of making them even less convincing' (McIntyre 1966, 264).

On the contrary, in this chapter I argue that one of the major merits of intuitionism is that it takes common-sense morality seriously and that it explains why we have the moral beliefs that in fact we have. Moreover, I take the relationship with common sense as the most effective way – more than the analogy with mathematics – to defend intuitionism.

Let me briefly introduce the issue.

Consider a set that includes all moral judgements. Some of them are rationally justified on the basis of more or less explicit inferences; others are the results of mere empirical generalizations; yet others are taken for valid on the basis of testimony or faith. There are however judgements that are immediately formulated, that seem to be obvious and that do not require any particular reflection to be held: "torturing children for fun is wrong"; "promises should be kept"; "pleasure is good"; "happiness shall be pursued"; "lying is wrong". They are generally immediately accepted by everyone who considers them. That is not to say that no one rejects them, but that arguments are required for their rejection but not for their acceptance. These judgements are both self-evident and commonsensical.

However, the equivalence between self-evidence and commonsense should be deepened. At first sight, an alleged paradox arises. Self-evidence requires a rigorous and demanding form of knowledge – so rigorous and demanding that many doubt its existence. Self-evident truths are rigorously true. On the contrary, commonsensical truths seem to be only acritically or pre-theoretically true. Self-evidence is a model of true knowledge – think for instance of self-evident principles of logic – while common sense is only taken to be true. Self-evidence expresses a sort of eternal truth – independent of space and time – while commonsense expresses only a contingent truth, dependent on human consensus and on many other factors, such as culture, society, and human psychology.

Granted, not all commonsensical truths are self-evident. For instance, "I know I have two hands" and other Moorean-propositions (Moore, 1925) are commonsensical propositions that are not self-evident or, better, not self-

evident according to our conception of self-evidence. Of course, not all self-evident truths are commonsensical. For instance, De Morgan's laws are self-evident, but considering them commonsensical demands too much knowledge of the laws of logic from ordinary people. Nonetheless, there is an intersectional set between self-evident truths and commonsensical truths that contains truths that are both self-evident and commonsensical. This set may contain self-evident and commonsensical laws of logic, such as the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of the excluded middle, that can be considered commonsensical because a common intellect normally understands them and acts upon them. Basic moral principles are surely candidates for inclusion in this set. Much of the self-evident principles, the Rossian principles for instance, are normally considered commonsensical. They are widely shared, at least in the world in which we live.

Nonetheless, as has been observed elsewhere concerning the epistemic status of self-evidence, one can be aware that these principles are commonsensical but not be aware that they are self-evident.

In the chapter, I will argue that the defense of common sense morality provided by intuitionism has nothing to do with a naïve conservativism. On the contrary, the intuitionist theory provides us with instruments that can in that moment criticize and not only clarifies common sense morality. One of its major merits of intuitionism is that it takes common-sense morality seriously and that it explains why we have the moral beliefs that in fact we have.

Far from being a mere sanction of ordinary moral thought, as critics often claim, ethical intuitionism explains common sense morality best, accounting for these features and many others that have not been mentioned in these introductory lines. Some of our moral beliefs are rationally justified on the basis of more or less explicit inferences, others are taken for valid on the basis of testimony but many of them are simply intuitions, convictions that are immediate or, to use the technical word introduced in the previous chapter, self-evident. My goal in this chapter has been to show how basic moral principles can be both self-evident and commonsensical. What is the epistemological status of principles such as: "torturing children for fun is wrong"; "promises should be kept"; "pleasure is good"; "happiness shall be pursued"; "lying is wrong"? Are they self-evident propositions or, simply, commonsensical propositions? The difference between what is self-evident and what is commonsensical is huge because the former seems to be rigorously true while the latter seems to be only acritically or pre-theoretically true. Self-evident is a model of true knowledge - think for instance at self-evident principles of logic - while the commonsensical is only assumed to be true. Self-evident expresses a sort of eternal truth - independent of space and time - while commonsensical expresses only a contingent truth, dependent on

human consensus and on many other factors (culture, society, human psychology etc.). As a provisional reply, we can say, with Audi (1997; 2004) that understanding the truth of a proposition that is self-evident - that is, understanding its epistemic status - is different from understanding its self-evidence. That is, a commonsense principle that we assume to be unreflectively or pre-reflectively true are self-evident for those who, besides accepting them, can also manage the concept of self-evidence and decide to reflect on the epistemic status of the principle at stake. The plain man can acknowledge a self-evident principle as commonsensical, and accept its truth, without acknowledging its self-evidence.[23] Let us take for instance Ross' *prima facie* duties. In Ross' purpose, *prima facie* duties are recognized as true by everyone who has sufficient mental maturity. Even if everyone does accept them as common sense, only a minority can recognize them as self-evident. Even if one might also doubt that everyone is aware that they are commonsensical, everyone would simply pre-theoretically recognize them as true without being aware of their commonsensical features.

On one hand, even if they are apriori, self-evident moral principles are defeasible and defeasibility comes from common sense morality. This is a reason why not to consider intuitionism a too abstract theory based on a *sui generis* conception of ethics without bearing on concrete moral life. On the other, once one has established that a self-evident moral proposition is self-evident – that it is true on the basis of an adequate understanding - this proposition can at the same time contribute to the revision of a commonsensical conception that does not acknowledge it as self-evident.

However, I agree with Singer for whom the judgements of common sense 'are likely to derive from discarded religious systems, from warped views of sex and bodily functions, or from customs necessary for the survival of the group in social and economic circumstances that now lie in the distant past' (Singer 1974, 516). Against all that, self-evident axioms, particularly those to which common sense has never paid attention, are the antidote.

Therefore, the relationship between self-evidence and common sense morality is helpful both – on behalf of self-evidence – because it avoids a rigorous but artificial and abstract representation of moral life and - on behalf of common-sense morality – because it prevents the reduction of ethics to a mere systematization of current and dominant ethical thought.

To sum up: on one hand, even if they are apriori, self-evident moral principles are defeasible and defeasibility comes from common sense morality. This is a reason why not to consider intuitionism a too abstract

[23] cfr. AUDI (1997: 49) «As moral agents we need intuitive knowledge of our duties; we do not need intuitive (or even other) knowledge of the status of the principles of duty».

theory based on a *sui generis* conception of ethics without bearing on concrete moral life. On the other hand, once one has established that a self-evident moral proposition is self-evident – that it is true on the basis of an adequate understanding - this proposition can at the same time contribute to the revision of a commonsensical conception that does not acknowledge it as self-evident.

The plan is the following.

In 4.1 I stress the fact that an appropriate way of conceiving this relation is helpful because the appeal to common sense avoids a rigorous but artificial and abstract representation of moral life, while the appeal to self-evidence prevents ethics from being a mere systematization of common sense morality. In 4.2 I show how, as early as Sidgwick, self-evidence and commons sense morality were already strongly intertwined. In 4.3 I present common sense as morality as the moral expert *par excellence*. In 4.4 I take intuitions to be evidence for default reasonable beliefs, while in 4.5 I discuss the problem of entitlement and argue that intuitions entitle us to believe self-evident moral proposition. This aspect is particularly relevant for self-evident ethical propositions because even people who do not have the capacity to have any kind of justification – such as children – are as just entitled to hold self-evident moral propositions as moral philosophers. I conclude, in a Wittgensteinian style, by arguing that we are entitled to hold self-evident ethical propositions within certain community rules.

4.2 Sidgwick, common sense morality and self-evidence

In a chapter of the *Methods*, significantly entitled *Review of the Morality of Common Sense*, Sidgwick describes common sense morality as 'a marvelous product of the nature, the result of long centuries of growth' (Sidgwick 1907, 337). On this account, common sense morality is distinguished by 'the positive morality of the community' which consists on the whole of the codes and the rules of conduct of a specific community that a member of the community is somehow compelled to approve to avoid social blame. On the contrary, 'the morality of Common Sense' is 'warranted by the consensus of mankind – or at least of that portion of mankind which combines adequate intellectual enlightenment with a serious concern for morality' (Sidgwick 1907, 214-215).

Sidgwick presents self-evident principles at the same time independent and conditioned by common-sense morality. Indeed, he pays great attention to common sense morality and his systematization is strongly intertwined with its conception of intuition and intuitionism.

Sidgwick recalls Aristotle's critical reflection on particular moral opinions held by 'the Common Sense Morality of Greece' and proposes to do the same himself with the Common Sense Morality of his age, making its implied premises explicit. Thus, the aim of Sidgwick's analysis is to submit the dictates of common sense morality 'to a final examination, in order to decide whether these general formulae possess the characteristics by which self-evident truths are distinguished from mere opinions' (Sidgwick 1907, 338). The task is ambitious: finding among common sense opinions on moral matters principles which are self-evident and that satisfy the conditions of clarity, precision, careful reflection, consistency and consensus that he has posited for self-evidence. Hence, we should look at those principles that satisfy Sidgwick's conditions or, to use his words, 'can claim to be classed as intuitive truths' (Sidgwick 1907, 338).

Despite assigning to common sense morality a central role, Sidgwick does not consider moral philosophy a mere formulation of common sense, but rather the effort of transcending and diverging from both the premises and the conclusions of common sense morality (Sidgwick 1907: 373). The moralist is asked 'to do somewhat more than define and formulate the common moral opinion of mankind' (Sidgwick, 1907: 373). It is not by chance that Sidgwick considers current beliefs as the starting point of his inquiry towards the establishment of a first principle of morality and toward the justification of the utilitarian principle as a candidate for being such a principle. The utilitarian principle is not valid by definition; it is valid because it is demanded by our actual moral principle. In a nutshell, the reason why Sidgwick opts for the utilitarian principle is mainly that the principle holds common sense morality in the background. The principle of utility orders and systematizes the variety of particular judgements, providing 'a method for binding the unconnected and occasionally conflicting principles of common moral reasoning into a complete and harmonious system' (Sidgwick 1907, 442). As Schneewind (2010) points out:

> A large part of Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics* is devoted to an examination of common-sense morality. The outcome of the examination is twofold. First, Sidgwick claims to have shown that the principles of common-sense morality are not independently valid and binding. They need to be supplemented by some further, fundamental principle or principles. Second, he holds nonetheless that common-sense morality is not to be rejected. Properly understood it provides sound guidance for action. Moreover, we must use common-sense morality in order to discover the needed first principle or principles and—

> paradoxically—in order to give reasons for accepting it or them (Schneewind 2010, 21)

Schneewind proposes distinguishing between two arguments that he calls Dependence argument and the Systematization argument.

The Dependence argument maintains that principles of common sense, despite being valid and binding, are not independently valid and binding but are subsumed under utilitarian principles as a principle that is fundamental and self-evident. Principles of common sense morality are not independently valid and binding because people sometimes do not know which principle, among the others, they should follow. They have to 'ask for reasons for or against the moral judgements involved in the difficulty. In giving reasons appeal is often made, not to further particular moral judgement but to more general rules or principles' (Schneewind 2010, 28). The Utilitarian principle is such a general rule because it can overrule common sense principles without being overruled by them. Granted, they are still valid, but their validity depends on the principle of utility; if they contradict it, they cannot be considered moral judgements.

The Systematization argument aims to show that it is the utilitarian principle and not any other principle that responds to how common sense effectively works. Alternative principles are wrong not in themselves but because they cannot provide any true explanation of common sense morality. To paraphrase a famous Kantian assertion, the utilitarian principle is the *ratio explicandi* of common sense morality; common sense morality is the *ratio essendi* of the utilitarian principle.

However, what matters here is not deciding whether Sidgwick is right in defending the truth of the utilitarian principle, but understanding its relation with common sense. The theoretical relevance of the problem was stressed by John Rawls. In *A Theory of Justice* (1972), Rawls considers Sidgwick's method as a progenitor of his method of *reflective equilibrium*. In a footnote, he directly refers to Sidgwick who 'takes for granted that philosophical reflection will lead to revisions in our considered judgments, and although there are elements of epistemological intuitionism in his doctrine, these are not given much weight when unsupported by systematic considerations' (Rawls 1971, 51fn). For Rawls, reflective equilibrium 'is an equilibrium because at last our principles and judgments coincide; and it is reflective since we know to what principles our judgments conform and the premises of their derivation' (Rawls 1971, 20). Rawls stresses here the coincidence of principles and of 'considered judgments duly pruned and adjusted'. This fits with his assumption that a theory of justice cannot rest solely on apriori analysis but in addition needs 'contingent assumptions' and 'facts'. For Rawls, if in the "original position", namely in absence of subjective bias,

there is conflict between a principle and a personal conviction, both the principles and the conviction should be revised and weighed until they reach an agreement or, to use a word introduced by Nelson Godman, 'reflective equilibrium'. The task of the ethical theorist is, therefore, that of matching principles with our pondered judgments.

In *Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium* (1974) Singer rejects this equivalence with Rawls. If for Rawls' method of reflective equilibrium a normative theory is validated by the accordance of general principles and intuitions, for Sidgwick 'agreement, no matter how widespread it may be, is not a criterion for the truth or validity of a normative theory' (Singer 1974, 514). Singer offers evidence against the view – held by both Rawls and Schneewind - that Sidgwick adopts the method of reflecting equilibrium in order to test the validity of the moral theories under examination. In fact, the mere accordance of a self-evident proposition with other intuitions does not guarantee its truth. For Sidgwick, such a proposition might turn out to be false. General consent - or, rather, common sense morality - may be a candidate for preventing 'all such error as arises from the special weakness and biases of individual minds, or of particular sections of human race' (Sidgwick 1879, xx) but it is not the criterion that detects these errors:

> For Rawls, reaching this kind of harmony is the goal of moral philosophy; it is the definition of "valid" so far as moral theories are concerned: for Sidgwick, it is the best possible insurance against error, but because our target is a moral theory that is true, and not merely in harmony with our intuitions and with common sense morality, we may still be in error (Singer 1974: 509)

In doing this, Singer mentions an article *The Establishment of Ethical First Principles* (1879), where Sidgwick directly addresses the relations between first principles and common sense morality. Sidgwick starts from the consideration that propositions which we consider self-evident, and therefore cannot be proved, can be asked for a proof by those who cannot see their self-evidence. One way of proving them is by appealing to consensus:

> A proposition which presents itself to my mind as self-evident, and is in harmony with all the rest of my intuitions relating to the same subject, and is also accepted by all other minds that have been led to contemplate it may after all turn out to be false-, but it seems to have as high a degree of certainty as I can hope to attain under existing conditions of human thought (Sidgwick 1879, 108)

Consensus can relate to self-evident principles in two ways: either by confirming my judgement on the self-evidence of a proposition or by overriding it. If in the first case it is plausible that acceptance by all other minds that undertake a proposition provides us with a good reason to accept it, things are different in the second case: 'Certainly if I found myself alone contra mundum, I should think it more probable that I was wrong than that the world was, and such a balance of probability is enough to act on' (Sidgwick 1879, 109)

If the method of reflective equilibrium is not an appropriate answer, that which provides evidence for the truth of a theory is the appeal to the self-evidence of fundamental moral principle. If this latter does not appear self-evident as it purports to be, either we must carefully consider whether it is implicitly self-evident, or we have to reject it as a fundamental principle. What is certain, however, is that the truth of the principle rests in the principle itself, neither in its accordance with other personal intuitions, nor in common consensus, no matter how broad that consensus may be. Therefore, Sidgwick avoids the temptation of lending excessive weight to particular intuitive judgments grounded in common sense morality. Here is how Singer summarizes Sidgwick's method: 'search for undeniable fundamental axioms; build up a moral theory from them; and use particular moral judgments as supporting evidence, or as a basis for ad hominem arguments, but never so as to suggest that the validity of the theory is determined by the extent to which it matches them' (Singer 1974, 517). An appropriate method of ethics cannot be the rationalization – or systematization – of commonsensical moral opinion or, even worse, prejudices. Nonetheless, the role of moral philosophers is that of making explicit principles which are, we might say, implicit in common sense morality. These principles are self-evident and in principle defeasible by further *aposteriori* beliefs.

A last point needs to be considered here. Sidgwick warns to beware of ethical principles that look like self-evident principles but that are in fact tautologies:

> These are principles which appear certain and self-evident because they are substantially tautological: because, when examined, they are found to affirm no more than that it is right to do that which is - in a certain department of life, under certain circumstances and conditions - right to be done (Sidgwick 1907: 379).

Therefore, ethical theory will find an equilibrium between self-evidence and common sense, and so avoid the 'Scylla and Charybdis of ethical inquiry', that is on one hand an ethical doctrine which only sanctions

common sense morality, and on the other hand a tautological theory which says nothing more than what it is yet implicitly known. It is all about 'avoiding on the one hand doctrines that merely bring us back to common opinion with all its imperfections, and on the other hand doctrines that lead us round in a circle, find any way of obtaining self-evident moral principles of real significance' (Sidgwick 1907: 379).

