



**Universiteit Utrecht**

# **The pragmatics of moral change**

A philosophical analysis of indignation in claims that we demand too much

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## **Abstract**

Revisionist proposals make up a substantial part of moral philosophy. Philosophers who favour a particular theory often propose we should act in accordance with this theory, and when we claim they demand too much they often argue that we have no substantial arguments for those claims. In order to create a better understanding of *why* we think some proposals demand too much, I will give two examples that show that when we propose revisionist changes we often ask things of people that they find too demanding. It will become clear that in both these cases the reactions of people to those changes show signs of indignation in addition to claiming that these proposals demand too much. This indignation is much more complex than often assumed. We show indignation because the commitments that shape our lives are threatened and because the frameworks we use to interpret the actions of others and shape our own actions with are breached. When we experience indignation because the proposed changes threaten to alienate us from our commitments, thereby not adhering to the 'Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism', we should not dismiss rejections claiming that too much is demanded as easily as philosophy is wont to do.

## Table of contents

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
1. Too demanding? Two case studies	9
1.1 Consequentialism	9
1.2 Gender identity	11
2. Indignation	14
2.1 Projects and integrity	15
2.2 Frameworks and beliefs	17
2.2.1 Breaching experiments and frameworks	17
2.2.2 Beliefs and projects	20
2.3 Why indignation matters	23
3. Pragmatics of moral change	25
3.1 Agnes	25
3.2 The principle of minimal psychological realism	26
3.3 Mutual understanding	28
3.4 Intellectual recognition	29
3.5 Rejecting revisionist proposals	31
4. A return to the case studies	33
4.1 Consequentialism	33
4.2 Gender identity	34
5. Possible criticisms	36
5.1 The impotence demandingness objection	36
5.2 Ground projects	37
Conclusion	38
Bibliography	40

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## Introduction

Revisionist proposals are all around us. We are often confronted with philosophers, sociologists, feminists and others proposing changes to our moral judgement, social structures and other areas of our life. Not all proposals for change count as revisionist. For a proposal to be revisionist it needs to advocate the change of a view, theory or doctrine that has been long-standing and is widely accepted. When someone proposes that you should wear dress shoes instead of sneakers to a fancy dinner, the proposal does not count as revisionist. Wearing sneakers to a fancy dinner is not a long-standing view, nor widely accepted. An example of a revisionist proposal would be to propose the prosecution of individuals carrying five or less grams of marijuana. In current Dutch society this is a punishable crime, but the Dutch government tolerates this offence by not enforcing the law.<sup>1</sup> This so called 'gedoogbeleid' is a long-standing view on how to handle the selling and buying of marijuana and is widely accepted. Both proposals might be met with rejection, but my focus will be on revisionist proposals for the reason that while they make up a big part of moral philosophy, their rejections are rarely taken seriously. Revisionist proposals are rarely met with enthusiasm and often give rise to feelings of indignation. People claim the changes asked for are too difficult to arrive at and demand too much of them. Can they, however, reasonably reject revisionist proposals by saying that going through with the proposed changes is too demanding for them? The common reaction in moral philosophy is to claim that a rejection based on something being 'too demanding' is insufficient to reject a revisionist proposal. Shelly Kagan, for example, states that the claim that consequentialism demands too much is nothing more than an intuition and impossible to defend.<sup>2</sup> With this thesis I hope to show that ethics as a whole should take rejections and the indignation behind these rejections more seriously than it has done so far. If we propose changes and claim that achieving these changes is the rational thing to do and that they can therefore not be rejected because they demand too much, we show a lack of understanding or an oversimplification of human moral psychology. In order to reject the claim that we demand too much, we need to understand why people are rejecting our proposals.

My approach will be twofold. First I will take up the question of *why* people show indignation when we propose revisionist changes, and why this indignation differs from the indignation we see when we propose non-revisionist changes. By discussing two cases, I will give two examples that show that when we propose revisionist changes we often ask things of people that they find too demanding: people feel robbed of something, attacked or offended and often show indignation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/drugs/vraag-en-antwoord/ben-ik-straftbaar-als-ik-drugs-bezit-gebruik-produceer-of-verhandel.html>

<sup>2</sup> Shelly Kagan, "Does Consequentialism Demand too Much? Recent Work on the Limits of Obligation," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Summer, 1984): 254, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265413>.

The first case that I will be discussing is consequentialist. Imagine what happens when we confront someone with consequentialism and tell him that this means he should give up his luxury products (for example, his expensive clothing, his MacBook, etcetera) so that the money he spends on these kinds of products can be redistributed among those poorer than he. What if this leads to him saying “this is too demanding, this would require me to change in a way that I cannot conceive”, “it would require me to change in a way that would disrupt the holistic relation between my beliefs”, “you are in no position to ask this of me” or “this conflicts with my own interests”?

The second case I will be discussing concerns transgenders and their wish to live as the other sex. Most Western countries offer possibilities for this, including hormone therapy, sexual reassignment surgery and a change in legal sex markers. Yet not all countries do, and revisionist proposals to change this are sometimes shot down by people who disapprove of the proposed changes on the grounds that they conflict with their beliefs. It will become clear that in both these cases the reactions of people to the proposed changes show signs of indignation in addition to the claims that we are being too demanding. It is often thought that this is because the proposed changes conflict with people’s personal interests, and that people are bound to get indignant when they have to give up some of those interests. If we claim that finding the changes too demanding is therefore not sufficient for rejecting revisionist proposals, we fail to show an adequate and complete understanding of *why* people show indignation.

Using the work of Harold Garfinkel and Bernard Williams, I will attempt to show that the notion of indignation is more complex than often assumed, and that we should not be as quick to dismiss indignation as a legitimate source of rejection as philosophers are wont to do. I will start with the notion of indignation as an emotion caused by having to give up our own interests, and expand on what it means to have certain interests, or as Williams calls them, projects. While not all our projects are central to who we are, some have shaped our life in a way that makes them so important to us that asking us to regard these projects as disposable would be to attack our integrity as a person.<sup>3</sup> In these cases, the indignation we feel and the rejection of a (consequentialist) revisionist proposal can, according to Williams, not be dismissed as easily as the proponents of these proposals would like. After I expand on the notion of projects and integrity, I will give an account of Garfinkel’s work on ethnomethodology, which will broaden the concept of indignation by looking at social interaction. Garfinkel states that members of a society make actions intelligible by a symmetry between the production of actions on the one hand and their recognition on the other. This symmetry of action determines how people react to others and how they interpret the actions of others by means of reflexivity. Using breaching experiments, Garfinkel demonstrated that the frameworks in our society are maintained by this reflexivity and symmetry,

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<sup>3</sup> J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 116-7.

which allows people to determine which actions are and which are not appropriate in situations and to interpret the behaviour of others in social situations. When others do not adhere to these social structures, people get confused and experience shame, indignation, anxiety and guilt.<sup>4</sup> Hence, when people claim that what revisionist proposals ask them to do is 'too demanding' for them, we can explain this by taking up Garfinkel's theory. Certain changes might be too demanding because we might be asking something from people that, from within their framework, cannot be rationally understood or demands that people leave their trusted framework. In these situations what we ask of them simply does not make sense because we do not share the necessary frameworks. Instead, our proposal breaches their framework which can lead, amongst other reactions, to indignation.

Second, I will examine whether showing indignation is enough to reject revisionist proposals, or whether something else is needed. When do people have defensible reasons for claiming that we demand too much and when should we take their claims with a grain of salt? I will argue that while we shouldn't disregard the influence of breaching frameworks or disrespect, alienation from our commitments or beliefs is the most defensible reason for rejection revisionist proposals. Owen Flanagan's 'Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism' will prove useful here. This principle states: "make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behaviour prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us."<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that when someone says something is too demanding, it necessarily is. It does mean that we need to be realistic concerning human nature and what we can ask of people. We cannot ask people to alienate themselves from their commitments and certain beliefs. However, revisionist proposals that ask us to alienate ourselves from our beliefs do not always violate the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism. In some situations we demand too much for the circumstances, but we do not demand too much per se. These kind of proposals do not violate the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism when there is room for mutual understanding and intellectual recognition in these proposals. I will then expand on the notions of mutual understanding and intellectual recognition by using the work of Susan J. Brison and Richard Foley. Susan J. Brison's *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*<sup>6</sup>, will prove useful in offering us a way around the impersonal and a-contextual accounts often found in revisionist proposals. Brison claims that using a first person narrative in order to share one's story can often be helpful in changing the way others relate to the storyteller and his or her feelings. By acknowledging the feelings a revisionist proposal invokes, and then using a first person narrative instead of rational arguments to give an account of why one is in favour of the proposal, one can

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<sup>4</sup> John Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 82-3.

<sup>5</sup> Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 32.

<sup>6</sup> Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

facilitate a mutual understanding that can prevent alienation.<sup>7</sup> Richard Foley's *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*<sup>8</sup> gives an account of how intellectual trust in our own faculties and the faculties of others works, and how intellectual conflict can be resolved. While we should have presumptive trust in others, the prima facie credibility of their opinions is defeated in a conflict.<sup>9</sup> While there are ways to determine whose opinions are the most credible, there is not always a 'right' and 'wrong' side, and by acknowledging this we can achieve intellectual recognition.

