THE FUTURE-PERSON STANDPOINT

BY

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> The more the separateness and differentness
> of other people is realised, and the fact seen that
> another man has needs and wishes as demanding
> as one's own, the harder it becomes to
> treat a person as a thing[*]

The following, I take it, is an exceedingly unpromising form of moral argument:

In desperate circumstances B@ [to be pronounced 'the broken world'], X would be right;

Therefore X is right.

It's unpromising, obviously, because the argument says nothing about why we should care what *would* be right *if* B@ obtained, if B@ doesn't obtain. A second form of moral argument is little better:

In desperate circumstances B@, X would be right;

B@ is possible;

Therefore X is right.

[*] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Goodness* (London: Routledge, 1970), 66.

This argument is unpromising because the premises only imply that X is *possibly* right. (Though perhaps, if B@ is possible, the best response to these premises is not to infer this conclusion, but to try and seal off B@'s possibility.) A parallel criticism holes a third kind of bad argument:

In desperate circumstances B@, X would be right;

B@ is future;

Therefore X is right.

Here the premises seem to imply only the conclusion that X *will be* right. (Though perhaps, if B@ is desperate, the most sensible response to these premises is not to infer this conclusion, but to try and avert B@ from being future.)

I'm afraid I suspect arguments of these three unpromising forms do, in practice, influence us more than they should. That can be the rhetorical or emotional effect on us of watching too many disaster movies, or of contemplating too many doomsday scenarios. It may perhaps also be the effect of thinking about too many far-fetched philosophical examples, quite a lot of which seem—in practice at least—to be deployed to smuggle past us unpromising arguments of these or similar forms.[1]

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[1] In Anscombe's famous words: "the point of considering hypothetical situations, perhaps very improbable ones, *seems to* be *to* elicit from yourself or someone else a hypothetical decision to do something of a bad kind. I don't doubt this has the effect of predisposing people—who will never get into the situations for which they have made hypothetical choices—to consent to similar bad actions, or to praise and flatter those who do them, so long as their crowd does so too, when the desperate circumstances imagined don't hold at all." G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958), 13.

Central to Tim Mulgan's *Ethics for a Broken World* are two forms of argument which (you'll be relieved to hear) I don't think are any of the above.[2] One is this:

In desperate circumstances B@, X would be right;

but X looks *obviously* wrong to us, or to most of us (suppose e.g. X is one of the survival lottery arrangements that Mulgan describes at EBW 10-11);

So maybe we should consider the possibility that our objections to X are less absolute than we take them to be.

And the other is this:

In affluent circumstances A@ [the affluent world], X looks *obviously* right to us;

but X would be wrong in desperate circumstances B@;

So maybe we should consider the possibility that our acceptance of X in A@ is less defensible than we take it to be.

As Mulgan himself begins by (in effect) telling us, one guiding thought behind both these arguments is a thought about *contingency*, parochialism. As Harold Macmillan famously put it, we've never had it so good: we rich westerners occupy—and it is one of the great merits of Mulgan's book to remind us of this fact so forcefully—a highly unusual and no doubt strictly temporary position in history, the position of affluence. Our perspective is, historically speaking, a most unusual perspective. What reason is there to expect it not to be also a *warping* perspective? What might

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[2] T. Mulgan, *Ethics for a Broken World: Imagining Philosophy After Catastrophe* (Montreal & Kingston-Itacha: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011). Henceforth EBW.

political and moral philosophy look like, if we tried to get free of the distortions of that perspective? If we tried, say, to adopt the perspective of a broken world's inhabitants instead, and think about how moral assumptions that seem entirely natural to us might strike them?

This line of thought suggests that either or both of two interesting general theses about moral argument may also structure Mulgan's project in EBW—two master-theses, as I shall rather grandiloquently call them. The first master-thesis is the less ambitious of the two. It has a rather contractualist air. We may hear echoes in it of both Rawls and Scanlon, not to mention echoes of the Golden Rule:

> MT1 For an arrangement to be justified, it must be justifiable to the person who does worst out of it.

The second and more ambitious master-thesis is a ringing denial of parochialism:

> MT2 For an arrangement to be justified, it must be absolutely justifiable—justifiable irrespective of any kind of contingency (such as the contingent circumstances of our own affluent society).

