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BERNARD WILLIAMS'S
REJECTION OF MORALITY

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1. 'Morality' and 'ethics'

Bernard Williams, in his brilliantly stimulating book *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, urges us to turn our backs on 'morality'. 'Morality', he says, grossly distorts our thought about how to live. This is a radical claim, though not as radical as it may first seem. We should reject 'morality', he says, in favour of 'ethics'. Williams's own goal is still to answer Socrates' question: how should one live, and what should one do? Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had done something similar before Williams. Kierkegaard called for 'a teleological suspension of the ethical', but to be replaced by a God-centred way of living.¹ Nietzsche, of whom there are frequent echoes in Williams, urged us to reject 'slave morality' and adopt instead a teleology of balance between the Dionysian and the Apollonian in the human make-up, which was to be achieved by 'a revaluation of all values'.²

There is no settled distinction in ordinary English between the words 'morality' and 'ethics'. Although nowadays one regularly hears public figures refer to 'an ethical and moral issue', implying that there is a difference between the two, we may be pretty sure that they could not tell us what it is.³ Most philosophers use the two words interchangeably, though there is a hint in contemporary use of a difference in scope. 'Morality' has especially to do with standards for

interpersonal behaviour, while ‘ethics’ can be more easily stretched to cover not only morality (in this interpersonal sense) but also prudence (self-interest). But this difference in scope has not really registered in either ordinary and theoretical use, and lexicography shows that the two words have been synonyms from the start. The Latin word *moralis*, the OED tells us, ‘was formed by Cicero as a rendering of the Greek *ethikos*, *mores* being the accepted Latin equivalent of the Greek *ethe*. So Williams is using the two words to mark a distinction very much of his own making, and he leaves us to do no little work to decide quite what that distinction is. In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* he writes of morality and ethics — without inverted commas. I shall write ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’ — with inverted commas — to mean his special sense of the words, and shall drop the inverted commas when I use the words in what I take to be their current ordinary sense.

2. What Williams means by ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’

Williams supplies several somewhat overlapping features of what he had in mind as ‘morality’:

(1) ‘Morality’ is a kind of ethical theory that ‘looks characteristically for considerations that are very general and have as little distinctive content as possible, because it is trying to systematize and because it wants to represent as many reasons as possible as applications of other reasons’.⁴ These very general considerations are, most prominently, ‘obligation’, ‘ought’, ‘right’, and ‘good’, while other ethical traditions have made prominent much more specific ideas, such as ‘cruel’, ‘brutal’, ‘dishonest’, ‘treacherous’, ‘chaste’, ‘kind-hearted’.⁵ The first sort of concepts Williams calls ‘thin’ and the second ‘thick’.

‘Morality’, Williams objects, ‘typically uses the assumption that we probably have too many ethical ideas’, whereas ‘our major problem now is actually that we have ... too few’.⁶

(2) ‘Morality’ assumes that ‘an Archimedean point [can] be found and practical reason, or human interests [can] be shown to involve a determinate ethical outlook’. It thus holds that ethical judgements can be objective.⁷

But, Williams insists, while ‘science has some chance of being more or less what it seems — namely, ‘a systematized theoretical account of how the world really is’ — ethics has no chance.’⁸ In scientific enquiry there can be convergence in belief, where the best

explanation of the convergence is that the belief represents how things are. ‘In the area of the ethical, at least at a high level of generality, there is no such coherent hope.’⁹ There is a difference between the *inside* point of view, the view from within an individual’s beliefs, dispositions, and commitments, and the *outside* point of view, the view, say, from another culture or — a much stronger form — from anyone’s point of view.¹⁰ We can reasonably claim that some of our scientific beliefs represent the world to ‘the maximum degree independent of our perspective and its peculiarities’; they give us ‘a conception of the world that might be arrived at by any investigators’.¹¹ Ethical belief, in contrast, can never, even after all possible reflection, work completely free from ‘the world as it seems peculiarly to us’. We can never entirely transcend the inside view.¹² Nonetheless, there is no good reason to deny that ethical beliefs have minimum truth — that is, truth simply in Carnap’s disquotational sense.¹³ Some ethical beliefs can also count as knowledge.¹⁴ We may reasonably be cognitivists about ethics, but not objectivists.

