4. PSYCHOLOGICAL INCAPACITY AND MORAL INCONTINENCE: HOW THE FORMER DOES NOT EXPLAIN THE LATTER

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ABSTRACT. Moral incontinence (that is, knowing what one ought to do but doing otherwise) has often been explained in terms of psychological incapacity/inability (that is, "ought but can't"). However, Socrates and others have argued that, whenever it is physically possible to act, there can be no rupture between judgment and behavior and therefore there are no instances of "ought but can't".

The analysis that follows will conclude either that Socrates was correct in holding that there are no ruptures between judgment and behavior or that, if there are such ruptures, then explanations in terms of psychological incapacity/inability are inappropriate.

Of the many ways that moral incontinence (that is, knowing what one ought to do but doing otherwise) has been explained, redescribed, or denied, one of the more common routes has been through an examination of psychological incapacity/inability. The relevance of this approach stems from the Socratic dictum that, provided one is physically capable of acting, one never omits doing those actions that one judges to be what one ought to do.1 Those who disagree with Socrates usually have explained moral incontinence as being caused by weakness of will, as that which is traceable to a psychological inability to put into action what reason has deemed the most appropriate behavior. In other words, while Socrates denies that (when it is physically possible to act) there can be a rupture between thought and action and therefore, there is no problem of "ought but can't", others have argued that (when it is physically possible to act) there are instances of moral incontinence and such ruptures between thought and action can be explained best in terms of the agent's psychological inability to put into action what reason deemed the most appropriate behavior--thus the problem of "ought but can't".2

The analysis which follows will conclude either that Socrates was correct in holding that there are no ruptures between thought and action or that, if there are such ruptures, then explanations in terms of psychological inability/incapacity are inappropriate.
I

R.M. Hare describes the two most common explanations of moral incontinence or weakness of will as follows:

The first is that the person who accepts some moral judgment but does not act on it is actually giving commands to himself, but unable to obey them because of a recalcitrant lower nature or "flesh"; the other is that he is, in his whole personality or real self, ceasing to prescribe to himself (though there may be a part of him that goes on prescribing, and though he may be quite ready to prescribe to others).³

We will consider the second version first. In setting up his explication of weakness of will or moral incontinence, Hare uses a criterion of sincerity which proclaims that: "It is a tautology to say that we cannot sincerely assent to a command addressed to ourselves, and at the same time not perform it, if now is the occasion for performing it, and it is in our (physical and psychological) power to do so".⁴ Hare explains that the advantage of this criterion is that it gives us a way to distinguish between cases where an agent has the power to act on her judgment, but does not act, from cases where an agent does not have the power to act on her judgment. The former are instances of hypocrisy while the latter are instances of weakness of will. More specifically, Hare maintains that it is not accurate to account for moral weakness in terms of one's not doing what one claims to desire to do.

Nor will it do to quote cases in which a man goes on saying that he ought, but fails to act, even though he can act, in every sense of "can". For this is the case of what I called purposive backsliding, or hypocrisy; and these are allowed for. If a man does what he says he ought not to, though perfectly able to resist the temptation to do it, then there is something wrong with what he says, as well as with what he does. In the simplest case it is insincerity; he is not saying what he really thinks. In other cases it is self-deception; he thinks that he thinks he ought, but he has escaped his own notice using "ought" in an off-colour way.⁵

Given this explanation, cases of moral incontinence are therefore cases of "ought but can't". Applying this notion, Hare maintains that "it is not in Medea's or St. Paul's psychological power to act on the imperatives that are entailed by the moral judgments which they are making."⁶

