Reasons of Justice:
Objectivity as Trans-positionality

By

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Declaration

This thesis is the outcome of the research carried out during my time as a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Warwick. This work is entirely my own. It has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Warwick or elsewhere.

Abstract

What is it to be objective in our evaluations of claims of social justice? What should be that standard that determines what is the correct use of reason regarding what is just?

As an answer to these questions, in this dissertation I propose an alternative conception of objectivity: objectivity as trans-positionality. My argument is the following: in order for our evaluations of justice to be objective, there are normative reasons of justice conditioned by one's social, historical, cultural, and biological contingencies that we need to consider.

My proposal is that objectivity comes from our capacity to consider some of these reasons to be relevant across positions: reasons are objective across positions when we can take them to be trans-positional, by engaging in a process of scrutiny involving all the reasons we need to consider at the positional level. In other words, objectivity as trans-positionality corresponds to the process of scrutiny that will allow us to move from what is normative and objective at the positional level to what is normative and objective at the trans-positional level. Those reasons that can survive trans-positional scrutiny will be trans-positionally objective reasons.

But in order to be objective in the sense just described, we need to know how we achieve objective evaluations. Namely, I argue, we are to participate in the exercise of trans-positional scrutiny by engaging with other positions — rather than detaching from them. That means that we need to engage in forms of scrutiny that involve getting to know and understand as best as possible the positions and reasons we are scrutinising. My argument will be that we should do this by 1) using diverse forms of communication with others while including as many positions as possible in that exercise; and 2) trying to know and understand other positions via imaginative perspective-taking.

Introduction

Justice is one of the fundamental ideas and ideals for the development and safeguard of societies. Its importance needs not be reinforced — neither historically, nor as a value. Fundamentally, in societies where citizens are considered to be free and equal, we need to know how we should treat others, how rights and duties should be defined and distributed, how our collective lives should be organised in terms of rules, norms, and institutions. Within this context, rules of justice exist to help guarantee that persons are treated similarly in similar cases.

When this does not happen, persons can make claims in order to see corrected what they take to be unjust. Persons, thus, present to others claims of justice based on the reasons they have — in order to justify their claims to others. So, for example, with the COVID-19 vaccination process, some persons may think they are being left out of the initial inoculation rollout. These persons will present their reasons as to why they should be vaccinated at the same time that another group of persons, and why it is unjust that they are not. This can be with persons within a country, such as persons from younger age groups, or persons from entire countries who think that they should not have to wait until after most of the developed countries have been vaccinated.

However, what some take to be (un)just from their own perspectives, may clash with the perspective of those on the other side of the claim. Given a plurality of perspectives in societies, and competing reasons of justice, we end up with different claims and evaluations of justice. Amartya Sen's (2010, pp. 12-15, 201) 'three children and a flute' example shows that clearly. Let us imagine three children, named Anne, Bob, and Carla, who each has a claim on a flute. Anne claims she should get the flute because she is the only one of the three children who knows how to play it. Bob, in turn, bases his claim on the flute on the fact that he has no other toys to play with, since he is very poor. And, lastly, Carla argues that the flute is the result of her labour. In this

example, we have three different reasons of justice,[1] all of them with their merits.

We thus become pressed to make a decision that is not arbitrary, a decision that corresponds to what it is the just thing to do. Justice, then, requires the existence of a common evaluative standard that we can apply uniformly, where all these considerations can be taken and decision made.

This is where *objectivity* comes in, since objectivity corresponds to that evaluative standard.

Although the relation between justice and objectivity is not always clearly defined, objectivity is often — commonly, even — taken to be a requirement, a demand, of justice. That is, since what is just should not be determined by one's personal views and desires, it needs to apply equally to all. In this context, objectivity sets the standards that regulate our assessments, judgements and decisions.

We are thus faced with the questions that prompted this dissertation: what does it mean to be objective in our judgments and decisions of justice? What should be that standard that determines what is the correct use of reason regarding what is just? These are key questions to answer, since decisions of justice will be grounded on what we take to be objective.

Consequently, we face two tasks: to define *justice*, and to define *objectivity* in the context of justice. In this dissertation, my focus is on objectivity and, as such, I will work with a minimal definition of justice. Specifically, this means that I will take a purely formal concept of justice — understood in its scope as *social* justice. Regarding the concept of justice: I will be taking justice as a formal concept, and not as a specific conception. What this means is that, following Perelman (1963)[2] and Hart (2012)[3], I will take the formal concept of justice to mean: treat what is similar similarly, and what is different differently.

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[1] These three lines of reasoning neatly appeal to different well developed views of justice: namely, utilitarian, egalitarian, and libertarian (Sen, 2010, p. 13).

[2] Who writes that '[…] a principle of action in accordance with beings of one and the same essential category must be treated in the same way' (p. 16).

[3] Who defines formal justice as '[t]reat like cases alike and different cases differently' (p. 159).

This definition is merely formal (that is, not a substantive conception), since it does not say anything regarding what should be taken to be similar, nor what should be taken to be different. Different views will give rise to different understandings of what justice involves, which will correspond to different conceptions of justice. So, the formal concept of justice corresponds to what ties together all different possible conceptions of justice.[4]

Furthermore, I am also taking justice to be understood, specifically, as social justice. Social justice is often taken as synonymous with *distributive justice* — with each specific conception defining differently what is to be distributed and how. This is what Iris Marion Young (1990, Chapter I) has identified as a *distributive paradigm*: a distributive paradigm that focuses on the distribution of benefits and burdens (both material[5] and nonmaterial[6] social goods), that both ignores the social structures and institutional contexts that help determine distributive patterns, and treats nonmaterial goods as static things (rather than as function of social relations and processes). Sen (2010), for example, also shares a critical position on the distributive paradigm of social justice, arguing that it focuses on the means of living — that is, on 'some detached objects of convenience' — instead of focusing on 'the *actual opportunities* of living' (p. 233).

I agree that focusing on distributive justice provides a very narrow understanding of justice that leaves out important problems. Instead, I will understand the scope of justice more broadly as social justice. Young, for example, proposes that social justice '[...] includes action, decisions about action, and provision of the means to develop and exercise capacities. The concept of social justice includes all aspects of institutional rules and relations insofar as they are subject to potential collective decision.' (1990, p. 16) In a similarly vein, Thomas Christiano writes that '[s]ocial justice comes into play when persons attempt to establish justice among themselves in various forms of treatment including social rules, norms, institutions, and more informal interactions.' (2008, p. 47) Following a combination of these two definitions,

[4] Such as Rawls', Nozick's, or Walzer's, to only name a few.
[5] Such as income, wealth, and other material resources.
[6] Such as rights, self-respect, opportunity, and power.

I will define social justice as any matter that in a social context raises issues of how to treat what is similar similarly, and what is different differently.

I call this definition a combination of Young's and Christiano's since Young's definition focuses on what we can consider to be a binomial relation between institutional contexts and persons collectively, while Christiano's definition seems to point towards social justice as going beyond the relations and rules that are subject to collective decisions. I embrace this broader definition because issues of justice and our social contexts can hardly be confined to the problems that confront persons collectively. Take, for example, the case of a child being bullied at school, or how teachers think they should evaluate their students.