(3) ‘Morality’ is distinguished by its special use of the notion of ‘obligation’. ‘There is an everyday notion of obligation, as one consideration among others, and it is ethically useful.’¹⁵ But ‘morality’ makes the notion of obligation ubiquitous: it represents ‘every

consideration that goes into a deliberation and yields a particular obligation as being itself a general obligation',¹⁶ and it makes blame its characteristic reaction.¹⁷ It treats obligations as 'inescapable ... what I am obliged to do is what I *must* do ...'.¹⁸

But this, Williams says, is not so. 'There are actions ... that are either more or less than obligations'¹⁹ — for example, heroic or other sorts of fine actions or, on the other side, admirable actions that one would not be blamed for omitting. 'Ethical life itself is important, but ... things other than itself are important.'²⁰ For example, one's key projects and attachments in life are not moral obligations, 'but at the same time [are] seen from within that life as part of what makes life worth living.'²¹ We need to regain our sense of obligation as merely one kind of ethical consideration among others, and doing so 'will help to lead us away from morality's special notion of moral obligation'.²²

(4) 'Morality' distorts the notion of 'voluntariness'. An action is voluntary, on its standard, only if undetermined by an agent's interests, commitments, social roles, desires — undetermined by anything but rational perception. 'Morality' makes people think that ... without its utter voluntariness', there are only external forces determining human action, and that all such action falls outside the ethical.²³

But this overlooks the role of moral emotion in the assessment of agents. Desires are not contrary to obligation — for example, desires central to projects essential to an agent — but are presupposed by it.²⁴ The notion of a will that arises above all emotion and social influences holds out the hope that agents can transcend luck and the natural lotteries of life. ‘But the idea of a value that lies beyond all luck is an illusion.’²⁵

(5) ‘Morality’ works with a narrow notion of practical necessity; what is necessary for an agent to do is largely reduced to moral obligation.²⁶

But practical necessity arises from much more than obligation. It can arise from one’s major projects, commitments, or conceptions of what makes a life worthwhile. One must save one’s child, even though one could instead save two strangers. Practical necessity, ‘even when it is grounded in ethical reasons, does not necessarily signal an obligation’.²⁷ Suppose, for example, that one has promised to visit a friend in hospital and so clearly to have an obligation to do so, but on the way to the hospital one encounters a spontaneous demonstration for a cause to which one is dedicated and one’s presence would help substantially to promote. Though one has no obligation to attend the

demonstration, one might none the less reasonably decide that doing so trumps keeping one's promise.²⁸

With all of these distortions at the heart of 'morality', Williams concludes, 'we would be better off without it'.²⁹

3. Examples of 'moralists'

'The philosopher who has given the purest, deepest, and most thorough representation of morality', Williams tells us, 'is Kant'.³⁰ But in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* it seems that much of modern philosophical ethics is also in his sights. In his Preface he says that 'the idea of rationality embodied in most contemporary moral philosophy' cannot meet the demands that the modern world makes on ethical thought. Some of his complaints about 'morality', he thinks, may also be directed against utilitarianism and contractualism.³¹

In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* he is in two minds about ancient philosophy. He thinks that, although most contemporary moral philosophy cannot meet our demands, 'some extension of ancient thought, greatly modified, might be seen to do so'.³² Socrates' question, how should one live?, at least gave us 'the best place for morality to start'.³³ Aristotle, he believes, comes closest to finding the right path. His *Nicomachean Ethics*, is, Williams thinks, 'the paradigm of an

approach that tries to base ethics on considerations of well-being and a life worth living'.³⁴ Although Aristotle's approach ultimately fails, he was right none the less in placing human interests at the base of ethical thought. What critical reflection is available to us 'will draw on human experience and relate to human interests'.³⁵ And though we can no longer share Aristotle's confidence that we can distinguish true human interests from false and bring the true interests into some kind of harmony, 'no one', Williams admits, 'has yet found a good way of doing without those assumptions'.³⁶ His critique of 'moralists' ends on a muted and uncertain note.