Partially anticipating Ross' theory of *prima facie* duties, for Sidgwick self-evident principles are to be found at a general level, but they cannot provide a rule of conduct in particular cases, because they are too abstract and universal. The principles of Justice, Prudence and Benevolence are examples of self-evident propositions that are known immediately by intuition. Again, the fact that these principles are apprehended by intuitions means that they can be found to be 'essentially reasonable' by 'merely reflecting upon them'. Besides these, there are rules to whom 'custom and general consent have given a merely illusory air of self-evidence' (Sidgwick 1907, 383). For common-sense morality many principles are apparently self-evident, but only a few of them are really so, that is, they are valid without exceptions (even if they cannot be applied in the concrete situations, because overridden by other self-evident principles). Therefore, the task of the moralist 'is that of seeking among commonly received moral rules for genuine intuitions of the Practical Reason' (Sidgwick 1907, 384). For Sidgwick, careful reflection and the other three conditions of self-evidence stated above reveal what is really self-evident and what is not, so to amend common-sense morality:

> I know by direct reflection that the propositions 'I ought to speak the truth', 'I ought to keep my promises' – however true they may be – are not self-evident to me; they present themselves as propositions requiring rational justification of some kind. On the other hand, the propositions 'I ought not to prefer a present lesser good to a future greater good' and 'I ought not to prefer my own lesser good to the greater good of another' do present themselves as self-evident; as much as the mathematical axiom that 'if equals be added to equals the whole are equals' (Sidgwick 1907, 383)

Here, Sidgwick does not consider propositions like 'I ought to speak the truth', and 'I ought to keep my promises' as self-evident because they require reflection. We have already seen that required reflection does not prevent moral propositions from being self-evident. On the contrary reflection is often needed especially for self-evident moral propositions. Nonetheless, what it is worth noticing here is Sidgwick's distinction between what it is really self-evident and what it is only apparently so. Much of our default

beliefs are not self-evident but simply held in virtue of our upbringing and education. For instance, that "the death-penalty is wrong" is not self-evident unless one has been educated to consider the inefficacy of the death-penalty (say, in preventing crimes), its bad effects, its paradoxical consequences. These are all non-moral considerations that affect our evaluation of "death-penalty is wrong" as self-evident or otherwise. Indeed, I could trace the judgement "the death-penalty is wrong" back to the basic judgement that "wrongful killing is wrong". Nevertheless, that "the death-penalty is wrong" is a case of wrongful killing is self-evident only to those that have been educated in a given context. According to the annual Gallup poll a narrow majority of U.S citizens are favorable to death penalty. According to recent data, the percentage favorable to death penalty in Europe is noticeably decreasing. The majority of people in Western European countries are against the death-penalty, while a great majority of Eastern European people are for the death-penalty (with peaks of almost 90% in favor in Romania and Turkey) with the exception of Bulgaria (only 33% in favor). Setting statistical data aside, from this consideration we can see that the commonsensical systems in which people have grown up tend to influence their conception of particular moral judgments as basic, self-evident moral judgement. Granted, the fact that they are not self-evident does not mean that they are not valid or true, but the distinction helps to avoid the temptation of considering self-evident principles that are only psychological or context-dependent. These principles can at most be considered derivatively self-evident, but the derivation from the basic principle to the principle is self-evident if and only if the commonsensical context in which we have grown up helps us in seeing the principles as derivatively self-evident and the derivation itself as self-evident.

Unfortunately, that is easier said than done. Self-evident ethical propositions are more likely to be contested than self-evident logical and mathematical propositions. Our intuitions can be false or contested and, even if one believes that they cannot be proved, they can be asked for proof. That gives rise to a dilemma. Suppose that two people, Sidgwick and I, disagree not about the validity of a proposition, but about its self-evidence. For instance, I might argue against Sidgwick that a proposition such as 'I ought to keep my promises' really is self-evident, because, perhaps, promises mean 'speech act that requires fulfilment' and, therefore, the proposition is true in virtue of the understanding. To convince Sidgwick that the proposition really is self-evident and not only apparently self-evident, after having applied the four conditions, I might be asked for proof. However, if I believe this proposition to be self-evident, what I cannot provide is a proof (because, again, self-evident propositions do not have any external proof). If the proposition at stake was a logical proposition, Sidgwick and I could be

requested to think more about it, to contemplate it in detail until we reach an agreement on its status.

Nonetheless, correlation does not mean circularity. Self-evidence and common sense are one in need one of the other, but it is the principle, not the common sense, that for Sidgwick has the last word:

> The history of moral philosophy – so far at least as those whom we may call orthodox thinkers are concerned – would be a history of attempts to enunciate, in full breadth and clearness those primary intuitions of Reasons, by the scientific application of which the common moral thought of mankind may be at once systematized and correct (Sidgwick 1907, 373-374)

To conclude, common sense principles for Sidgwick are not the criterion of the truth of the principle of utilitarianism, a principle that is non-inferentially valid, but a confirmation of its results. However, despite its non-inferential validity the utilitarian principle 'is valid because it is demanded by our actual moral principles. In a world that was very different from ours, in which very different moral principles were commonly accepted, some other principle might be the independent first principle' (Schneewind 1963, 150). Nonetheless, the validity of the principle is independent because it passes the test of the fourth conditions of self-evidence. The fact that common sense morality works as the principle supposes it to work is only a confirmation, or an indirect proof of the validity of the principle. What if the principle, after having passed the four conditions test, disagrees with common sense? Then, being a principle of morality a rule for human conduct, it is necessary to think a little more about it, wondering whether the four conditions were well applied. Common sense can detect and prevent error and misunderstanding in establishing what the fundamental moral principle is, or which self-evident moral principles are basic (and if they are really so):

> If we have once learned that, either from personal experience or from the history of thought, that we are liable to be mistaken in the affirmation of apparently self-evident propositions, we may surely retain this general conviction along with the special impression of the self-evidence of any proposition which we may be contemplating; and thus however strong this latter impression may be, we shall still admit our need of some further protection against the possible failure of our faculty of intuition. Such a further guarantee may reasonably be found in general consent; for though the protection this gives is not perfect – since there are historical examples of untrue propositions

> generally accepted as self-evident – it at least excludes all such error as arises from the special weakness and biases of individual minds, or of particular sections of the human race. A proposition which presents itself to my mind as self-evident, and is un harmony with all the rest of my intuitions relating to the same subject, and is also accepted by all others mind that have been led to contemplate it may after all turn out to be false: but it seems to have as high a degree of certainty as I can hope to attain under existing conditions of human thought (Sidgwick 1879, 508)

From Sidgwick, we learn that the relation between self-evident principles and common sense morality should be deemed important. Roughly speaking, only self-evidence can restore common sense morality, and only common sense morality can save self-evidence from abstraction. I agree with Singer, for whom the judgements of common sense 'are likely to derive from discarded religious systems, from warped views of sex and bodily functions, or from customs necessary for the survival of the group in social and economic circumstances that now lie in the distant past' (Singer 1974, 516). Against all that, self-evident axioms, particularly those to which common sense has never paid attention, are the antidote. So conceived, intuitionism ceases to be a form of dogmatic conservativism, and attacks on it on that basis lose their force. I will try to develop this idea in what follows.

4.3 Common sense as moral expert

All of us need experts in some fields of our life. When we decide to buy stocks, we need market experts. When we got a disease, we call the doctor. We ask engineers how to cope with the cracks we have found in the wall. We need also expert advice for improving our cooking ability, for finding an effective way of refurbishing our old grandparents' country house and for understanding why when the car water temperature is too high, the engine switches off. In general, we tend to trust what the financial advisor, the mechanic, the post office employee and *Google Maps* tell us concerning specific issues. Our trust is often due to a practical convenience. We cannot understand and manage the great amount of knowledge that is required in our lives. Thus, we are obliged to have confidence in others so that we can face problems readily and with efficacy. We usually call these 'others' experts.

What about experts in moral issues?

Here things are more complicated. If it seems reasonable to faithfully follow doctors' indications concerning a therapy – because the doctors (and not us) are the experts – it seems much less reasonable to faithfully follow

what moral experts tell us, especially without any critical considerations. That is not to say that we do not need any advice concerning moral matters but that the reasons provided by experts should be at least minimally understood and considered from one's own point of view. That is cogent with the idea of autonomy. From Kant onwards, that ethics should be autonomous has been seen not only as a way of defending the legitimacy of the discipline, but also as a condition for our free will and, more controversially, for the ascription of responsibility. It is worth noting also that a Christian theologian such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer considers autonomy as one the deepest gains of the modern age (Bonhoeffer, 1945)[24]. Moreover, even though only few of us are asked to be moral reformers (Bergson, 1932), all of us are required to hold our moral judgment not on blind faith but on the grounds of reasons that have been autonomously endorsed. Roughly speaking, if medical pronouncements should be followed for a therapy to succeed, it is intuitively reasonable to be suspicious of any ready and clear-cut pronouncements concerning our moral life, especially when they come from outside sources, be they Holy Books, traditional rules or, indeed, experts.

In addition, if doctors are experts in medical issues and if lawyers are experts in legal issues, who are the experts of moral issues? Traditionally, religious authorities such preachers, priests, rabbis, monks or authoritative characters, such as ancient men in traditional communities, have been considered moral experts *par excellence*. Nowadays, many people tend to defer to psychologists, gurus and life coaches as well. The idea is that people who are acquainted with moral problems of others or that have studied moral problems are more apt to judge and to provide indication for solving problems of morality.

The contrasting idea of moral philosophers as experts of morality is highly controversial[25]. For a mainstream view of metaethics, the task of moral philosophers is merely that of clarifying moral language and moral concepts.

For Peter Singer, 'moral philosophers have, then, certain advantages which could make them, relative to those who lack these advantages, experts in matters of morality' (Singer 1972, 117). Singer criticized positions expressed by prominent moral philosophers such as Ayer who argued that moral philosophers do not have any position of advantage over ordinary man

[24] L. FONNESU, *Il ritorno dell'autonomia. Kant e la filosofia classica tedesca*. Quaderni fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno, (43), 2914; J.B. SCHNEEWIND, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1998.

[25] More recently, a defense of the claim that philosophers are moral experts has been put forth by Burch (1974); for Gesang (2010) moral philosophers are 'semi-experts' while for a view that strongly denies that moral philosophers are experts see Archard (2011) and a reply on behalf of the "moral philosophers as experts thesis" by Gordon (2014).

and that people 'mistakenly look at moral philosophers for guidance' (Ayer, 1954 in Singer 1972, 115) or as Broad, for whom 'moral philosophers as such have no special information not available to the general public about what is right and what is wrong' (Broad, 1952 in Singer 1972, 115).

On the contrary, Singer's claim is that moral philosophers are better trained than ordinary men in drawing inferences and conclusions, they have more familiarity with 'moral concepts and the logic of moral argument' and they may devote more time to moral reflection than ordinary people Put simply, moral philosophers are those moral experts that have the relevant information, are able to parse that information and can then reach plausible conclusions, avoiding conceptual confusion and misunderstanding. Therefore, their importance is even greater in societies where the principles of morality and their application are highly disputed.

I argue that these two views could be integrated. As much as non-moral experts can refer to the developments and the refinements of their discipline through the centuries, so moral experts can refer to the deep and rich heritage of moral reflection throughout the history of mankind.

Common sense morality – as this legacy could be called - can be considered the most prominent moral expert. Indeed, common sense morality is shared by all humans within a given community. That is not to say that everyone should accept the dictates of common sense morality, but simply that the adherence to common sense morality is the standard way of thinking and acting in a moral way for a subject of the community. A great part of our ethical judgement is almost automatically formulated. However, reflection may be required in complex and unclear situations, such moral disputes or dilemmas. Not by chance, in a famous passage of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821), does Hegel ascribe to Socrates the principle of particular subjectivity. With his refusal to obey to the traditional law of the state, as Hegel understands it, Socrates breaks up with the ethical unity of the classical world, opening a new era, the era of freedom. However, in absence of strong countervailing evidence and in absence of moral disputes, common sense morality seems to be the most effective way to judge and to act. One of the conditions of the provisional moral code of Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* (1637) was:

> to obey the laws and customs of country, holding constantly to the religion in which by God's grace I had been instructed from my childhood, and governing myself in all other matters—i.e. all the ones not settled by the law of the land or my religion —on the basis of the most moderate and least extreme opinions, the opinions commonly accepted in practice by the most sensible of the people with whom I would have to live (Descartes 1637 (2017), 11)

Notwithstanding, the reasons adduced so far are merely pragmatic. That is why we should go deeper in our inquiry. Our concern is whether, beside these plausible pragmatic reasons, there are also epistemological reasons for considering common sense morality a moral expert.

> Moral understanding might be important because you yourself having some systematic grasp of moral reasons might in practice be the only way that you could reliably do the right thing. While in principle, your moral instincts might be infallible so that you always instinctively chose the morally right action, or you might keep your moral guru by your side at all times to advise you, in practice, neither of these is likely to happen. Moral decisions are often complicated. Moral reasons can be difficult to assess and interact in quite complex ways. Small differences in factual situations can make significant moral differences. You often have to make judgments of what to do quite quickly, so you do not have the time to find and consult with an expert. There is simply no one to ask; you have to make the decision on your own, and you will make a good decision only if you have moral understanding—the ability to make accurate judgments in new circumstances—or luck (Hills 2009, 106).

Knowledge has a very important social epistemic role: much of our knowledge comes "second hand", and testimony is a very common way of sharing the knowledge that we have. What distinguishes knowledge and understanding is that knowledge can be transmitted by means or trustworthy sources, such as when someone tells us, or our society tells us, that, say, one should keep promises. If we acknowledge that an epistemic source S – say, a parent, a teacher, the society – is trustworthy and if this S tells us that p, then we come to know that p. This example illustrates what Hills means with knowledge and how it should be distinguished from understanding. For Hills, even though testimony can provide justification for our belief, this is not a route to moral understanding:

> If someone tells you that *p*, that *q*, and that *q* is why *p*, under the right circumstances you will know why *p*. It is possible that you will at the same time acquire the abilities i–vi. Having been told that lies that make people happy are not always right, for example, you will immediately see why this is so, and how to apply your grasp of these considerations to other similar cases (where, for example, you do not lie but fail to tell the whole truth, or where a lie is the only way to avoid a really terrible outcome). But as with many abilities, you will not always or

> even typically acquire these abilities through testimony. Instead, you have to practice. Most people cannot learn to ride a bike, to perform brain surgery, or to type at 100 words a minute by listening to someone describe how to do so, or reading even an exceptionally good textbook. Still less can they learn to do so by having someone merely describe the outcome at which they are aiming. These are difficult skills to master, and most people need to practice them. (Hills 2009; 119)

The plan of the chapter is the following. I proceed with a brief look at what Sidgwick had to say about the relation between self-evidence and common sense. I then look at some more recent work and try to figure out how our knowledge based on common sense morality is justified. I then try to show that this conception of common sense is one that intuitionism can perfectly well accommodate. My general theme is that the standard contrast between the apriori character of self-evident principles and common sense morality is a mistake and that by looking at common sense morality we better understand what self-evident principles are.

4.4. Dispositional intuitions and default reasonable beliefs

We have seen in the second chapter that an intuition is the outcome of the process of correctly understanding a self-evident proposition. Still, the content that our intuition has grasped at the end of the process can be also available to those that are not able to understand it and to those that, despite having the capacity to understand it, do not understand it in that moment. That is to say that one can assume a proposition to be true by default even though he does not have any understanding of it. For instance, most people often assume basic principles of morality to be true without having any understanding of them.

Indeed, intuitions have a *synchronical* and *diachronical* role in the process of knowledge.

They have a synchronical role when a self-evident principle is targeted at a given moment, that is when we acknowledge the truth of a self-evident principle in a given situation by the process of understanding, as when we realize that a promise should be kept by virtue of its being a promise.

But intuitions also have a diachronical role when the self-evident principle is not intuited but held in the background. In this case, we have the capacity of intuiting the principle, even though we do not entertain it at a given moment. Our evidence for basic self-evident principles is available even when we do not consider them, when we forgot them or when for several

reasons we argue against their truth. It is this feature of intuitions and self-evident propositions that concerns us in this chapter and that relates them to common sense.

Now, recall the distinction between *episodic intuitions* – that were at stake in the second chapter – and *doxastic intuitions* – that are at stake in the present chapter. As we have already considered, the former are occurent while the latter are dispositional. Doxastic intuitions are evidences but, whereas episodic intuitions are evidences that arise from adequate understanding, doxastic intuitions are evidence in absence of understanding. Certainly, this does not imply that the epistemic subject that has the intuition is in principle unable to understand the proposition but simply that his understanding is not occurent in that moment. Therefore, the difference between doxastic and episodic intuition is that while the latter is a result of an adequate understanding, the former displays only knowledge without understanding, even though the proposition, being self-evident, is still justified.

Let us now concentrate on doxastic intuitions. One has a doxastic intuition when one accepts, say, that "promises should be kept" without being able to articulate an adequate understanding of the proposition. For instance, he might accept the proposition as part of the common moral knowledge or accept it as an immediate result of his upbringing. One might wonder, and perhaps deny that that person really is virtuous. But it is perfectly conceivable that a person, despite being incapable of understanding moral principles, could accept them to be true. For instance, she immediately judges that taxes should be paid, that it is wrong to betray a person for convenience or that blood donation is a right thing to do. This person normally accepts these principles as true, even though she does not understand why it is true, say, that that taxes should be paid, that it is wrong to betray a person for convenience or that blood donation is a right thing to do.