By extending the definition of social justice as I am suggesting, there is the risk, as Sandel (1982) and Young (1990) point out, to go too far and start equating social justice with morality. But between Young's binomial relation and all of morality there is a gap in which questions of justice still apply, as just suggested.

Having established the concept of social justice I will be following, we can now return to the focus of this work: objectivity in the context of social justice. More specifically, what is it to be objective in our assessments, judgments and decisions regarding claims of social justice?

The most common views propose that objectivity is related, or synonymous, with impartiality.[7] On these views, our assessments, judgments and decisions need to be free of biases in order to be just. They need to apply equally anywhere and to anyone. Understood in this way, objectivity determines that our reasoning and our reasons regarding claims of justice need to be evaluated according to a neutral standard, and this will be the basis for our judgments and decisions of justice.

Although this may start to resemble what many take justice to entail — again, even in our ordinary lives —, I will argue against this view, for it a) leaves out reasons of justice that we should take to be relevant in our assessments, judgments and decisions, and b) does not lead us to be in a position to properly assess those reasons and claims. Instead, I will argue that

[7] Most notably, Nagel (1986, 1991), Rawls (1999), Sen (2010).

objectivity should be understood as *trans-positionality*. Contrary to objectivity as impartiality, I will defend that objectivity as trans-positionality allows us to consider perspectives, reasons, and claims that do not apply anywhere and to anyone, but that still arise in social contexts regarding justice.

Consider, for example, the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement's main claim is one of social justice: that Black individuals are oppressed by structural inequalities that follow from structurally racist societies and that these societies need an all-encompassing change. In order to consider some of their reasons, we need to take their specific positions to matter, at the same time that we need to be correctly positioned to assess them. As I will show, conceptualising objectivity as a form of impartiality, of detachment, implies that some relevant reasons are ignored, since some reasons and claims do not apply to anyone, nor can be understood from anywhere.

My overall argument will the following: in order for our judgments and decisions to be objective, there are normative reasons of justice conditioned by one's social, historical, cultural, and biological contingencies that we need to consider. These are reasons that are objective according to the positions from which they follow. These *positional reasons*, as I will call them, are normatively relevant reasons that escape the traditional objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy.

Although positional reasons should be considered relevant, these reasons cannot be taken to be objective across positions, since they are attached to specific positions. That is, what is a reason from one position may not be a reason from another position. Objectivity comes from our capacity to consider some reasons to be relevant across positions: reasons are objective across positions when we can take those reasons to be trans-positional, by engaging in a process of scrutiny involving all positions. In other words, it is the process of scrutiny that will allow us to move from what is normative and objective at the positional level to what is normative and objective at the trans-positional level. Those reasons that can survive trans-positional scrutiny will be *trans-positional reasons* — corresponding to what should be done objectively.

But in order to be objective in the sense just described, we need to know how we achieve objective assessments. As such, I will also propose that we are to participate in the exercise of trans-positional scrutiny by engaging with other positions — rather than detaching from them. That means that we need to engage in forms of scrutiny that involve getting to know and understand as best as possible the positions and reasons we are scrutinising. My argument will be that we should do this by 1) using diverse forms of communication with others while including as many positions as possible in that exercise; and 2) trying to know and understand other positions via imaginative perspective-taking.

To put my argument into a context, let us return to the Black Lives Matter movement example. The movement arose as a response to what Black people have identified as their oppression by a structurally racist society. This identification comes from the positions they occupy in the world: from the position of Black individuals and neighbourhoods who are the target of, namely, police violence, forced segregation, and disinvestment in housing and infrastructures. I am not using the clause 'from the positions they occupy' as a form of disqualifying the overall legitimacy of their claims, but because the positions each occupies plays a central role in the conception of objectivity that I will put forward in this dissertation. To highlight that it is from *their* position that certain claims of justice are being made is both a meaningfully descriptive and normative point to what should be consider objectively.

In this context, what it means for our judgments and decisions to be just is to start by considering and assessing if, from the position of those who the Black Lives Matter movement's fight applies to, their reasons regarding their claims of justice are positionally objective. If they are, then, we need to consider them in a wider context, where they would be assessed by other positions. If after this, their reasons have survived scrutiny, then these will be trans-positionally objective reasons. What it is to be objective in this context, however, is not simply to exercise trans-positional scrutiny, but to actively engage with the position of the members of the Black Lives Matter movement. It is to actively try to know and understand their positions accurately by engaging in all-inclusive deliberation that makes use of

different forms of communication with them; and it is to engage in imaginative perspective-taking, where we are to imagine being in their position and, in that way, imaginatively experience that position. Only then can we say that we have been objective in our judgments and decisions about justice.

In more detail, this dissertation will be organised in the following manner:

In **Chapter I**, I argue that there are normative reasons that defy the traditional objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy. I start the chapter by arguing that the traditional way of conceptualising reasons by creating a dichotomy between subjective reasons and objective reasons is mistaken — it is mistaken because it compares two types of reasons that, as traditionally defined, do not operate at the same level. That is, it puts side by side reasons that have to do with specific agents, with reasons that have to do with the standpoint that any agent should occupy — the standpoint that matches how the world is taken to be as a matter of fact. As a result, the dichotomy is also unhelpful, since it eclipses the possibility of taking some normative reasons (those that I will call *positional* reasons) to be relevant.

After identifying the problem, I propose that we should abandon the dichotomy and start conceptualising objectivity in a different way. I start by introducing Amartya Sen's concept of *positional objectivity*. Briefly, positional objectivity corresponds to what can be concluded from a specific position by anyone who shares that position. As I will explain, *position* does not simply refer to physical positions, but to any parameter that might be relevant for the development of a perspective and that may be sharable; that is, one's positionality affects the perspectives one holds, and these are (positionally) objective if others sharing the same positionality can hold the same perspectives.

From here I argue that not only does positionality have an influence on the development of our perspectives, but also on the development of our practical standpoints and practical reasoning.

Following that, I propose that there are reasons that are normative due to one's positionality. And that these reasons can also be positionally objective reasons. These, I call, are *positional reasons* — the status of

objectivity of these reasons is not determined by subjectivity nor impersonality, but by the positions one occupies. However, these are reasons that are objective at the positional level, but not across all positions.

After establishing in Chapter I that there are normative reasons that can be positionally objective, in **Chapter II** I argue that the objectivity of these reasons across positions — and not merely positionally — should be understood in terms of *trans-positionality*. That is, that we should engage in the exercise of scrutiny of these reasons and that scrutiny should be exercised across positions. Those reasons that survive trans-positional scrutiny are *trans-positionally objective reasons* (or *trans-positional reasons*, for short).