By applying the above to the two cases it will become clear that changes in the gender identity case are, at least in Western culture, harder to reject by claiming they are 'too demanding' than the proposed changes in the consequentialist case. Not only are the frameworks in our society more and more supportive of transgenders, proposals concerning gender identity rarely pose a real threat to someone's commitments and beliefs. Thus, while people might feel indignation, these proposals rarely seem to break the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism, meaning that in this case indignation is not enough to reject the changes. When it comes to consequentialism however, the indignation felt by people poses a bigger challenge than in the transgender case. The frameworks in Western society are very supportive of having some degree of individual control over one's money and goods, and most importantly: the integrity of persons is threatened when they have to give up their projects in favour of consequentialism, a clear sign that consequentialism does not conform to the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism. However, in both cases we should keep in mind that we might not demand too per se, but only for the current circumstances.

After I have returned to the two cases, I will discuss two possible criticisms. The first criticism is targeted at claims stating consequentialism demands too much, but is, I think, applicable to other revisionist proposals as well. The other is concerned with Williams' view on commitments. I will conclude this thesis by claiming that we should not be too quick to dismiss rejections of revisionist proposals as some philosophers are inclined to do. Indignation is much more complex than often assumed, and while some kinds of indignation are to be taken more seriously than others we should not instantly dismiss a rejection and a claim of 'this is too demanding', but instead look critically at our proposal if indignation is coupled with a proposal breaking the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism.

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<sup>7</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Foley, *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-117.



## 1. Too demanding? Two case studies

In the introduction I explained the difference between ordinary proposals for change and revisionist proposals for change: if we want to change a view, theory or doctrine that is widely accepted and long-standing the proposal is revisionist. The revisionist proposals that will be the focus of this paper were mentioned as well: a proposal that advocated redistribution and the proposals that led to the changes in laws concerning gender identities that deviate from the standard male-female binary opposition. These cases function as examples of revisionist studies because both propose or proposed changes to views that are widely held and long-standing. In the consequentialist example the changes concern the question of how people should spend their money, in the gender identity example the changes concern people's views on the acceptance of genders outside the standard male-female binary opposition. While different forms of consequentialism, its best known being utilitarianism, have been around since the fifth century BC<sup>10</sup>, society does not seem to have transferred to a solely consequentialist moral framework. While facing more vocal criticism than consequentialism, the revisionist proposals concerning gender identity have had some success the past years. In this chapter I will expound on both cases, describing in more detail what the revisionist proposals concerning consequentialism and gender identity entail, and why people reject these proposals.

### 1.1 Consequentialism

The best known form of consequentialism is probably Jeremy Bentham's classic utilitarianism, also known as hedonistic act consequentialism. Act consequentialism states that an act is morally right only when that act maximises the good, in that the total amount of good minus the total amount of bad is greater after the act than before the act. This claim becomes hedonistic by adding that 'good' is taken to mean pleasure and 'bad' is taken to mean pain, the resulting claim being that an act is morally right only if it causes the 'greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number'.<sup>11</sup> Classic utilitarianism has been attacked from different angles, by deontologists and consequentialists alike, which has led to a number of alternative theories based on Bentham's work. These theories all have one thing in common with each other and Bentham's classical utilitarianism: normative properties depend only on consequences, which is the unifying characteristic of all consequentialist theories.<sup>12</sup> One of these theories is rule-consequentialism, which claims certain rules determine which acts are morally wrong or right based on the

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<sup>10</sup> Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu and Han Fei Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 110.

<sup>11</sup> John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 457-462.

<sup>12</sup> Kagan, "Does Consequentialism Demand too Much?," 1.

consequences of these rules.<sup>13</sup> Current proponents of consequentialism can be found in most areas of moral philosophy. John Harris, for example, uses consequentialism to argue for a 'donor lottery' to solve the problem of organ donations.<sup>14</sup>

Consequentialism in itself is not necessarily revisionist. Like deontology, it is foremost a theory about what is 'right' and 'wrong'. However, as often happens with moral theories, philosophers claim that since we now *know* what is right or wrong, it would be irrational not to act in accordance with the proposed theory. Most consequentialists make these claims as well. They state that the arguments are in consequentialism's favour and that we should adhere to a consequentialist way of living, while at the same time claiming that it would be rational to do so.<sup>15</sup> Yet, not many people live consistently consequentialist lives. This could be attributed to the theory being predominantly featured in an academic environment and less in other layers of society. However, even in the academic environment consequentialism is not the only moral framework individuals and groups adhere to.

In the introduction I used a specific example of what a consequentialist proposal might ask from people, namely that of redistribution. In societies where resources are not equally distributed, people should redistribute resources from the rich to the poor. Doing so will harm the rich less than it will benefit the poor, leading to a greater overall amount of happiness.<sup>16</sup> What happens, however, when we confront someone with consequentialism and ask him to redistribute his belongings? When we ask people to give up their luxury products like expensive clothing, nice cars, fancy computers and other technological products that are not strictly necessary, they will most likely not instantly agree with this proposal. They might say that redistributing their wealth would be a very noble and good thing to do, but that it is simply too demanding for *them* to do so. Their products are important to them, part of their image, and they have earned their money themselves and should be free to spend it as they want to. It is their right to do so, and besides, who are we to ask this from them? Changing this part of their lives would have such an influence on their other beliefs and the holistic relation between these beliefs that they see the proposed changes as 'too demanding'. The indignation at being asked to give up one's goods is especially palpable in the last question. How should we react to this? Are these claims that we demand too much and the indignation behind these claims defensible? Shelly Kagan claims they are not, since these claims

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Darwall, *Philosophical Ethics* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 135.

<sup>14</sup> John Harris, "The Survival Lottery," in *Bioethics: An Anthology*, ed. Helga Khuse and Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 491-5.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Consequentialism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/consequentialism> (accessed June 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Darwall, *Philosophical Ethics*, 135.

are based on nothing more than an intuition.<sup>17</sup> As I will argue later on, the idea that something cannot be defended if it is based on intuition demonstrates an unrealistic view of human moral psychology and the complexity of indignation.

We will now turn to the case of the new transgender law, where we will see comparable reactions.

## 1.2 Gender identity

The term gender identity refers to a person's subjective experience and inner sense of their gender, where gender is generally described as being male or female.<sup>18</sup> The majority of people have a congruent gender identity and biological sex, meaning that if they have primary and secondary male sex characteristics their gender identity will be male as well. It can happen that individuals experience an incongruence between their biological sex and gender identity, in which case we speak of gender dysphoria. The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders states: "people whose gender at birth is contrary to the one they identify with will be diagnosed with gender dysphoria."<sup>19</sup> The DSM also notes that gender dysphoria itself is not a mental disorder, and that the critical element in diagnosing it is the presence of significant distress associated with the condition. The most effective treatment of gender dysphoria (for adults) is generally considered to be a combination of psychotherapy, (cross-sex) hormone replacement therapy and sex reassignment surgery (the latter two are considered as biological treatments, the former as psychological treatment).<sup>20</sup> Countries differ in which forms of treatment they have available and how these treatments are regulated, but treatment options are becoming more widely available. For example, the United States Department of Health and Human Services has ruled that transgender people receiving Medicare<sup>21</sup> can seek coverage for their sexual reassignment surgery.<sup>22</sup> Not all transgenders in the US are covered by Medicare (see footnote 22) and many private health insurance companies and state-run Medicaid<sup>23</sup> programs do not cover sexual reassignment surgery. However, since insurance companies tend to follow the government's lead

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<sup>17</sup> Kagan, "Does Consequentialism Demand too Much?," 254.

<sup>18</sup> Neil R. Carlson and Donald Heth, *Psychology: The Science of Behaviour* (Toronto: Pearson, 2010), 140-1.

<sup>19</sup> American Psychiatric Association, "Gender Dysphoria," *American Psychiatric Publishing* (2013), <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Gender%20Dysphoria%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf> (accessed June 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Luk Gijs and Anne Brewaeys, "Surgical Treatment of Gender Dysphoria in Adults and Adolescents: Recent Developments, Effectiveness, and Challenges," *Annual Review of Sex Research* 18 (2007): 178–224, doi: 10.1080/10532528.2007.10559851.

<sup>21</sup> Medicare covers almost everyone who is 65 or older, certain people on Social Security disability, and some people with permanent kidney failure.

<sup>22</sup> Roni Caryn Rabin, "Medicare to Now Cover Sex-Change Surgery," *nytimes.com*, last modified May 30, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/31/us/ban-on-medicare-coverage-of-sex-change-surgery-is-lifted.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Medicaid covers low-income and financially needy people, including those over 65 who are also on Medicare.

this might change.<sup>24</sup> The ruling might therefore, in the long run, make surgery possible for those who do not have Medicare but cannot afford the costs on their own.<sup>25</sup> Progress is also being made to counter the discrimination transgenders often encounter in the workplace. With a two-third majority vote the US Senate passed ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act<sup>26</sup>, in 2013, a bill that has been introduced in Congress almost every year since 1994.<sup>27</sup> ENDA was designed to protect individuals from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in hiring and employment and explicitly prohibits preferential treatment and quotas. Small businesses (less than 15 employees), religious organisations and the military are exempt from the ruling.<sup>28</sup>

The above examples show that acceptance of non-binary gender identities is becoming more commonplace, but this acceptance is not shared by everyone. While these revisionist proposals managed to become laws, this was only because the US government works with a majority system.<sup>29</sup> The practices, and the views behind these practices, that the proposals attempted to change were long-standing and were widely accepted in the past. Indignation and rejections of the proposals did occur, and until this year the people who rejected ENDA formed a majority. With regards to the Medicare ruling the most-heard arguments against the proposed changes were that being transgender 'is a choice', that sexual reassignment surgery is not a medical necessity<sup>30</sup>, or that surgery should not be allowed because being transgender is wrong according to the Bible.<sup>31</sup> In the discrimination example the reactions showed more signs of indignation. Senator Dan Coats spoke out against ENDA to share his indignation concerning the bill. He felt that the bill would

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<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Clemens and Joshua D. Gottlieb, "Bargaining in the Shadow of a Giant: Medicare's Influence on Private Payment Systems," National Bureau of Economic Research (October 2013), doi: 10.3386/w19503.