In general, many people who have become accustomed to virtue possess a kind of practical wisdom that makes them accept the truth of moral principles even when they are not able to articulate justification for these principles in particular cases. Most of their moral judgements are formulated automatically. If they hear that John has deliberately betrayed his friend Mike, they immediately judge that John has committed wrongdoing. If one see a man plunging into the sea to save another one, one immediately judges that the action they are witnessing is praiseworthy. In cases like these, reflection is not only superfluous, but unusual. As Joshua Green claims: 'there is a substantial and growing body of evidence suggesting that much of what we do, we do unconsciously, and for reasons that are inaccessible to us' (Green 2005, 35)

Moreover, although they are often quick and immediate responses to situations, people usually take confidence in their moral judgements. Even if

we often need evidence for being justified in holding a belief, there are beliefs whose justification does not rely on epistemic evidence – that is an evidence based in epistemic reasons (in this case on the process of correct understanding). More precisely, the evidence we need in these cases is not an epistemic evidence, but, rather an evidence based on testimony or on the words of others. There are beliefs - and some moral beliefs are beliefs of this kind - that we are entitled to hold, that is we have the epistemic right to hold even in absence of epistemic evidence. Sometimes facts and circumstances that are independent of any reasoning capacities may entitle the subject to hold a certain belief. I will not try here to give an exposition of the current understanding of the problem; that would be far too large a task to undertake. The focus is rather on common sense morality as the source of epistemic judgement to which we are entitled.

It seems that in such cases non-reductivism between understanding and knowledge is plausible. Knowledge cannot be reduced to understanding because we can have knowledge even in the absence of understanding. If Gettier's cases deny that having justified true beliefs entails knowledge, it also true that knowledge does requires justified true belief as well. We know lots of things that we are not justified in believing. Common sense principles of morality are examples.

It is often maintained that intuitionism holds that there are basic moral principles that are non-inferentially knowable. Boghossian (2011) suggests two senses in which "non-inferentially justified" can be understood: 'for us to be non-inferentially justified in believing something we would have to be justified in believing it either on the basis of some sort of observation or on the basis of nothing' (Boghossian 2001, 6). Only the first sense, not the second, involves intuition or, as Boghossian puts it "rational intuition", as a constitutive part. Therefore, it is possible to conceive non-inferential justification without any appeal to intuition. This is the case for what Boghossian calls "default reasonable beliefs", namely beliefs that are "reasonable in and of themselves, without any supporting justification from either observation or argument" (Boghossian 7, 2001). So one can know that p without understanding why p. Still, our knowledge that p can be legitimate, namely an epistemic subject S that knows p without understanding it, has nonetheless the right to know p. The notion of entitlement is frequently appealed to in cases where we do not have justification but are entitled to have knowledge.

Let us focus now on the notion of entitlement.

4.5 Entitlement and self-evident principles of morality.

In *Entitlement: Epistemic Rights Without Epistemic Duties* (2000) Fred Dretske presents the notion of entitlement in the following way:

> Like various legal or moral rights (e.g., the right to vote, the right to park your car here) epistemic entitlements accrue to a person as a result of special circumstances or status (citizenship, a physical handicap, etc.) of which the entitled may be unaware. One may actually have a justification for accepting what one is entitled to accept, but the right does not depend on it. Remove the justification and the entitlement remains (Dretske 2000, 592)

Entitlement is an epistemic right. As for other kinds of rights, such as legal and political rights, understanding the right is not a requirement for having the right. For instance, one need not have a full understanding of the right to vote or of the right to have medical care in order to be entitled to vote for the political election or to be hospitalized. Even though many legal and political rights have been acquired after centuries of political and social struggles, they require now a minimum of awareness to exercise them. Particularly, it is sufficient to have heard that we have them in order to be able to benefit from them. Neither ability in engaging in disputes relating to them, nor ability to understand them is a requirement for being entitled to these rights. However, unlike any other kind of right, entitlement is an epistemic right. To put it briefly, entitlement is not a right that concerns our relationship with some particular objects but, rather, a right to accept 'what one is entitled to accept' independently of whether that acceptance is justified. It is not difficult to see how entitlement is particularly helpful for our discourse. Only few people are justified in accepting the principles of common sense morality, but, as for the right to vote or for the right to receive medical care, everyone is entitled to those principles. That is, everyone has an epistemic right to accept them and to claim to know them even if he cannot provide any sort of justification for them. In what follows I will argue for the thesis that subjects can be (non-inferentially) justified in believing self-evident moral principles but also that be entitled to them when justification lacks.

Let us start by presenting in outline Dretske's account.

The problem of entitlement for Dretske is that of determining 'whether there are unjustified justifiers. It is about whether there are propositions that provide for others what nothing need provide for them-viz., reasons for thinking them true. It is about whether there are propositions that provide for others what nothing need provide for them-viz., reasons for thinking them true' (Dretske 2000, 591). For Dretske, externalists are those people that

admit unjustified justifiers:

> some externalists – I happen to be one of them – go farther and say we are not only entitled to believe things we have no reasons to believe, we often, in fact, know things we have no reason to believe. Knowledge, the supreme form of entitlement, requires no justification. This is not to say that it doesn't some-times have it (Dretske 2000, 591)

More than the question concerning what kind of things we are entitled to believe, the main question of Dretske's paper focuses on the grounds of this entitlement. So, on what grounds are we entitled to believe anything.

Two solutions are possible here: one can be entitled in holding a belief either by the reliability of the belief-forming process, or by features of the belief itself. Though appealing, the first solution should be rejected.

The advantage of reliability theories comes from the fact that, unlike for other kind of rights, what grants a right that purports to be epistemic is its relationship with the truth. Reliability theories seem to preserve this tie to the truth, presenting a reliable belief-forming process. We are entitled to hold those beliefs that are reliably formed. The epistemic right to the belief that *p* is given by the reliable process that produces p. For instance, I have the epistemic right to hold that "there is a lemon tree in front of me" if my visual system is deemed trustworthy enough for reliably forming the belief.

It is worth noting that we can be tempted towards relying on reliability theory as well. For instance, we could claim that one is entitled to hold those moral belief that are formed by a reliable process and that common sense morality is what warrant the trustworthiness of the process. If, as Sidgwick pointed out, common sense morality is the product of centuries of growth of the mankind, one might be tempted to claim that fundamental moral beliefs are reliable enough to be entitled to hold them even in absence of understanding.

However, Dretske sharply rejects reliabilism. Consider the example of a brain in a vat that has the same evidence that I have. Though his beliefs are false, and mine true, he is entitled to believe what I have the right to believe.

> If I see that the lights are on and he, having the same experiences as me, merely thinks he can see they are on, then he has as much right to believe they are on as I do. In light of the fact that his mistake is inextricable and that he, therefore, has no way of finding out is belief is false, the fact that it is false does not count against its right to believe. He is unlucky, a victim of

> circumstances, and I am not. But if I am entitled to my beliefs, he is entitled to his (Dretske 2000, 596).

For Dretske, the fact that the belief-forming process of the brain in a vat is unreliable does not imply that the brain in a vat has no right to believe; that he is not as entitled to his belief as I am entitled to mine. Nonetheless, being both entitled to our beliefs, my belief forming process is reliable while his belief forming process is not reliable:

> entitlement does not consist of a reliable connection to the facts. I (let us hope) have a reliable connection to the world I have beliefs about and the brain in the vat lacks it. Yet we are both entitled to our beliefs. The entitlement I enjoy when I have such knowledge must, therefore, come from somewhere else (Dretske 2000, 596)

The rejection of the reliabilists' theory of entitlement, that is the denial that we are entitle to the belief p because the p has been reliably formed, avoids a subtle misunderstanding, namely that of considering reasons or justifications for accepting p as true as conditions for entitlement. On the contrary, we are entitled even in the absence of reasons and justification, as in the "brain in a vat case". To sum up: entitlement cannot be granted by justification – as an internalist would like to – nor by a reliable belief forming process. What, then, can confer this right? For Dretske, the right is given by the 'psychological immediacy and irresistibility' (Dretske 2007, 598).

To explain this point, Dretske considers a kind of rights the he calls *liberty rights*, which are the rights that one has when he does an action and he is not obliged to do otherwise, for instance because of a duty that prescribes an alternative action. For instance, in a liberal political system, I have the *liberty right* to choose the kind of car I wish because I have no obligation to choose a specific car (as it would happen if I lived in the DDR and had to choose a Trabant). Or, to use Dretske's example, no one can criticize me for having parked my car in front of my house because I have no obligations not to park the car there. Now, the question is: is this kind of right also applicable within the realm of epistemic rights? If it were the case, the entitlement thesis that we can have entitlement without justification seems to be a case of liberty epistemic rights. But can liberty rights be found in the epistemic domain?

Dretske considers the case of perceptual judgements. We are entitled to our perceptual judgement because, faced with a perceptual experience, we have no choice in what to believe. Obviously, we have no obligation to believe otherwise. Dretske takes the paradigmatic case of visual experience.

> I do not choose to believe my wife is sitting on the sofa when I see her there. Believing she is there when I see her there is not a voluntary act. I have no choice in the matter (Dretske 2007, 599)

Therefore, we are entitled to our belief that "my wife is sitting on the sofa" because we cannot cause ourselves to think otherwise. The belief is caused by events – like perceptions – over which we cannot have direct control and that, in this specific perceptual case, we cannot cause ourselves not to perceive. The idea is that in the perceptual case we have no choice in what to believe if we are epistemically responsible agents. In fact, one way of preventing me from believing my perception can be convincing myself of self-deception. However, in doing so in absence of strong evidence (say, I know that I have just consumed drugs), I would not behave as an epistemic responsible agent. So concludes Dretske:

> nothing short of self-deception, nothing short of convincing myself (if that is possible) that I was not seeing her on the sofa, would have prevented me from being caused to believe she was there when I saw her there. At the time I see her I cannot prevent myself from believing she is there and, before I see her, there is nothing I could have done (short of self-deception, that is) that would have prevented me from being caused (by my experience of her) to believe she was there. So nothing I could have done would have changed anything. And if there is nothing an epistemically responsible agent could have done to avoid believing P, that agent has the right to believe P. There are absolutely no grounds for criticizing him. He is entitled to the belief. (Dretske 2007, 600)

In this case, the brain in a vat has the same epistemic right as me in believing that the wife is on the sofa because he has the same evidence, though a false evidence, that I have. The *criteria* for discriminating between epistemic responsible agents that have entitlement and epistemic non-responsible agents that are not entitled is that the latter have done something that prevents them from believing what they perceive. If the agent could have avoided the experience that causes him the belief, then he is not entitled to the belief. But if nothing could have been done, then he is entitled to the belief, independently of the truth or of the falseness of the belief. Hence, the brain in a vat is also an epistemically responsible agent.

Let us now wonder whether this line of thought also applies for self-evident propositions in general and, more specifically, for self-evident moral propositions. Here, I argue that we are entitled to self-evident moral

propositions, but that entitlement in this case is different from the entitlement in the perceptual case as it has been presented by Dretske. Let us now consider these differences.

We have seen that in the perceptual case we can be entitled both to false and to true beliefs. The only condition is that one should be epistemically responsible. On the contrary, we cannot be entitled to false belief in self-evident proposition. If our belief is false we lose our epistemic right. The case of a false belief in a proposition that is erroneously taken to be self-evident is different from the false perceptual belief based on an erroneous perceptual experience, such as that indicated in the "brain in a vat" case. In the perceptual case, the "brain in a vat" is entitled in this belief because it is both epistemically responsible and because, in the context in which the perceptual experience takes place, it is rationally coherent to take the content of the perception at face value. Perceptual beliefs are true if the perceptual experience reflects something that really exists – my belief that "my wife is sitting on the sofa" is true if and only if through the perceptual experience I *really* see my wife sat on the sofa. But the truth of the belief is not a condition for the entitlement: that is present even when the belief is false.

Things are different in the self-evident case. Also in this case the brain in a vat has the same evidence of a normal epistemic subject. But, if in the perceptual case it has entitlement for a belief even though it is false, here it cannot have such an entitlement. In this case, what is false is not the content – for the basic reason that a self-evident proposition cannot be false – but the mental state. Namely, one can have the false intuition that a self-evident proposition (that of course it is not acknowledged as self-evident) is false but, in contrast to the perceptual case, the epistemic subject has no entitlement to his false belief. As we have seen, in the perceptual case a brain in a vat is not epistemically responsible for his false belief because he has done everything that is in his power. His failure is not a voluntary one. On the contrary if one has a false intuition of the truth of p, one has no entitlement for his belief. To explain the reason why the two cases are different let us consider two cases in which an intuition is false. In both cases we are not entitled to the belief.

As for the first case, we have argued that an intuition applies by definition to a self-evident proposition. If the proposition to which the intuition applies is not self-evident, but only apparently so, the intuition is false because in this case we would have only an intuitive belief, though disguised as an intuition. Therefore, we have no entitlement as we are not entitled to hold the judgment that "abortion is wrong" if we do not have any justification for it.

As for the second case, an epistemic subject could acknowledge as false (or as wrong) a self-evident principle. Suppose that S has the intuition that "promises should be kept" is false. That S has the intuition that "promises

should be kept" is false does not mean that S denies that there is a tie between promises and the act of keeping. It simply means that S does not acknowledge the obligation of promise keeping, namely that is it does not acknowledge that "promises should be kept" is a self-evident truth. For the intuition to be true he should have acknowledged that "promises should be kept". But this is not the case. Hence, the intuition is false.

In this case, S is not entitled to the belief because, differently from the "brain in a vat" in the perceptual case, S acts here like an epistemically irresponsible agent. Certainly, it is a kind of irresponsibility that is different from that of the drunken car driver. S cannot be morally blamed for his failure. Towards him we would feel the same disappointment that we feel towards a student that has the mental capacity to learn, but that does not apply his capacity. Nonetheless, he has no entitlement because his failure, unlike the failure in the perceptual case, though not completely voluntary, could have been avoided. It could be avoided if the subject would have exercised his rational capacity as the "brain in a vat" in the perceptual case has exercised his perceptual capacity. The "brain in a vat" in the perceptual case is entitled because, as an epistemically responsible agent, it has done everything that in its power. S has not exercised his rational capacity, that is he has not done a good job with his understanding. If this does not sound convincing enough, imagine being beside the "brain in a vat" in the perceptual case (of course, without being "a brain in a vat" too) and beside S. If the "brain in a vat" tells you about his false belief you know that trying to invite it to reconsider its judgement will be unhelpful. He cannot do otherwise. But, if S tells you that "promises should be kept" is false it is legitimate, and perhaps a good thing, to invite him to reconsider his view.

If this general line of argument is true, then there is both bad and good news for self-evident propositions. The bad news is that only true intuitions entitle us to believe self-evident propositions. The good news is that, if we have a true intuition, it suffices for us to be entitled to hold the self-evident proposition even in the absence of justification. The intuition has the 'psychological immediacy and irresistibility' that Dretske presents in perceptual experience. We do not have a similar experience in the case of non-self-evident beliefs. In this case, intuition does not entitle us for holding the belief because we could cause ourselves to believe otherwise.

That we are entitled in believing self-evident proposition is extremely important in the case of moral beliefs. Children and the intellectually poor can have the right of accepting the principles of morality and can claim to know them even though they cannot afford any sort of justification or reason for them. In contrast to other kinds of non-moral judgements, that require justification, subjects are entitled to believe self-evident moral principles even in the absence of justification. If in the perceptual case the background

scenario – being it real or virtual as for the "brain in a vat" – is the enabling condition for the subject to be entitled in his belief – in the sense that the "brain in a vat" is entitled because he is "envatted" in such a scenario – we should now ask what the enabling conditions are for the subject to be entitled in believing the self-evident proposition.

A plausible answer could be the common sense morality in which he has been grown up. As in the perceptual case, the brain in a vat is entitled in holding the belief because he cannot believe otherwise, given the conditions in which he finds itself, so we could say that in the self-evident moral case, the unaware subject is entitled to holding the self-evident principle because it is provided by the surrounding common sense morality.

Before going on, another aspect of the entitlement to self-evident propositions should be taken into consideration. As Dretske rightly observes (Dretske, 601) the brain in a vat does not know that his wife is on the sofa, but it is only entitled to it. On the contrary, in the case of common sense morality we should say that the entitled subject also knows the proposition and is not merely entitled to it. For self-evident propositions entitlement and knowledge go together. Assuming, with Williamson, that knowledge is "justified true belief" if in the perceptual case we can be entitled to false belief, in the self-evident case we cannot be entitled if our belief is false. To bring the two together: either there is no entitlement or the entitlement is to true propositions. That is why, for self-evident propositions, if we are entitled to them we also know them.

However, that entitlement entails knowledge is far from being obvious. Robert Arrington (2002) argues the opposite. He claims that we do not have knowledge of principles, such as Rossian principles, but that we presume to know on the basis of their self-evidence. Even though Arrington does not directly refer to entitlement, his remarks help us in proceeding with our argument. Let us flesh out his account.