I specifically frame objectivity as trans-positionality within a public reason framework by proposing the *trans-positional account of public reason*. On this account, all persons collectively participate in determining what is objective by engaging in the scrutiny of positional reasons. This amounts to saying that reasons need to be *publicly justificatory* in order to be taken to be objective across positions. According to the trans-positional account of public reason, although objective reasons are those positional reasons that survive trans-positional scrutiny, this scrutiny is based on what I will call the *perspective-understanding view* of public reason — and not on a consensus or convergence view. On the perspective-understanding view, in order for a reason to be accepted as objective, that reason needs to be understood in its own context by those exercising scrutinising.

In **Chapter III**, I start to develop a view of how trans-positionally objective assessments — *i.e.*, the exercise of public justification — should be understood. Rather than requiring detachment from other positions, I argue that objectivity requires *engagement*: specifically, it requires that we create the conditions for us to properly engage in trans-positional scrutiny.

What I propose is that in order to appropriately exercise scrutiny we need to know and understand the positions we are scrutinising. In this way, I argue that engagement should be predicated on what I will call *democratic engagement* with other positions — that is, a form of democratic deliberation that relies on different forms of communication to learn about other positions — and on *imaginative perspective-taking* (Chapter IV).

Lastly, in **Chapter IV**, I argue that the engagement view of trans-positional assessments should also require the exercise of imaginative perspective-taking. I specifically argue that we should engage in different forms of imaginative perspective-taking — either other-oriented or self-oriented — depending on the type of positions we want to understand better.

In short, in this dissertation I propose a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality in what concerns issues of social justice. It should be noted that I do not aim to provide an answer to which decisions and evaluations are just — that falls outside the scope of this work. My argument is merely concerned with what it should mean to be objective regarding reasons and claims of social justice.

Chapter I — Positional reasons

In this first chapter, I will argue that there are reasons — namely, *positional reasons* — that are relevant for claims of objectivity, and that these reasons escape the traditional view of reasons characterised by the objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy.

In order to make this argument, the chapter will be divided into two main sections. In the first section, I.1, I will start by problematising the objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy. Against this view, I will argue that we should abandon it on two grounds: first, what defines the objectivity of a reason should not be the reason's neutrality in relation to an agent; second, and as a result, there are reasons that have normative significance for objectivity that would not be taken to be relevant if the dichotomy were to stand. This last point will be developed throughout the chapter.

In section I.2, I will propose that the reasons that have normative significance for objectivity and that the objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy ignores are reasons that arise from the fact that our evaluative perspectives are constrained by one's historical, cultural, social, and biological contingencies (*i.e.,* positionality), and that are positionally objective.

Specifically, in I.2.1, I will introduce Amartya Sen's concept of *positional objectivity*, where the objectivity of a view is dependent on specific positions — that is, that the objectivity of our beliefs is conditioned by the way one comes to conceive the world. From here, I will argue in I.2.2 that historical, cultural, social, and biological contingencies (*i.e.,* positionality) not only help define our perspectives, but also help define our practical standpoints: that is, that positionality conditions the agents we are by conditioning how we exercise practical reason.

In I.2.3, I will argue that there is a specific type of normative reasons that arises from the fact that our evaluative perspectives are constrained by positionality: these will be reasons that are objective as a function of an agent's evaluative perspective; these reasons will be called positional reasons.

To make this argument, I will start by arguing that positional reasons are normative in virtue of a process of construction that starts from one's practical standpoints, with the relevant process of construction starting from evaluative perspectives, and I will frame positional reasons within a Humean constructivist metaethical view. Within this framework, I will argue that positional reasons are normative reasons since these are reasons that coherently follow from specific evaluative perspectives.

Finally, in I.2.4, I will also argue that positional reasons' possible status as subjective reasons or impersonal reasons is irrelevant, insofar as subjective reasons can also have normative significance for objectivity (or, at least, positional objectivity) by not constituting a form of contradiction with a conception of objectivity that focuses on positions rather than on agents themselves.

From the argument I will put forward in this chapter, I am proposing that positional reasons are the relevant type of reasons for an initial understanding of what objectivity is, instead of the traditional view reinforced by the objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy.

I.1 — The objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy

The literature on normative reasons places a particular emphasis on the dichotomy between objective reasons and subjective reasons. It will be part of my argument in this chapter to show that the focus on this dichotomy, and the attempts to take it as the main framework on how to categorise reasons, is both misplaced and unhelpful. The claim that this dichotomy is misplaced and unhelpful will be grounded on the argument that it prevents us from considering reasons that have normative importance by incorrectly suggesting that normative reasons have to be agency-independent. The very reason of existence of the dichotomy is to contrast and show that subjective reasons (and claims based on these reasons) have no (relevant) normative force, whereas objective reasons (and claims based on these reasons) are normatively significant because they are agency-independent. However, this framework eclipses an important possibility: that of reasons that can be

associated to a standpoint agents occupy that is neither agent-specific nor the standpoint of *any* agent.

In this first section, I will problematise the objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy by expanding on the diagnosis just introduced. The section will be organised in the following way: I will start by presenting the dichotomy in detail. I will then identify that, whatever the terminology used to designate these reasons, the dichotomy can be traced to a particular way of understanding objectivity and subjectivity as impersonal and personal, respectively. This will allow us to more easily identify the problem with the dichotomy and why I am arguing that it is both misplaced and unhelpful.

The objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy has been represented and named in slightly different ways in the literature, but, for the most part, these different representations and nomenclatures are all representative of the same fundamental distinction between two types of reasons. These two types of reasons have been characterised, on the one hand, as being objective, real, primary, or agent-neutral; and, on the other hand, as being subjective, merely apparent, secondary, or agent-relative. Whatever the exact terminological pair, this is not a new dichotomy, but it is one that has become the main paradigm for understanding reasons in the literature for the last three decades or so.[8] [9]

However, given how diverse these similar dichotomies can be, their definitions can be taken for granted and not as well-defined as one would

[8] See, merely as a significant sample, Bykvist, 2018; Dancy, 1994; Dorsey, 2012; Ewing, 1948; Graham, 2010; Korsgaard, 1993; Lord, 2015; Mason, 2013; Oddie and Menzies, 1992; Nagel, 1970, 1979, 1986; Parfit, 1986, 2011; Schroeder 2008, 2018; Sepielli, 2012, 2018; Sidgwick, 1874; Smith, 2010; Thomson, 2008; Vogelstein, 2012; Way, 2009; Whiting, 2014; Wodak, 2017, 2019; Zimmerman, 2009.

[9] According to Sepielli (2018), we can differentiate between two types of philosophers and how they understand the dichotomy: on opposite camps we can have the debaters — those who frame the debate in a way that sets reasons to be either objective or subjective —, and the dividers — those who frame the debate around the idea that objective reasons and subjective reasons may be related. In fact, it is possible to identify even more differences and different degrees of disagreement in the debaters/dividers divide. I bring up this debaters/dividers divide merely to provide further evidence of how ingrained and standard the dichotomy is within the literature, and how the debates can be situated; I will not pursue this.

hope (see also Bykvist, 2018, regarding the agent-neutral/agent-relative distinction). This requires a more attentive focus on each of the most paradigmatic distinctions: objective/subjective, real/merely apparent; and agent-neutral/agent-relative.