Hare is maintaining that weakness of will occurs when one is psychologically incapable of doing what one thinks one ought: when one lacks the strength of will to hold fast to a resolve with due regard to circumstances. Yet, Hare's analysis of this lack of will-power seems to take more the form of a barrier to, rather than an absence of, something—for he models psychological incapacity along lines similar to those of physical inability.⁷ For example, Hare would say that while for one archer it is physically impossible for him to shoot when his hands are tied, for another archer it is psychologically impossible for him to shoot when he takes himself to be bound by his promise not to shoot. Yet, set-up in this fashion it is easy to neglect appreciating the important difference between abstract wishing and concrete desiring.⁸ Specifically,
Armstrong has noted that in cases where one claims to want one thing and yet does not do what is necessary to bring about that goal, the oft-used explanation is psychological incapacity. Yet, Armstrong argues, in actuality, the professed goal was not one without reservations, but rather one that would be gladly pursued if only things were different. Therefore, according to Armstrong, the so-called want was merely an abstract wish accompanied by qualified reservations as to what would be needed for it to become a concrete desire.

The difference then between Hare's and Armstrong's account of a rupture between thought and action is that while Hare sees it as a lack of will-power, as psychological incapacity, Armstrong sees it as the agent's unwillingness to do what is necessary to enact her abstract wish; that is, the agent, after realizing what it would take to achieve her professed goal, decides against it. For example, Dogberry wishes to go to the evening concert, but then finds out the price of the tickets, the problem with parking, the possibility of being mugged, the need to dress up, etc., and, therefore, does not go but still wishes to go. Due to Dogberry's realization of the conditions associated with going to the concert, he did not have a concrete desire to go, for if he had, then despite those conditions, he would have gone. Building upon this thesis, Armstrong concludes that the popular distinction between "cannot" and "will not" is fallacious: "'cannot' may be a more civil phrase than 'will not', but where there is no moral impossibility the expressions are synonymous." In the same vein, George Thomas argues that when one is unwilling to perform a given action, or when one cannot bring oneself to do certain things, or when a specific alternative action is judged to be psychologically incapable of being initiated, such cases can only be interpreted as instances wherein the agent has overwhelmingly good reasons either for doing what in fact she does or for not doing otherwise.

While it was not Thomas' intention to offer an analysis of weakness of will, his position is evident: when one operates deliberately, any action performed is one that the agent takes to be backed by sufficient, and therefore justifying, reasons; and accordingly, all apparent cases of weakness of will are cases wherein the agent lacks what she takes to be sufficient, and therefore justifying, reasons for acting in a given manner.

What Armstrong and Thomas are claiming is that the proper explanation of weakness of will is not—as Hare holds—that the agent lacks the ability to act in a certain way, but rather that the agent chooses not to act in a certain way, and that the choice is buttressed by a judgment that there are not sufficient reasons to perform the proposed act. In other words, contrary to Hare, "psychological incapacity" must be understood as a state which an agent willingly imposes upon herself. The agent's failure to perform the proposed act is not a matter of being deficient in resolve, but rather is a matter of choice. Armstrong and Thomas have joined Socrates in holding that we always act in accordance with how we judge the alternatives. Consequently, there are never instances of a rupture between thought and action.
II

The above analysis should not be taken as a refutation of Hare's account, but only as a substantial evidence that a viable contrary view can be defended. Yet, let us now examine more closely Hare's interpretation of weakness of will as psychological incapacity.

If, for example, St. Paul's complaint that "the good which I want to do, I fail to do; but what I do is the wrong which is against my will" is, as Hare claims, a clear case of one lacking the psychological capacity to act differently, then it should be easy to distinguish it from a case of hypocrisy. But how do we determine whether a proposed act is within one's psychological capacity? Presumably the fact that one does not do it is not sufficient to demonstrate that it was not in one's psychological power to do it—for this would entail that there is, using Hare's criterion, no such thing as hypocrisy. What alternative criteria are there? If something is not in my psychological power when I try to do it but fail, this in turn presents problems: There is a need to restrict the nature of failure to that which is relevant, so that failure resulting from external interference does not count as evidence of my limited psychological power. However, even in a case where I try, for example, to make myself get out of bed and fail, although nothing else prevents me from getting up, is it clear that it was not in my psychological power to do better? Or as Jonathan Glover asks: "What reply can I make to the person who says, 'It was in your psychological power: you just did not try hard enough'?" If the reply is that it was not in my psychological power to try harder, it is again unclear how this claim could be substantiated. One possibility is to invoke the determinist's thesis that it was determined that I not do otherwise. Yet, then I did not have a choice as to what I did, for "whenever a person chooses, he must believe that alternative actions are possible and that it is possible to do what he chooses." In other words, if I believed that it was not within my psychological power to get out of bed, then my staying in bed was not a matter of choice. And if no choice was involved, then I never have the psychological power to do anything that I do not in fact do. But his argument once again rules out the possibility of Hare's criterion of hypocrisy. Furthermore, if one's psychological capacity is restricted to only those acts which one in fact performs, then all omissions are excusable under the banner that such actions were not possible. And this excuse, in the final analysis, eliminates any meaning and status to "ought"—which, ironically, eliminates the very problem of "ought but can't" that Hare's explanation of weakness of will is meant to address.