One interesting way to take MT1 is to take the 'arrangements' of which it (with studied vagueness) speaks as being dispositions. So understood, MT1 gives us a framework within which to address the question of how the virtues are to be justified. For justice, say, or courage to be a virtue, it must be true that justice or courage makes sense not only for those who benefit from justice and courage, but even for the person who does worst out of it, or in the situation in which we in general do worst—or more broadly in situations where humans do very badly.

One reason why it would be interesting to pursue this line is because it gets us thinking about dystopias, a very interesting moral topic indeed. Take the *Melancholia* dystopia, the situation in which everyone is depressed and a collision with a rogue planet is about to incinerate all terrestrial life. Do the virtues, as traditionally conceived, make sense there?

Or take the *Never Let Me Go* dystopia, the situation in which you and your friends turn out to have been cloned to provide non-cloned members of society at large with a source of donor-organs. Do the traditional virtues make sense there?

Or the *Hunger Games* or *1984* or *Brazil* or *Matrix* or (no fictionalising italics, alas) 1930s-Germany dystopias: same question. (And so on for various dystopias.)

In all these cases, as it happens, I think the answer is yes: despite everything that is so horribly lost in these various awful cases, the traditional virtues do make sense even in these scenarios, simply because living according to the virtues goes on being the best way to live *no matter what may come*. The reason why this is so, or part of it, is that the virtues are not means to a further end called flourishing: if they were, then in these dystopias, where by definition flourishing of a further-end sort is unattainable, the virtues could not possibly achieve their end. Rather, living according to the virtues, even in situations where misery or annihiliation is inevitable, is *itself* a fulfilment of flourishing; only living according to the virtues has that particular shine of genuine admirability or beauty that Aristotle calls *to kalon*. The striking thing about the virtues on the traditional lists is that it is they and things like them, and only such things, that pass the test that is set by thinking about such awful dystopias. That, of course, is why these are the *virtues*.

This line of argument about the virtues is an interesting one and a venerable one, but it is not the main thing I want to pursue here. What I most want to talk about is, as my title suggests, a different line of thought suggested by MT1. This has to do with what, as a small kind of homage to Stephen Darwall, I'll call *the future-person standpoint*. I turn to this now.

Take MT1 to be about our present political and moral arrangement: the institutional, economic, social, and personal set-up of our society. And take the future people of B@ to be, collectively, the people who do (will do) worst out of that arrangement. Then the basic form of Mulgan's critique of our present arrangement is that it is not justifiable to the imaginable B@ people. So insofar as our present arrangement has the predictable consequence of bringing those B@ people—and B@ itself—into actual existence, it is not justifiable at all.

This, I think, is a very promising form of argument. Very plausibly we might make it a quite general necessary condition of the acceptability of any political or moral proposal, that it should be justifiable to whoever is least benefited/ most harmed by it. Informally, the gist of this line of argument is given by rhetorical questions like 'If we don't look after the world we pass on to our descendants, how could we look them in the eye if we met them?' In a very different application, something like this argument is stated, to the king in disguise the night before Agincourt, by the pessimistic soldier Williams in *Henry V* Act 4 Sc.1:

> But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all 'We died at such a place;' some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in a battle; for how can they charitably dispose of any thing, when blood is their argument?

> Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that
> led them to it.

Williams is concerned too about the harrowing prospect of dying at the king's behest in a state of mortal sin—and this is the side of his argument that the disguised Henry himself chooses to take up, possibly because it is the easiest bit to deal with, in a long and highly legalistic response that is bound to strike the reader as, in more than one sense, windy. But it is also at least part of what Williams is getting at here that it is the PBI who are at the sharp end of Henry's wars, so that if those wars are to be justified at all, they must be justified first to the foot-soldiers. (So far as I recall, neither Henry nor Williams takes any account of the French civilians, who are, *sans doute*, even more at the sharp end. Nor come to that do any of the French warriors.)