On the first pair, we have *objective* reasons, which can be characterised as reasons that are given by facts, *i.e.*, these are attitude-independent reasons which find their normativity on how the world really is. On the other side of this dichotomy, *subjective* reasons are reasons dependent on a subject's beliefs, desires, feelings, evidence, or probabilities, *i.e.*, these are attitude-dependent reasons, determined by the subject's perspective on the facts or on their circumstances. Subjective reasons are commonly associated with what is rational for one to do or believe, and can be further understood in several different ways, as we are going to see next. Fundamentally, the objective/subjective reasons dichotomy can be summarised as attitude-independent reasons v. attitude-dependent reasons.

Another version of this dichotomy can be found in the distinction between real reasons and merely apparent reasons (Parfit, 2011, pp. 34-35) — sometimes these are also called objective and subjective reasons, respectively. In this version of the dichotomy, the emphasis is not on attitude-(in)dependence, but on the truth of one's beliefs. That is, a reason is considered *real* if the belief whose truth gives the subject a reason to act is true. If the subject's belief is false, then the reason is considered to be a *merely apparent* reason to act.

Whereas in both these distinctions, objective/real reasons are taken to be normative reasons, the normativity of subjective/merely apparent reasons is the object of contention. We can find, in the literature, two main views on this point.[10] On one view, subjective reasons have to be of a special kind in order to have any meaningful normative force. On another view, subjective reasons have normative force if they have objective correlates. That is, a subjective reason to do *x* would have meaningful normative force if there would be an objective reason (an agent-independent reason) to do *x*.

[10] See, for example, Nagel, 1986; Parfit, 2011; Sepielli, 2012; Schroeder, 2008, Vogelstein, 2012; Way, 2009; Whiting, 2014. For critical discussions see Kiesewetter, 2012; Wodak, 2019, 2017.

Lastly, there is the *agent-relative* reasons and *agent-neutral* reasons distinction.[11] In this case, although these terms are sometimes used synonymously with subjective reasons and objective reasons, respectively, they do not express the exact same idea. From Nagel (1970, 1979, 1986) and Parfit (1986, p. 143) we have the identification of these two types of reasons that can be differentiated in the following way: on the one hand, we have agent-relative reasons, which are reasons that specific agents have to promote something. All agents may have them, but each reason relates intrinsically to the agent that has it, they are personal property (Korsgaard, 1993, p. 26). As Parfit helpfully puts it, it is not that this type of reasons '[…] *cannot* be a reason for other agents [but] it may not be' (1986, p. 143). On the other hand, we have agent-neutral reasons. These are reasons that anyone has to promote something, independently of who the agent is. That is, reasons that are detached from any specific individual content and that anyone could, and should, hold. To return to Korsgaard's suggestive contrast, these reasons can be understood as common property (1993, p. 26).

As I noted above, these pairs of concepts may not have the exact same content throughout, but they do seem to share a common thread — although it may not seem to be so immediately. In fact, taken in their initial meaning, agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons do not seem to have a direct correspondence with subjective reasons and objective reasons. We can take Nagel's view as an example of that: for Nagel, some agent-relative reasons take the form of subjective reasons, whereas other agent-relative reasons can be considered objective reasons; at the same time, agent-neutral reasons are always objective reasons, were these are objective reasons of a stronger normative kind than agent-relative objective reasons (for more on this, see Dancy, 1994; Korsgaard, 1993). Having said that, the three terminological pairs representative of the overall objective/subjective dichotomy are not that distant from each other, as I prefaced this paragraph. And that is because, as I see them, they share a common thread: they identify reasons as either following from a perspective (subjective and agent-relative) and being

[11] See Bykvist (2018) for an analysis of the evolution of these concepts.

personal, versus reasons that are perspectiveless (objective and agent-neutral) and that are considered to be impersonal.[12]

My point, more specifically, is that, at the dichotomy's very core, whichever specific version we pick, we can identify a tension between the personal and the impersonal, between what is specific of some agents and what applies to any agent. The tension, to put it in one sentence, is that what appears from an agent's perspective to be a reason, may not be from outside of that perspective. The tension arises because *what* is personal in this sense — *i.e., that* that follows from a perspective —, when it cannot be understood impersonally, is considered to be a source of error, mistakes, distortions, biases, which are only justifiable from an agent's own perspective, but not from outside of that perspective. Nagel (1986), for example, correlates subjective standpoints with 'false appearances' that, when eliminated, will yield a standpoint that is more objective than before.

Another way to put it is to say that, on the three versions of the dichotomy presented before, what determines the normativity of a reason, and therefore its status as objective, is the reason's correspondence with what is external to the agent. Even when we have a subjective reason (when understood in terms of attitude-dependence) that is also a real reason (that is based on a true belief), what ties these two versions of the dichotomy together — and thus make it part of the overall subjective/objective dichotomy represented in the personal/impersonal tension — is its reliance on a correspondence with what is taken to be reality. Such a reason, then, would cease to merely be a subjective reason: it would also be objective (or attitude-independent) since it is no longer the subject's attitude that is determining it to be a reason, but its correspondence with the world that is independent of the subject. In this case, the subjective reason would be a real and objective reason merely because the perspective of the subject would coincide with what is attitude-independent.

[12] Although Nagel considers that agent-relative reasons can be either subjective reasons or objective reasons, I am including them in the personal category because of the requirements Nagel sets for an agent-relative to be taken as objective. In order for that to happen, an agent-relative reason has to be seen as a reason from an impersonal standpoint. Although this is not the place to explore this point at length, there is good reason to doubt that an agent-relative reason can be understood from an impersonal standpoint without losing its status of agent-relativity (see Chapter III, section III.1.2).

Yet, at the same time, to the extent that an agent's own perspective can be a source of error, it is also taken to be an important and intrinsic part of who one is and of one's life, and how one engages with practical reasoning. It is from this perspective that we find meaning and purpose in our lives. This constitutes the other side of the tension, and one of the reasons why we should not fully subscribe to an objectivist view of standpoints and reasons, which has been best described by Nagel when he writes that there is uncertainty about '[h]ow far outside ourselves we can go without losing contact with this essential material — with the forms of life in which values and justifications are rooted […]'. (1986, p. 186). The solution that Nagel proposes, as a result of this view, is that we should try to minimize this tension by trying to adopt both viewpoints.

Expressed like this, to live within these two possibly opposite and in tension domains is the equivalent of trying to square the circle. We thus arrive at what I consider to be the crux of the problem: that the dichotomy is both misplaced and unhelpful. My argument is that it is misplaced because it puts in tension two domains that are not comparable (in a sense to be explained); and it is unhelpful because, as a result, it makes us lose sight of reasons that are not objective in the sense being discussed (*i.e.*, do not follow from an impersonal perspective) but that nevertheless have normative importance (this point will become clearer in section I.2).