We have thus discredited Hare's account of moral incontinence as psychological incapacity by demonstrating that the most defensible rendering of the notion of one's "ceasing to prescribe to himself" is not in terms of one's psychological incapacity, but in terms of one's choosing not to prescribe to himself. We will now consider the first version of weakness of will which Hare describes (and which was previously quoted): "the person who accepts some moral judgment but does not act on it is actually giving commands to himself, but unable to obey them because of a recalcitrant lower nature of 'flesh'." Hare gives this thesis the following metaphorical account:

One part of the personality is made to issue commands to the other, and to be angry or grieved when they are disobeyed; but the other part is said either to be unable to
obey, or to be so depraved as not to want to, and to be stronger than the part which commands.\textsuperscript{14}

The general issue relative to this explanation of weakness of will is that of determining how one part of the personality can overcome another. More exactly, if psychological incapacity involves reason's inability to move the agent to act a certain way, and this rational impotency is the effect of emotion or passion overcoming the authority of the intellect, then how does this occur?\textsuperscript{15} In order to answer this question, we should first concentrate on a prior question: If emotion or passion can overcome cognitive judgments, then are the former \textit{ipso facto} unreasonable; irrational? And to answer this question requires yet again a prior question. What meaning and status are to be attributed to "unreasonable" and "irrational"? R.S. Peters tells us that

\begin{quote}
where we use the words "unreasonable" and "irrational" we assume a background of reasoning that the person either actually performed or could have performed. Both presuppose some estimate of the alternatives which are open and some assessment of the comparative strength of considerations deriving from them as they apply to what the problem is.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Besides the common backing of reasoning, "irrational" and "unreasonable" apply equally to both conduct and thought. Yet how do they differ? Describing a person's action or belief as irrational is claiming that the person deviated from what there are conclusive reasons for doing or thinking, and that this refraining was knowingly done. Accordingly, an irrational action or belief is one that is performed or held wittingly in the face of conclusive evidence against it or is one that is performed or held with such zeal that it is quite problematic whether the person would treat anything as discounting the value of the action or belief. And in most cases when an action or belief is judged irrational, a special explanation is added which is meant to account for this deviation. For example, the person had some inner obsession or absurd scruple, or the person was overcome by emotion.\textsuperscript{17} On the other hand, describing a person's action or belief as unreasonable connotes that while there were reasons for what the person did or thought, they were very weak, and the unreasonable person is not inclined to give due consideration to contrary evidence that would count against her. Due to her somewhat myopic viewpoint, the unreasonable person violates the cardinal requirement of objectivity. In this respect, "unreasonableness" has social dimensions which are not implicit in "irrationality". Furthermore, the unreasonable person is not like the irrational person in another way: while the former is operating with limited knowledge (or perhaps out of a self-imposed ignorance), the latter knows what is appropriate, but, because of something that overcomes her, does not act or think in the required way.\textsuperscript{18}

\section*{III}

Given this explication of "irrational" and "unreasonable", let us consider what would make an emotion (or passion) either irrational or unreasonable. Now while some philosophers have held that all emotions are unreasonable, if not irrational, this position is not one that withstands scrutiny. In the first place, there seem to be obvious cases of
reasonable emotional reactions—for example, being struck dumb with indignation upon discovering that your best friend deceived you, or being afraid when a large wild animal jumps at you. Examples of this type give support to the thesis that, contingent upon the circumstances, emotions can be judged by some standard of appropriateness. In the second place, there are rational passions "without which reasoning in general would be unintelligible"—for example, the partiality toward consistency or the quest for truth. Examples of this type give further support to the thesis that emotions can, on occasion, be reasonable or rational. "It does not seem, therefore, that the passive states, which we call emotions, are necessarily either irrational or unreasonable."