Arrington discusses the judgement "it is wrong to tell a lie", which is closely related to the self-evident principle "promises should be kept". According to Arrington, we often presume to know that "it is wrong to tell a lie" because of the current use of the verb "believe". We believe lots of things, especially those that are 'placed in the archive' – that is they are assumed as true by default - and the fact that we have confidence in their truth lead us to the erroneous conclusion that we also know them. On the contrary, Arrington argues that if we can claim to know many of our beliefs – such as, for instance, that human beings are born in sin, that capitalism leads to lots of evil and that Joe DiMaggio is the best baseball player ever – it is because we are also able to defend them from those who express doubts on them. Notwithstanding, for Arrington it is not possible to do the same with "it is wrong to tell a lie". Propositions of this kind, like our self-evident propositions, are simply

assumed to be true because 'parents and early teachers drilled it into my head' (Arrington 2002, 277). The feeling of uneasiness that we experience when someone puts them in doubt is probably due to the fact that they are firm points of the environment in which have been educated. Being a 'weak epistemological credential' (Arrington 2002, 276) this sense of obviousness weakens our ability of managing and defending the propositions. Moreover, we could say, recalling the distinction between understanding and knowledge, that we do not have the need of understanding propositions of this kind. We just know it. However, 'if knowledge is what we have here', Arrington writes, 'it is a fairly strange type of it, since there was never any process of coming to know this proposition and there are no grounds that I am ready to provide in order to demonstrate its truth, to show how I know and how I am in a position to know it – all this being things we stand ready to do in normal cases of claiming to know'(Arrington 2002, 277). On this basis, Arrington concludes that propositions like "it is wrong to tell a lie" are neither beliefs nor knowledge in the strictest sense while beliefs that are not (alleged) self-evident propositions such as "American war in Vietnam is morally wrong" "or abortion is wrong" do constitute moral knowledge. Still, if they are not knowledge, what is then the epistemological status of propositions like "it is wrong to tell a lie"? We have claimed that propositions like these are self-evident moral principles. That is something that Arrington strongly denies. In doing this, he develops Wittgenstein's distinction between grammatical and empirical propositions. Following Diego Marconi, for Wittgenstein 'conceptual inquiry does *not* lead to conceptual truths, i.e. to true propositions about concepts it leads to the discovery of rules that set connections among concepts' (Marconi 2011, 3). In a nutshell, grammatical propositions 'set out rules for the proper use of the words' (Arrington 2002, 282). For instance, one cannot claim to use the word "lying" correctly unless he considers it wrong. In this sense, grammatical propositions have an internal necessity, but not a necessity of a metaphysical sort. Rather, grammatical propositions reflect 'the current standards of human language practice'. It is in this sense that, in a Wittgensteinian style, Arrington claims that propositions like "it is wrong to tell a lie" belong to the 'language game' that we are playing. They do not receive any justification from 'language-independent logical forms or structures of reality which the grammar is thought to reflect' (Arrington 2002, 284). In this sense, being part of a language game, we could say that subjects are entitled to the proposition. Writes Arrington:

> *It is wrong to tell a lie* is a grammatical rule partly constitutive of my concept of morality. […] As Wittgenstein puts it, it has been placed in the archives. For those who accept and operate with this concept of morality (and the grammatical remarks

> expressing it), it is something they take as a matter of course, without question. But this exalted status doesn't mean that we who accept this grammatical proposition claim to know it. On the contrary, because it has this archival, matter-of-course status, it is inappropriate to speak of knowing it. Knowledge requires proof, evidence, observation – precisely what we do not have in this case. People who are 'ignorant' of the proposition simply have not had a good moral education – it is not they have missed out on the evidence or failed to grasp the proof' (Arrington 2002, 286)

Arrington claims that there is no apprehension of self-evident moral truths. Ross and intuitionists are guilty of having attributed to self-evident propositions an epistemological status that they do not deserve. For Arrington, Ross was on the right path in insisting on the process of "intuitive induction" – namely, the apprehension of self-evident principles is not made abstractly but in the particular act - but he lost the way in appealing to a rational apprehension. When we see the rightness of some act, there is nothing like a rational apprehension or intuition but, rather, 'the manifestation of our ability to use the word 'right' in our moral language game' (Arrington 2002, 288). Ross' principles are not substantive ones but 'grammatical propositions regulating the language of right and duty. […] They are rules that give sense to our moral language' (Arrington 2002, 288). Arrington concludes that fundamental moral truths so conceived define our moral space.

This way of understanding self-evident principles helps us in improving our view on common sense morality. Commonsense morality is like the book of etiquette of moral good manners. It is the place where one learns how to think and act in a moral way. Moreover, we are entitled to hold moral beliefs by our acquaintance with common moral practice. By encountering social institutions or moral sages we learn moral principles more readily and effectively then by considering them in abstraction. We have good reason to trust common sense morality so far as we have good reason to trust our visual perception. Still, the trustworthiness of common sense morality does not depend on the alleged reliability of its content. Epistemic subjects are entitled to hold their moral beliefs on the basis of common sense morality as much as the brain in a vat is entitled to hold his perceptual belief on the basis of his visual perception. As Arrington has emphasized, we cannot learn the grammatical rules of morality and we cannot be entitled to hold moral judgement unless we take part in the language game of morality and this language game is anything but common sense morality. Given, as we claimed in the opening lines, that no one can invent a new moral code, we must acknowledge common sense morality as the normal moral space. If what I

have claimed so far is true, we are entitled in holding moral beliefs on the basis of common sense morality, just as sunny light is the normal condition under which we are entitled in trusting our visual faculty. That is not to say that "anything goes" in moral matters. On the contrary, the fact that these principles are self-evident – in the ways we have considered – requires that they receive an internal justification, that is even though people are entitled in believing the principles in virtue of being members of a community that shares them, these principles have autonomous justification. Although people get acquainted with them within a language game, the principles can be also justified in an abstract way in virtue of mere understanding. Someone who belongs to a different linguistic game can understand the principles and be justified in believing them once he considers them carefully. The mere fact that he or she is not entitled in holding the belief by default – because he does not belong to the community - does not imply that he cannot be justified in believing it.

4.6 Conclusion

The chapter illustrates the ways in which we can be entitled to believe self-evident propositions without having justification for them. I have claimed that entitlement comes from two sources: both by the psychological immediacy and irresistibility that is conferred to the propositions by intuition and by the belonging of a subject to a community that shares a common sense concerning moral matters. Nevertheless, I argue that this kind of entitlement is conferred only for self-evident propositions. The intellectually poor and children are entitled to holding these principles because of their self-evidence, that is by virtue of their psychological immediacy and irresistibility and by virtue of the acknowledgement of the principles at stake within the community they belong to. Nonetheless, merely belonging to a community does not entitle subjects in holding the belief without having justification for them. For instance, even if they belong to our moral linguistic game, they are not entitled in holding non-self-evident moral belief such as "abortion is wrong" or "premarital sex is right", because of the absence of any psychological immediacy and irresistibility that in the case of self-evident propositions is given by intuitions. Common sense morality constitutes the milieu where we learn self-evident principles and entitlement so conceived explains why we should take common sense morality at face value.

5
EMOTIONS AND THE APRIORI

5.1 Framing the issue

Emotions can be faint or vivid, artificially induced or spontaneous, sketched or full-fledged and can be experienced differently by different people. However, that emotions are important to ethics can indeed be hardly doubted. Emotions are ineradicable elements in the phenomenology of our ethical life. This final chapter will discuss the role of emotions in intuitionism and, more generally, in a self-evident theory of ethics.

At first sight, emotions might seem out of place in an inquiry on ethical intuitionism. In fact, ethical intuitionism has been traditionally represented as a paradigmatic form of moral rationalism. That is even more true if we consider intuitionism as a self-evident theory of ethics. After all, the appeal to self-evidence is likely associated to an idea of abstract rationality, as alluded to by the claim that self-evident truths are grasped by mere understanding.

> Intuitionism, because of its strong historical association with rationalism and by the often cut and dried operation of intuitive judgement portrayed by such writers as Prichard, has often seemed too intellectualist to take account of the role of emotion in grounding and refining moral judgement (Audi 2004, 57)

These initial remarks are confirmed by the fact that whenever an agreement between emotions and intuitionism has been found, ethical intuitionism has been conceived as more a particular kind of moral sense theory than a rationalistic theory of ethics. Not by chance have some interpreters (Frankena, 1955; Hudson, 1967; Garner, 1990; Lecaldano, 1969) paralleled intuitionistic theory with common sense theory by observing that, in the history of philosophy, intuitions have been sometimes represented as moral senses. For instance, at the very beginning of his book on *Ethical Intuitionism* (1967), W. D. Hudson gathers under the label of ethical intuitionism philosophers that share the common assumption of an immediate awareness of moral values and distinguishes two kinds of theories, one based on moral sense, the other based on reason or understanding. Needless to say, for Hudson both theories are intuitionist.

> Some of these have contended that the awareness in question can only be conceived satisfactorily as a form of sense-

> perception. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson will be our sources for this moral sense view. Others have argued that it is his reason, or understanding, which gives man this awareness (Hudson 1967, 1)

Setting historical details aside, it is worth noticing that if in moral sense theories the rationalistic nature of intuitionism has been weakened or shaded and emotions have been restored, the price of this restoration has been usually paid at high costs. The price of "emotional intuitionism" is that either self-evidence does not play any role in intuitionism (McDowell, 1998) or that self-evidence has not the pivotal role that we have attributed to it (as Roeser (2011) claims for her "affective intuitionism").

My general thesis in this chapter is that emotions and self-evidence are not incompatible, and that one can defend a self-evident intuitionist theory of ethics while at the same time attributing to emotions an essential role in the theory of knowledge.

Let me be more specific about the issue that I will be discussing here. The general problem can be encompassed as follows. If our beliefs in self-evident propositions are justified in virtue of adequate understanding, and if adequate understanding alone suffices in providing justification for our belief in self-evident propositions, it should be determined precisely what role is played by emotions. *Sic stantibus rebus*, that emotions do not play any role, should be assumed a plausible option.

The framework is complicated by an additional issue. It has been observed throughout this thesis that self-evidence entails apriori. Now, even if we have claimed, quoting Woods (1999), that holding apriori justification and knowledge does not imply 'closing your eyes, stopping your ears, shutting yourself off from all external inputs - and precisely thereby acquiring some knowledge (which is all the purer for being untainted by sensory information)' (Wood 1999, 56) it seems too demanding to maintain that emotions play a relevant role in apriori knowledge. From Kant onwards, according to a standard view of apriori in ethics, apriori is almost necessarily associated with rational knowledge. Following this line of thought, emotions are distorting factors that compromise the pretense of necessity and universality of apriori judgement. As a matter of fact, emotions are contingent, they have a felt character (Pugmire, 1998; Stocker, 1983) and they often cannot be even verbalized or communicated. They are often dependent on our upbringing and education, and depend on character traits much more than reason depends on our them. This is not to say that our capacity of understanding is completely independent from our personal history, but simply to claim that our capacity of feeling emotions can be more easily influenced by our

gender, our culture, and also by the moment in which the event that triggers the emotion occur. Finally, emotions have a 'mind-to-world direction of fit' (Searle, 1983) and therefore, unlike desires, they are often seen as passive phenomena.

Certainly, emotions can still be acknowledged to play a relevant role in ethics, even in an ethical theory grounded upon self-evident moral principles. Recent literature generally acknowledges that emotions are not distorting factors, and some Kantian interpreters have reassessed the role of emotions within the Kantian system itself (Sorensen, 2002; Borges, 2004; Sherman, 2014). A relevant trend in the contemporary debate tends to attribute to emotions the power of contributing to our epistemic activities. This is because many emotions have a justificatory power, that is they can justify our evaluative judgement or simply enhance our capacity to make evaluative judgement or to perceive evaluative properties. In addition, emotions and affective dispositions are relevant to one's readiness to obey the law or, alternatively, to shed light on morally relevant properties of the objects and situations that we experience (Brady, 2010: 124; de Sousa, 1987: 195). Notwithstanding, it seems that there is no need to appeal to emotions in intuitionism and in a self-evidence theory of ethics. Emotions are perhaps important elements, important for motivating, but not indispensable for moral knowledge.

However, *pace* the aforementioned recent re-evaluations, the Kantian approach to emotions has become the paradigm of the mistrust against emotions in ethics. Bernard Williams emphasizes three objections that from a Kantian point of view can be addressed against the claim that a moral agent should be an emotional agent and that emotions play a relevant role in moral knowledge (Williams 1966, 226).

Firstly, 'emotions are too capricious' (Williams 1966, 226). Emotions are outside the borders of morality because they are capricious, namely they are personal response triggered by 'changing moods', devoid of any rational consistency and thus incompatible with a view of morality based on principles. On this view, the occurrence of emotions undermines impartiality and consistency.

Secondly, 'they are passively experienced' (Williams 1966, 226). Emotions are outside the borders of morality because they are passive and morality is notoriously the domain of freedom. One cannot choose to feel an emotion, but is subjected to it.

Thirdly, 'a man's proneness to experience them or not is the product of natural causation and in that sense fortuitously distributed' (Williams 1966, 226). This objection is the most relevant for goals. If morality depends on the emotional capacity, it will be dependent upon natural features because 'men differ very much in their emotional make-

up, as a result of many natural factors' (Williams 1966, 228). As a matter of fact, emotions derive from contingent traits of human personality, including his social and cultural history.

> It is this thought, that moral worth must be separated from any natural language whatsoever, which, consistently pursued by Kant, leads to the conclusion that the source of moral thought and action must be located outside the empirically conditioned self. […] No human characteristic which is relevant to degrees of moral esteem can escape being an empirical characteristic, subject to empirical conditions, psychological history and individual variations whether it be sensitivity, persistence, imaginativeness, intelligence, good sense; or sympathetic feeling; or strength of the will (Williams 1966, 228)

It is well-known that it is the condition of morality, according to Kantian ethics, that the will should be determined by pure reason, and not by empirical grounds (Kant 1790). Being response dependent, emotions (as much as feelings and the other conative states, like desires) are empirically conditioned. Therefore, they cannot be the determining ground of the will. For an action to be moral, it should be performed on purely rational grounds, without the involvement of any kind of emotive state. Certainly, neither Kant nor anybody else will doubt that in a morally integrated person, the fulfilment of the duty is usually accompanied by appropriate emotions. What Kant claims is that the will – say, of helping someone in need – should not be determined by an emotion – for instance, by the compassion felt towards that person. In this case, ethics would fall into contingency and arbitrariness, because emotions are felt subjectively, and in a different way from person to person and for the same person from moment to moment. For this view, in the best-case scenario emotions do not add anything to moral knowledge; in the worst-case one they compromise the moral character of such a knowledge, that becomes merely pragmatical or prudential knowledge. Granted, Kant acknowledges that emotions have a motivational force and, under some unusual reading (Bagnoli 2011, 71) he also concedes that emotions play a normative role[26].

The non-indispensability of emotions is also shared by early modern intuitionists in contrast to moral sense theorists and by Twentieth century intuitionists in contrast to emotivism. Nonetheless, if early modern

[26] For Carla Bagnoli 'what Kant finds problematic in the sentimentalist account is neither that emotions lack cognitive cores, nor that they are episodic and adventitious, but that they are taken as uncritical surrogates if reason, which undermine the agent's autonomy' (Bagnoli 2011, 71 fn23).

intuitionists – like Cudworth and Price – are internalists for which cognitions are in themselves motivating, Prichard and Ross are externalists. Motivation comes from external emotions, in addition to the apprehension of self-evident principles. For Ross, one can be able to apprehend a principle without having any emotions. The emotion – or, in Ross' term, the desire to do whatever is right – may be absent without the subject being deprived by his ability to apprehend the principle (Ross 1930, 158). In this case, what the subject lacks is the desire to do whatever is right and consequently the desire to act the action that one has apprehended as right. Nonetheless, our understanding capacity is neither improved nor undermined by our emotional capacity.

For the sake of clarity, let us notice that arguing whether emotions are, or are not, self-evident is conceptually misleading. As we have already considered for intuitions, self-evidence is not a feature of those mental states, but a feature of the propositions intuited and of the principles that are expressed through them. The same goes for emotions. Also in this case, self-evidence is a feature of the propositions to which they provide access and of the principles they express. Now, if it is conceivable - even if highly disputable – that there could be self-evident apriori propositions that are grasped by intuitions, it is less plausible that there are self-evident emotive propositions and, consequently, self-evident apriori laws of emotions. Nonetheless, Jan Smedslund (1992) claims that it is possible defend a view that considers the laws of emotion as apriori, universal and necessary[27].

All these things considered, it seems reasonable to believe that emotions do not play any epistemic role in a self-evident theory of ethics, though they play a motivational role: 'whether one endorses sentimentalism or rationalism, it is hard to deny that emotions play a significant role in rational deliberation by affecting our motivational set' (Bagnoli 2011, 68). Indeed, it is perfectly possible to conceive an ethical theory that accepts Rossian *prima facie* duties and assigns a role to emotions in particular judgements, but claims that emotions are at best unhelpful – because understanding suffices in providing justification for our belief – and at worse distorting factors – because they prevent a correct use of our understanding – in the justification of our beliefs in self-evident propositions. Therefore, the burden of the proof is on those who claim that emotions are epsitemic elements in a self-evident theory of ethics.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that emotions are just such epistemic elements. This is not to say that self-evident moral propositions cannot be justified and known without the concourse of the emotions. If fundamental basic principles are self-evident, then they can

[27] For a philosophical discussion of Smedslund position, cfr. Eiland (1992)

also be justified by understanding and apprehended by intuition alone. Nonetheless, I argue that it is only through emotions that one fully understands these self-evident moral principles. By 'full understanding', I mean 'moral understanding'. Let me introduce the difference between the mere *understanding*, *knowledge* and *moral understanding* of a self-evident principle. We have claimed that a self-evident principle is justified by adequate understanding. If the principle is not obvious, for the principle to be justified one should take it into careful consideration. We have seen that, far from being an obvious task, understanding a self-evident principle can require time and sufficient mental maturity. Once I have understood a principle I can claim that I know it. However, even if understanding and knowing can coincide, they are not one and the same task. As we have already argued in the last chapter, if it might be true that understanding necessarily implies knowing - if p is self-evident, the final step of the understanding process that p coincides with the acknowledgment of the truth that p -, knowing does not necessarily imply understanding – I can acknowledge and know a principle as true even if for several reasons I cannot demonstrate why it is true. In a nutshell, the difference between understanding and knowing can be summarized as the difference between *knowing why* and *knowing that*.