As for MT2, the prospects for this look less good at first sight than they do for MT1. 'Justifiable irrespective of *any* kind of contingency' is a vertigo-inducing phrase, and it sets a tall order. But MT2 emerges naturally enough from things that Mulgan either actually says or clearly implies. As above, the problem with the kind of justifiability that appeals to us in our affluence is that our affluence is such a historically unusual perspective. No doubt it is too much to hope that we might actually get an account of justifiability that is *completely* free of *every* kind of irrelevant contingency. Still, such an account is not an unreasonable target or ideal. To dismiss MT2 out of hand with the usual glib schtick about 'the impossibility of a view from nowhere' is just boring standard-issue academic relativism.

Looking in a slightly different direction, it may seem tempting to rephrase MT2's talk about 'absolute justifiability' in a way that moves MT2 towards MT1: as justifiability to anyone, hence justifiability even to the person who does worst under whatever arrangement is to be justified. I won't go in that direction here,

for what I take to be a good reason. The reason is that as they stand, MT1 and MT2 usefully pick out different aspects of the task of justification: its *audience* (MT1), and its *conditions* (MT2). In what follows I would like to keep these aspects apart from each other.

A different line of argument begins from what is sometimes called 'the idiot's veto objection.' MT1, recall, says that an arrangement is not justified unless it is 'justifiable to the person who does worst out of it.' But suppose that under some otherwise highly attractive arrangement, the least-benefited person is offered a cogent and convincing justification for it, which he is not impressed by. According to MT1, we might then say, the arrangement, no matter how attractive, and no matter how cogent the justification, can't be justified; for its chief victim refuses to count it as justified. MT1 will then have the unappealing consequence that it takes the side of the obstinate and stupid against arrangements that, though inconvenient for them, are clearly best overall. MT1, it seems, gives a veto to idiots, or a charter to dogs in the manger.

This can be countered in a way familiar from discussions of Scanlon's famous clause about *reasonable* rejection.[3] According to this counter, the question is not whether the person least-benefited *does* reject the attractive arrangement. It is whether he *can reasonably* reject it: whether he is *entitled* to say that the justification he has been offered is inadequate.

The trouble with this counter (it is also fairly standard to say) is that now all the questions that we started off hoping to answer using Scanlon's formula, or the present formula, reappear as questions about what rejections are *reasonable*, or about what

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[3] T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Others* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1998).

justifications *ought to be* accepted. The formulae promised to give us some informative and useful grip on the normative. But we have no account, so far, of the nature of the reasonable, or of what ought to be accepted. And to give an account of either seems pretty well to start from scratch on the task of building an account of the normative. So it seems that the earlier promise of the reasonable-rejection formula, or of the present justifiable-to-the-worst-off formula, now turns out to be illusory, and that being informative about the normative is no closer now than it ever was. In the end—so runs this line of response—MT1 leads us no less into hopeless vertigo than MT2 does.

I have already criticised certain familiar responses to MT2 as giving up too easily, and I think the same criticism applies to the present line of response to MT1. That this line of response goes wrong *somewhere* should be clear from the fact that it ends up in an obviously wrong place. For it ends up saying that the trouble with Scanlon's reasonable-rejection formula, or with the present formula MT1 about justifiability, is that it has no account of what counts as reasonable, or as a justification that ought to be accepted. But this is an unfair demand. There is no ground at all to expect either formula, in and of itself, to provide any such account. (This is one reason why so much of Scanlon's book is, as students reading it often complain, 'about other things': that is, it is not about Scanlon attempting to spin an account of what rejections are reasonable out of the mere idea of reasonable rejection. He doesn't do that for the good reason that he sees that it can't be done.)

What is worth keeping hold of in MT1—and no doubt in Scanlon's formula too—is something different. It is not that either of these formulae gives an *a priori* handle on the notion of 'the reasonable' or 'the justifiable.' Very differently from that, the main point of MT1 is to set *a condition of second-personality* on moral

and political justification. To justify some arrangement is not a disengaged exercise in *a priori* cerebration that I might as well conduct all on my own. For some 'you' who is affected by that arrangement and some 'me' who is the defender of the arrangement, my task is to use whatever resources I have in the way of an account of what is reasonable and why, not to demonstrate the justifiability of the arrangement in the abstract, but to justify it to *you.*

What difference does it make to apply this condition of second-personality to political justification? As Stephen Darwall has brought out in his wonderful recent book *The Second-Person Standpoint*,⁴ it makes all sorts of differences to see our political, moral, and other public decisions, not just as decisions of a consequentialist sort to promote or honour the impersonal good or goods, nor again just as decisions of a non-consequentialist sort numbly 'to do our duty' against the vague sepia background of The World In General, but also as needing to be backed by justifications that are addressed, second-personally, to particular other people.