<sup>25</sup> The total cost of transgender-specific care for one person is estimated at between \$25,000 and \$75,000, according to the Human Rights Campaign. Human Rights Campaign, "Are transgender-inclusive health insurance benefits expensive?," accessed July 2014, <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/are-transgender-inclusive-health-insurance-benefits-expensive>.

<sup>26</sup> The Obama administration declined to create a separate standard for LGBT employees, instead the Executive Order 11246 was amended. This places sexual orientation and gender identity on equal footing with race, colour, religion, sex, and national origin. Human Rights Campaign, "With Executive Order, Obama Takes His Place in History," last modified July 20, 2014, <http://www.hrc.org/press-releases/entry/with-executive-order-obama-takes-his-place-in-history>.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Employment Non-Discrimination Act: Legislative Timeline," accessed July 2014, <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/employment-non-discrimination-act-legislative-timeline>.

<sup>28</sup> Text of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2013, accessed July 2014, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/s815/text>.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Mason, *Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure* (National Conference of State, 2000), 353.

<sup>30</sup> "Should transgender surgery be covered by insurance?," debate.org, accessed July 2013, <http://www.debate.org/opinions/should-transgender-surgery-be-covered-by-insurance?nsort=2&ysort=6>.

<sup>31</sup> Sue Bohlin, "What is a Biblical View of Transgendered People and Hermaphrodites?," probe.org, accessed July 2014, [http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4222623/k.8B00/What\\_is\\_a\\_Biblical\\_View\\_of\\_Transgendered\\_People\\_and\\_Hermaphrodites.htm](http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4222623/k.8B00/What_is_a_Biblical_View_of_Transgendered_People_and_Hermaphrodites.htm).

discriminate against an employer's religious beliefs and would require employers to hire individuals who contradict their very, most deeply held, beliefs: "Make no mistake, we are seeing the free exercise of religion and freedom of speech constrained and restricted."<sup>32</sup> How can we reply to these reasons for rejecting the proposals concerning gender identity? Simply ignoring them would fail to address the indignation people feel at having their beliefs disregarded, and individuals will not abandon their beliefs simply because the majority of Senate or Congress approved a bill (that was rejected every year before that). We will need to take a closer look at the workings of indignation and the reasons for rejecting these proposals before we can answer the above question.

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<sup>32</sup> Ben Johnson, "Who was the only Senator to speak out against ENDA, the transgender 'discrimination' bill?," [lifesitenews.com](http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/who-was-the-only-senator-to-speak-out-against-enda-the-transgender-discrimi), last modified November 7, 2013, <http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/who-was-the-only-senator-to-speak-out-against-enda-the-transgender-discrimi>.

## 2. Indignation

In this chapter I turn to the notion of indignation. As we have seen, rejections of revisionist proposals are often combined with some form of indignation: people feel their beliefs are threatened, or that their way of life is being attacked. My analysis of indignation will differ from what one might already assume about indignation. The current use of the term indignation is quite narrow and does not convey the complexity of its causes, which is why I think the discussion concerning claims that we demand too much would benefit from a more in-depth study of indignation. While I do not propose to change the term, I do propose we become more aware of the complexity of indignation. I believe a better understanding of indignation is crucial for understanding why people reject revisionist proposals: only if we know why people show indignation we can attempt to understand their reaction to revisionist proposals.

Indignation is standardly defined as anger caused by something that is unfair or wrong. We feel indignation when we feel that people threaten our interests, when we feel that something is unfair or wrong, when things are not going our way, when we do not get what we want or what we feel we deserve. This definition of indignation might be sufficient to describe the indignation we feel at non-revisionist proposals (for example, the proposal to change one's shoes into something more appropriate for a fancy dinner), but is quite narrow, and only deals with the anger we intuitively feel when we feel wronged. When this is seen as the cause of indignation and thus the reason for claiming the changes demand too much, it is no wonder that it is often regarded as insufficient to reject a revisionist proposal.

An example of this attitude toward indignation and changes demanding too much can be found in the work of Shelly Kagan, whom I've mentioned before. Kagan examines three attempts to defend the view that it is permissible for agents to pursue their own projects rather than the overall good, but finds all of them lacking.<sup>33</sup> One of these attempts comes from Samuel Scheffler, who tries to provide an argument for integrating agent-centred prerogatives into moral theories in order to make it permissible for an agent to spend energy on his own interests or projects. Scheffler claims that our ordinary moral intuitions show indignation at the idea of there not being a limit to what morality can require from us, at there not being some kind of personal independence. Since people typically don't promote the overall good, we should not be required to. Kagan objects to this by arguing that personal independence might constitute an appeal for an agent-centred morality, but that there is no actual reason for allowing this appeal, only the intuition that when we do not leave room for

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<sup>33</sup> Kagan, "Does Consequentialism Demand too Much?," 240-254.

personal preference, we demand too much.<sup>34</sup> This leads Kagan to concluding that: “Indeed, if the intuition that consequentialism demands too much remains impossible to defend, we may have to face the sobering possibility that it is not consequentialism, but our intuition, that is in error.”<sup>35</sup>

While Kagan’s work concerns the rejection of consequentialism, his argument can be applied to rejections of other kinds of revisionist proposals on the grounds that these proposals demand too much. However, as this chapter will show, the indignation we intuitively feel is much more complex than often assumed, and reactions like Kagan’s fail to appreciate this. As mentioned in the introduction, I will discuss two authors to broaden the notion of indignation: Bernard Williams and Harold Garfinkel. These authors represent two approaches to indignation: an interest-based approach and an approach concerned with social interaction.

### *2.1 Projects and integrity*

According to Bernard Williams, it is inherent to utilitarianism that the project of a utilitarian agent is to bring about maximally desirable outcomes. How the agent acts is dependent upon this project, and other agents might have other projects that determine how they act, for example the project to be good Christian, or to avoid cruelty and killing. Underneath these projects are other projects, the ‘basic’ or lower-order projects. It is these lower-order projects that can be described as interests, and as described above, it is thought that when these interests are threatened people show indignation. These lower-order projects are made up of things we desire for ourselves or our family, pursuits of intellectual character, and desires concerning objects of taste.<sup>36</sup> There is a vast amount of different projects people can take up, and Williams argues that utilitarianism should realise that their aim of maximising happiness asks people to give up their individual or shared projects if this creates the greatest net amount of happiness. People all have their own projects that might be undesirable to others, that might conflict with the projects of others, that have better alternatives, etcetera. In these cases the reply of the utilitarian would be that the satisfaction someone might get from fulfilling his project and the satisfaction others would get from him fulfilling his project have already been calculated. If the projects of an agent are inadequate in comparison to someone else’s project, he has to give up his.<sup>37</sup> Williams finds this unsatisfactory, and his reasons for this are applicable to not just utilitarianism but to revisionist proposals in general.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>36</sup> Smart and Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, 110.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 114-6.

Williams states that everyone has projects that one is deeply and extensively involved in and calls these projects 'ground-projects', 'first-order projects', or 'commitments'.<sup>38</sup> Our identification with these commitments is of a different order than our other projects, and Williams asks how it is possible for us to regard a commitment we have built our lives around as disposable, solely based on how our commitments and the commitments of others determine the net amount of happiness.<sup>39</sup> This is, according to Williams, an attack on our integrity as a person:

It [the having to give up one's higher-order project] is to alienate him in a real sense from his actions and the source of his action in his own conviction. It is to make him into a channel between the input of everyone's projects, including his own, and an output of optimistic discussion; but this is to neglect the extent to which his actions and his decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions which flow from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified. It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity.<sup>40</sup>

People have projects around which they have centred their lives, projects that they have invested themselves in and that are important to them. Asking them to give up these projects because of some utilitarian calculus is simple-minded and might make people feel indignant, even if they do not instantly realise the reason for this indignation.<sup>41</sup> They might say that it is intuitive, not being able to pinpoint the source of the indignation. Most people will not have heard the term 'ground-project' or 'first-order' project, and it is hard to articulate one's intuition when one lacks the vocabulary to do so. This should not lead us to taking up Kagan's position. The utilitarian calculus is the result of utilitarianism not being able to match theory to the world as it really is, of having too few thoughts and feelings to match the actual world. The happiness of people lies in their identification with these commitments, and therefore these commitments do not allow for a trade-off between their commitments and those of others: when we ask this of people they react with indignation. Asking people to give up their projects or commitments would not only result in a lesser net amount of happiness<sup>42</sup>, it also shows an unrealistic notion of what to expect of people. We are not agents of some universal satisfaction system, we just act based on the situation we find ourselves in.<sup>43</sup> Hence, while indignation can be the result of a threatening of our interests, it can

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 116-7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 118.



also be the result of a threatening of our commitments, the projects people have centred their lives around. Our integrity is not something we can disregard as easily as our interests, and we should be aware of this, whether the indignation is seen as intuitive or not.