If emotions are not inherently either irrational or unreasonable, then what actually happens when they are said to overcome one's cognitive judgments? Is the answer simply that overcoming one's cognitive judgment is sufficient to render an emotional reaction inappropriate and, therefore, either irrational or unreasonable? But such an answer presupposes that all cognitive judgments are of the same quality relative to emotional states. In this view, an emotion is inappropriate not because it is predicated on some falsehood, but because it contradicts the particular cognitive judgment, irrespective of whether the judgment is true or false. Clearly, such a view will not do. On the other hand, if we modify this view by making truth the standard of appropriateness, rather than merely any cognitive judgment, we run into other problems. If one's cognitive judgment is true and one knows that it is true, then what supplies the direction, character and strength of the overriding emotional reaction? Stated another way, is it really intelligible to describe emotions as non-cognitive forces that can disrupt and triumph over cognitive judgments known to be true? Is not such a view taking the metaphor of a divided self too seriously? Clearly, such a view assumes that emotions have no cognitive footing, that what one feels has nothing to do with what one believes. Apparently, fearing a charging wild animal is totally independent of any cognitive judgments about charging wild animals (be they true or false judgments). From which it follows that when an emotional reaction happens to be appropriate, it is merely a matter of chance, for the emotion did not need any cognitive judgment to give it direction, character and strength. But this is absurd. Emotions, such as anger or contempt, arise from rational estimates of a situation. Or as Jerome Neu argues: "thought is a logically necessary or essential constituent of an emotion." More exactly:

Appropriate beliefs (whether conscious or unconscious) constitute an essential part of what it means to have an emotion. If one has no ground for ascribing the appropriate type of belief—to oneself or to another—one then has no ground for attributing one type of emotion rather than another. Distinguishing a person's beliefs provides us with the interpretive ground for recognizing his emotions.

Evelyn Shirk makes the same point, but through a more dramatic series of questions:

When we experience emotion, is it not toward some thing or event? Do we not exercise thought about that which arouses the feelings of desire, distrust, hatred, doubt, and love within us? Are not emotions always found in conjunction with some idea? Does not any idea bring a corresponding
feeling response? The idea of some consequences makes us elated; of others, depressed; and of still others fearful. Do not some ideas bring placidity, other alertness? Has any logic ever been cold? Do not men respond to the reasoning of both the scientist and the dictator with ardor and dedication? Is not censorship directed against the possible feelings which some ideas may bring? In short, ideas bring feelings; feelings are generated by ideas. If this is the case, can ideas and feelings be so entirely disparate and inherently opposed to one another?23

As we previously concluded, emotions are neither inherently irrational nor unreasonable. Furthermore, there is now sufficient evidence to conclude that emotional states are, in themselves, neither good nor bad. Rather, an emotion becomes good when aroused by a correctly evaluated situation and by an accurately appraised outcome, and it becomes bad when aroused by misunderstanding. Therefore, since the "head and heart, far from operating independently, always act in cooperation", then "desire need no longer be interpreted as being capable of overpowering reason."24 And if emotions cannot overcome reason, then we have discredited the very premise upon which the most popular version of moral weakness depends—for, without the possibility of cognitive judgments being rendered impotent by the passions, without the explanation of psychological incapacity, without emotions being inherently either irrational, unreasonable, or bad there is no problem of "ought but can't".