Here is a trivial example of the kinds of difference second-personality can make to moral/ political discourse. (At least at outset, Darwall himself motivates much of his discussion by reference to a different trivial example—the difference between standing on a stranger's foot accidentally, and standing on the foot as it were *at* the stranger, as an insult or a message directed to the stranger as a person.) Compare these three scenes, common enough in the life of a humble long-distance railway traveller like myself:

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⁴ Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint. Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2006).

1. You're alone in a railway carriage. It's too hot. The window-blind on the sunny side of the coach could be drawn down to put the interior of the carriage into the shade. Since pulling the blind down will make things better, you pull it down.

2. You're with other people in a railway carriage. It's too hot. The blind on the sunny side of the coach could be drawn down to put the interior of the carriage into the shade. Since pulling the blind down will make things better, you pull it down.

3. You're with other people in a railway carriage. It's too hot. The blind on the sunny side of the coach could be drawn down to put the interior of the carriage into the shade. You point this out to the other passengers, and agree with them that pulling the blind down will make things better. So you pull it down.

The key thing is that in Scenario 2 *you don't ask the other passengers*. Disregarding what they might have to say about it, you just pull the blind down 'because that will make things better.' As I've set up Scenario 2, your action will indeed 'make things better.' But that's not enough to make your action all right. The other passengers in Scenario 2 have a legitimate ground of complaint against you, namely that *you've acted as if they didn't exist.* You decided on and performed an action which affected every person in the carriage as if you were the only person there, and hence the only one who could, or had the right to, decide on and perform such actions. Your action is criticisable on this interestingly second-personal ground: because it evinces a lack of respect for them.

The example is, as I say, trivial, and exceptions or counter-examples to or complications of the moral I want to draw from it are readily imaginable. One type: on occasion I've seen people

take unilateral action with railway-carriage window-blinds, and been, on balance, simply grateful to them for it. In trivial cases like this, one doesn't always *care* if one is simply disregarded. Another type: I've certainly seen people take unilateral action against loud muzak in a bar and been *very* grateful—though this latter case is complicated by the fact that disconnecting the wires to the speakers is likely to be a furtive act. And a third type: another thing that unfortunately happens on public transport sometimes is racist ranting. (There is Youtube footage of one well-known recent case of this in London which led to a prosecution.) In a less well-known case that I witnessed myself, it was striking how one person took it on himself to tell the racist ranter to shut up. Interestingly, the ranter's response to his challenger was 'And who might you be?'[5]—in other words, 'What is your public authority to tell me to shut up?.' Equally interestingly, the other passengers, including me, cheered the challenger for what he had taken it on himself to do—that is to say, we *gave* him a sort of public authority. Effectively, he became the spokesman for us other passengers by *ex post acto* acclamation. That shows that second-personality in public decision-making can often come in by assumption; it is not always a matter of explicit *ante-rem* deliberation. But it doesn't undermine my claim that second-personality is key to public deliberation (and the further claim that I would also want to make—that therefore, second-personality is key to political legitimacy and authority); if anything, the opposite is true.

I hope none of these complications distract us from the valuable point that I think my trivial little example makes, which is that when non-trivial political, moral, or otherwise public actions fail to be appropriately second-personal, this can be a *deep* failing in those actions. In many, perhaps most, significant public

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[5] That at any rate—to quote Alan Bennett—was the gist of his response.

actions, it is simply *wrong* to act as if it were 'just the world and me;' as if there were nothing to consider except my own agency on the world, and the impact on the overall goodness of states of affairs that my agency can bring about—as if I were, as Bernard Williams once famously put it, simply "the janitor of the impersonal utility system."[6] What is missing from such pictures of (much or most) public action is the important place in generating it of public or shared deliberation, the consultation of others based on the recognition that the decisions I am proposing to take are not just *my* decisions but *our* decisions. They are decisions in which those others have just as much stake and say as I do, and on which they have an equal right to my own to be recognised as deliberators.