## 2.2 Framework and beliefs

The work of Williams was valuable in showing that indignation is not just a sign of our interests being compromised, but there is more to indignation than alienation from our commitments. We also show indignation in social interactions, especially when people do not act in the way we expect from them. An example of this, which will be discussed in more detail later, is the exchange of greetings. When agent A says “hello” to agent B and agent B does not respond, agent A is likely to feel indignant. This indignation cannot be explained by alienation (the wish to always have one’s greeting returned is hardly a commitment), which is why I now turn to the work of Harold Garfinkel.

When Harold Garfinkel started his work on ethnomethodology he was interested in the way researchers treat the knowledge that a member has of his surroundings. He used the term ‘ethnomethodology’ to describe the study of “a member’s knowledge of his ordinary affairs, of his own organised enterprises, where that knowledge is treated by us [as researchers] as part of the same setting that makes it orderable.”<sup>44</sup> Garfinkel hypothesised that there was a contingency of the reciprocity of perspectives of persons, which would be able to account for the “persistence and continuity of the features of concerted actions.”<sup>45</sup> This reciprocity of perspectives finds its source in Alfred Schütz’s thesis of reciprocal perspectives, which states that actors will assume that biographical differences are irrelevant for the situation at hand and that each of them has “selected and interpreted the actually or potentially common objects and their features in an identical manner or at least an ‘empirically identical’ manner, i.e. one sufficient for all practical purposes.”<sup>46</sup> To prove his hypothesis and Schutz’s thesis, Garfinkel decided to perform what he termed ‘breaching experiments’.

### 2.2.1 Breaching Experiments and Frameworks

The idea behind the breaching experiments was “to start with a system with stable features and ask what can be done to make trouble. The operations that one would have to perform in order to

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<sup>44</sup> Harold Garfinkel, oral contributions in *Proceedings of the Purdue Symposium on Ethnomethodology*, ed. Richard J. Hill and Kathleen Stones Crittenden (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1968), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Harold Garfinkel, “A conception of, and experiments with, ‘trust’ as a condition of stable concerted actions,” in *Motivation and Social Interaction*, ed. O.J. Harvey (New York: Ronald Press, 1963), 187, quoted in John Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 78.

<sup>46</sup> Alfred Schutz, “Commonsense and scientific interpretations of human action,” in *Collected Papers volume 1* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), 10, quoted in John Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 81.

produce and sustain anomic features of perceived environments and disorganised interaction should tell us something about how social structures are ordinarily and routinely being maintained.”<sup>47</sup> Garfinkel asked his students to start an ordinary conversation with a friend or acquaintance and to insist, while pretending that what one was asking was completely normal, that the other explain his or her remarks. This resulted in some interesting cases, two of which are quoted here. ‘E’ stands for experimenter (Garfinkel’s student), ‘S’ for subject.

The subject was telling the experimenter, a member of the subject’s car pool, about having a flat tire while going to work the previous day.

S: I had a flat tire.

E: What do you mean, you had a flat tire?

She [S] appeared momentarily stunned. Then she answered in a hostile way: ‘What do you mean? What do you mean? A flat tire is a flat tire. That is what I meant. Nothing special. What a crazy question!’<sup>48</sup>

The victim waved his hand cheerily.

S: How are you?

E: How am I in regard to what? My health, my finance, my school work, my piece of mind, my . . .

S: (Red in the face and suddenly out of control.) Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don’t give a damn about how you are.<sup>49</sup>

From these experiments Garfinkel concluded that each of the students had successfully breached the reciprocal perspectives shared in most situations. In each experiment the subject expected the experimenter to interpret their remarks in a way that was empirically identical to the way S intended the remark to be interpreted. Breaching the reciprocal perspectives did not only lead to a breakdown of the conversation, but was also quickly and forcefully sanctioned.<sup>50</sup> The subjects wanted to either restore the situation and go back to a situation of shared perspectives and/or demanded explanations for the way the experimenter behaved. They interpreted the breach as a motivated and intended action and responded with indignation, feeling as if their trust was

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<sup>47</sup> Garfinkel, “A conception of, and experiments with, ‘trust’ as a condition of stable concerted actions,” 187, quoted in Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*, 78.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 221-2, 80.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*, 81.

violated.<sup>51</sup> When one takes the results of all the breaching experiments performed by Garfinkel and his students, some interesting aspects of social order, or frameworks, appear.

The breaching experiments showed that actors are committed to a particular trusted view of a situation, based on the assumption of shared perspectives. How does this work, however, in regular life? Most situations have their own set of expected reciprocal perspectives, of which the 'how are you?' case is an example, that Garfinkel calls a 'framework'. In a framework certain perspectives are expected to be shared and actions are to be interpreted in accordance with these perspectives. The shared perspectives are thus a sort of 'sense making device' in which some actions make sense and others do not and actions are treated accordingly to this. The experiments established a number of things concerning social order and frameworks that were largely unknown before. First, there are assumptions and contextual features that may be used by people in order to sustain a certain interpretation of an event. Second, the framework or underlying pattern wherein the actions take place is assumed from the outset and third, when a framework is breached and an explanation is not given, people assume an attitude of righteous hostility and regard the breach as a moral matter.<sup>52</sup> Maintaining the frameworks is thus largely dependent on interpretative trust:

Given the enormous array of possible contextualizations for a statement and hence of possible interpretations for it, and given also that the producers of the statements can never literally say what they mean, then the producers of statements can only make themselves understandable by assuming that the recipients are accomplishing the relevant contextual determinations for what is being said. Moreover the producers must assume that the recipients are accomplishing this task by 'trusting' and relying on the proposed documentary pattern over the course of its emergence.<sup>53</sup>

The maintenance of this interpretative trust is, according to Garfinkel, a deeply moral matter in the eyes of participants. Deviations from the framework are almost always interpreted as intentional and motivated, and there is no 'time-out' from this accountability of actions. It is because of this that the participants reacted so violently to a breach of their framework. They were not concerned with the "integrity of a cognitive order which they perceived as threatened"<sup>54</sup>, but instead felt as if an unaccountable breach of trust had taken place and either wanted to restore this trust or be given an explanation. When trying to restore the framework subjects normalised the disruptions to

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 95-6.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 96-7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 100.

stay undisturbed themselves. Even when restoration was achieved, however, subjects still seemed angry with the students. “Why did you pick me?” was a common reaction.<sup>55</sup> People felt indignant when the students of Garfinkel broke the frameworks, and restorative action did not manage to take all of the indignation away.

Frameworks are thus so strictly adhered to because people are aware of what happens when they employ alternative courses of action: their actions will be analysed and interpreted as intended, and they will face indignation, shame, guilt and anxiety from others.<sup>56</sup>

### *2.2.2 Beliefs and projects*

Garfinkel’s theory shares quite some characteristics with conventionalism. David Lewis analyses convention as an arbitrary solution to a coordination problem that is reoccurring. When others conform to a certain convention, there is no reason to deviate from a particular solution to a coordination problem. Lewis’ precise analyse is as follows:

A regularity R in the behavior of members of a population P when they are agents in a recurrent situation S is a convention if and only if it is true that, and it is common knowledge in P that, in any instance of S among members of P,

- (1) everyone conforms to R;
- (2) everyone expects everyone else to conform to R;
- (3) everyone has approximately the same preferences regarding all possible combinations of actions;
- (4) everyone prefers that everyone conform to R, on condition that at least all but one conform to R;
- (5) everyone would prefer that everyone conform to R’, on condition that at least all but one conform to R’,

where R’ is some possible regularity in the behavior of members of P in S, such that no one in any instance of S among members of P could conform both to R’ and to R.<sup>57</sup>

Where conventionalism (at least in Lewis’ conception of it) would state that social occurrences and actions are founded on conventions that we expect each other to conform to, Garfinkel states that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 97-102.

<sup>57</sup> David Lewis, *Convention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 76.

actions are interpreted in frameworks that are implicitly agreed on by members of society. Both theories share the idea that it is society that determines how something is to be done (according to a convention or certain framework), and not some abstract or external reality. The argument that 'changing demands too much' can thus be seen as having a conventionalist side: people can claim that something is 'too demanding' for them because convention tells them to do otherwise. Since everyone prefers that everyone conforms to a certain convention (regularity R in Lewis' analysis) and expects others to do so (see 2 and 4 in Lewis' analysis), the conventionalist might argue that there is no obligation to change: there is an agreed upon convention. However, conventions can differ between different social groups and are not static, they change over time. There is the possibility that someone might realise that there is another or better suited convention for a situation. In these cases someone might see the proposal as reasonable, but still find changing too demanding because he is used to dealing with a situation according to the convention that people ask him to depart from. Garfinkel's theory gives us an explanation that shows why people find departing from a framework (or convention) difficult. This explanation is concerned with why it is so hard to step away from what is familiar.