Yet, one might object that just because emotions are not inherently irrational, unreasonable or bad, just because emotions can be judged appropriate or inappropriate, just because emotions need beliefs to give them direction, character, and strength does not entail that emotions cannot overcome reason. However, if the above characterization of emotions is granted, it follows that beliefs are a necessary condition for emotions. Furthermore, there is nothing in the above thesis that restricts the beliefs which are necessary conditions for emotions to being conscious beliefs. Finally, when asked to supply a counterexample to the above account of how emotions cannot overcome reason, what might the objector offer? Perhaps the objector's best move would be to cite a case where Dogberry does something and when asked why he did it, replies: "I don't know, I just felt like it". But if this example illustrates how emotions can operate independently of and contrary to reason, then it would be the case that if Dogberry's entire set of beliefs (both conscious and unconscious) about the situation in which he acted were radically changed, it would still be intelligible to maintain that he would have acted the same way. Then and only then would it have to be acknowledged that Dogberry actually had no reason for acting as he did. And, if this were true, then there would be situations when, regardless of what one believes, one could just as easily feel anger as joy, boredom as excitement, rage as tranquility, love as hate. But clearly, to suggest that what one believes has no relationship to what one feels, directly contradicts the objector's earlier concession that emotions can be judged as appropriate or inappropriate.

At this point, the objector could change her ploy and withdraw her previous acceptance of the characterization of emotions. Her new challenge might be to offer a different kind of example. Rather than one which shows how emotions can be independent of reasons (as her first example was meant to do), what is now offered is an example which is
meant to show how emotions can be contrary to reasons. Her example could be something like the following: Maggie has known Eddie for five years and professes love for him. Upon being told (or reminded) that Eddie thinks nothing of killing people who get in his way, lies whenever it is convenient, steals whatever catches his fancy, has no feeling or regard for anyone, including Maggie, and eats peas from a knife, Maggie responds, "I know he has all those bad qualities, but I love him just the same. I can't help it." The objector offers this example as a case of reason being rendered impotent by emotion. But is the objector's account the correct and only account of this scenario? If Maggie's beliefs about Eddie either did not condition her feelings towards Eddie, or were overridden by her feelings toward Eddie, then it should be the case that regardless of how Maggie's beliefs about Eddie changed, her love for him would stay the same.

Before we examine this possibility, note that the objector's example does have an obvious element of truth. Imagine this less extreme case: Wilbur tells Jack of his feelings for Agnes, "I know she bleaches her hair, lies about her age, does not like stockcar racing, is a poor cook, and thinks that Christianity is for weak people, but I love her just the same". The clear difference in these cases is that with Eddie we have what might be termed objectively bad qualities, and, therefore, Maggie's need to add "I can't help it". But with Agnes we have qualities which only some people would consider bad and, therefore the absence of a need for Wilbur to add an explanation. And it is this absence which is quite telling, for we are entitled to conclude that, while Wilbur realized that someone else (perhaps Jack) might judge Agnes' qualities as sufficient to stifle any possibility of loving her, Wilbur apparently does not place that kind of importance on those qualities; he apparently finds an Agnes which is distinct from the mentioned qualities, an Agnes who has other qualities (such as, having a good sense of humor, being supportive, liking children, etc.) which more than compensate for the acknowledged "faults". But understood this way, there is no further explanation necessary; and certainly we have no ground for treating this case as one which involves one's emotions overriding one's beliefs.

What then of the Maggie and Eddie case? Using the same analysis that applied to Wilbur and Agnes, we need to realize that Maggie does not put the highest importance (that is, in this context, negative worth) on the mentioned qualities of Eddie, and apparently believes that there is an Eddie who is distinct of those "faults". For example, Maggie might see Eddie as having the positive qualities of being strong-willed, tall, dark, handsome, intelligent, clever, good-humored, mysterious, etc. If Maggie's love for Eddie were not contingent upon her belief that Eddie has certain positive qualities, and we could change radically Maggie's beliefs about Eddie, she should still love him. Yet, who then would she love? Who is this Eddie who allegedly stays the same despite the complete reversal of (believed) qualities? Is it really the case that Maggie's love for Eddie is independent of, and contrary to, any set of general beliefs and any specific beliefs she has about Eddie? The objector is now obliged to explain why this case cannot follow the same pattern that worked so well with the Wilbur and Agnes case.