How exactly is the dichotomy misplaced? The dichotomy is misplaced because it wrongly identifies two different domains with each other: it puts side by side reasons that are dependent on specific agents (on the subjective side) with reasons that any agent could have (on the objective side). The problem is that the latter type of reasons are not reasons that are dependent on an agents' agency — which would make the comparison with subjective reasons fair — but reasons that are determined precisely by the absence of specific agents, since what determines these reasons are their relation to a position any agent could occupy. In this way, the dichotomy is contrasting reasons that are related to the perspective and agency of specific agents with reasons that are related to a position all agents could occupy independently of their agency — this position has nothing to do with agents themselves, but with what matches reality. In other words, the dichotomy is

misplaced because it creates an artificial tension between two different domains: those of agency-dependency and agency-independency.

What this means, to reinforce my point, is that claims regarding the objectivity of reasons are, from the definitions set above, independent of agents, while claims of subjectivity are completely agential. Whereas the latter are reasons that are dependent on the agent — they are from the perspective of that specific agent who holds certain beliefs, not from the perspective of any possible agent —, the former are reasons that are independent of the agent, reasons that anyone could and should hold because they correspond to the position from where the world is what it is — even if that is from nowhere; this implies that different agents should occupy that position. Claims of objectivity of certain reasons are not claims about what each agent should have as a reason, but what the position says that the agent should have as a reason. In short, the problem I am trying to identify is that, when we enter this objectification process, *i.e.*, when we try to move from the personal to the impersonal (from the perspectival to the perspectiveless), what we are supposed to share with any agent is the standpoint of the world and the reasons that follow from that standpoint; what is not being shared, however, is our agency and subjectivity, which is what the definition of subjective reasons is trying to capture. These are the two unrelated domains that are contrasted in this dichotomy.

For an illustration of this point, consider Parfit's (2011, p. 34) paradigmatic 'snake' example:

> Suppose that, while walking in some desert, you have disturbed and angered a poisonous snake. You believe that, to save your life, you must run away. In fact, you must stand still, since this snake will attack only moving targets.

I called this example paradigmatic because it represents a case where we can clearly see what the dichotomy between subjective reasons and objective reasons is trying to capture, and where these reasons supposedly break apart from each other. As the example intends to show, each type of reasons pulls one's action into a different direction: one can either run away or stand still, and the reasons to do one or the other are of a different kind. One would have a subjective reason to run away (but would not have an objective reason to do

that), and one would have an objective reason to stand still (but would not have a subjective reason to do that).

Although it constitutes a prime example for justifying the need for the dichotomy, it can also help us see the problem I have been identifying with it: the subjective reason one would have to run away comes from the agent's own perspective on the facts, the reason is attitude-dependent — it is dependent on one's agency. It follows that the subjective reason is attributable and has strength over the subject/agent who is facing the choice. The objective reason to stay still has to do with the facts of the matter that are completely independent of the agent facing the problem. Once again, it is a reason that any agent could hold (if in possession of all the facts). The fact that this is an attitude-independent and agency-independent reason, and that the agent does not have access to the facts of the matter, suggests that objective reasons should not be attributed to any agent, but to the position that agent should be in — said position being the one where all the facts of the matter on how to behave when facing that snake would be known.

Even if the agent had known that they should stand still given the type of snake they are facing, the reason for that specific agent to stand still was their subjective reason which just happened to coincide with the objective reason. But this objective reason to stay still when facing the snake follows from the position of knowing, which is completely independent from the agent. Then, we label as objective that that is attributable to *any* agent whose reason would match what would follow from that position of full-information; it would not be attributable, however, to the reasons of specific agents.

As a result — and this is why the dichotomy starts to be unhelpful — the dichotomy eclipses an important possibility: that of reasons that are dependent on the standpoint an agent occupies, but that are not necessarily agent-specific, nor the standpoint of *any* agent. In the snake example, the dichotomy is not able to capture reasons that an agent may have to run away, not because of the agent's subjectivity *per se*, but because of the position the agent occupies — which any agent in that same position would have. This is what I will develop in what follows.

I.2 — Positional reasons

In the previous section, I mapped out how subjective (*i.e.*, attitude-dependent) reasons are deemed normatively irrelevant by the subjective/objective reasons dichotomy. Throughout the rest of this chapter, my argument will be that a reason's objective status should not be defined in terms of a reason's attitude-(in)dependence. Instead, I will propose that there are reasons that find the source of their normativity in the positions agents occupy, regardless of their attitude-dependence or attitude-independence. That is, these reasons, which I will call *positional reasons*, are normative and objective reasons in virtue of their position-dependence. Were an agent to be conditioned by other positions, that agent would probably have a different set of (positional) reasons. As such, I aim to show that there is a type of normative reasons that is relevant for claims of objectivity, and that may include reasons that are subjective or impersonal, that escape the objective/subjective reasons dichotomy.

In order to make this argument, this section will be organised in the following way. In I.2.1, I will start by introducing Amartya Sen's concept of *positional objectivity* and the idea behind it that objectivity has to do with specific positions, since one's historical, cultural, social, and biological contingencies (*i.e.*, *positionality*) helps determine how one comes to conceive the world. This will provide an initial alternative to the view presented in the previous section on how to conceive objectivity. But, more importantly, it will provide the conceptual framework from which I will develop my argument that there are normative and objective reasons that are determined by an agent's positionality.

Following from the insights from I.2.1, in I.2.2, I will argue that an agent's practical standpoint should be defined in relation to positionality, and that it is from that positional standpoint that one normatively engages with the world.

Then, in I.2.3 and I.2.4, I will address how positional reasons acquire their normativity, and how subjective reasons are also normatively significant reasons for objectivity (in other words, there is the need to show that

subjective reasons are also relevant, since the claim that positional reasons can either be subjective or impersonal would be controversial). I will expand on these points by further fleshing out that positional reasons are better understood in an anti-realist constructivist metaethical framework, specifically a Humean constructivist one.

Before proceeding, one terminological note is required: from now onwards, I shall call the objective reasons we saw in the previous section as impersonal reasons. There are two reasons for this: the first reason is that, in a work that proposes to enquire into the meaning of objectivity, we are not yet in a position to associate impersonal reasons with *objective* reasons — in fact, my argument throughout this work will be that these are not synonymous; as a result, the second reason is that the use of the term *objective* at this moment would introduce terminological confusion for the later stages of the work. At the same time, I shall use *subjective* not as oppose to objective, but as opposed to *impersonal*, and synonymous with *attitude-dependent* and *personal*.

I.2.1 — Positional objectivity and positionality

In this first part of the section, I will start developing an alternative understanding of objectivity by introducing Amartya Sen's concept of positional objectivity, the role positions play in the development of our perspectives, and the relevance of positional objectivity and positionality for the objectivity of those normative reasons I will be calling positional reasons. Although Sen develops these concepts regarding perspectives, I will propose, by the end of this chapter, that these should also be applied to normative reasons.

Amartya Sen's (1983, 1993, 2010) work on what he calls *positional objectivity* represents an alternative way to start understanding what it is for a standpoint to be objective (later, in I.2.3, I will expand on the relation between positionally objective standpoints and reasons). In order to get to the more precise connection between objectivity and positions, however, I will start from where Sen starts: looking at how positions relate to persons.