By asking people to change their attitude or behaviour, we might be asking something that cannot be rationally understood from within their framework. What we ask of people in these situations does not fit in their 'sense-making-device' because we do not share the framework necessary for the situation. Instead, our proposal breaches their framework which can lead, amongst other reactions, to the above mentioned indignation. To see how this might work we need to examine more closely how frameworks function as a 'sense-making-device', and the way people react to actions that do not fit their framework and breach the interpersonal trust that is so valued by them. Frameworks are the background against which we interpret the actions of others and give meaning to our own actions. When people breach a framework (whether this be by intent or not) others try to find excuses for this breaching. For example, when we say "hi" to someone and they don't respond we might think to ourselves "he probably didn't hear me" or "he might have been in a hurry" in order to make sense of his not returning our greeting, instead of feeling indignation at being ignored. This situation is fairly uncomplicated compared to the situations I sketched earlier. When we tell someone that they should give up their luxury products in order to redistribute resources from the rich to the poor, we might be asking something that does not make sense within their framework. This might seem a bit far fetched, but we need to keep in mind that Garfinkel's frameworks go beyond simple conversations and also apply to the more fundamental institutions of our social life.

A good example of this is the case of Agnes that Garfinkel discusses. Agnes was a woman Garfinkel met when she was a patient at the Department of Psychiatry at the University of

California at Los Angeles, where she was referred to when she came to UCLA wanting to obtain a sex-change operation to get rid of her penis and testes which she saw as an “accidental appendage stuck on [her] by a cruel trick of fate”<sup>58</sup>. Agnes had lived and had been recognised as a boy until she was seventeen, but by the time Garfinkel and the doctors at UCLA met her at the age of nineteen she was convincingly female and seemingly indistinguishable from ‘normal’ girls her age. Agnes insisted that she was not gay, a transvestite or transgender but that she was essentially and all along female, and she did get her sexual reassignment surgery not too long after coming to UCLA. She later revealed that she had been stealing her mothers Stilbestrol (oestrogen) since the age of 12.<sup>59</sup>

Garfinkel however wasn’t as much interested in the how and why of her wish to have sexual reassignment surgery as in the way sexual identity was produced and maintained in social interactions. He found that while sexual status is naturally distributed and visible (male and female sex characteristics) a moral distribution takes place simultaneously. Moral distribution is often an invisible aspect of life and runs parallel to how things are naturally distributed. Deviating from the natural distribution is seen as morally reproachable, while adhering to the natural distribution is seen as normal and not necessarily worthy of praise. Moral distribution is thus revealed by the reaction to people who, in the eyes of others, deviate from the natural distribution. These reactions mostly take the form of moral retribution, of which Agnes’ family is an example: “After her initial assumption of female status, Agnes reported, her cousin’s attitude changed from one which was favourable to Agnes to one of strong disapproval. Other family members displayed open hostility and ‘consternation and severe disapproval’.”<sup>60</sup> In order to be accepted as female, Agnes tried to reproduce the ‘natural-moral institutional order’ in which she wanted to participate and belong, that of the biological female. How is this relevant for the discussion concerning indignation? By not adhering to the natural distribution of sexual status Agnes broke frameworks and conventions that were constitutive of everyday life. Her case is therefore an excellent example on what happens when we break frameworks and conventions, and how this might lead to indignation.

Sexual status and its institutionalised features are produced and reproduced by biological males and females in almost every social occasion, and Agnes became an expert in ‘passing’<sup>61</sup>, having developed a meticulous knowledge of the particulars of these ‘ordinary’ social arrangements.

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<sup>58</sup> Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Malden, MA: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishing, 1984), 129.

<sup>59</sup> Roy Boyne, “Citation and Subjectivity: Towards a Return of the Embodied Will,” in *Body Modification*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publishing, 2000), 215.

<sup>60</sup> Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*, 193.

<sup>61</sup> A person’s ability to be regarded (at first glance) as a cisman or ciswoman (a cisgender is someone whose gender identity matches with the sex they were assigned at birth).

Garfinkel emphasised that, because sexual status is almost constantly reproduced in society, Agnes rarely had any time-out from 'passing'.<sup>62</sup> The Agnes case shows that Garfinkel's frameworks not only apply to conversational patterns, but also to the institutions that shape our everyday life. When we ask someone to change their attitude or behaviour we might be asking them something that does not make sense from within their framework, which can lead to indignation. Agnes' family, whose framework concerning sexual status was breached by Agnes because she initially did not conform to their framework in which the idea that someone could be born in 'the wrong body' seemed incomprehensible, reacted with indignation to what she was doing. In the end most of them supported Agnes, but their initial reaction shows (as did the other case studies) what happens when something occurs or people act in a way that does not seem to make sense within someone's framework.<sup>63</sup> Agnes' belief that she was woman was, however, a much stronger belief than that of her family and apparently quite central to her identity. She so dearly wished to be a woman that she took oestrogen pills and claimed to be intersex, and was willing to lie to others in order to live her life as a woman. She clearly found the notion that she might be a man unacceptable. This was because in the framework she functioned in, in which her penis and testes were a freak accident, she simply *was* a woman. This meant that Agnes did everything she could to make sure that others perceived her as a woman, which meant reinforcing this framework with doctors and psychologists and people who knew of her past (while at the same time breaching the societal framework wherein one's birth-sex determines one's gender), and 'passing' as a woman with others who did not know of her past. If we had told Agnes that her framework was wrong, and that she was, in the end, male, she would have responded with indignation. She was convinced that she was female, and being told otherwise was inconsistent with her, very fundamental, belief that she was essentially and after all a woman.<sup>64</sup>

### *2.3 Why indignation matters*

Only if we understand why people react with indignation to our proposals can we attempt to understand their rejections, which is why I have attempted to give a more in-depth analysis of indignation in this chapter. I started with the common view that we experience indignation when our interests are compromised or when we feel wronged, and how this is an incomplete view of indignation. To broaden the notion of indignation I turned to the work of Bernard Williams and Harold Garfinkel. The work of Williams showed that our interests (or projects) run deeper than simple desires for ourselves and that at the core of who we are there are commitments around which we have centred our lives and determine our actions and decisions. When we get alienated

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>63</sup> Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, 126-8.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 128-133.

from these commitments we show indignation at having our integrity as a person attacked. I then turned to Garfinkel, to examine where indignation in social interactions, that cannot be explained by alienation, might stem from. Garfinkel demonstrated that social interactions (and other aspects of our life) are made intelligible by frameworks that are maintained by a reflexivity and symmetry of our actions. When people do not adhere to these frameworks, others show indignation because they interpret this breach as intended and motivational. When someone acts in a way that breaches the frameworks of others, whether this be the greeting framework or the maintenance of sexual status, they show indignation because from within their trusted framework the actions of that person suddenly do not make sense anymore. The indignation with which people react to revisionist proposals can thus not only stem from a compromise of their interests, but also from a perceived risk of alienation or a breaching of frameworks, leading to the rejection of these proposals.

I now return to the topic of intuition. Indignation is often seen as an intuition and therefore not taken seriously by philosophers who claim that if the only defence of our claim is our intuition, our claim is impossible to defend. However, the indignation in people's reactions might seem (merely) intuitive because they do not realise the source of this indignation. Now that I have broadened the notion of indignation it has hopefully become clear that while indignation might seem no more than an intuition, it actually is (or can be) a part of human moral psychology that is (amongst other things) a signal of alienation and the breaching of frameworks.

In the next chapter I take up the question of whether showing indignation is enough to reject revisionist proposals. We have seen the complexity of indignation and that it is more than an intuition that something is wrong, but is this enough to defensibly reject revisionist proposals? In the next chapter I will attempt to answer this question by returning to Garfinkel's study of Agnes.



### 3. The pragmatics of moral change

The last chapter showed that indignation is much more complex than assumed, and while there are now two possible explanations concerning *why* people reject revisionist proposals (alienation and the breaching of frameworks), we still do not know how defensible these rejections are. When is indignation enough to support someone's claim that we demand too much? When should we just acknowledge that changing is the rational thing to do, like Shelly Kagan would claim? The Agnes case can shed some light on this because it demonstrates the difference between the indignation people experience due to alienation from one's commitment (or beliefs) and the indignation people feel when we breach their framework. I will argue that people can defensibly reject a revisionist proposal when it asks them to alienate themselves from their commitments or beliefs: what revisionist proposals ask from people must conform to the 'Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism', meaning that what it proposes must be psychologically possible and feasible.<sup>65</sup> If this is not the case the proposed changes do indeed demand too much: they demand something that is not possible for human beings, and in these cases indignation concerning the proposals is sufficient to reject these proposals. In these situations we should not dismiss a rejection based on the proposal being too demanding, but instead look critically at our proposal.

#### 3.1 Agnes

The study of Agnes that Garfinkel performed showed that sexual status is produced and reproduced in everyday life. When Agnes 'came out' to her family she no longer conformed to their framework in which someone's birth-sex determined their gender, leading to conflict. If Agnes and her family wished to stay in touch with each other one of the parties had to change their beliefs or commitments. As I said earlier, Agnes had a very fundamental belief that she was essentially and after all a woman. While this cannot be said with certainty, the chance that she would have accepted living as a male is quite small. While this might seem speculation, we should not forget that Agnes was, in the end, transgender.<sup>66</sup> Research shows that the majority of transgenders (82 percent or more)<sup>67</sup> either transition (socially, medically, or both) or wish to transition. We can thus assume that Agnes' wish to transition was not something she would easily give up and forget about. Her family's initial reaction at Agnes' wish to undergo sexual reassignment surgery was indignation, they were openly hostile to her. While her family's attitude towards her changed to acceptance after the surgery, it is unsure if this is because Agnes' penis, which was in their eyes

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<sup>65</sup> Flanagan, "Varieties of Moral Personality," 32.