4. A realistic 'ethics'

If we abandon 'morality', as Williams wants, what are we left with? We are left with something much more modest, 'ethics' — without systematic theory, without the dominant role in practical thought, without the strong sort of obligations that transcend desires and natural causation.

'Ethics' is not the creation of philosophers, despite what most of them assume. Most philosophers see their role in ethics in Cartesian terms: deconstruct a society's raw ethics, pass its elements in critical review, reject the faulty ones, add needed abstraction, then reassemble

the pieces into something altogether sounder. What Williams means by ‘ethics’ is a natural growth in a culture or sub-culture. Its growth does not need the help of philosophers, though it is usually subjected to various sorts of challenge. ‘Ethics’ is likely, initially, to employ a high proportion of thick concepts. But the large increase in intercultural contacts in modern times brings changes. And human agents have powers of critical reflection. One example of its operation would be the changes in beliefs and attitudes that lead people to give up using a certain thick concept, an obvious case being the great decline in the use of the term ‘chastity’.³⁷ In abandoning such a concept a person also loses a piece of knowledge; applications of the word ‘chaste’ to states of the world will no longer figure among that person’s stock of minimal truths.³⁸ Once reflection upsets an ethical conviction in this way, neither the decision model (‘the source of ethical conviction [is] a decision to adopt moral principles’ or ways of life), nor the certainty model (‘ethical conviction arises from knowledge’) look to us very helpful.³⁹ We can, however, hope for something else: what Williams calls *confidence*, which is ‘basically a social phenomenon’. ‘It is a social and psychological question what kind of institutions, upbringing, and public discourse’ will hope to foster *confidence*.⁴⁰

In the eight years between the appearance of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* and *Shame and Necessity* Williams's muted and uncertain note in his remarks about Aristotle was replaced by clarity and decisiveness. Williams no longer hankers to salvage something from Aristotle. He has decided that Socrates, and especially Plato and Aristotle are too tainted by morality to be looked to for help,⁴¹ and he turns to a still earlier ethics — a largely non-philosophical ethics implicit in Homer and, later, in the Attic tragedians. There he finally finds the sort of link he has been looking for between ethical demands and a realistic picture of human motivation. There too one finds an integration of the agents' personal perspective and the outside view. Homer and the tragedians represent agents, even the most admirable of agents, as acting not only on reasons, as 'moralists' require, but also on desires, beliefs, and personal aims.⁴² We find a Homeric ethics (to use that term for the ethics discoverable in both Homer and the tragedians) a manner of ethical thought unmarred by the distortions later introduced by over-rationalized 'morality'.

5. Our powers of reflection

Do we? That depends upon how extensive our powers of reflection are. In Williams's writing 'reflection' is much involved and

little explained. He gives only one example of its working: that, now and then, reflection can lead a person to abandon a thick ethical concept (e.g. 'chaste'). But our powers of reflection must be more extensive than this. Given the form of his argument, it is astonishing that Williams does not say more about the extent of our powers of 'reflection'.

Homeric ethics will no doubt deploy a different range of thick concepts than Williams's 'ethics'. The great difference in thin cultural contexts ensures that. But deliberation in both Homeric ethics and Williams's 'ethics' will be conducted much more in terms of thick concepts than it is in most modern ethics. But the distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' can easily mislead. 'Untruthful' and 'cruel' are reassuringly thick. But what about 'just', 'fair', 'unfeeling', 'sympathetic', 'kindly', 'benevolent'? Williams admits that 'just' is one of an important class of concepts that lie between the thick and the thin.⁴³ And, of course, he thinks that an adequate ethics will also deploy, at appropriate times, thin concepts, such as 'obligation', 'good', and 'right', though most often in conclusions reached on the basis of thought conducted largely in thick concepts. But he should also admit that no plausible ethics could be without a concept such as 'fair', and that fairness has centrally to do with equal treatment, which

in turn requires consideration of what sorts of equal treatment are demanded by fairness and what sorts are not. That is, in deploying the notion of fairness we are deploying thin concepts. Deploying the concept of fairness thus naturally engages our powers of reflection, powers that once in operation may unsettle, or even undermine, a thick concept or two. Williams's picture of a stable array of thick ethical concepts, ruffled only very rarely by reflection, and ideally constituting the substance of nearly all ethical thought seems to me a gross oversimplification.