Sen's starting point is twofold: on the one hand, what we observe depends on our positions in relation to the objects being observed; on the other hand, our beliefs are, at least in part, informed by our observations. Sen provides a quite persuasive example: we can observe from Earth that, during an eclipse, the size of the sun and the moon appears to be the same. With no additional information about this matter, it would be plausible to formulate the belief that the size of these two celestial bodies is similar. The formulation of this belief would be based on our observations, and dependent on our positionality in relation to the objects being observed. In this case, the essential feature of the observation that leads to the conclusion that the size of the sun and the moon is similar is the position from where the observation is made — and the lack of some forms of knowledge. In this scenario, it is possible to conceive that anyone on Earth could come to believe that the sun and the moon have the same size. This conclusion, however, would be very different if the observation would be made from the moon. As the example illustrates, whatever we see is constrained by the position through which we observe the object, which will influence what we believe. Straightforwardly, then, we can conclude that beliefs can be dependent on our positions in the world. This is simply to say that we are influenced by how and where we apprehend what surrounds us.

In comparison to the view from I.1, notice how Sen's starting point already starts to introduce nuance to what was previously taken to be merely subjective. That is, there is a distinction to be made, according to Sen, between the beliefs that are subjective and the beliefs that result from where one stands in the world, which is independent of one's mind. Whereas those who support the dichotomy would take an agent's position and subjectivity as synonymous and both to be a source of error, requiring the need to transcend them, Sen proposes that one's position is most relevant to determine one's beliefs and claims of objectivity about beliefs. The emphasis is on positions rather than on persons themselves.

To make the disagreement sharper, the most radical shift introduced by Sen's focus on positions is the extent to which we could define objectivity based on the positions of specific persons, instead of just brushing off beliefs arising in this matter as being merely subjective. Following from the role

positions have on one's beliefs, Sen's proposal is that what starts determining the objectivity of a belief is not the content of one's observations, but the extent to which that same observation can be made by other persons if in the same position. However, we cannot yet use the term *objective* to classify a belief, since, at most, what we have is a belief that is objective from a specific position: for now, such a belief would be merely *positionally* objective.[13] That is, this would be a belief that is *person-invariant* and *position-relative*.

What this means, to put it in another way, is the following: if, in the 'sun and moon' example, it is the case that more than one person can reach the conclusion that, from earth, the sun and the moon have the same size, then this would be a positionally objective conclusion. And yet, it is not true that the sun and the moon have the same size — it is so only from a very specific position. That is why we cannot say that this view is fully objective, for it only represents one perspective.[14]

Positional objectivity, in summary, 'is about the objectivity of what can be observed from a specific position' (Sen, 2010, p. 157), independently of who is observing. Objectivity, in this way, is related to that that can be concluded from each position, rather than being related to the truth of the beliefs of specific persons.

In comparison with the framework presented in the first section of this chapter, this view on objectivity solves, at least in part, the tension between the subjective and the impersonal. By proposing that claims of objectivity are dependent on specific positions, this view introduces a middle ground between understanding things as being either subjective or impersonal. It starts with the person, but it acknowledges that part of what it is to be a person is conditioned by what a person's place in the world is. This constitutes a different framework insofar as what the person is capable of observing and judging is not taken to be an error or a false appearance that needs to be corrected. Given that persons find themselves alive within specific contexts (I will return to this in the next sections), persons are naturally conditioned by their positions. Since they cannot choose the position through which they

[13] In Chapter II, I will expand on Sen's distinction between *positional* objectivity and *trans-positional* objectivity.
[14] Again, I will explore what constitutes objectivity (as *trans-positionality*) in Chapter II.

observe the world, it would be arbitrary to take one's position as a negative feature rather than a neutral one (Sen, 1983, p. 123).

Lastly, it should be emphasised that these beliefs have little to do with the subjectivity of one's judgments or the fact the judgment is relative to an agent; it is not. Since a belief is considered positionally objective only if it can be reached by others sharing the same positions, this view weeds out possible worries of beliefs that are formed strictly as the result of any mental state or the mental operations of particular individuals.[15] Judgments and beliefs are relative to positions: the more person-invariant that judgment is, the more we can claim that it corresponds to what the world is from that position.

I.2.1.1 — Positionality

Behind the concept of positional objectivity lies the idea of positionality. If one's position not only influence what one sees, but also what one may come to believe, then whatever precisely discloses this position — *i.e.,* the parameters that comprise and determine what this position is — plays a fundamental role in determining one's perspective.[16] Consequently, we need to understand what discloses/determines each position.

A way to look at this is by conceptualising that each position is composed by a certain number of parameters that together form a whole. Returning to the 'sun and moon' example, we can identify certain parameters that define the position of those believing the sun and the moon have the same size: we can say, for example, that they are on planet Earth; that they do not possess scientific information regarding astrophysics; that they lack some geometrical knowledge and a complete understanding of perspective. Other parameters could be potentially added. Any parameter that can explain one's positions is a positional parameter, which Sen defines as follows:

> [t]he positional features […] can include any general, particularly non-mental, condition that may both influence observation, and that

[15] This is how Sen defines *subjectivity* (1993, pp. 128-129; 2010, p. 158).
[16] Perspectives being anything that one develops from the positions one occupies, such as beliefs, values, attitudes, judgments, experiences, norms, observations, etc.

> can systematically apply to different observers and observations. (2010, p. 158; for an earlier formulation see 1993, p. 127)

In other words, positional parameters, or positionality more generally as a whole, should not simply be understood as comprising the spatial/physical influences on the development of our beliefs. As some of the parameters mentioned before were an example of, we can consider a further case in which different blind persons sharing the same type of blindness can be said to share the same positional perspectives.

The idea behind positional parameters is that they should provide an explanation of two things: one, of the observations one makes; two, the perspectives one develops. These will be explained insofar as the relevant parameters are disclosed, and we can ascertain as to their influence in developing one's position. Following Baujard and Gilardone (2019, pp. 7-8; see also Sen, 1983), the idea behind understanding positions can be put systematically in three points: firstly, we would be able to explain different persons' perspectives on the basis of the position each occupies; secondly, we would be able to explain why changing positions may change a person's perspective on the object of observation; thirdly, and as mentioned before, one is conditioned by the positions one is in, without much capacity to change that fact. Following from this, any perspective is dependent on one's non-neutral positionality, and any claim of objectivity is dependent on the analysis and disclosure of the specific positional parameters that help develop such perspective.

More generally, if we were to be able to disclose all the parameters that influence specific observations and the development of specific perspectives, then anyone should be able to see how these perspectives came about, so that in the process, that perspective becomes positionally objective (see Sen, 1993, pp. 136-137; Gilardone, 2015, p. 128)

Defined in this way, positionality plays an important role in the development of one's perspectives. However, it may be said that this definition is too broad, and certainly we can identify positional parameters that should have a bigger impact than others on defining one's positions. As such, I will be using positionality to be short for social, historical, cultural,

and biological contingencies, more specifically. I will take these to be the types of positional parameters that determine one's positions the most.