<sup>66</sup> Boyne, "Citation and Subjectivity", 215.

<sup>67</sup> Jaime M. Grant et al., *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011), 26.

contradictory to her claims of being female, was removed in surgery or because they started to accept Agnes for who she was. In both cases however, the fact remains that Agnes was born as a biological boy. And while she tried to suppress any evidence of a male upbringing or male characteristics by exaggerating evidence of her femininity, the amount of effort she had to put in passing and the steps she had to undertake to appear female show that Agnes did have some sort of male upbringing.<sup>68</sup>

The fact that Agnes' family managed to accept Agnes in the end (whether this was because she no longer had a penis or because of other reasons) while the chance that Agnes would have opted to live as a male to appease her family is very small, tells us something significant concerning the question when indignation is an indicator that we demand too much. When it comes to Agnes' family Agnes did not demand too much: they accepted her in the end even though their first reaction was indignation. Had Agnes' family demanded that Agnes was to live as a male from now on, there is a significant chance that she would not have done so. The indignation she would have shown would have been a sign that her family demanded too much. The crucial difference between the two lies in the difference between alienation and breaching frameworks. While alienation might seem to be happening in both cases, Agnes' family was not alienated from a commitment or belief that was central to their integrity. Instead, their framework was breached and needed restoration. Agnes herself however had such a commitment to undergo sexual reassignment surgery so she could be physically female, that to ask her to give this up would demand too much because it would lead to alienation. Garfinkel's study of Agnes and frameworks thus shows us that a revisionist proposal might seem to alienate us, but that this is not necessarily the case. If a revisionist proposal does alienate us from our commitments or beliefs, it demands too much.

The Agnes case is only one example that shows the difference between the two kinds of indignation and the relevance of this difference for rejecting revisionist proposals because they are too demanding. In the next section I will strengthen the claim that indignation due to (the risk of) alienation gives people a defensible reason for claiming that we demand too much.

### *3.2 Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism*

In *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* Owen Flanagan gives the following definition of the 'Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism (hereinafter called the PMPR): "Make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decisions processing, and behaviour prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be

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<sup>68</sup> Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, 128-135.

possible, for creatures like us.”<sup>69</sup> Whether or not a moral theory or ideal asks things of us that are within our possibilities thus depends on what we think it entails to be ‘a creature like us’.

Flanagan’s search for what constitutes the nature of persons starts with what he calls the ‘Theory of Minimal Persons’. According to the proponents of that theory we should accept the truth that the human race is made up of separate persons who all have distinctive beliefs and desires which they try to express in their actions. Any ethical conception should accept this truth, but it makes no normative requirements on what ethical conceptions can or cannot ask from us.<sup>70</sup> What Flanagan does next is enriching the Theory of Minimal Persons by combining it with Bernard Williams’ views on commitments, projects and integrity. Agreeing with Williams’ view that people live their lives centred around their projects and commitments, Flanagan states that any reasonable philosophical psychology will have to accept this. We should not take away these projects and commitments because they are crucial in giving meaning to life. To take them away would be to violate someone’s integrity.<sup>71</sup>

When we take the Theory of Minimal Persons, amplified with the notion concerning projects and commitments, and combine it with the PMPR, we arrive at a principle that states that, for a moral theory to be acceptable, it should treat these features of what it means to be a person as serious constraints on what it demands from people, and should therefore not demand from people that they do not have their own projects and commitments. In the eyes of Flanagan most modern moral theories do not give enough consideration to these constraints and are thus far too demanding. However, neither the Theory of Minimal Persons, nor the PMRM, nor a combination of both is enough to make any claims as to what the content of acceptable projects and commitments could be. The PMPR thus requires that a moral theory acknowledges that persons are individuals with distinctive opinions and motivational systems, but it cannot make claims about the content, heterogeneity and independence of these opinions, nor about whether the projects of different people are mutually satisfiable.<sup>72</sup> What can be extracted from the PMPR is that we cannot ask people to alienate themselves from their commitments and motivating systems:

What can be extracted from this [...] is roughly that it would not be demonstrably rational for persons to accept an ethical conception which required them to treat their aims and desires as if they did not attach specially to themselves, and as if they did not have even a prima

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. See also footnote 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 56-71.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 70.

facie right to satisfaction and were not in many cases appropriate objects of disproportional practical attention.<sup>73</sup>

We should be aware of the difference between objections that claim we demand too much and that there is no obligation to change, and objections that claim we demand too much for the current circumstances. When it comes to the latter, Flanagan warns us to not reject every moral theory on the grounds of it being alienating. There are enough examples that support the idea of generational change by intellectual recognition in our current society, one of them being the decline of (outward) racism and sexism:

Persons who were raised in very racist or sexist environments and who therefore have certain racist or sexist feelings often come to understand that racism and sexism are wrong. Such intellectual recognition is insufficient to bring about a purification of the agent himself. But it is often sufficient to change the beliefs and feelings that are conveyed to the next generation.<sup>74</sup>

These examples show that when we adopt a different view on the timeframe in which the changes from the proposal should take place, a revisionist proposal that seemed alienating at first does not necessarily have to violate the PMPR when the proposal includes room for mutual understanding and intellectual recognition in order to change the circumstances.

### *3.3 Mutual understanding*

Circumstances can be changed, and when a revisionist proposal risks alienation it can still conform to the PMPR by incorporating a focus on mutual understanding in the proposal. This means that we tell our story to people, sharing why the proposed changes are important to us, and that we acknowledge that, for the current circumstances, we are demanding too much. This won't immediately change the circumstances, but when people share their story without judging the stories of others they create a situation of mutual understanding that can, in time, lead to changed circumstances. According to Susan J. Brison this requires first person narratives, because mutual understanding is centred around the concept of 'telling stories'.<sup>75</sup> Brison argues that there are three aspects of the self: the embodied self, the self as a narrative and the autonomous self.<sup>76</sup> While we can attribute autonomy and responsibility to a person, we should acknowledge that we are subject

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>75</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 49-59.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 41.

to change, vulnerable and influenced by our surroundings.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, we should be realistic about who we are. This realism includes being aware of the danger of alienation. Brison finds the obsession philosophy has with impersonal and abstract accounts indefensible, and claims that first person narratives are better suited for trying to explain one's standpoint because it relies on a person's actual experiences. First-person narratives are necessary if we want to expose previously hidden biases in our arguments and if we want to facilitate an understanding of others who are different from us and vice versa.<sup>78</sup>

By understanding where others are coming from, or their framework, and by making it possible for others to understand where we are coming from, we can create a situation of mutual understanding by fostering an attitude of "I don't agree with you, and your arguments do not make sense to me, but I can understand why it might be important to you." We cannot force people to change, but by telling our own story, by sharing why these changes are important to us as a person, we might achieve an understanding that could be the start of people actually changing. When we have such an understanding the risk of alienation and thus not conforming to the PMPR has been significantly minimised because we acknowledge that, in the current circumstances, we demand too much. However, mutual understanding is not all that is needed, there is also the need for intellectual recognition.

### *3.4 Intellectual recognition*

People can come to recognise that their beliefs are wrong, as Flanagan demonstrated with the racism example. Flanagan calls this intellectual recognition, a situation wherein people realise that their beliefs are wrong but are not yet able to change the behaviour that is based upon these beliefs. But how can we achieve this intellectual recognition? Richard Foley offers us some insights into intellectual recognition with his theory on intellectual conflict, which is based on an epistemology that says that the amount of trust people have in our own opinions should correspond to the degree of confidence they have in these opinions and the depth of this confidence. Related to that is the idea that the amount of trust people have in their intellectual faculties should correspond to the degree of confidence they have in the reliability and the depth of this confidence.<sup>79</sup> We call someone rational when his beliefs promote the goal to have an accurate and comprehensive belief system, which means his beliefs and opinions fit together in a way that makes these beliefs and opinions invulnerable to self-criticism. This means that one's opinions must not just be in accordance with one's other first-order opinions, but also with one's second-

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 59-64.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 24-35.

<sup>79</sup> Foley, *Intellectual Trust*, 25-7.

order opinions about the way one can reliably acquire opinions.<sup>80</sup> While this gives no guarantee that these beliefs are, indeed, correct, Foley claims that people must accept that self-trust in their faculties is central to their lives. The demise of classical foundationalism gives people no other choice than to trust in their own faculties.<sup>81</sup>

This leads to the following question: when your claim conflicts with my claim, whom should I trust? Foley proposes three possible theses concerning the authority of others in answering this question: epistemic universalism, epistemic egotism and epistemic egoism. Epistemic universalism states that it is reasonable for us to grant authority to the opinions of others, while epistemic egotism states that it is never reasonable to grant authority to the opinions of others (the only way to legitimately influence the opinions of others is by Socratic influence<sup>82</sup>), and epistemic egoism states that we should only grant authority to others if we have special information about them that gives us reason to.<sup>83</sup> The last two theses are quickly dismissed by Foley on the grounds of incoherence. If we trust in our own faculties, it is incoherent for us not to have trust in the faculties of others, since our intellectual faculties and environment share broad commonalities and our opinions are constantly influenced by the opinions of others.<sup>84</sup> Foley therefore proposes a mild form of epistemic universalism: we should have presumptive trust in others, but the prima facie credibility of their opinions is defeated when there is a conflict. The term conflict is quite broad, but I take it to mean a situation wherein two or more individuals disagree about something in such a matter that it hinders their relation or the daily life of at least one party. An example of such a conflict is the gender identity case, where there is a conflict concerning the medical necessity of sexual reassignment surgery. In conflicts like these, we need special reasons that show that the other is in a better position than us to make a claim in order to trust that person over ourselves.<sup>85</sup> These special reasons are, for example, when the other has more opinions about a set of issues than I do, or when the other is an expert on the topic. Experts have less reason to trust someone else's claim instead of their own because they have extensive opinions on their area of expertise, which makes it unlikely that they have reasons to think that others are in better position to make claims. This means that when we encounter an expert, the reverse holds true and we have reasons to defer to the expert. When there is no expert knowledge available, a consensus across a

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 27-37.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 18-24.