Here now are two interesting misunderstandings of this picture of shared deliberation, and one interestingly correct understanding of it. First, the picture is misunderstood if it is taken as simply registering an instrumental claim rather than a constitutive one. It isn't just that we should consult others on public decisions because, if we don't, they will protest that they have a right to be consulted, and their protests will lead to inefficiency. Rather, the point is simply that they *do* have a right to be consulted. Hence if I make a choice not to consult them, or to disregard what they say when consulted, usually I am not incurring a cost that can be offset in the familiar utilitarian-calculus way against the possible benefits that it generates, e.g. the avoidance of dog-in-the-manger or idiot's-veto problems. It is—usually—more like there is something wrong in the whole way I frame my choosing. The question of the costs and benefits arising from a public choice only comes up once we have already acknowledged that we need to make the choice together: that we

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[6] B.A.O. Williams, *A critique of Utilitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p.118.

need to be dialogical, second-personal, in our approach to our public decision-problem. Failing to see this is going wrong all right, both morally and rationally. But it is not the same kind of going wrong as going wrong in our cost-benefit analysis.

This does not mean—as a second misunderstanding has it—that a commitment to second-personality in public decision-making has to be *absolute*, in the sense that I can never ever refuse to go on trying to deliberate together with someone else because my interlocutor, the other person, is being manifestly unreasonable. *Of course* I can do that. (So can my interlocutor, if *I* am being manifestly unreasonable.) But it does mean that such refusals should not be parsed as utility-based. My reason for refusing to go on deliberating together with this particular idiot or that particular dog-in-the-manger is not that my interlocutor's unreasonableness is a threat to utility. Rather, the reason is simply my interlocutor's unreasonableness. (After all, that unreasonableness could be objectionable even if it was obviously no threat whatever to utility.) Once again the point is constitutive, not instrumental.

Finally, then, the interestingly correct understanding of this picture of shared deliberation is this: it is non-utilitarian and non-maximising. Certainly such deliberation will aim for optimality in *some* respects, in particular those identified by MT2: as far as possible it will try to throw off every kind of irrelevant contingency or appeal to special interests, and will insist on repeating and repeating the challenge, to all those involved as deliberators, that they should keep inspecting their own motives and intuitions, to make sure that these are not polluted by what Iris Murdoch beautifully calls 'the fat relentless ego,' by special pleading or other forms of covert self-interest. Still, the deliberation will not try to bring about that mythical thing 'the best possible state(s) of affairs.' The reason why not is obvious

from what I've just said: *even if* our shared public deliberation is entirely cost-benefit in form once it begins (a condition which is highly unlikely to be satisfied in practice), still there are key non-utilitarian conditions about respecting our interlocutors as interlocutors which need to be in place before our deliberation can so much as begin.

Another way to put this is to go back to the railway carriage, and see that the right thing to do about the window-blinds is not necessarily what—as the usual highly misleading phrase has it—'is optimal.' Maybe it would 'be best' if we cooled and darkened the carriage by putting the blinds down. But that lady over there tells us, when asked, that she is working on her tan; or that gent in the other corner tells us, when consulted, that he is a bird-watcher hoping to see a hoopoe in the trackside undergrowth. *Despite* the fact that their contributions do not help to get us to what is clearly the optimal solution, in fact directly block it, we had reason to include them in our deliberations, simply because they're passengers too with the same rights as all the other passengers. And now that we have consulted them, we have reason to listen to and try to accommodate what they've said, even if on balance we rather regret their contributions. Despite the heat and the glare, they don't want the blinds down, and they have good reasons for this preference—reasons that we may not share, but nonetheless find intelligible enough as *their* reasons. It is not 'best' that we all sit here in the heat with the blinds up. But there are cases—not *all* cases are like this, but *significantly many* are—where getting a solution that everyone accepts is more important than getting 'what's best.'

It is tempting, but it is a distortion, to insist that what this must really mean is just that we have changed our conception of the best. We can equally say that, for any one of us, his/ her conception of what's best has undergone no change whatever,

but that the point is that what we should collectively do does not depend on any individual's conception of the best, but on the result of our shared deliberation.