The same is true of virtue terms: 'courageous', 'prudent', 'temperate', and so on. They too are thick concepts, though there is still the problematic case of the virtue of 'justice'. What may seem to us to be ethical dispositions can lead us badly astray. One's apparent compassion can be merely soft-heartedness; one can lend a hand when it would have been better to let the person cope alone. What one takes to be courage can turn out to be a disposition to take needless risks. Time factor may not give one time to assess all the risks. For those reasons, the dispositions that are allied to virtues must be put through critical refinement; agents have to grow in understanding of what the virtues really are. We must learn the right dispositions in the right balance with one another. But the criteria for *right* are likely to involve

some intermediate and thick concepts, and again the picture of thick concepts as largely independent of thick looks greatly oversimplified.

What is more, the sources of our action that Williams particularly stresses — a person's projects, commitments, and conceptions of what makes life worth living — can sorely need refinement. Any fully developed person, he thinks, has 'commitments' or 'ground projects' that the person 'takes seriously at the deepest level as what his life is about',⁴⁴ projects that are 'closely related to his existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning to his life'.⁴⁵ He cannot abandon such projects just because the reports from the utility network indicate that, say, as chance or the actions of others have stacked things, utility would be maximized by his doing so. Williams claims that this would be to ask him to commit a kind of suicide, to abandon himself. It would be to attack 'the value of integrity', as Williams put it in earlier writing.⁴⁶

But what is this supposed value, integrity? Whereas 'integrity' as ordinarily used — to mean something like 'honesty' or 'general uprightness' — does name something valuable, 'integrity', as Williams uses it, in its more literal etymological sense of 'wholeness', does not. Persons often have as their 'ground project', as what their life is about, morally hideous, or merely shabby or shallow, ambitions.

To ask a person whose life is centred on resentment or revenge or vanity to ‘abandon’ himself may be just what he needs. Some persons most need, and all of us to no small degree would benefit from, some well-chosen ‘disintegration’ and ‘reintegration’.⁴⁷ These forms of criticism that our projects and commitments need are clearly not beyond us, and they too must be counted among our reflective powers.

In *Shame and Necessity* Williams alludes often to the figure of Ajax in Sophocles’s play of that name. At the start of the play Ajax, humiliated by the award of Achilles’s armour to the hated Odysseus and not to him, decides to retaliate by killing all the generals of the Greek army. Athena prevents this by making him mad. In his delusion he thinks that he is killing Odysseus and the other generals, while he is slaughtering the army’s flock of sheep. When he recovers his sanity and realizes how absurd he has made himself, he is overcome with shame. He knows that, given his character and this grotesque humiliation, he cannot continue to live the only kind of life that would, for him, be worth living.⁴⁸ I have here lightly paraphrased Williams’s own *précis* of the play, but now, when we come to his interpretation of the play, let me quote him. ‘People do not *have* to think that they could not live in that situation ... But they may sensibly think it if their understanding of their lives and the significance their lives possessed

for other people is such that what they did destroyed the only reason they had for going on.’⁴⁹ Ajax resolves to kill himself, cannot be dissuaded, and throws himself on his sword. ‘This is a form of ethical thought’, Williams observes ‘as far removed as may be from the concerns of obligation’.⁵⁰

So it is. But it is not a form of *respect-worthy* ethical thought unless it has several further features that Williams never mentions. Williams says of Ajax that ‘he has no way of living that anyone he respects would respect’.⁵¹ But this itself is a respect-worthy judgement, even in terms of Homeric ethics, only if Ajax means ‘anyone he *rightly* respects would *rightly* respect’. We *choose* our ethical paradigms, our model of excellence, and we have powers of discrimination between real ones and spurious ones, we can be expected to exercise these powers. Of course, this sort of discrimination is often far from easy, and may often be faulty. None the less we have these powers, fallible though they be, and they should also be counted among our powers of critical reflection.