What about moral understanding? Recall Sliwa's definition of moral understanding:

> moral understanding is a valuable epistemic good. It's something we look for when deciding whom to rely on for moral advice. It's a goal of moral education: something we hope to instill in our children. And it's an integral part of moral wisdom: a moral sage is someone who has profound moral understanding' (Sliwa 2017, 521)

Where Sliwa uses the concept of "moral understanding", I would rather use the concept of "understanding of moral principles". Consider Audi's distinction between *moral perceptions* and *perceptions of moral phenomena* (Audi 2013, 31). An analogous distinction can be made for intuitions. Having the intuition of a phenomenon that has the moral property of wrongness does not imply having the intuition of its wrongness. On the basis of the intuition of the truth of a self-evident proposition, one can conclude that its denial is false without seeing the wrongness of the negation from a moral point of view. That is, one can have the intuition of the property of wrongness without having a moral intuition of its wrongness. Granted, in cases like this, the intuition of the moral phenomenon plays an evidential role in the process of justification of the proposition - and, hence, of the judgement – that describes

the phenomenon. Still, in order for the judgement to be moral - and not merely a judgement on moral matters - an additional element is needed. The best term to indicate this is probably *moral understanding*. Without moral understanding I cannot understand a judgement - with its own condition of justification - as a moral judgement but only, once again, as a judgement on moral phenomena. In my view the difference between *understanding a moral principle* and *understanding a principle morally* (the principle itself can be moral or non-moral) is that the latter, but not the former kind of understanding, includes emotions as essential elements.

We have just seen that there are two objections that can be raised against the claim that emotions play a relevant or essential role in ethics, one weaker and one stronger. For the weaker objection, even if they are welcomed (and perhaps wished), emotions are not essential elements for understanding a moral principle. For the stronger objection, emotions are merely epistemically distorting factors that impair our moral judgements. The distinction between understanding, knowing and moral understanding helps to address both objections.

As for the stronger objection, the claim that emotions are distorting factors may be right, if the emotions interfere with our understanding and with our knowing. Certainly, the ability to reason and draw conclusions from reflection should be free from emotional factors. In order to understand a particular instance of the self-evident principle that we have the duty to make up for wrongful acts previously done to other, one should not be influenced, say, by the envy felt toward that persons. Therefore, understanding should be non-emotional. Likewise, knowing should not be influenced by the emotions. Anger can me make acknowledge as true a principle that is not, or, in the case of self-evident principles, it could make me acknowledge as false a principle that is self-evident and that I have rightly understood to be so.

As for the weaker objection. Even if it is true that simply understanding and knowing a self-evident principle can be enough for fulfilling moral requirements, we are not inclined to judge as morally integrated a person that remains cold. Kant (1789) famously distinguishes between acting for the duty and acting according to the duty and claims that only the former acting is strictly speaking moral, while the latter is only legal. Analogously, I would claim that only understanding and knowing principles rationally count as legal acts, while moral understanding is made possible by emotions. Granted, emotions need not be occurent, but we should at least concede that the emotion should be dispositionally felt.

At this stage, those who defend intuitionism might be tempted to endorse a perceptual model of emotions. If emotions are like perceptions

through which we can grasp evaluative properties, intuitions can be conceived as emotions that perceive the moral features of a self-evident proposition. Nonetheless, the view is problematic and merely conceiving emotions as sui generis kinds of perceptions or - as Thagard and Finn (2011) do – as emotional intuitions does not help in overcoming the problem of the perceptual model. However, my strategy is to start from the perceptual model and, with suitable modifications, to conclude that emotions are seemings. Neither intellectual seemings, as seemings are generally conceived by intuitionists, nor practical seemings such as Dancy (2014) intends them. Following Deonna and Teroni (2012), I take emotions as attitudes taken towards a content, whether it is propositional or non-propositional. For the attitudinal model, to one and the same content can correspond different attitudes. Therefore, self-evident principles can be instanced by attitudes of different kind. In my model, attitudes can be paralleled with the role played by intellectual seemings in the acknowledgment of self-evident propositions. Seemings are just the 'click' (Bedke, 2008) put on a self-evident proposition that realizes the truth of the proposition. Analogously, emotions are the 'click' put on the self-evident principles that acknowledge the propositions as moral.

Granted, it is not my concern here to defend the attitude theory of emotions over other theories. Rather, I claim that the attitude model is the model that best fits with a model of self-evidence in ethics, that is with the claim that there are self-evident principles of ethics. It is easy to say why: emotions are in the attitudes and not in the contents. Therefore, the apriori (universal and necessary) character of self-evident propositions can be saved. Emotions grant that we have 'morally understood' the proposition, while in the absence of them we could say that we have only understood the propositions and known them to be true. The idea is that one cannot morally understand the proposition "promises should be kept" unless she feels guilt for promise-breaking. If one instead remains emotionally cold, he can understand the proposition and he probably knows it to be true but he cannot claim to have understood it morally. Moreover, as one can know the Pythagorean Theorem but fail to understand it unless he can use it, so can one know a moral principle without being able to use it unless one is emotionally involved. For example, suppose that while watching a *corrida* for the first time on television I formulate the judgement (or, if you want, I have the intuition) that killing bulls for fun is wrong. Notwithstanding, I can judge that killing bulls for fun in a *corrida* is wrong without being emotionally involved in the killing itself. In this case, I can claim only to have understood the situation, without having any moral commitment for it. For my judgement to be moral, *moral understanding* is needed. One can have non-moral normative reasons to act accordingly to the judgement that killing bulls for fun in a

corrida is wrong without any *moral understanding*. Granted, some form of evaluation is needed. In this case, I can judge as inappropriate the causing pain for no reason other than to entertain people. If I am rationally convinced that my belief is justified, then - under normal cognitive conditions and in absence of counter reasons - I can act accordingly. I can, for instance, make a money donation to a charity that fights for animal rights. Or, alternatively, I can write a pamphlet or lobby to promote a law against this kind of entertainment. Notwithstanding, I argue that in order for my judgement to be moral I need something else: a moral intuition that helps me see the phenomenon as moral.

I argue that there are good reasons to call moral intuitions *emotions*. Therefore, we can non-emotionally know a proposition p, while moral understanding of p is different and entails an emotional capacity.

Emotions have epistemological weight. They can make us change or reconsider our moral views. For Roger Crisp 'to understand ethics one must engage with real life, and judge in the heat of the battle rather than the cool of the study' (Crisp 2002, 72). Peacocke goes even further in claiming that experiencing emotions is a condition to acquire the seeming that some contents has moral properties:

> Emotions can help us to formulate new principles. They can even lead to the formation of new, morally significant concepts. In experiencing joy at the success of a friend it seems to me that it is good that he should succeed. In experiencing moral indignation at an injustice it seems to me that some event or condition is unfair. These representational contents of emotions are not merely intentional contents. They are contents which, by virtue of his having the emotion, seem to the experiencer of the emotion to be correct (Peacocke 2003, 252).

As we have seen in chapter one, having epistemological weight may imply two different things: playing an epistemological role - that is, taking part in the process of knowledge and justification without being essential elements for knowledge and justification – and having an epistemological role – that is, being a direct way of justification and knowledge. Now, concerning emotions one should determine whether intuitions only play an epistemological role – for instance, they can favor judgement readiness – or whether they have an epistemological role, as Peacocke's quote seem to allude.

In the first section I will introduce the general problem of the alleged incompatibility between self-evident apriori knowledge and emotions. In 5.2 I claim with Williams that emotions play a relevant role in the semantic of the propositions and I explain in what sense emotions are essential elements for moral understanding. In 5.3 I focus on the role of emotions in the process of understanding self-evident propositions and claim that even though understanding does not require emotions, emotions favor the process itself. In 5.4.1 I deal with emotional knowledge, starting from the alleged parallelism between intuitions and emotions. In 5.4.2 I present and discuss some views that endorse such parallelism and argue that emotions can be seen as seemings that, alongside with intuitions, target self-evident propositions. Paragraph 5.5 argues that we can be entitled to hold self-evident propositions on the basis of emotional seemings.

5. 2 Williams on emotions and understanding

In *Morality and the Emotions* (1966; 1995) Bernard Williams draws attention to the centrality of emotions in moral philosophy and complains about the lack of interests of recent moral philosophy towards emotions. The complaint is quite strange because, at the time Williams was writing, two important works on emotions – Bedford's *Emotions* (1963) and Kenny's *Action, Emotions and the Will* (1963) – have already been published. Moreover, more or less two decades before, emotivism and emotivist moral philosophers such as Ayer and Stevenson dominated the scene of metaethics.

What, then, leads Williams to claim that the role played by emotions has been neglected by moral philosophers? A plausible answer could be that when moral philosophers appeal to emotions as sources of morality, or as a part of it, they appeal to them either to undermine the rational power of ethics and the same possibility of ethical knowledge, or to blame them as interferences of moral thought, that is considering them 'as possible motives to backsliding and thus destructive to moral rationality and consistency' (Williams 1995, 207). Looking at the history of moral philosophy, we can single out two traditional models of the relationship between emotions and reason. For one of these positions, reason and emotions are antithetical. Let us call it the conflicting model of reasons and emotions. The model can be divided into two subclasses. One is the Humean tradition, for which reason is and should be the slave of passions when considering ethics. Ayer, Stevenson and emotivists in general clearly belong to this tradition. The other subclass is the Kantian tradition, for which emotions are merely distractors and obstacles to

morality. As Elgin observes both views share the idea that 'To be under the sway of emotion is to be irrational. To be rational is to be cool, calm, and deliberate; that is, to be unaffected by emotion' (Elgin 2009, 1).

For an alternative model, that we can call an *alliance between reasons and emotions*, reasons and emotions are allies. Aristotle and the Aquinas are probably the leading exponents of this view. The alleged opposition between emotions and reasons is the focus of Williams' concern when writing his article. That is why I opened my paper with an analysis of Williams' theses on emotions. Although since Williams' paper emotions have regained a central place in the philosophical debate, I argue that the diagnosis he provides is still valid because a therapy that successfully cures the opposition between reasons and emotions in morality cannot be found insofar as we do not reconcile emotions with self-evidence.

As Williams points out, besides historical and sociological reasons, there are two philosophical reasons that have caused the neglect of the emotions in moral philosophy. The first reason concerns the role played by language in metaethics; the second consists in the timeless Kantian appeal of morality without emotion that we have already considered. For Williams, emotions were forgotten by contemporary moral analytical philosophers because of the absence of 'highly general connections between emotions and the language', with the exception of emotivism, a theory by which 'the function and nature of moral judgements was to express the emotions of the speaker and to arouse similar emotions in his hearers' (Williams 1995, 208). Emotivism associates emotions and judgements according to two claims. The *first claim* maintains that one makes a wrong use of words in some (but not in all) moral sentences, unless those words are used for expressing emotions. The *second claim* states that, even if the non-emotive use of words in a moral sentence is not incorrect, moral judgments are only those that are uttered emotionally. 'One might say that the first possibility concerns the semantic of a certain class of sentences, while the second possibility concerns the definition of a certain speech act, the speech act of making a moral judgement' (Williams 1995, 208).

Concerning the first thesis, Williams affirms that the semantic of making moral judgements does not necessarily require emotions for these judgements to be considered moral, although there might be judgements that must involve emotions. To explain this point, Williams compares two judgements:

J1: 'Of course, he went back on his agreement when he got to the meeting, the little coward'

J2: ‘As might have been predicted, he went back on his agreement at the meeting through fear; which he ought not to have done’

What is the difference between the two judgements? For Williams, both are moral judgements, but the first expresses a different attitude from the second, although both express disapproval. J2 does not express the same moral judgement as J1. Nonetheless, they are both moral judgements even if an emotion, say indignation, is embedded in the J1 but not In J2. Both judgements express a disapproval of a man’s behavior, but the J1 expresses a different moral view than the J2. We could say that the J2 is “colder” than J1. In this and in similar cases, Williams writes, ‘we might not be able to isolate the moral judgements content of the utterances from what makes them expressive of emotion’ (Williams 1995, 214). I shall make use of the comparison between J1 and J2 in the distinction between emotions as intellectual seemings and emotions as practical seemings that will be introduced in the last section of this chapter, where I distinguish between intellectual and emotional apprehension of moral judgements.

Now, let us take our attention to the second emotivist thesis that Williams calls the speech-act thesis, which states that ‘the expression of emotion might be logically involved, not in the semantics of certain sentences that people utter, but in the description that we give of their uttering them: that a speaker’s expressing emotions should be regarded as a necessary condition of his utterance’s counting as the making of a moral judgement’ (Williams 1995, 214). According to this perspective, moral judgements are a type of speech act, the role of which can be clarified by focusing on the notion of sincerity.

However, as in the first thesis, Williams denies that possessing emotions is a necessary condition of performing the speech-act of making a moral judgment. There are moral judgements that require being sincere expressions of the emotions of those that utter them, as in the J1 case. However, there are also moral judgements where, as in the J2 case, the speaker ‘feels strongly about the matter’ without using emotional terms. Nonetheless, the stronger the emotion about the matter is displayed, the stronger the moral judgement will be in absence of phenomena such as dissimulation or self-deception. Moral frivolity could lead to an expression of strong emotion for weakly held moral judgement. On the contrary, one could exaggerate the emotional expression of a judgement in order to persuade others. However, it is worth noticing that the correlation between emotions and moral judgements is, for Williams, a criterion of holding a strong moral view and not merely an empirical correlation. In the case of

sincerity, the more one is emotionally involved, the stronger the moral view is.

To summarize, with both theses on the relation between moral language and emotions, Williams claims not only that, *pace* emotivism, moral judgements can be formulated even if they are not expressions of emotions but also that emotions strengthen moral judgements, independently of their being felt in conditions of sincerity or not. Moreover, emotions have an epistemic role because they help with seeing a situation in a certain light.

To explain this last point, Williams wonders how one can appropriately appraise the action of a man. The evaluation of the morality of his action does not come with the presence of emotions such us compassion or remorse, but with the presence of grounds that justify compassion. As Williams puts it:

> The short answer to this objection is that what is relevant for our understanding of his moral dispositions is not whether there are (in our views) grounds or reasons for action of that sort, but whether he takes there to be, whether he sees the situation in a certain light. And there is no reason to suppose that we can necessarily understand him as seeing in that light without reference to the structure of his thought and action (Williams 1995, 223)

Williams thesis can be seen as a starting point for our argument. In what follows I argue that emotions have a twin function: they can improve our understanding and they can serve as means to enhance our knowledge. However, they have not only an heuristic role but they can provide justification in a non-trivial sense.

5.3 Emotions and understanding self-evident propositions

In what follows I shall argue that to understand the epistemic role of emotions one should separately consider the role that they play in understating and the role that they play in knowledge, according to the distinction between understanding and knowledge that has been endorsed throughout the thesis. The idea is that treating understanding and knowledge as separate elements will be helpful also for comprehending the epistemic role of emotions[28]. If I

[28] cf. The collection of essays on the epistemic role of emotions Brun, G., Dugoglu, U., and Kuenzle, D. (2008).

am right, with this move I will show that emotions might contribute to self-evident knowledge in two ways: by improving our understanding and by improving our knowledge. In this section I start with understanding and in the following section I will consider the case of knowledge.

One of the most complex problems associated with the claim that self-evident propositions are justified by adequate understanding is that of determining what "adequate understanding" means.

We have already pointed out that "adequate understanding" is different from a mere semantic understanding: 'adequacy of understanding goes beyond basic semantic comprehension. A bilingual person, for instance, could understand a self-evident proposition well enough to translate a sentence expressing it into another language, yet still fail to believe it' (Audi 2015, 67).