Shared deliberation of the kind that I've described is genuinely epistemically humble, genuinely open to the thought 'Well, I may think, after the most careful and intelligent reflection that I can manage, that *this* is obviously right; but these other people think that it's *not* obviously right, or perhaps even obviously *not* right, and they're no less careful and intelligent than I am. So I must be at least open to the possibility that I am wrong, or have missed something important.' This epistemic humility makes us dependent, in our shared deliberations, on those we share them with, on our interlocutors. It also makes us vulnerable to the danger of falling well short of what are, or would otherwise be, optimal outcomes because of its insistence on respecting all those involved. But that, in my view, is not only not a decisive objection to such deliberation. It's not an objection at all.

Suppose I am right to think that this line of argument that I've sketched out is a fair extrapolation from what Mulgan actually says. (It certainly isn't a careful or scholarly exposition of his text *ad litteram*, and I don't claim it is. Mulgan is his own best expositor, and my aim here is not to be a faithful expositor of his text but to be at least slightly interesting.) Then the key charge that EBW brings against many of our current assumptions and arrangements is not just the familiar charge that they are unjustifiable (though I think it is pretty clear that Mulgan thinks that too). Rather, the key charge in EBW is the less obvious point that we get by applying MT1 to the case of B@. It is the charge that these arrangements could not be justifiable to the group who, on certain plausible assumptions, will be the group most gravely disadvantaged by them: the inhabitants of B@. (Whoever these inhabitants may be. I am aware of the supposed problems raised

elsewhere by Parfit and indeed by Mulgan himself about 'person-affecting choices,' but to be honest I am unimpressed by these problems. All they seem to me to show is that we can't define 'harm to x' as 'making x worse off than x would otherwise be.') And this fact can be made most apparent by looking at our arrangements as Mulgan looks at them in EBW: from B@'s inhabitants' perspective. From that standpoint much of what we do in our society, as Mulgan repeatedly brings out, seems *just absurd:* motor racing, for example. And are we well-placed to argue back, dog-in-the-manger style, that our choices may not be maximising, but they are at any rate our choices, and that after all, as above, an acceptable public policy can be sub-optimal? We are not. The permission that we derived above to do *less than the optimal* in public policy is not a permission to do *whatever the hell we like*–where 'whatever the hell we like' seems an unhappily apt description of far too many of our own society's arrangements. In any case we are subject, as before, to MT2's stringent requirement to place everything we want to justify to others under the harsh spotlight of the absolute demand that *every* kind of bias and contingency be stripped away from our justifications.

This requirement is another factor, alongside the strange perspective of B@, that generates a kind of Martianism in Mulgan's approach. Martianism, the deliberate adoption of an amazed outsider's view on human arrangements, is another theme that we could fruitfully pursue through his book, and indeed through many other books and articles. Martianism in western philosophy goes back at least to Heracleitus' weirdly estranged mode of observation of his fellow men and their ways. (In western literature it goes back even further: there is one kind of Martianism in the four-legs-two-legs-three-legs riddle that the Sphinx sets Oedipus, and another kind in Sophocles' famous line "Many are wonders, but nothing more wonderful than Man" (Πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει, *Antigone*

332).) Martianism is of course a central weapon in Socrates' and Plato's philosophical panoplies, in Hobbes', Descartes', Voltaire's, Paine's, and Bentham's, and today in a whole army of writers (especially the utilitarian ones) on applied ethics; the great opponents of Martianism are Aristotle in ancient Greek philosophy, John Locke, Thomas Reid, Edmund Burke, and John Stuart Mill in the Enlightenment, Heidegger and Wittgenstein in the twentieth century, conservatives like John Cottingham, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Rai Gaita and Roger Scruton in the twenty-first.

It is a striking achievement of Mulgan's book to have found out what so far as I know is a genuinely new variation on this ancient theme of Martianism. However, looking at the arrangements that he wants to criticise from the Martian perspective of B@ is not, as it is in some other authors, a mere rhetorical or heuristic device to bring home to us emotionally the conclusions for which Mulgan wants to argue anyway. On the contrary, this deployment of the second-person standpoint is an autonomous mode of argument in ethics in its own right, quite distinct from other modes of argument such as, in particular, the appeal to consequences. In fact, it seems to me that in presenting this argument Mulgan is presenting a basically non-consequentialist argument for a particular attitude to the future. And I, of course, am the very last person that he will hear complain about that.

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