Any half-way adequate ethics must also have a response to unavoidable conflicts of values or norms. The most common response to these conflicts is to look for a way to attach weights or degrees of importance to the conflicting values or norms, which then allow one to

decide which is the weightier or more important. A. A. Long, in his article ‘Williams on Greek Literature and Philosophy’, points out that in his discussion of Ajax Williams completely omits the fact that other characters in the play, prominent among them his wife, argue powerfully against his decision to kill himself.⁵² ‘In her extremely moving plea, Tecmessa urges Ajax to reconsider’.⁵³ She begs him to remember that he will be highly vulnerable, that he will shamefully abandon his needy old parents, that he will condemn his young son to a highly dangerous orphaned future.⁵⁴

What I wish especially to draw attention to is Sophocles’ view of this undeniable conflict of values. Sometimes one can, without too much difficulty, find a more detached perspective from which to compare conflicting values, and sometimes, indeed not infrequently, one cannot. This search for a more detached viewpoint will often be a search for more general — less thick — ethical ideas. Often, but not always. But that it is sometimes the case that resolution of conflicts is enough to show that Homeric ethics too will entirely naturally lead to a much greater mix of thick and thin than Williams admits.

Ajax, as pictured by Sophocles, feels torn by this conflict. At first he is unmoved, scoffing at Tecmessa for thinking that she could alter his character at this late stage in his life. But then he starts to pity

his family, and he changes his mind. Not only will he not kill himself, but he is also becoming detached enough for his intense hatred of Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Menelans — and of the Greek generals as a whole — to subside. ‘Must we not learn ... self-discipline?,’ he asks, and answers ‘I think we must. I now know this, that while I hate my enemy I must remember that the time may come when he will be my friend.’⁵⁵

When we next see Ajax, he is, despite his changing mind, found preparing his suicide. No explanation is offered. It is just that in the end his pity has not prevailed over his sense of dignity; his character is indeed too fixed. And his is a character that can no longer fit into the world; even the Gods will not let him act. Ajax’s change of mind does not come about because he has weighed the competing values and determined the weightiest; their relative weight is irrelevant to him. His hatred has returned in full force. ‘The stern unresting Furies, see this death and know that the sons of Athens brought it on me: and wipe them utterly out with deaths as vile as their vile selves.’⁵⁶ ‘So dies a willful man’; ‘that stubborn soul was doomed’, the chorus resignedly opines.⁵⁷

His death occurs a little over half-way through the play. It is not the play’s climax. Its climax is the resolution of the wrangling over his

burial. Teucer, Ajax's brother, prepares the burial. Menelans and Agamemnon arrive, and spewing hatred of Ajax as intense as was his earlier of them, forbid the burial. Teucer will not back down. Nor will Menelans and Agamemnon. There is some right on each side, as the chorus makes clear, but that just inflames their passions all the more. The disputants are big-souled, hot-headed, and narrow minded. Then Odysseus appears on the scene and, though he admits his earlier hatred of Ajax, tries to mediate. 'He was the bitterest enemy I had; and yet ... I could not bring myself to grudge him honour, or refuse to admit he was the bravest man I ever saw ... It is against all justice for you to treat him with contempt ... Even if you hate him, it is against all justice ...' Agamemnon is incredulous; 'Are you mad?', he asks Odysseus; 'Your enemy, and dead, and you revere him?'⁵⁸ 'Yes', Odysseus replies; 'his goodness outweighs his enmity by far.'⁵⁹ He warns Agamemnon against 'obstinate intolerance'.⁶⁰ Teucer proceeds to bury Ajax.

Although Ajax, and his like, can no longer fit into the world, death is a loss. It is a loss for the reasons that Odysseus gives. With Ajax's death we lose his unequalled capacity for heroic action. We cannot pick and choose: Ajax's virtues are not independent of his vices. And without big-souled, hot-headed, narrow minded heroes like

Ajax, Agamemnon, and Menelans we should also lose something. Their primary concern is self-referential — namely, the calls on them and how they rise to them. Against this Odysseus presses an other-referential concern: justice. Tecmessa presses another such concern: pity for his wife, parents, and son.