With Hills, we have seen that understanding involves several abilities, including that of drawing conclusions and that of being able of defending against objection. Let us take now what Christopher Peacocke claims:

> sometimes a priori knowledge is hard to attain. Attaining it may require deep reflection on concepts in the proposition known. But deeper reflection, when successful, seems always to involve deeper understanding, rather than anything extraneous to understanding (Peacocke 2005, 751)

Here, the idea is that a deeper reflection does not involve that understanding and requires something external in order to be deepened. On the contrary, for a deeper reflection to be successful it suffices that understanding will be deepened. Now, one could think that self-evident theorists are committed to the following claim: understanding relations among the concepts of a proposition might may take time and effort, it might be attained by considering hypothetical scenarios and by the use of examples. However, once one has understood the proposition he will be able to apply it. It seems that all that is required is our cognitive ability, which can be strengthened by our upbringing or by our discipline. Ross' reference to "mental maturity" seems to imply that mature people are those that are able to understand self-evident ethical propositions as much as mature mathematicians are those that are able to manage mathematical concepts. On the contrary, emotions may be seen as obstacles to obtaining good understanding. In this sense "adequate understanding" might mean "the most rational and independent understanding possible". This position presented by Catherine Elgin (who is not endorsing the claim) follows this line of thought:

> When I am frightened, I think that the situation is dangerous. When I am infatuated, I think that my beloved is wonderful. Nor,

> at the time, do I consider the connection between my occurrent emotions and beliefs accidental. I am frightened, I believe, because the situation is dangerous. I adore him, I believe, because he is wonderful. In cooler moments, I may think differently. I recognize that many of my fears have proven unwarranted. I concede that I have not been drawn unerringly to wonderful men. Such failures might persuade us that suitably reliable correlations are not to be had. Then whatever we think or feel in the heat of the moment, it might be wise to defer to our cooler judgment that emotional deliverances are not trustworthy sources of information. Still, we go too quickly, I think, if we dismiss them (Elgin 2008, 35).

The thought appears to be that when we are in the grip of emotions we feel or experience evaluative properties that we do not feel when we are 'cold'.

However, as it has already observed, judging in the grip of emotions can be seen positively or negatively. Accordingly, as we have seen, emotions can be enhancing and distorting factors of our evaluations is a classical way of figuring out the role of emotions in epistemology. *On one hand* emotions grant the access to the evaluative properties, enriching our appraisal of a given situation; when I feel fear I can sense the danger of the growling lion much more deeply and much more readily than by considering with careful observation that I have good reason to run away. *On the other hand*, emotions may distort our appraisal of the situation: when I am in love I tend to attribute to my beloved virtues that she has not; when I am in the grip of anger I tend to say words that in a cooler moment I would never utter. Emotions could also preclude us from correct understanding, for instance by clouding relevant properties of an object or of a situation, e.g. my anger towards a person might prevent me from acknowledging her reasons for an action, while my admiration for my boss could prevent me from noticing that he is taking advantage of meAs Elgin puts it 'emotional deliverances are indicators, but not always accurate indicators of aspects of their objects' (Elgin 2008, 37).

That reveals the benefit and the dangers of relying on emotions especially when we try to attain a "deeper understanding" and, consequently, a deeper knowledge. Recall that for the standard view on self-evidence understanding is sufficient to provide justification for the belief in a self-evident proposition. If I have adequately understood the proposition p than I have a defeasible justification for believing it. The same goes if the self-evident proposition is a moral or a non-moral one. Following this line of thought one might be tempted to appeal to emotional understanding, a sort of Pascalian 'logique du coeur', and argue that only through an emotional

understanding the self-evident moral proposition is justified. I confess that I have taken this hypothesis into consideration for a long time during my research. Nonetheless, I now believe that is not feasible.

The problem with the option could be posed as follows. Since emotions are responses (not necessarily passive responses) to objects or events that trigger them, if they constitute justifications and reasons for our beliefs, then our beliefs would depend on the presence of those objects and events. This contrast with our the claim that self-evident propositions are justified by merely considering the concepts and the relations involved. Given that self-evident moral propositions are justified in the same way of self-evident non-moral propositions, it seems that emotions do not play any useful role in understanding self-evident proposition. Given that merely considering the concepts seem to be sufficient for understanding the propositions, the fact that emotions might favor our understanding seems not compensate the risk that they could distort it. So, if we could be satisfied with our merely rational and adequate understanding, why should we appeal to the emotions?

First of all, let us start by noticing how it is widely accepted that emotions contribute to understanding in general (not specifically of self-evident propositions). As Deonna and Teroni point out, even if understanding can be obtained through a non-emotional route 'being a competent user of the evaluative concept may after all require more than the mere ability to apply them in the correct circumstances. Categorizing an object as funny or shameful is indeed hardly detachable from the understanding that its properties give one reason to favor or reject it' (Deonna and Teroni 2012, 122-123). The reason why this is the case is evident from the fact that emotions and evaluative properties are strongly intertwined. That is not to say that a subject devoid of emotions cannot understand anything, but, that his capacity of understanding is different from ours, as emotional creatures. The underlying idea is that given that emotions disclose evaluative properties, in absence of emotions our understanding will be poor because it will lack those evaluative properties:

> The force of this point comes to light if we imagine a creature deprived of emotional responses who has been able to get a handle on our evaluative practices because say, she has learned to recognize the responses of others. This creature is thus linking her application to responses she can discriminate correctly in others. But does she understand the evaluative judgements she makes? […] We are emotional creatures, and a failure to have any experiential access to how given circumstances tend to emotionally impinge on us should make us wonder what a non-

> emotional creature can understand of the evaluative verdict she comes up with' (Deonna and Teroni 2012, 123)

A similar concern is shared also by Robert Audi, who contends that emotions can support cognition even though they do not embody any definite cognition. He considers the case of anxiety:

> I was once temporarily hosted by someone I had just met. He was acting in a disturbingly strange way. We were sitting alone in a dining area where several kitchen knives lay on the table at which I was lunching. He stared at them for a time and was silent while doing so, though the conversation resumed. I found myself uncomfortable. I had no belief that he might be dangerous or seriously disturbed, and I do not think that I drew any inference from anything I believed concerning his psychological makeup. This is not to say that I could not have formed beliefs that would be a basis for having the emotion I had begun to feel. But I alter saw that my anxiety – which was likely a response to many more indications than his staring at the knives – was some evidence of his being seriously disturbed (Later incidents unmistakably confirmed that he was indeed disturbed that day) (Audi 2013, 139)

There are at least four points that deserve the attention here and that confirm the role of emotions in understanding in general.

First, the principle of charity would allow that from the fact that emotions may be distorting factors, it does not follow that emotions are always distorting factors. Perhaps they may distort our judgements, as many cognitive elements such as prejudice and biases may distort our judgements. However, the fact that sometimes prejudice and biases distort our judgements is not a reason not to think that they always distort our judgements. The same applies to emotions.

Second, there are more pros than cons in taking emotions to play an important role in the process of understanding, especially when the understanding concerns moral matters. The price of unemotional understanding is too high to be paid because it sacrifices something too important for our humanity. That's why we tend to be much more sympathetic with Dido's mad love for *Aeneas* in Virgil's *Aeneid* than with the Star Trek Captain Spock's cold appraisal of life. We should run the risk because, without it, we will probably miss important aspects of a situation, as when fear for losing my patrimony helps me in understanding that investing too much money buying high-risk stocks is too dangerous for my financial health.

Third, the participation of emotions in the process of understanding accounts for the personal point of view from which moral judgements are often expressed. The love felt toward my children helps me in understanding why I should forgive them even when a mere rational understanding would induce me to punish them, while the contempt felt towards an unknown serial charlatan would rapidly induce me to denounce him to the authorities.

Finally, notice that acknowledging the role of emotions in understanding does not imply the emotions should be occurrently felt during the process of understanding. For instance, I might decide not to cheat during a public contest because I figure that I will be shamed if someone discovers me. Granted, the shame hypothetically felt – or the fear of feeling it – is not a conclusive reason for understanding why cheating is wrong. Still, the intuitive thought that I will feel shame might induce me to reflect upon the situation and make me understand that the act of cheating during a public contest is a kind of wrongdoing.

However, one thing is to claim that emotions have a role in the process of understanding, another is to claim that they contribute to the adequacy of understanding of self-evident propositions, namely that without emotions that understanding is not adequate. If emotions might improve and help the formulation of non-self-evident judgements - such as when feeling embarrassment for a cruel joke induce me to seeing its wrongness – when self-evident propositions are at stake they might appear unuseful. Why should we think that feeling indignation against promise breaking induce me to better understand that "promises should be kept"?

Consider the following claim by Michael Brady (2010):

> if the goal of thinking about emotional objects and events is *understanding* rather than evaluative belief or evaluative knowledge, then there is a clear reason why we ought to make ourselves aware of such reasons, rather than resting content with the information provided by our emotional responses alone. This is because the fact that we are afraid of something, let's say, does not contribute to our understanding of the dangerousness of our situation; If then the goal of thinking of emotional objects and events is understanding rather than beliefs or knowledge, we have an explanation for why it is illicit to rely upon our emotional experiences in forming evaluative judgements, in those circumstances were we could be aware of the features that such experiences reliably track. In resting content with our emotional experiences, we would be failing to pursue our primary epistemic goal of understanding (Brady 2010)

It is worth noticing here that in acknowledging the role of emotions in focusing and enhancing our attention, Brady denies that emotions provide justification and reasons for our understanding. That is not to say that emotions are useless. Rather, their function is that of triggering our attention towards the evaluative properties of a given situation, with no pretension toward justifying our judgements, nor grounding them. They are 'proxies' or 'surrogates for genuine reasons' (Brady 2010, 155).

Nonetheless, if someone entertains an emotional experience without having any reason for experiencing it, we expect him to look for those reasons, in order for his evaluation of the situation to be justified. Brady argues that subjects are not entitled to take emotional experience at face value, thus they am not justified unless they discover the non-emotional reasons that have caused their emotional experience. For Brady, evaluative understanding 'involves emotion', as it involves "independence of emotions" insofar that the reasons that have a bearing on the accuracy of our emotional responses do not include the emotional responses themselves' (Brady 2010, 148).

Nonetheless, if one the hand having the emotional experience without being aware of the reason is a case of epistemic weakness, on the other, the emotional experience is the occasion to express a need that I would probably never have looked for before. Therefore, if there is an epistemic role of emotions in the process of understanding, this role is that of 'capturing and consuming the attention' and moving it towards the search of reasons. In fact, emotions enhance our apprehension of the evaluative properties of a situation, drawing our attention vividly and rapidly to objects or properties:

> what normally happens in emotional experience is that we (more or less) reflectively and consciously seek out reasons which either support or count against our initial emotional appraisal or take on our situation […] we feel the need to seek out reasons that either back up or disconfirm our emotional take on some object or event, and thus feel the need to seek out considerations that have a bearing on the accuracy of our initial emotional response. In so far as the persistence of attention motivates this search, it functions to promote conscious reflection on such reasons, and enables us to gain an enhanced representation of our evaluative situation (Brady 2010a, 221-222)

Therefore, emotions do not only have a motivational role, but also an epistemic role because they induce us in looking for reasons that we will non-emotionally discover. For instance, in the case of promise breaking, the feeling of shame that I experience when I break a promise made to someone

might trigger my attention and motivate me in the search for the reasons why "promises should be kept". In absence of the emotions I could think that promise-breaking is something venial. Nonetheless, what characterize self-evident moral propositions, for instance Rossian principles, is that we often feel intuitively hurt by their violation even when their violation is somehow justified. To use a famous Rossian example, if I break a promise because promise-breaking leads to a higher good - for instance if I break the promise I've made to my son to play tennis with him in the evening because of an unexpected load of work that I cannot postpone –, I might nonetheless feel shame or disappointment for not having kept the promise. Suppose that so far I have been quite insensitive to promise keeping. Nonetheless, the fact that the promise has been made to my beloved son, makes me feel emotionally involved my promise-breaking and it might lead me wonder why promises are so important. My understanding is thus helped by my

There are, I think, no reasons for claiming that things are different for self-evident principles or, more precisely, for when situations can be evaluated by self-evident judgement formulated on the basis of principles that are self-evident and that on these grounds are considered apriori. If self-evident propositions are justified by adequate understanding, whichever favor a better understanding in general also favors the understanding of self-evident propositions.

5.4 Emotions and knowledge

There seem to be good reasons to try to save the possibility of emotional understanding of self-evident principles. In the previous paragraph, we have seen that we can reach an understanding of a principle through a non-emotional route, though a participation of emotions, as we have claimed, should be preferred. If someone considers the principle that "promises should be kept" and the principle that "damaging others is wrong" and when confronted with a case of promise breaking or wrongdoing remains totally indifferent, we will think that something is missing in him. In other words, unlike the understanding of principles of logic and mathematics, the understanding of principles of ethics requires at least a minimum of emotional appraisal of the situation. Compare a person that feels indignant in front of a case of betrayal of a friend and another that in front of the same betrayal considers it a wrongdoing without feeling indignation. We normally believe that the first person has a more deep understanding than the second.

Let us now consider the relation between emotions and knowledge of self-evident principles. Now, if emotions have no grounding and no justificatory role in understanding, they might perhaps have a grounding

and justificatory role in knowing self-evident propositions. Here, it should be determined whether emotions can play a role that is parallel to the role played by intuitions. This idea is shared by perceptual theories of emotions, on one hand, and by recent intuitionist theories on the other. In this section, I argue that in the case of self-evident moral propositions, emotions have an analogous function to that of intuitions in the non-moral case. If intuitions acknowledge the proposition as true, emotions acknowledge the content of proposition as wrong, right, disgusting, praiseworthy, etc. If intuitions are apprehensions of the truth of the proposition, emotions are apprehensions of evaluative properties of the propositions. If emotions in the process of understanding can function as proxies and stimuli for seeking out non-emotional reasons, emotions in knowledge make the final apprehension, and thus the understanding, more complete. The hypothesis is appealing because, if emotions are a privileged access to evaluative properties, it follows that they play a relevant role in the apprehension of moral self-evident propositions. In this case, moral emotions can be the source of moral knowledge, rather than being only correct or justified in light of a pre-existent, non-emotional moral knowledge.

Of course, knowing principles by emotions might lead ethical knowledge to be subjective. This is certainly an option but, for sure, not the one that would be endorsed by those who defend intuitionism. Hence, intuitionists are faced one more time with two options: either finding a way of settling the compatibility between emotions and knowledge of self-evident principles or giving up the pretense of considering emotions as playing an epistemic role in the knowledge of those principles.

5.4.1 From intuitions to emotions

The idea of a an "emotional intuition" is not new. Not only can we find it in the work of Max Scheler, but recent studies have even considered the hypothesis that 'intuitions' and 'emotions' are interchangeable terms. However, as far as I know, none of this reappraisal of intuitions in terms of emotions has ever related emotions with self-evident knowledge. This is the scope of this subsection.

Let us start by roughly comparing intuitions and emotions. Both are central elements in moral epistemology. They take part in moral life and in the process of human knowledge. Every person with a basic moral education has intuitions and emotions at the base of their actions. Still, the difference between emotions and intuitions is more conceptual than real. If it is virtually possible for philosophers and psychologists to draw a conceptual divide between emotions and intuitions, people outside of

philosophy can hardly understand them as different elements. If John blames a person for having accepted a bribe, we could say that his intuition that the person has committed a wrongdoing in accepting the bribe arouses an emotion, say, of indignation. If John had responded this way, he would have responded as a traditional intuitionist would have done. Emotions are aroused on the base of previous intuition. But there are other possibilities: emotions can be present even in the absence of a concomitant intuition or judgement. In this case, emotions can lead to intuitions or judgements. The feeling of happiness that one experiences while being with someone might lead him to judge that that person is praiseworthy.

That is what Audi contends in *Moral Perception* (2013). Besides perception and reflection, emotions are major routes to moral intuitions. Emotions have an evidential role and might draw the attention on features of facts that lead to intuition. Audi distinguishes between cases where emotions are not supported by cognitions or intuitions, but where they support cognitions themselves. We could say, in cases like these, the emotion that p might lead to the intuition that q, if p and q are related in some way. It might happen, for instance, that during a meeting I feel uncomfortable with a person. I have neither intuition nor judgement that my emotion is justified, but my emotional experience might lead me to the intuition or to the judgment that later is revealed as correct or incorrect. In addition, Audi affirms that through emotions 'we sometimes know things we would not otherwise know. We also know some things more readily through that evidence than we would have if our knowledge depended on non-emotional evidence' (Audi 2013, 142). However, although strongly intertwined, intuitions and emotions are for Audi two different and specific elements that mutually support each other, without confusing the one with the other.

A quite different view is defended by Thagard and Finn in *Conscience: What is Moral Intuition?* (2011). Here, Thagard and Finn develop an Emotional Consciousness theory of emotion. To introduce the theory Thagard and Finn use the following example:

> When Apple announced the iPhone early in 2007, [Paul] knew he wanted one, but was taken aback by the high projected price. Then it occurred to him that perhaps he could put the iPhone on his research grant. Immediately, however, he got the bad feeling that this would be wrong, a misuse of government funds for personal purposes. His conscience said not to do it by generating the moral intuition that charging an iPhone to a research grant would be wrong. This reaction was a conscious experience marked by negative emotion, tied to a mental representation of

> the possibility of getting the iPhone in an inappropriate manner (Thagard and Finn 2011, 151)

This example presents a view on intuitions and emotions that conceives 'moral intuitions as a kind of emotional consciousness' (Thagard and Finn 2011, 151). For Thagard and Finn even if there might be cases of emotional consciousness where intuitions are not involved, most emotions arise from intuitions. In the case above, the intuition that 'charging an iPhone to a research grant would be wrong' generates negative emotions, and the feeling that the act would be wrong.