These four categories of contingencies are still quite broad in order to encompass smaller, different types of contingencies, since it seems that it could be possible to present an endless list of contingencies. Anderson (2003, p. 241) mentions that parameters like '[…] background beliefs and attitudes, cognitive limitations, personal relations to the object, and so forth' can have an impact one's judgments of an object. Decesare (2017, p. 225) adds to this list one's history, geography and empirical experiences. Although we could go on and add more, all of these can be seen as subsets of the four main categories I highlighted and can even correspond to cross-categories: cognitive limitations, for example, fall both under biological contingencies and social contingencies, as one's place in society affects one's cognitive development.

To put this idea of positionality into a context, and to return to the Black Lives Matter example from the Introduction, the perspective that gave rise to this movement — that African Americans are oppressed by the existence of social inequalities that follow from a structurally racist society — has been determined by their positionality: their social, historical, cultural, and biological contingencies have shaped how they observe the world. Namely that of police violence and racialised targeting in predominantly Black neighbourhoods, forced segregation, and disinvestment in housing and infrastructures. Given these contingencies, we can start to understand their perspectives.

This example seems to also point us towards one specific type of position that, on its own, can be understood as a positional parameter that influences and helps explain one's overall position, which deserves special attention. I am referring to social positions, which have a particular impact on the perspectives one forms — this particular effect that follows from social positions is what Young calls 'social perspectives' (2000, p. 136). Young explains that

> [b]ecause their social locations arise partly from the constructions that others have of them, as well as constructions which they have of others in different locations, people in different locations may

> interpret the meaning of actions, event, rules, and structures differently. Structural social positions thus produce particular location-relative experience and a specific knowledge of social processes and consequences. Each differentiated group position has a particular experience or point of view on social processes precisely because each is part of and has helped produce the patterned processes. (2000, p.136)

The point is that the different social positions we all inhabit — such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age — create specific social perspectives which further have an impact on our understanding of the world and on the other perspectives we form. We can see instances of this in different political struggles, such as how employers and employees tend to see shifts in minimum wages differently, or how persons belonging to different social classes assess differently the state of the country they both live in, or how both react differently to policy measures in response to a pandemic. Persons in different positions will have different experiences, history, and social knowledge (see also Sen, 2010, pp. 161-169), and, as a result, social positions and social perspective can be understood as giving an important contribution to the more general idea of positionality. It provides a clear case of the different impacts positionality can have on the formation of positional perspectives of different individuals, given their very diverse nature and starting points.

To help further contextualise, we can look at other examples in addition to that of the Black Lives Matter movement. Consider now an example regarding gender discrimination in India that Sen provides when discussing *objective illusions*[17] (2010, pp. 166-167). The example explores the difference between perceived morbidity and observed morbidity, and the impact this has on women's health. Contrary to what would be expected, until recently, women in certain states of India had a higher mortality rate than men. However, the self-perceived morbidity rates by women were not higher than men's. This meant that, although there was a higher percentage of women dying than men, women believed that they were diseased less often than men. According to Sen, this fact can be associated specifically with two

[17] For this chapter, it is not necessary to explain what *objective illusions* are; I will explain and return to this topic in Chapter II.

problems: the educational deprivation that women experience, and the common social view that gender discrimination is 'normal'.

This example purports to show how several factors can make the members of a specific group to incorrectly assess their own health: given the constraints Sen mentions, these women were not able to recognise the symptoms of poor health as medically correctable symptoms. Furthermore, Anderson (2003, p. 246) suggests that 'they […] adjusted both their feelings and their preferences to their lower expectations.' (Anderson, 2003, p. 246)

There are many angles through which to explore this example, and I will return to it later. Here, I want to establish that perspectives are dependent on one's positionality, with a particular emphasis on social positions. If we look at these women's possible social, cultural, historical and biological contingencies, we can identify how these women's positions as women, from a low class, uninstructed, within a specific Indian culture with its own established patterns and practices, influenced the way they interpreted the meaning of actions, rules, and structures in a harmful way to themselves. Their positionality helped determine the perspectives they objectively developed: from the same position, these women all arrived at the same conclusion.

So far, in I.2, I have taken two fundamental ideas from Sen: that of positional objectivity and that of positionality. The core takeaway from these insights is that by disclosing one's positional parameters we can determine the extent to which one's perspectives are positionally objective, insofar as these could be held by anyone else sharing those positional parameters, *i.e.,* occupying the same positions.

We have seen how these two ideas apply to perspectives. My argument in this chapter, however, regards normative reasons. My suggestion will be that, analogously to Sen's proposals discussed until now, if we can say that positionality matters to determine the normativity of one's reasons, as I will argue that it does, then positional reasons are objective reasons in the positional sense. That is, positional reasons are positionally objective.

Positional reasons, I will propose, are normative reasons that are normative and objective in virtue of a process of practical reasoning which is

defined in relation to the positional perspectives from which they arise. Specifically, they are reasons that are positionally objective because they are *person-invariant* and *position-relative*. In other words, what determines the objectivity of a reason in this sense is not the content of the reason, but the extent to which any other person sharing the same standpoint would have such a reason (I will expand on this in I.2.3).

Before I am able to make this argument about positional reasons, however, in what follows, I will first argue that we should define our practical standpoints in relation to positionality — that is, that positional perspectives matter for what agents take to be reasons.

I.2.2 — Positionality and practical reasoning

In this subsection, I will argue that we should define agents' practical standpoints by a process of practical construction that starts from particular positions. In other words, I will argue that the standpoint from which we become agents and from which we exercise our agency is a practical construction starting from our positional perspectives.

Let me start with the assertion that our practical standpoints are a practical construction. Here I directly follow Carla Bagnoli's (2002) argument that *construction*, as a metaphor, is the best representation of our normative reality. Bagnoli's argument is that an agent's normative relations result from the agent themself having an active participation in determining their normative relations (p. 133). Bagnoli explains it best when she writes that

> [t]he image of construction rules out a traditional conception of practical reasoning in which the agent confronts "the situation" or "the problem", she surveys the relevant facts, runs her deliberative procedure, and then draws her conclusion. Alternatively, the image of construction suggests that "the situation" is not merely given, standing before the agent, waiting for her to make up her mind or to simply discover the right solution to her problem. Rather, through the appreciation of multiple constraints, the agent constructs the situation as such, and figures the problem she has. The evaluative characterization of the situation and of the problem that the agent faces is also object of deliberation. (p. 134)

That is, the agent is an active part in determining their normative reality, given the constraints one undoubtedly faces as an agent. The idea is that agents establish normative relations with the world, and they do so by searching for reasons — this is what is to be an agent (p. 131). It is in this sense that we should understand one's normative reality as a construction, and this starting point is what Bagnoli calls one's *basis of construction*.

The basis of construction is one of the three elements Bagnoli proposes that can help explain our normative realities and how we find ourselves as agents in the world. The other two elements are the *objects* of construction, and the *methods* for moral reasoning. The objects of construction, of practical reasoning, are the content of the reasons about what there is reason to do (or feel).[18] These are normative relations that agents construct based on their own practical reasoning and the constraints their deliberation faces. In turn, the methods with which we practical reason are how we engage in practical reasoning: these, as Bagnoli suggests (p. 132), can take different forms and will differ according to different types of constructivism. For the purposes of this subsection, I will not focus on the methods themselves, but rather on what constraints there can be on the methods we accept we use for practical reasoning, whatever constructivist view we may subscribe to.