By ignoring the second half of the play, Williams ignores the more complex picture of ethics that Sophocles offers us. Ajax's suicide is not the ethical act that Williams portrays it as. It is not even an ethical act on Williams's conception of 'ethics'. Ajax's inability to rise above his stubbornness, despite the greatness of which it is a part, is the very source of his tragedy. Feelings of pity and shame and a sense of what makes a life worth living are all powerful determinants of action. But sometimes we must rise above certain of our passions and consider middle to high level matters such as justice. We can, and must, be prepared to bring critical reflection to bear on our commitments and projects and sense of importance. We must step back to a more detached viewpoint. Of course, this makes ethical judgement all the more complicated. It is not a matter simply of passionate conviction. The chorus has the last word in the play: 'Many are the things that man seeing must understand'.⁶¹ He must understand that one can fully meet

the demands of justice and benevolence and still have a piercing sense of loss.

6. Aristotelian and Neo-Aristotelian ethics

In taking the measure of our powers of reflection, let us look again at Williams's judgement of Aristotle. Aristotle was right, he thinks, to place human interests at the base of ethical thought. Aristotle draws his ethics from his teleological metaphysics. He believes that everything has its own function or task, the performance of which is its final end. So he sets off on a search for the task or end of human beings. It is not simply life, he says, because plants have that too; nor is it sentience, because animals have that. It is, rather, rational activity — either pure rationality — divorced from everyday life, the contemplation of eternal truths — or practical rationality.

Williams is right, I should say: we can no longer take Aristotle's teleological metaphysics seriously. But can we not jettison it, yet retain Aristotle's conception of the ideal human life? The exercise of rationality, however, is not the *content* of the ideal life. There are many other activities besides the exercise of rationality that are valuable in themselves: enjoying oneself, accomplishing things, deep personal relations, and so on. And it is not that one of them is the single peak of

human existence either; no one of them on its own would do. The exercise of rationality merely determines what the ideal life is. It is, Aristotle thinks, a life containing the right balance of virtues. Nor, I would add, is there a *single* right balance. The right balance is likely to vary from person to person. We should be pluralists not only about values themselves but also about valuable forms of life.

But we can amend Aristotle along these lines too, and get a form of (let us call it) neo-Aristotelianism. We can retain Aristotle's objectivism; the identification of the good-making features of human life, we may say, can be right or wrong, and fully rational persons will agree on what they are. Williams, though, rejects this sort of neo-Aristotelianism as well. The thesis that there are real human interests that all rational persons can agree on, he says, 'needs to be provided with a theory of error', as does any thesis about how the world is.⁶² We in modern times can no longer believe that, with ethics, it is possible. 'It is hard [for us now] to believe that an account of human nature — if not already an ethical view itself — will adequately determine one kind of ethical life as against others.'⁶³ 'Other cultural and personal aspirations' have as good a claim to represent human flourishing.⁶⁴ 'The agents' perspective is only one of many that are equally compatible with human nature'.⁶⁵

At this critical point in his argument, Williams merely points to the variety of incompatible ethical beliefs we find in the modern world and asserts that rational criticism will not remove it. But if we were to compile lists in various cultures of the features that make an individual life good simply for the person who lives it, one would, I suspect, find a fair measure of agreement. One might find considerable agreement on prudential values though more, and more persistent, disagreement on moral standards. Williams may be expecting ethics to be a good deal more homogenous than it is; he may expect the prudential and the normative domains to be more alike than they are. Critical reflection may have stronger powers in the domain of prudence. If at least some prudential values turn out to be objective, then the inferential paths running from prudential values to moral norms become central to ethics. These possible inferential paths need a discussion of their own.

NOTES

¹ See esp. his *Fear and Trembling*.

² See esp. his *Genealogy of Morals* and *Birth of Tragedy*.