Thagard and Finn's aim is that of finding a middle ground between two alternative theories of emotion: *the cognitive appraisal theory of emotions* – for which emotions are evaluations, and the *somatic perception theory* – for which emotions are internal representations or perceptions of bodily states. For Thagard and Finn, and beforehand for Thagard and Aubie (2008), emotions are both cognitive appraisals and bodily feelings. This model has neurological and psychological roots that cannot be examined here. It is sufficient to say that the EMOCON model proposed suggests that areas of the brain interact in generating emotions. 'For example, your reaction of disgust and fear to a mangled body results from your brain's integrated representation of your bodily response and your evaluation of a possible threat to your survival goals'. The merit of the theory is that it 'can explain many aspects of emotional consciousness, such as the varying intensity, change, and positive and negative valence of emotions' (Thagard and Finn 2011, 152).

For Thagard and Finn a theory of moral intuition should explain, first, how moral intuitions can be both cognitive and emotional and, second, how they are normatively demanding.

As for the first point, it is enough to say that moral intuitions are cognitive because they evaluate how things are and are therefore apt to truth or falseness. The intuition that a certain act is wrong can be true or false. In addition, moral intuitions are emotional because they tend to generate emotional reactions, at least in most cases. For Thagard and Finn, and their EMOCON model, the process could be explained as follows:

> If moral intuition is a kind of emotional consciousness as specified by the EMOCON model, it is easy to see how ethical reactions can be both cognitive and emotional. They are inherently emotional because they are carried out by the same neural process that generates emotional reactions, including the perceptions of bodily states that give emotions – and moral intuitions their visceral character. A purely somatic theory of

> emotions would have difficulty accounting for the cognitive content of ethical judgements, but this is not a problem for our emotional consciousness theory that allows a crucial component of appraisal with respect to goals. This appraisal, carried out by the full range of cognitive processes in the prefrontal cortex, can call on all the representational resources of the brain's most intellectually sophisticated part. Through incorporation of the experimentally established neural interconnections of the prefrontal cortex with viscerally connected areas such as the insula and amygdala, the EMOCON model shows how moral intuitions can simultaneously and inextricably be both cognitive and emotional (Thagard and Finn 2011, 152)

As for the second point, Thagard and Finn wonder how intuitions are normatively significant, providing a degree of evidence that justifies the judgement of rightness or wrongness formulated on this intuitive evidence. The EMOCON theory helps to avoid two problematic answers: 'the affirmative one that moral intuitions can reflect judgements that are true apriori and the negative one that moral intuitions are just emotional reflections of untutored prejudices that have no evidential force' (Thagard and Finn 2011, 160). Here, the attempt is that of overcoming the distinction between intuitions as rational apprehensions of apriori truths and emotions as mere reactions. For Thagard and Finn, the EMOCON theory contributes to overcoming the distinction. The EMOCON theory provides such a justification for our judgements of right and wrong because it is a combination of somatic perceptions – that are empirical ad neurological evidences – and of cognitive appraisals: 'an emotional intuition that performs such an incorporation is not just an unreflective bodily reaction, but rather an integration of legitimate contributor to ethical judgements with somatic perceptions' (Thagard and Finn 2011, 161).

This is not the place to enter into the detail of the theory, but it is worth noticing that for Thagard and Finn we should take ethical judgements at face value if our intuitions on which they are based are informed; if people have reflected carefully on their judgements, if they have balanced the pros and cons in absence of physiological defects, lack of moral education, biased moral education or situational distortion. Still, to fully appraise all of these elements, emotional intuition is needed. However, the idea is that only throughout an integration of cognitive elements and emotional reactions can we have a full appraisal of the situation. That is what is granted by a unified theory of consciousness such as the EMOCON theory, that does not separate what classical theory tends to consider as separate elements such as emotional reactions and cognitive

appraisals. That is the advantage of the EMOCON theory over a classical intuitionist theory:

> intuitionism has no way of identifying which intuitions have the desired objective character, which is a major problem when intuitions so often differ. When one person is adamant that abortion is wrong and another person has an equally strong intuition that abortion is right, it is impossible to say which one has immediate awareness of some moral truth. In contrast, we argued that the emotional consciousness theory of conscience can help illuminate the conditions under which moral intuitions tend to yield objective judgements: when they are based on experience rather than on neural defects, poor education or situational distortions (Thagard and Finn 2011, 157)

Despite taking into account the philosophical implications of their theory, Thagard and Finn approach the issue from a psychological and neurological point of view. From an epistemological point of view the issue is addressed by Jonathan Dancy in *Moral Intuitions and Emotions* (2014). Here, Dancy proposes to reframe intuitionism, developing a conception of moral emotions as practical seemings.

Dancy conceives emotions as practical seemings in contrast to intellectual seemings. In his view, intuitions are seemings that can be intellectual or practical. The difference between the two is this: an intellectual seeming is an intellectual intuition that has moral content, such as the intuition that Cesar was wrong to cross the Rubicon; a practical seeming is an intuition that is essentially motivating**.** The thesis to be proved is that such intuitions as practical seemings are in fact emotions.

To clarify this point, consider again the case of the corrida that I have already proposed. I might feel that what I am seeing – e.g. a bull struggling against a torero – is wrong. That can be either an intellectual seeming – if what happened strikes me 'coldly' – or a practical seeming - if what happened not only strikes me, but if I also feel anger or indignation towards it. Practical seemings are a kind of intuition where some consideration is not just *represented* but *presented* to an agent as a reason.

Thus, in contrast to intellectual seemings practical seemings are essentially motivational states. To shed light on this distinction, Dancy separates 'presenting a consideration to being so' from 'presenting it as a reason to respond it in a way or another':

> If practical seemings are presentations of reasons as reasons, this will give us something of a distinction between intellectual and

> practical seemings. For intellectual seemings are presentations of matters of fact that do not ordinarily present those facts as reasons, even though those facts may be reasons and be recognized as such. Of course, it remains possible that some intellectual seemings present facts and at the same time present them as reasons for belief. But the possibility of this sort of dual presentation is not a difficulty, since a practical seeming may do the same. And I do not find the possibility disconcerting. We can perfectly well distinguish between reasons for belief and reasons for action, emotion, and other practical responses; intellectual seemings that present facts as reasons, if there are any such, are still intellectual rather than practical because they present the facts as reasons for belief (Dancy 2014, 795)

In this passage, Dancy acknowledges that intellectual seemings can also provide reasons. The reasons provided here are however reasons for belief while the reason provided by practical seemings are motivational reasons, that is are reasons that become practical and can lead to action. Dancy suggests that emotions could be such practical seemings 'without postulating any unfamiliar and unnecessary addition to our psychological repertoire' (Dancy 2014, 795). Granted, not all moral emotions are intuitions, because they are not presentations of reasons. As some moral intuitions are not emotions because they are mere intellectual seemings, they sorely present facts without considering that as reasons, as emotions do. Dancy's hypothesis is that some moral intuitions that present facts as motivational reasons – in contrast to reason for belief – are anything but emotion.

Dancy's proposal, if correct, would play a relevant role for ethical intuitionism because, as we saw in the third chapter, it would help meeting the objection from motivation. If intuitions are not only intrinsically cognitive but also intrinsically motivational, much work in the direction of explaining how intuitions can motivate would already be done. However, as Dancy remarks, the tradition of ethical intuitionism – with some exceptions, such as Ewing (1947) – tend to confuse the notions of desire, feeling, attitude, and emotion, opposing them with judgements. On the contrary, 'one of the achievements of recent intuitionists ... has been to stress the practical nature of moral cognition, in such a way as to avoid any worries deriving from the so-called Humean theory of motivation, which has it that no state can be both cognitive and motivational.' (Dancy 2014, 790).

Dancy combines two theses held by McDowell (whom he considers a leading figures of contemporary intuitionist) – the idea that the moral

world is not motivationally inert and the idea that there is an acquired capacity of discerning this world – with his thesis that emotions are practical seemings. Emotions are the acquired capacities of understanding the world as motivational. His point is that we can have intuition of moral facts, but only emotions discover these facts as motivational reasons.

Moreover, motional capacities are developed and improved by upbringing, education and social learning. We could say that emotions are not the same as blind impulses, they embed a cognitive base and it is for this reason that as Dancy suggests that, unlike animals, humans are capable of distancing themselves from motivational reasons. A similar idea was famously expressed by the Kantian claim that if animals act in accordance with law, humans act on representation of the law. Therefore, humans can say "yes" or "no" to the representation of virtue in their cognitive capacities. Emotions are not blind, but they can see throughout the eyes of reason:

> The general picture here is of a cognitive system sitting on top of a motivational one, capable of influencing it in some ways but not in all. The motivational system is not mere motivation—that would be the blind impulse of which Sidgwick spoke. Not even the animals are restricted to blind impulse. The sort of motivation we are talking about is a presentation of some consideration as a reason, and in that sense is already cognitive (Dancy 2014, 790)

To summarize. Emotions as practical seemings are cognitive, because they respond to a consideration presented as a motivational *reason*. Dancy defines 'a motivational state as a state whose onset is or includes a change in one's motivations' (Dancy 2014, 790). Motivation arises on the basis of a presentation, that is a state of affairs that is not motivational, but that is what motivates. The same state of affairs can be known either on the basis of an intuition or on the basis of an emotion or, more precisely, on the basis of an intellectual seeming or on the basis of a practical seemings. In the first case the intuition is merely cognitive; in the second case, even if in the presence of the same cognitive base provided by intellectual seemings, the state of affairs intuited is only what provides motivation, and motivation is provided by the practical seemings of the state as a reason.

> Such presentations, being motivational, need not be thought of as inert cognitive states; they may be cognitive, but they are still inert in the sense that their presence makes the sort of difference

> to one's dispositions to act that is traditionally awarded only to desire. Practical moral intuitions of this sort will be practical seemings, assent to which can be action rather than belief. And even before we get to action, to accept that the reasons are as they seem to be will be to go with, or consent to, a motivational flow that already exists (Dancy 2014, 790)

What is the relation between intellectual and practical seemings? To better understand the relation between intellectual and practical seemings, let us clarify this point by analogy with the relation between intuitions and emotions in ethical intuitionism. Ethical intuitionists have always conceived the relation between intuitions and emotions as if there are intuitions – it does not matter if they are seemings or beliefs – that provide us with cognitive content and emotions that color the content of the intuitions. Dancy's model claims that practical seemings are not an addition to intellectual seemings that bear the content but, on the contrary, they are in themselves bearers of content.

Consider now this example. I am seeing a man vulgarly accusing another in front of an audience while the other is not present. It seems to me that what I am witnessing is wrong and that I am in the presence of an injustice. This is a kind of intellectual seeming as is conceived, for instance, by Huemer (2005). My appraisal of the state of affairs can either stop here or might go on and become emotional, when, besides the intellectual seeming that I am witness to a wrongdoing, I can have the practical seemings that make me experience indignation. Indignation can become anger as far as I realize that the man who is being accused is a close friend of mine. After a few minutes, however, I suddenly change my seemings. After having listened what the accuser says I realize that the blame is justified. My friend is guilty of something that he has hidden from me, and therefore he deserves blame both for the fact itself and for not have been honest with me, his old, close friend. Thus, it now seems to me that what I am witnessing is right. Consequently, my seemings change and I might feel now sadness and contempt for what my friend has done.

What I have said so far might induce one to consider intellectual and practical seemings as diachronic phases of the process of intuitive knowledge. *In one sense*, this is true because my appraisal could stop at the first intellectual seeming phase without any practical seeming occurring. In this case, I only have an intuition of a "moral fact" (or, to be more neutral, a state of affairs where morality is involved). *In another sense*, it could be claimed that practical seeming is both cognitive and emotive. That is, the emotion provided by the practical seemings is something that colors an object provided by the intellectual seeming, but the object is present in

the practical seemings since the onset of the seeming. Practical seemings, as far as I conceive them, are intrinsically cognitive and intrinsically motivating. If it practically seems to me that p, my seeming of p is not only cognitive but also at the same time emotional; it is in this case, I argue, that my appraisal is moral and that my intuition is no longer an intuition of a "moral fact" but a *moral intuition*. Consequently, the distinction between intuitions and emotions relies on the fact that intuitions as intellectual seemings can be directed towards both moral and non-moral facts while emotions as practical seemings are those intuitions that morally appraise a fact. This goes along with McDowell's thesis that the world is not motivationally inert. Granted, as Dancy himself remarks, not every emotion is a moral intuition, that is, a practical seeming, just as not every intuition is an emotion.

What is certain is that morally integrated people are those that shed light into moral facts by means of practical seemings and not only by intellectual seemings. The one cannot hold without the other, even if how we experience depends on both our upbringing and education. For instance, a person who has high moral sensitivity can either intellectually see the wrongness of a fact and practically perceive it with the appropriate emotions. A person who lacks moral education or a morally indifferent person might fail either to see the wrongness of the fact or to experience the appropriate practical seeming, or both.

Now it seems to me that Dancy's account has the undeniable merit of shading the contrast between intuitions and emotions, claiming that if there are intuitions and emotions that are distinct, there are also moral intuitions that we could also call emotions. However, the epistemology he develops for the intuitions is not one that fits with the model of intuitions and self-evidence that we have defended throughout the thesis.

To conclude, as both Thagard and Finn and Dancy have argued, intuitions can be conceived as emotions. Nonetheless, once we have established that moral intuitions can be conceived as emotions, it is helpful to shed light into what account of emotions best explains both the analogy between intuitions and emotions and the agreement with self-evidence.

5.4.2 Emotions as seemings

Providing a comprehensive theory of the emotions goes beyond the scope of my inquiry, which is to sufficiently characterize emotion in order to understand their role and their contribution to self-evident and apriori knowledge. Therefore, the problem at stake here is not that of determining which theory of emotions best explains what emotions are and how they

work, but what kind of theory best suits our theory that basic principles of ethics are self-evident.

Let us start by outlining contemporary philosophical theories of the emotions[29]. For the *evaluative theory*, emotions are assimilated to evaluative judgements with proper conditions of justification and conditions of correctness[30]. For the *mixed theory* emotions are beliefs combined with desires – e.g. fear is made by the association of the belief that p is dangerous with the desire to avoid p[31]. Meanwhile, for the *attitudinal theory* emotions are felt bodily attitudes directed towards objects, and these attitudes are correct if the objects towards which the attitudes are directed have the relevant evaluative properties that are instantiated by the attitude: 'it is for instance because Julianne takes the attitude of fear towards the dog that its dangerousness features in the correctness conditions of her mental state' (Deonna and Teroni 2012, 77)[32]. It would go beyond the scope of this inquiry to address them all at length; rather, I will argue here from a perspective rooted in the perceptual theory of emotions. If for the evaluative theory, emotions are evaluative judgements and if for the attitudinal theory emotions are attitudes taken towards objects, for the perceptual theory, emotions are perceptions of values or of evaluative properties.[33] As previously affirmed, I do not claim that the perceptual theory best explains the nature of emotions over the other alternative theories; I argue rather that the thesis that emotions are a kind of perception is compatible with the role we assign to emotions in our model of self-evident knowledge. I argue that even if the perceptual model suffers from fatal flows as a theory of emotions, as Deonna and Teroni (2012) rightly show, conceiving emotions in terms of intuitions can save the theory and provide a plausible account on emotions relating to self-evident principles.

In what follows, I rapidly sketch the perceptual model in outline and I present some worries that have been raised by the model, I then explain why this model can fit with our model of self-evidence.

A clear-cut approach to the model can be found in Christine Tappolet:

[29] I take this general framework from Deonna and Teroni (2012).
[30] Nussbaum (1994), Sorabji (2003), Solomon (2002) and, in weaker form, Roberts (2003) and Greenspan (1988)). For Deonna and Teroni (2012, chapter 5).
[31] (Marks (1982), Searle (1983), Green (1992))
[32] Beyond (Deonna and Teroni, 2012 and 2015) see Dewey (1895), Frijda (1986, 2007).
[33] De Sousa (1987), Tappolet (2000), Johnston (2001), Prinz (2004), Goldie (2009), Döring (2007).

> According to the perceptual account, emotions are perceptions of values. Thus, fear would consist in perceiving something as fearsome, disgust as perceiving something as disgusting, shame in perceiving something as shameful, and so forth for every distinct kind of emotion (Tappolet 2012, 206-207)

The advantages of the model are well-known. It accounts for the intentional nature of emotions (Kenny 1963) without committing emotions to propositional content. Unlike the evaluative theory, it explains how emotions can be experienced by subjects unable to formulate evaluative judgements, such as children and animals. It accounts for the recalcitrance of emotions that all of us sometimes experience against our considered judgements. This is not the place to go into details of the theory.

For the sake of our inquiry, the analogy between emotions and perceptions seems to go along with that between intuitions and perceptions.

However, the model has raised many doubts. At the end of the chapter I will consider some of these doubts and show how they could be answered. It is worth noticing how Julien Deonna (2006) claimed that the analogy between emotions and perceptions can be defended on the basis of their perspectival nature

> when perception is seen for what it is, the gap between perception and emotion as ways of gathering information ceases to seem so significant. Perception, as emotion, is in part a perspectival concept, and as such bears the comparison with emotion very well (Deonna 2006, 30)

Deonna's core claim is that 'if perception not only alerts a creature to how things are in the world, but it informs her of how things are in the world from the standpoint where she stands' (Deonna 2006, 32), something analogous exists for emotions: 'one's *emotional dispositions* can function as a frame of reference for emotions such that one's emotions will be tracking perspectival evaluative facts on the individual-relative dimension […] perspectival tracking holds for emotion as it does for perception' (Deonna 2006, 32). Moreover, the perspectival nature of emotions depends on the emotional system from which the emotion raises or from the emotional disposition. Moreover, emotional dispositions present regularities: people respond in similar ways to similar circumstances, though emotional reactions cannot be predicted with certainty unless we consider the whole context into which they occur.