However, if for some reason the Maggie and Eddie case cannot be accounted for as the Wilbur and Agnes case was, then rather than concluding that Maggie's emotions were triumphant over her beliefs, a more plausible explanation would be that Maggie's love for Eddie is irrational.
In this context, this means that Maggie used one set or level of beliefs (what she took to be Eddie's positive qualities) to dominate another set or level of beliefs (those which people in general and Maggie in particular usually judge to be the most important). In other words, Maggie switched the importance of the qualities of her beliefs: she exempted Eddie from being unworthy of love by irrationally ignoring his important (negative) qualities, and emphasizing his unimportant (positive) qualities. And what makes Maggie irrational in this situation, is that she generally recognizes and appreciates the difference between important and unimportant qualities, and usually shares with others judgments as to what is a positive and negative quality. Given this account, we would have to conclude that Maggie chose to be irrational in her feelings for Eddie. However, being irrational does not translate to being overcome by passion. Maggie's emotions never lost their cognitive ground, rather the ground was never firm enough to support the emotions. That is to say, the beliefs upon which the emotions were based were false beliefs, but beliefs nonetheless. Therefore, Maggie's irrationality is that she, in some sense, knew her beliefs and appraisals regarding Eddie's qualities to be faulty, but chose to ignore them.

Assuming that the above argument has silenced the objector, we can now proceed in tidying up some major loose ends. We still need to explain what actually occurs in those cases which were previously characterized as instances of psychological incapacity. Now it should be remembered that as Thomas clearly demonstrated, cases which were explained as being instances of psychological incapacity were often situations in which the agent "had overwhelmingly good reasons for not choosing otherwise". Therefore, if the notion of "psychological incapacity" is to be retained, then its meaning must be changed. The notion should not be used to represent merely the lack of something. Rather, "psychological incapacity" should stand for the relationship between an agent and those acts which she does (and will) not perform due to choosing to perform other acts which she judges as being supported by overwhelmingly good reasons. In this sense, then, the notion of "psychological incapacity" loses much of its previous explanatory power by gaining in dimension, for now it will apply to all alternatives in a situation wherein an agent does not judge them as having sufficient warrant to enact. This conclusion is the same as Armstrong's: psychological inability is the same as being unwilling.

If there were such an ingredient of a person's ability to act as psychological ability, this would admit of detection in a case where somebody wished without reservation to carry out a certain action and also had the strength, skill and opportunity to do it, but still did something else. . . . But such a case does not occur. For a person always acts as he wishes, in that what a person endeavors to realize may be called that from a wish for which he acts as he does. Given this account of psychological incapacity, we no longer have a ready explanation of weakness of will. But rather than to bemoan this fact, the wiser course of action is to determine if there really is a problem of moral incontinence that needs an explanation.
Jonathan Glover offers an unconventional characterization of psychological incapacity as the state of having an intention which is unalterable despite persuasion by good reasons. Specifically, I would be suffering from a psychological incapacity if I were not open to persuasion by reasons of the following two types:

They may be reasons which I myself accept as being sufficiently good to make me change my mind if I were able to, as when the alcoholic admits that he would be better off if he gave up drinking. Or they may be reasons which, one has adequate grounds for saying, would be so accepted by the person in question if he were able to reason properly, or were not in some way deluded. According to Glover's account of psychological incapacity, alcoholics and drug addicts are prime examples, for they are seldom, if ever, open to persuasion altering their ways. "The test for self-control, which differentiates between my intention and that of the alcoholic, is that my intention can be altered by providing reasons that give me a sufficiently strong motive, while his can only be altered, if at all, by some form of manipulation such as behavior therapy or drugs". What then of cases of moral weakness; what then of cases when one knowingly breaks from what one judges to be morally binding?