<sup>82</sup> Socratic dialogue is a form of inquiry and discussion based on asking and answering questions to encourage critical thinking.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 83-9.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 99-107.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 108-117.

large group of people gives me more reason to believe a claim than the opinions of one individual.<sup>86</sup> In this way, people can come to recognise that their beliefs are wrong. This does require the ability to take a step back from one's beliefs to engage in a meaningful discussion, but when there is a situation of mutual understanding as described above, this should be possible.

Foley thus gives us a way to achieve intellectual recognition, which combined with mutual understanding can in time lead to changed circumstances. Proposals that leave room for this and acknowledge that for the current circumstances too much is demanded, might not conform to the PMPR, but are also not necessary alienating. However, there are situations in which there is no easy way to resolve a conflict. Not all judgements have a truth value, and we should be more reluctant to rely on the opinions of others in situations where this is the case. While we should always remain open to the Socratic influence of others, the pressure to trust the judgements of others diminishes in these cases without this being incoherent. For example, when it comes to moral opinions people are less likely to defer to the judgements of others, and the pressure to do so is weaker than in conflicts that do not concern morality.<sup>87</sup> In these cases we should acknowledge that there might not be an answer to the question of who is right. By understanding this we can achieve intellectual recognition even when there is no solution to a conflict.

### *3.5 Rejecting revisionist proposals*

In the last two chapters I have attempted to expand the notion of integrity beyond it being the result of a compromise of our interests, and then turned to the question of when we can defensibly claim that a revisionist proposal demands too much. The discussion of indignation proved useful in understanding *why* people show indignation at revisionist proposals. It is not just a matter of feeling wronged or having our interests compromised, but of having our integrity as a person attacked, of being alienated from our ground-projects, commitments or beliefs. Another source of indignation is the breaching of frameworks. Social interactions are made intelligible by frameworks that people maintain by a reflexivity and symmetry of their actions. When people do not adhere to these frameworks, others show indignation because they interpret this breach as intended and motivational.

Only one of these sources of indignation forms a defensible reason for claiming that revisionist proposals demand too much. As Agnes' family showed, indignation due to the breaching of frameworks can be overcome. Frameworks can be restored or changed, and while there might be

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 117-121.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 115-6.

some anger left,<sup>88</sup> the indignation people feel should lessen when this happens. This isn't as easily accomplished when people are being alienated from their commitments or beliefs. The idea that indignation as a sign of alienation is a defensible reason for rejection revisionist proposals is supported by the PMPR. If proposals do not conform to the PMPR, the proposed changes do indeed demand too much: they demand something that is not possible for human beings, they ask people to alienate themselves from their commitments. In these cases our indignation concerning the proposals is justified, and we should look critically at our proposals. However, sometimes a proposal might appear not to conform to the PMPR, while this does not necessarily have to be the case. It can be that what appears to be indignation due to alienation is instead due to the breaching of frameworks. Some revisionist proposals are rejected because they demand too much for the current circumstances. However, as I argued earlier, these proposals do not always violate the PMPR when there is room for mutual understanding and intellectual recognition in these proposals. We should not take the above as a smart way of formulating revisionist proposals to get around the consequences of the PMPR, but as an example of the need to critically examine proposals that elicit indignation. The PMPR cannot make claims about the content of commitments, nor can it make claims concerning the content of the revisionist proposals, but it can counter the oversimplification of human (moral) psychology found in the claims that we should 'just be rational'. Whether people can defensibly claim that we demand too much depends on why they show indignation, but we can no longer dismiss claims that changes demand too much on the grounds of these claims simply being an indefensible intuition or an attempt to protect our own interests.

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<sup>88</sup> Heritage, *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*, 101.



## 4. A return to the case studies

What are the consequences of this view on rejecting revisionist proposals for the two cases that have been the central examples in this thesis? In this chapter I will return to the cases of consequentialism and gender identity to explore if anything can be said on whether the rejection of these changes is defensible. It will become clear that whether or not proposals can be rejected because they demand too much depends on why people show indignation.

### 4.1 Consequentialism

The consequentialist proposal to give up our luxury goods in order to redistribute our wealth more equally among the people in society is not foreign to western society. Some countries have a tax system that redistributes a part of the wealth of the rich in society to the poor, but the differences between the richest and the poorest are still staggering, especially when viewed worldwide. While the attitude that “there is plenty of opportunity and anyone who works hard can go as far as he wants”<sup>89</sup> has become less popular the last few decades, many still feel that one should be allowed to reap the benefits of their own work<sup>90</sup> and have the freedom to make one’s own decisions about one’s life.<sup>91</sup> Arguments against redistribution can be found in political philosophy as well. Robert Nozick claims that redistribution in the form of forced taxation can be compared to forced labor<sup>92</sup>, and criticises egalitarian principles of distributive justice on the grounds that they require considerable redistributive relocation of goods. We might have an ethical duty to aid the poor, but unless there is universal consent, it is morally off-limits to compel people to do so through taxes, transfer of goods, or other means.<sup>93</sup> Surveys show that attitudes like these are still prevalent in the United States and that Americans strongly support rewarding people according to their talents and accomplishments instead of their needs and efforts.

The most important source of indignation concerning the consequentialist proposal lies in people’s commitments and beliefs, and it is there where the redistribution proposal appears not to conform to the PMPR. For some people changing would require them to give up their commitments or beliefs, for example the commitment to live ones life according to another moral theory or the belief

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<sup>89</sup> Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 21.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> The Feldman Group, “Defining Our Beliefs: American Ideology Post 9/11,” June 2005, quoted in Kao-Ping Chua and Flávio Casoy, “The Case for Universal Health Care,” American Medical Students Association, accessed July 2014, [http://www.amsa.org/AMSA/Libraries/Committee\\_Docs/CaseForUHC.sflb.ashx](http://www.amsa.org/AMSA/Libraries/Committee_Docs/CaseForUHC.sflb.ashx).

<sup>92</sup> Robert, Nozick. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 169.

<sup>93</sup> Jan Narveson, *The Libertarian Idea* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 232-244.

in capitalism, and thus threatens their integrity as a person. Consequentialism (at least in this case) does not seem to take serious the features that are central to being human. Since, according to the PMPR, it would not be rational for people to accept an ethical conception that asks people to alienate themselves from their commitments, claims that these changes demand too much cannot be ignored or seen as no more than intuitions. However, not everyone's commitment to being able to spend one's money as one wishes is strong enough to defensibly claim that one is being alienated and that therefore too much is being demanded. We should be careful not to mistake indignation due to a compromise of one's interest with indignation due to alienation. In addition to this, the proposal to redistribute one's goods is one of those revisionist proposals that might demand too much for the current circumstances, but not for other circumstances. We should therefore carefully analyse the indignation people show at the proposal to redistribute one's goods, since the refusal to feel the force of redistributive obligations and the claim that we demand too much might not be as defensible as they appear. We need to keep in mind that commitments and ground projects are not just any project, and that the indignation people feel might not be due to a perceived risk of alienation but a breaching of frameworks, or the compromise of lower-order interests. It is thus impossible to say something definitive concerning the rejection of the proposal to redistribute one's goods without knowing the reason *why* people show indignation at the proposal.

#### *4.2 Gender identity*

The majority of society shares the belief that being transgender (or homosexual) is not a sin or somehow wrong, we have come a long way from the days wherein being transgender or homosexual was perceived as such. Still, not everyone is as accepting, and the proposals/legislation I discussed earlier encountered quite some resistance. When I first discussed this case I gave a few examples of arguments against the proposals, with some of these reactions showing signs of indignation. One of the arguments against medical treatment was that it was not medically necessary. Most definitions define medical necessity as services that are provided by health care entities appropriate to the evaluation and treatment of a disease, condition, illness or injury.<sup>94</sup> This has led to the World Professional Association for Transgender Health statement, backed by a court ruling stating that the sexual reassignment surgery of the plaintiff was required for her health and well-being<sup>95</sup>, that "The medical procedures attendant to sex reassignment are not 'cosmetic' or 'elective' or for the mere convenience of the patient. These reconstructive procedures are not optional in any meaningful sense, but are understood to be medically necessary for the treatment

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<sup>94</sup> Including those of Medicare and the American College of Medical Quality.