Now, we have seen in the last chapters the usefulness of dispositions and episodes in determining the nature of intuitions. The same

goes for emotions. For Goldie (2000) an emotional episode is a particular experience of an emotion that lasts for less time than an emotion and that is different from an emotion. an emotional episode is a current experience of a particular emotion. For instance, saying that James is jealous might mean that he is jealous of a certain relationship or that he is 'currently experiencing a jealous thought or feeling' (Goldie 2000, 13). Our episodic occurrent emotions – namely the emotional experiences that we feel at a given moment – depend on the emotional disposition that we already have. Thus, we could say that emotions are perspectives that we have 'from the standpoint where she stands' towards content. If this content is expressed by a self-evident proposition we could say that emotions are not something that influence the nature of the proposition but only ways of approaching the proposition. The emotional episodes reveal the situation that instances the proposition under a certain perspective.

Here, when directed towards self-evident principles, emotions (as episodes) are like the emotional counterpart of intellectual seemings. Through the emotion it seems to me that the principle has features that I would not have seen without it. Notice that I am not claiming that all emotions are seemings, nor am I endorsing a definite theory of emotion. My restricted claim is that when involved in knowledge of self-evident propositions, emotions are like seemings. We should now shed light on what such a seeming would be like for emotions.

I argue that seemings are like attitudes taken towards a proposition, a kind similar to those argued for by Deonna and Teroni in recent works (2012; 2014). Starting from the well-known distinction in the philosophy of mind between attitudes – that is 'the way in which the mind is concerned with' – and contents – 'what the mind is concerned with', Deonna and Teroni's account individuates the difference between emotions in the attitude and not in the content. This differentiates the model from contemporary theories of emotions. Both in the perceptual theory and the in evaluative judgement theory it is the content of the emotion that distinguishes different types of emotion: 'judging that one is degraded or perceiving one's own degradation is being ashamed, judging that a remark is offensive or perceiving its offensiveness is being angry' (Deonna and Teroni, 2014). Setting aside classical objections against the two theories (evaluative judgement theory's incapacity to account for the possibility of emotions of oblivious being, e.g. animals and infants, and perceptual theory's appeal to a mysterious perceptual faculty) Deonna and Teroni observe that a powerful objection against the evaluative theory and the perceptual theory is that both 'conceive of the emotions in terms of one single attitude that is not distinctively emotional' (Deonna and Teroni 2014, 5). This leads to two odd consequences. First, that emotions are not

distinct from, respectively, non-emotional judgements and perceptions apart from the evaluative content that is respectively, judged and perceived. Second, also within the realm of emotion, the distinction is in the content, so that all emotions are the same psychological attitudes of judging or perceiving. For the attitudinal theory, on the contrary, the difference lies in the attitude: an emotion is an attitude towards an object, an attitude that it is appropriate to have when the latter exemplifies a given evaluative property' (Deonna and Teroni, 2012, 76). I consider here only two in my view related aspect that are relevant for my inquiry. *First*, the theory is closer to the way of commonsensically conceiving emotions. Indeed, 'it is natural to understand the contrast between, say, fear, anger and joy as one between different ways the mind is concerned with objects and events' (Deonna and Teroni 2014, 6). Admitting that there are different emotional attitudes constitutes an improvement over Dancy's account. *Second*, the theory accounts for the fact that different attitudes can share the same content: 'if Sharon's aloofness makes Jennifer angry and amuses Franz, it is quite reasonable to say that they relate in different ways to one and the same thing' (Deonna and Teroni 2014,7).

Now, let us see how we could relate this with self-evident knowledge. An attitude raises as a final step of the process of understanding. Notice that if the process of understanding self-evident propositions in general requires the seemingness of truth as a condition for the understanding to be adequate, so the process of understanding self-evident moral propositions requires, in addition, that some attitude rises as a consequence of this process. If this attitude is a seeming, the proposition instantiated is seen under a certain light. If the seeming is an intellectual seeming, the proposition is seen as true; if the seeming is an emotional seeming the proposition is seen as valuable. Nonetheless, the emotional appraisal comes from the outside. It is not necessary for understanding the proposition, but it is an expected outcome that comes along with the seemingness of truth of the self-evident proposition that we have called intuition.

Therefore, emotions as seemings do not suffer from the weaknesses of emotions as perceptions. If, as Deonna and Teroni (2012) point out, it is true that the perceptual model fails in conceiving emotions as perceptions, the model can be saved if, instead of conceiving emotions as perceptions in general, we conceive emotions as seemings.[34] Certainly, I am not claiming that all emotions are seemings. My restricted claim is that some

[34] This does not mean that the perceptual model should be endorsed, but that conceiving emotions as seemings immunizes the model against the objections against it presented above. This is only a negative defense of the model that can fail for other reasons that will not be considered here.

moral emotions are, only in some circumstances, seemings. Emotions as seemings are a sort of immediate reaction to a fact experienced. In front of a case of promise-breaking, when we see someone damaging another for fun, when we see someone being unfair.

Conceiving emotions as seemings has the advantage of overcoming the over-intellectualization of emotion of the judgmental model, but it does not expose it to canonical objections raised against the perceptual model (Deonna and Teroni 2012, 68-69). *First*, if perception is made possible by the five ordinary senses, there is no reason to suppose that there is a similar sense that detects evaluative properties. Postulating such a sense would lead the perceptualist to appeal to a kind of *sui generis* faculty; the perceptual model can claim that there is an organ for emotions as there is an organ for our sight. *Second*, in contrast to perceptions, emotions are rooted in the personality and in the character traits of subject. Different personalities will react in different ways to the same situation. *Third*, unlike perceptions, emotions have a valence, that is, emotions can be positive and negative. Anger, fear, shame and disgust are negative emotions while pride, joy and amusement are positive emotions. *Fourth*, unlike perceptions, emotions are not transparent. I cannot explain what a sense perception is without referring to the properties perceived by the sense. *Fifth*, emotions need a cognitive non-emotional and non-evaluative base that causes the emotion and that is distinct from the emotion itself. *Sixth*, it would be odd to ask for the reasons of a perception, but not to ask for the reasons of an emotion.

If we conceive emotions as seemings we can meet at least some of the objections raised here. First, seemingness does not require any specific emotional organ or any sui generis faculty. 'Emotional seemings' is simply a way of saying that something appears to us under an emotional guise. Second, while it is true that seemings depend both on our personality and on emotional dispositions, in the case of self-evident propositions seemingness is a result of the process of correct understanding, namely something that every rational being, qua rational, can have. If there are different degrees of capacities of understanding, this difference in degrees is also present in perception, e.g. a sommelier has ability of taste that are higher than in a normal wine drinker. Third, seemingness has a valance and, fourth, emotional seemingness are not transparent. Finally, it makes sense to ask why questions concerning seemings.

These rough replies suggest a way of saving one of the best assets of the perceptual model, its account of the immediacy that distinguish emotions from other mental states, such as judgements, and that brings them near to intuitions. If emotions are seemings for self-evident

propositions, then they play a role in self-evident knowledge as intuitions do.

Moreover, if emotions are seemings, emotional entitlement may also be plausible, given the psychological immediacy that is typical of seemings.

5.5 Emotional entitlement and self-evident propositions

In the last chapter we have claimed that intuitions entitle epistemic subjects to hold self-evident moral principles even in the absence of understanding. Epistemic subjects that have intuitions of a self-evident principles can claim to know the principle even if they do not understand it. The thinker may be entitled to make a judgment without having the capacity to think about the states which entitle him to make the judgment. It is the character of intuitions joined with common sense morality that entitle the subject in believing the principle. With Dretske, we have stated that it is the psychological immediacy and irresistibility of some perceptions and of some intuitions that entitles epistemically responsible subjects in holding beliefs. What if emotions have an analogous role, that of conferring to our self-evident beliefs the aura of psychological immediacy and irresistibility that entitles us to hold them?

The plausibility of emotional entitlement is denied by Brady: 'it is by no means obvious that we take the content of our emotional experiences at face value' (Brady 2012). Unlike for the perceptual case, 'it is a mistake to suggest that in normal circumstances we take the representational content of emotions at face value when forming evaluative beliefs' (Brady 2012, 108). Brady argues against perceptualist theories of emotions that if perceptions provide default reasonable beliefs, emotions does not entitle subject to hold beliefs because, unlike perceptions, they do not constitute reasons but require them. On the contrary, for Goldie (2000) and Döring (2007) – and for perceptualists in general – we have reason to take our emotional experiences at face value.

Now, we have affirmed above that conceiving emotions like seemings prevent us from committing to the perceptual model but at the same time permits us to exploit one of its aspects that is relevant for entitlement: the psychological immediacy and irresistibility that entitle us in holding a belief. In the last part of the chapter I will try to advance reasons for the claim that if there is no emotional entitlement for our evaluative judgements, we have such entitlement if these judgements are self-evident.

Emotional seemings that entitle us in holding self-evident propositions seem in fact to be immune from the objection raised by Brady. Being the result of a process of correct understanding, they constitute reasons that an epistemic responsible subject should take the content of emotional experiences at face value.

Notice here that it is one thing to say that people take emotional deliverances at face value, quite another is to say that they should take them at face value. People that are reflective enough could refuse to take their emotional deliverances at face value, but they should take them at face value if those deliverances are the result of the process of understanding self-evident propositions. They are entitled to them by default. This does not happen in the case of emotional deliverances that are not directed toward self-evident principles and in case of the unclear self-evidence of the principle in the current situation. But once it is, the responsible epistemic subject not only has the epistemic right, but also the epistemic duty to hold the belief based on the emotional seeming.

One last feature of emotional knowledge should be considered in this section. We have seen in the last chapter that some of our beliefs have been 'placed in the archive' of common sense morality and that they are reasonable by default in virtue of the language game or the community rules in which we live. The underlying idea was that there are beliefs – in the Arrington's (2002) example that we have considered: 'it is wrong to tell a lie" – that are so easily taken at face value that we do not even know how we can argue for them against skeptics. We have claimed that these principles are self-evident. Analogously, we can claim there are beliefs that we take at face value simply on the basis of the emotion that our language game or the community rules associate to them. If we hear a case of a man who repeatedly betrays his faithful wife or if we hear of a case of sexual harassment in workplace we immediately experience, say, indignation or disgust. In cases like these, the emotional appraisal of the situation precedes the non-emotional appraisal. Even though the emotional experience comes along with our awareness that "betraying one's wife is wrong" or "committing sexual offences is wrong", it is often through the lenses provided by our emotional experience that we see the wrongness of the situation. Thus, emotions are ready and rapid ways of knowing principles that are instantiated in situations even in absence of understanding or when the understanding is not occurrent. As there is an entitlement based on intuitions, so there is an entitlement based on emotions. Also in the emotional case, the subject should be epistemically responsible. As epistemic responsibility in the intuitional case implies the willingness of avoiding foreseeable mistakes, so responsibility in the emotional case implies the willingness of working on my emotional

responses. That has further implications for moral education: one has to strive to acquire the capacity to experience the right emotions.

In the emotional case, as in the intuitional one, it is clear that we are entitled in believing self-evident propositions because they are self-evident. Self-evidence constitutes that 'independent reason' to which Peacocke refers. Also in this case, understanding alone justifies us in believing the proposition. In this case, emotions are a non-justificatory kind of evidence. They do not provide justification, but they draw the attention on the proposition that nonetheless has independent justification.

5.6 Conclusions

Emotions are needed for the model of self-evidence that we have defended so far. Even if self-evident propositions can be known by rational intuition alone and even though they are self-justifying emotions play a crucial role in offering a more comprehensive apprehension – moral understanding. Moral understanding is made possible by the participation of emotions into the process of understanding and by the role that emotions have in moral knowledge under the guise of seemings.

Concluding Remarks

The idea that there is a relationship between intuitions and self-evidence is quite old. In the first chapter I have shown that this is a touchstone of contemporary ethical intuitionism. Although it has its roots in early modern age, and probably before, my reconstruction of this philosophical tradition goes from Sidgwick's *Method of Ethics* up to the present, with Audi, passing thorough the important works of Moore, Prichard and, especially, Ross. It is with these authors that the conception of intuitions, the conception of self-evidence and their relationship have been deeply analyzed and progressively refined. Nonetheless, much more work should be still done in order to develop the notions of self-evidence and intuitions, both in ethics and in epistemology.

In the present work, I have defended four claims.

First, in the first chapter I have offered an analysis of intuitions, of what they are, of what they aim at, distinguishing them from mental states that, apparently disguised as intuitions, are only intuitive, in the sense that they immediately and non-inferentially believe, perceive, desire something. On the contrary, I have argued that intuitions are only those mental states that target self-evident propositions and that referring to intuitions outside these borders is misleading. Moreover, by introducing promising theoretical tools for understanding what the concept of intuition implies, the chapter provides some arguments for explaining why we have reasons to consider intuitions as a *sui generis* kind of mental states. In fact, it is well-known that contemporary theory of intuitions can be divided in two groups: for one of these two groups intuitions are reducible to a kind of beliefs or to dispositions to believe; for the other intuitions are *sui generis* seemings. I suggest that intuitions have a double nature and that they can be at the occurrence beliefs or seemings. Even though intuitions are mainly seemings I also concede that they are beliefs when they are held in the background and when they are taken to be true by default without any occurent episodic seeming.

Second, I have claimed that one way of comprehending what is self-evidence and how intuitions are related to it is by distinguishing between understanding and knowing. Starting from Audi's definition of self-evident proposition for which one is justified in believing a self-evident proposition in virtue of having adequately understood it and that believing the proposition on the basis of that understanding implies knowing it, I argue that understanding and knowing should be kept separately. Understanding can be pursued by drawing internal inferences, by reflecting carefully on the proposition, while knowing is nothing but the successful outcome of the process of understanding when

it is adequate. In this case, we have an intuition, that is a seeming of the truth of the proposition. Moreover, I claim that if an understanding of a self-evident proposition cannot be considered adequate unless it leads to the seeming of the truth of the proposition, namely unless it gives rise to an intuition, it is possible to have intuition of the truth of a self-evident proposition even in the absence of understanding.

This is the *third* claim. We are entitled in holding self-evident propositions, even when understanding is lacking. That is true for self-evident propositions in general but even more for self-evident propositions in ethics. This account for the experience of children and intellectually weak people that, even though they do not have a capacity of adequately understanding self-evident propositions, they have the epistemic right to hold them. Particularly, in chapter four I have argued that we are entitled to hold self-evident propositions on the basis of our intuitions as much as we are entitled to hold perceptual beliefs on the basis of our perceptual experiences. The additional claim here is that as the normal vision conditions entitle us to visual beliefs, so the moral community into which we live, namely common sense morality, entitle us in holding self-evident moral principles, even when understanding is lacking.

The *fourth* claim concerns the relationship between self-evident propositions, intuitions and emotions. Here, I argue that emotions can play a role in the process of understanding a self-evident principle, because emotions might trigger our search for non-emotional reasons through which we justifiedly understand it. Moreover, I argue that, conceived as seemings, emotions can play a role that is parallel to the role play by intuitions in acknowledging the truth of self-evident principles. That is emotions have also a role in moral knowledge. This is not merely a motivational role, but also an epistemic role. Moreover, I argue that emotions entitle us in believing a self-evident principle without that the principle loses its self-evident character.

At the end of this work, there are still unexplored points, that might constitute the starting points for further lines of research. To mention three of them: (1) the relationship between self-evident principles and particular moral judgements; (2) the consequences of adopting a self-evident model of ethics, (an issue that could be called metaethical) on the normative theory ethics that we endorse; (3) The relationship between self-evident moral principles and evaluative properties that are grasped by intuitions or emotions.

To be honest, I am afraid that not all the knots have been untied. In the course of the expositions there are still tensions and, to improperly quote a famous

book of Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, interrupted tracks that haven't been adequately explored. The genesis of this work has indeed been long and hard. I started my PhD-course with a project on the notion of value between Phenomenology and analytical philosophy in the early decades of the Twentieth Century: Brentano, Scheler, Hartmann on one hand; Moore, Ross and R.B. Perry on the other. Nonetheless, in the course of the research my attention has been drawn to a problem that in the original project was only a secondary one, that of intuitions and their role in ethical justification and knowledge. I tried to compare the use of intuitions in Phenomenology and analytical philosophy but I realized, after a while, that the comparison between the two fields was unfruitful, and even more was unsuccessful the attempts of finding a common ground of analysis, and not merely of juxtaposition, between analytical philosophers and those who are called, perhaps improperly, Continental philosophers. Therefore, I decided to restrict the research to the analytical field, where the debate is much more lively and promising. However, my philosophical education was not that of an analytical philosopher and my knowledge of analytical issues and literature was perhaps too naïve for beginning a research of this kind. This is probably neither a justification, nor an excuse for the mistakes, the naiveties and the conceptual obscurities that are present in the inquiry. Responsibility is mine.

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