If, like the alcoholic or the drug addict, he is not open to persuasion by himself or by other people, then he does have a psychological incapacity. Yet, if a reasonable amount of persuasion would alter his attention, but he himself chooses to avert his attention from the reasons in question, his is then a case of moral weakness without psychological incapacity. If so, under normal circumstances, there is no reason to absolve him from responsibility for what he does.

Glover's account seems to leave us with mutually exclusive explanations. Whenever there is a rupture between thought and action which is other than hypocrisy, either it is due to psychological incapacity or physical impossibility, or it is due to moral weakness. If the former, then no choice is involved, and accordingly, one is absolved from moral responsibility. Yet, if the latter, then the agent is morally responsible, but it is not a case of psychological incapacity. Therefore, once again we have found the concept of psychological incapacity inadequate to clarify the nature of moral incontinence. However, Glover's analysis of moral weakness is fraught with import.

In Glover's case of moral weakness, the agent chooses to avert his attention from the reasons that could alter his intention. This characterization dovetails with Peters' general account of irrationality and unreasonableness (which we have previously examined), and his specific description of the psychopath.

The psychopath is basically a person who cannot postpone gratification. . . . The situation of the psychopath, when the factor of time is left out, is that he discounts the known probability that something most undesirable will happen to him which he does not want at all. He is so overwhelmed by the present that he sees the situation without a proper
sense of reality. This failure to countenance future facts is the explanation of one class of case called "weakness of will", of which the psychopath is an extreme example.30

While Peters' description of the psychopath seems to cut across the difference between the irrational and the unreasonable person, three things must be realized and appreciated when dealing with cases of moral incontinence. First, that the traditional account of emotion overcoming reason is an inept explanation of moral incontinence, for rather than being independent of thought, feelings follow from and are generated by thoughts.31 Second, that if moral incontinence is a condition for which one is morally responsible, then it cannot also be a state of psychological incapacity, for the latter does not involve choice.32 Finally, that since "cannot" is not different from "will not", then a so-called morally incontinent person is one who merely does not judge a proposed alternative as one which warrants her enactment.33 Therefore, there is no problem of "ought but can't" that is in need of an explanation.34 And since there is no problem of "ought but can't", then either there are ruptures between thought and action, and explanations in terms of psychological incapacity or emotions overcoming reason are inappropriate, or Socrates was correct in holding that, when properly understood, there are no ruptures between thought and action.35

ENDNOTES

1 Protagoras 352a-360d; Meno 77b-78b; Gorgias 467c-479d, 492c-509d. Also see Geoffrey Mortimore, ed., Weakness of Will (London: Macmillan, 1971), and Norman O. Dahl, Practical Reason, Aristotle, and Weakness of the Will (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), especially Part Two.

2 For a general analysis of the concept of "ought but can't" see Bruce B. Suttle's "I Ought To, But . . . : How the Problem of Moral Incontinence Has Been Misunderstood", Educational Theory (forthcoming).


5 R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, 82f.

6 R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, 79.


8 A.MacC. Armstrong, "On Psychological Impossibility", Journal of Value Inquiry, 5(2), (Spring, 1971), 88ff..

9 A.MacC. Armstrong, "On Psychological Impossibility", 89.


George B. Thomas, "He Could Not Have Chosen Otherwise", 273.

R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, 81.

R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, 81.


R.S. Peters, "Reason and Passion", 226.

R.S. Peters, "Reason and Passion", 218.


> What is the difference between the feeling and disgust, nausea or discomfort that I have on seeing Fred torture the cat and the very similar feeling I have on seeing a veterinary surgeon perform a necessary operation on a cat? The difference is not to be discerned by a closer examination of my feelings, . . . but by a cognitive and rational consideration of the relationship of the circumstances to principles. The approval or disapproval flows from reason and not from feeling.


George B. Thomas, "He Could Not Have Chosen Otherwise", 270.


30 R.S. Peters, "Reason and Passion", 222f.


32 Susan Khin Zaw, "'Irresistable Impulse' and Moral Responsibility".


34 Bruce B. Suttle, "I Ought To, But . . . : How the Problem of Moral Incontinence Has Been Misunderstood".