³ One among many examples: Alice Walker, in *The Times*, London, 6 November 08, p. 35. ‘Though I understand that Mr. Obama wishes to show himself as “strong” ... this is problematic on ethical, moral, and practical levels.

⁴ *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, London: Fontana, 1985 (hereafter *ELP*); pp. 116-17.

⁵ See Williams, ‘Truth in Ethics’, in Brad Hooker (ed.), *Truth in Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 25-6.

⁶ *ELP*, p. 117.

⁷ *ELP*, p. 132.

⁸ *ELP*, p. 135.

⁹ *ELP*, pp. 136, 151-2.

¹⁰ *ELP*, p. 51.

¹¹ *ELP*, pp. 138-9.

¹² *ELP*, p. 139.

¹³ *ELP*, pp. 143-5; ‘Truth in Ethics’, pp. 26-7.

¹⁴ *ELP*, pp. 147-55; ‘Truth in Ethics’, p. 27.

¹⁵ *ELP*, p. 174.

¹⁶ *ELP*, p. 175.

¹⁷ *ELP*, p. 177.

¹⁸ *ELP*, p. 178.

¹⁹ *ELP*, p. 179.

²⁰ *ELP*, p. 184.

²¹ *ELP*, p. 184.

²² *ELP*, p. 182. Four years earlier than *ELP*, in writing about the ethical thought of the ancient Greeks, Williams expressed substantially the same doubt about ‘morality’: ‘... though we have used the word “moral” quite often for the sake of convenience — this system of ethics [i.e. the ethical thought of the Greeks] basically lacks the concept of *morality* altogether, in the sense of a class of reasons or demands which are vitally different from other kinds of reason or demand.’ In Moses Finley (ed.), *The Legacy of Greece*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

²³ *ELP*, p. 196.

²⁴ *ELP*, p. 189.

²⁵ *ELP*, p. 196.

²⁶ *ELP*, pp. 187-91.

²⁷ *ELP*, p. 188.

²⁸ *ELP*, p. 180.

²⁹ *ELP*, p. 174.

³⁰ *ELP*, p. 174.

³¹ *ELP*, pp. 74-92, 107-10, 118-19, 184.

³² *ELP*, Preface.

³³ *ELP*, p. 4.

³⁴ *ELP*, p. 34.

³⁵ *ELP*, pp. 117-18, 152.

³⁶ *ELP*, p. 53.

³⁷ 'Truth in Ethics', p. 30.

³⁸ 'Truth in Ethics', p. 29-30.

³⁹ *ELP*, p. 169.

⁴⁰ *ELP*, p. 170.

⁴¹ *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, (hereafter S&N), pp. 42-6, 108-118, 154-67.

⁴² *S&N*, p. 33.

⁴³ ‘Truth in Ethics’, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Bernard Williams, ‘A Critique of Utilitarianism’, in J. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 116.

⁴⁵ Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Williams, ‘A Critique of Utilitarianism.’

⁴⁷ I borrow this paragraph, with small changes, from an old note in my book *Well-Being*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 352 n. 26.

⁴⁸ *S&N*, pp. 72-4.

⁴⁹ *S&N*, p. 74.

⁵⁰ *S&N*, p. 74.

⁵¹ *S&N*, p. 85.

⁵² A. A. Long, 'Williams on Greek Literature and Philosophy', in Alan Thomas (ed.), *Bernard Williams*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 171-3.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 172.

⁵⁵ Sophocles, *Ajax*, in Sophocles, *Electra and Other Plays*, trans. E. F. Wetling, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 41. (ll. 690-ish). Also see Long's interpretation, *op. cit.* pp. 170-3.

⁵⁶ Sophocles, *op. cit.*, p. 46 (ll. 350-ish)

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 49 (ll. 910-ish)

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 64 (l. 1345-ish)

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 64 (l. 1355-ish)

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 65 (l. 1360-ish)

⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 67 (l. 1418-ish)

⁶² *ELP*, p. 43.

⁶³ *ELP*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ *ELP*, p. 52.

⁶⁵ *ELP*, p. 52.