<sup>95</sup> Davidson v. Aetna Life Ins, accessed July 2014, [http://www.leagle.com/decision/1979102101Misc2d1\\_1102.xml/DAVIDSON%20v.%20AETNA%20LIFE%20INS](http://www.leagle.com/decision/1979102101Misc2d1_1102.xml/DAVIDSON%20v.%20AETNA%20LIFE%20INS).

of the diagnosed condition.”<sup>96</sup> Getting treatment for gender dysphoria can thus indeed be a medical necessity: it is the treatment of a diagnosed ‘condition’. The argument that being transgender is a choice is of a different calibre. While science is close to finding a possible cause, gender dysphoria is still diagnosed and seen as a mental disorder, even though the DSM points out that it is not truly a disorder. Some people claim that being transgender is a personal choice, while others believe it is against nature or that one’s chromosomes determine one’s gender. The belief that one’s biological sex determines one’s gender identity and that to deviate from this is somehow wrong, might be central to how someone views himself or part of a holistic set of beliefs that determines his worldview. An example of this can be found in Christianity, with some churches condemning people not living in the gender role that God has assigned to them, that of their biological sex.<sup>97</sup> When we threaten these (religious) beliefs people react with indignation, and we often implicitly disrespect their moral autonomy and choices in life. These religious beliefs are also often part of frameworks that are shared with other adherents of a religion and when we propose changes that leave no room for these beliefs, people might feel we do not understand them or feel as if we’re disrespecting them. But, while people might feel their beliefs and thus their integrity is threatened, this is not always so. Most revisionist changes concerning transgenders do not pose a threat to people’s commitments in a way that makes it incompatible with the PMPR, because while what they propose might conflict with people’s commitments, it does not force people to stop having these commitments. People can still believe sexual reassignment surgery should not be insured when it is, and if one has a small company one can still refuse to hire transgenders (in the US, that is). In addition to this, the proposals concerning transgenders, especially the ENDA bill, are an excellent example of proposals that, in the end, did not demand too much because the circumstances changed. And, as the Agnes case showed, it is often not alienation from one’s commitment but the breaching of a framework, in this case the framework concerning sexual status, that leads to indignation. As with the consequentialist case, whether or not the claim that we demand too much is defensible depends on *why* people show indignation.

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<sup>96</sup> The World Professional Association for Transgender Health, “WPATH Clarification on Medical Necessity of Treatment, Sex Reassignment, and Insurance Coverage for Transgender and Transsexual People Worldwide,” Accessed July 2104, [http://www.wpath.org/site\\_page.cfm?pk\\_association\\_webpage\\_menu=1352&pk\\_association\\_webpage=3947](http://www.wpath.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=1352&pk_association_webpage=3947).

<sup>97</sup> Bohlin, "What is a Biblical View of Transgendered People and Hermaphrodites."

## 5. Possible criticisms

In this section I discuss two counterarguments. One concerns my claim that when people show indignation because we threaten to alienate them from their commitments, we do indeed demand too much. The counterargument is targeted at claims stating consequentialism demands too much, but is, I think, applicable to other revisionist proposals as well. The other is concerned with Williams' view on commitments.

### 5.1 *The impotence of the demandingness objection*

In 'The Impotence of the Demandingness Objection' David Sobel studies the claim that consequentialism as a whole demands too much from people because it, for example, does not leave them with enough private time. The demandingness objection states that the costs of consequentialism are costs of a kind that people feel they should not have to pay. Morality should not be allowed to take over our lives, but should instead be compatible with a range of autonomous lives that are attractive to people. These lives include lives that involve commitments (not in the way Williams uses the term) to family, friends, and non-moral projects. Sobel's claim is that these objections focus on what consequentialism requires, instead of focussing on what consequentialism permits.<sup>98</sup> What Sobel means with this is that the demandingness objection is overly focused on the potential benefactor. Proponents of the demandingness objection seem to forget that the potential recipient of aid would sacrifice more under non-consequentialist theories than under consequentialist theories, because these theories do not require others to aid them. Sobel offers the following explanation for this way of thinking: "This is because, when we are advancing the Objection, we are already in the grip of the thought that a moral theory that requires X to sacrifice for Y is demanding on X but a moral view that permits Y to suffer rather than insist that X help is not similarly demanding on Y."<sup>99</sup> The demandingness objection thus downplays the costs that are permitted to happen, while protesting the costs that are required to happen if we wish to change the permitted costs.

When the claims that we demand too much are not generated by a perceived threat to one's integrity, Sobel makes a solid point. People are often more focused on what they have to give up than on what others have to give up. As I argued earlier, indignation is not always enough to claim that revisionist proposals demand too much, and while Sobel does not seem to distinguish between different sorts of commitments and projects, his argument supports this. But, while

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<sup>98</sup> David Sobel, "The Impotence of the Demandingness Objection," *Philosophers' Imprint* vol. 7, no. 8 (2007): 1-17, accessed July 2014, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/phimp/3521354.0007.008/--impotence-of-the-demandingness-objection/1?view=pdf&size=200>.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*,

Sobel's argument is worth paying attention to, he seems to use a rather superficial notion of when something demands too much. Not having enough private time is quite different from being alienated from oneself, and Sobel does not seem to realise that having one's integrity attacked due to alienation might actually make the required costs bigger than the permitted costs.

## 5.2 Ground projects

I have drawn extensively upon the work of Bernard Williams for this thesis, but his work on integrity is not without criticism. In 'The good life and the radical contingency of the ethical' John Cottingham states that Williams' focus on people's personal commitments is destructive for the philosophical project of trying to determine how one should live.<sup>100</sup> The importance Williams assigns to people's ground projects (or commitments), and the contingency between these projects makes it seemingly impossible to have serious ethical thought in the form of a moral theory that is not contingent.<sup>101</sup>

I would like to reply to this criticism, that can also be found in Martha Nussbaum's work<sup>102</sup>, in two ways. First is Williams' own reply that while his arguments might make it appear as if there is no hope for moral theory, this is not without reason. What he does is bring out the basic point that his arguments show that most moral theories are frivolous in not allowing for people's experiences. If a theory does leave room for personal experience it is an impoverished experience, which the theory then holds up as a rational norm. The problem, according to Williams, is not him being destructive, but theories being 'stupid'.<sup>103</sup> The second reply to the above criticism is that Williams is not being destructive concerning the philosophical project of forming a moral theory, but realistic. It is for a reason that there are so many different moral theories and that Flanagan states: "Make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decisions processing, and behaviour prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us."<sup>104</sup> Humanity is diverse, and to appreciate this does not make one destructive, but makes one realistic about human diversity and moral psychology.

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<sup>100</sup> John Cottingham, "The good life and the radical contingency of the ethical," in *Reading Bernard Williams*, ed. Daniel Callcut (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 35.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-5.

<sup>102</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "Bernard Williams: Tragedies, hope, justice," in *Reading Bernard Williams*, ed. Daniel Callcut (Abingdon, Routledge, 2009).

<sup>103</sup> Martin Hollis, "The shape of a life," in *Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams*, ed. J.E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 217.

<sup>104</sup> Flanagan, "Varieties of Moral Personality," 32.

## Conclusion

With this thesis I hoped to show that ethics as a whole should take rejections and the indignation behind these rejections more seriously than it has done so far. To achieve this I first gave two examples of revisionist proposals in order to illustrate how people react to these proposals and to examine *why* people find changing too demanding: a proposal to redistribute our goods and two new laws concerning transgender rights. Using the work of Bernard Williams and Harold Garfinkel, I argued that the reply of ‘this is too demanding’ can not be rejected because it is no more than an intuition. Claims like these are often paired with feelings of indignation, and the source of this indignation is much more complex than an egoistic tendency to protect our own interests. Breaching frameworks and asking us to give up our ground projects, our commitments, can cause feelings of indignation and lead to rejections claiming that the changes demand too much. After the discussion of indignation I turned to the case of Agnes to demonstrate that not all indignation is a sign that we really demand too much. While indignation due to alienation from one’s commitments is sign that we indeed demand too much, indignation due to the breaching of a framework is not. I then turned to the work of Owen Flanagan to back this claim. Flanagan states that moral theories need to conform to the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism, which states that moral theories should be constructed in a way that what they propose is possible for human beings. If moral theories (or revisionist proposals) ask people to alienate themselves from their commitments and beliefs, they do not adhere to the PMPR, and we should not be too quick to dismiss rejections that claim the proposal demands too much. However, some proposals might only demand too much for the current circumstances. If there is room for mutual understanding and intellectual recognition in these proposals, revisionist proposals that appear to ask us to alienate ourselves from our commitments and beliefs do not always violate the PMPR. In the discussion of the case studies it became clear that it is not always easy to determine the source of indignation, and that the proposals featured in these cases did not always violate the PMPR, because there was often the possibility that the proposals demanded too much for the current circumstances instead of demanding too much *per se*.

We all have something we would like to see different in this world, and moral philosophy is rich with proposals for change. These proposals differ in scope and content, but they all share the idea that what they propose is *rational*, and that, as Kagan claimed, we have no adequate reasons to reject these proposals. As I have attempted to show, this attitude shows a meagre understanding of what it is to be human. We all have different commitments, opinions, beliefs, and we act based on the situation we find ourselves in, not on the basis of some universal satisfaction system. Therefore we need to observe the pragmatics of morality when we ask people to change, treating their rejections sensibly and realistically. When people reject our proposal because we demand too much, we

should not dismiss these rejections without examining *why* people feel we demand too much. Alienation from oneself is not to be taken lightly, and there is much more at stake than a compromise of our interests.

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