So far, I have introduced Bagnoli's proposal that practical reasoning is best understood as construction. In what follows I will present Bagnoli's argument that the methods of practical reasoning are conditioned by the basis of construction, and I will subsequently argue that we, as agents, are specifically conditioned by our positionality. In other words, I will first provide Bagnoli's answer to the question 'how is it that our practical reasoning is conditioned by the basis of construction?' and then I will argue that the answer to that question should specifically be that our practical standpoint should be defined in terms of positionality.

[18] Given the focus of this chapter on reasons, I will uncritically accept Bagnoli's identification of judgments based on *reasons* as the objects of our normative experiences (for a possible alternative account of what can be understood as the 'Centrality of Reasons', see Peter, 2019b).

Bagnoli starts with the assumption that we, as agents, are 'necessarily constrained and conditioned, finite and historical, and […] that [human agency] develops in time and is determined through time.' (p. 132) Similarly with the idea expressed in I.2.1 that by disclosing our positional parameters we could explain our perspectives, Bagnoli proposes that our normative experiences are constrained by the type of agents we are and that, by disclosing the constraints that limit our normative relations, we can establish the agents we are. In other words, by disclosing the constraints we face we can establish how we engage in practical reasoning.

Bagnoli specifically highlights four types of constraints on the normative relations one establishes (p. 133). These are: first, epistemic constraints (see also Mason, 2006.), in that the agent only has access to a certain amount of information, both in their capacity to acquire it and to process it; second, diachronic constraints, in that time imposes constraints on agents *qua* agents; third, what I will label sociability constraints: these are related to the fact that agents establish relations with other agents, whom themselves have interests, needs, and can make claims on each other; and, lastly, deliberative constraints: deliberation conditions, and is conditioned by, the normative relations we establish with the world and what we take to be meaningful from those relations. How we deliberate now is conditioned by how we deliberated before: '[p]ast deliberations constrains the options and inform the vision of the world that we have now.' (Bagnoli, p. 133)

But there is something that we can make even more salient in Bagnoli's argument. Namely, that there is one thing these four constraints have in common and that we can take to help identify other constraints such as these: they are all representative of the way in which, for one to be an agent, one can only exercise one's agency to the limit of what is possible and accessible to them. That is, one's normative relations are bounded by certain constraints that the agent is facing. One is an agent only from one's practical standpoint. In Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear Window* (1954), Jeff, who is confined to a wheelchair with a broken leg in his apartment, starts observing his neighbours from his window, to pass the time. One night, Jeff hears a woman screaming 'Don't!', followed by the sound of glass being broken. Following a series of observations from his window, Jeff comes to the belief

that one of his neighbours — Mr. Thorwald — killed his own wife. Independently of our knowledge of what happens next in the film, at this point, Jeff, as an agent, faces a few decisions: whether to call the police, whether to continue investigating, whether to try to do something about what he believes has happened. Most importantly for the purpose I am bringing this example up, Jeff's normative reality is heavily constrained: Jeff faces epistemic constraints, since the amount of information he has is sparse and limited to what he can observe from his wheelchair in his apartment; Jeff faces diachronic constraints since he has to make certain decisions when he has to make them; Jeff also faces sociability constraints since it can be said he has obligations arising from the fact that he lives in a society where murder is wrong, or that he should guarantee his girlfriend's safety when it is dependent on his actions; and, lastly, Jeff also faces deliberative constraints, since Jeff takes some things to be meaningful rather than others, such as guaranteeing his girlfriend's safety or that murder is wrong. As an agent, Jeff's methods for practical reasoning, and what he takes to be reasons to act following that, are limited by his practical standpoint.

Although these four constraints can help show how one's practical standpoint is constrained, I wish to establish two further points: 1) that agents' practical standpoints are constrained by one's positionality; and 2) that one's practical reasoning — one's practical construction — necessarily starts from one's positionality. In short, I will argue that positionality influences one's normative reality and one's normative relations. It is positionality that helps establish how one finds oneself in the world and is able to deliberate on how and why to act.

In I.2.1.1, I suggested that there are, at least, four main groups of positional parameters: social, historical, cultural, and biological. Now I suggest that these are the types of positional parameters that are relevant in one's process of practical construction: it is from specific social, historical, cultural, and biological positions that we develop our practical standpoints and engage in normative relations.

The first way to see why this is so is by showing how these positional parameters condition the four types of constraints that Bagnoli identifies on the normative relations one establishes. That is, social, historical, cultural,

and biological contingencies condition the information one is able to access, the relations one develops with others, and how one deliberates. Positionality does that by setting the specific contexts in which we find ourselves as agents in the world, and how we engage with that world. Even the world with which we engage with is itself constrained by specific contexts that vary widely.

But a better way to make this point and to establish that one's practical standpoint should be in fact defined in terms of one's specific positionality is with the aid of an example. The case I will be considering is that of Manchester United's Marcus Rashford's campaign for the British government to continue to guarantee free school meals during the imposed lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The simple version of this case is the following: in the summer of 2020, with schools' closure for summer holidays and in the context of the COVID-19 related measures, the Department for Education announced that its free school meal vouchers would stop for that period. In response to this decision, Marcus Rashford wrote an open letter to parliament arguing that the decision should be overturned.

To understand why this case is relevant in terms of positionality and practical reasoning, let us consider what Rashford wrote in the letter addressed to parliament. In that letter, Rashford described in relevant detail what we can take as a clear case of positionality which helped to determine his practical reasoning. In that letter, Rashford wrote:

> […] my mum worked full-time, earning minimum wage to make sure we always had a good evening meal on the table. But it was not enough. […] As a family, we relied on breakfast clubs, free school meals, and the kind actions of neighbours and coaches.[19]

After this description, Rashford added that if it were not for breakfast clubs, free school meals, and the help from others, he would have been in the same situation a lot of children were being put in today because of the government's decision. Had that been the case, Rashford considers, he would not be currently in a position of fighting for these children and 'become part of the solution'. In fact, Rashford wrote, 'I would be doing myself, my family and

[19] https://www.theguardian.com/football/2020/jun/15/protect-the-vulnerable-marcus-rashfords-emotional-letter-to-mps

my community an injustice if I didn't stand here today with my voice and my platform and ask for help.'

From this information we can see how Rashford's social, historical and cultural contingencies helped determine and construct his current practical standpoint and his normative relations with the world. It is his specific positionality that has informed his practical reasoning and the agent he is.

This, of course, only serves as an example of positionality helping to define one's practical standpoint. But it also serves as an example of how positionality can be a source of normativity of one's reasons, as I will argue next. From the Rashford example, we can ask: did Rashford, specifically, have a normative reason to fight for free school meals to continue during schools' closure? If so, to what can we trace the normativity of that reason? My proposal will be that Rashford did have a normative reason, specifically a positional reason. And he did have a positional reason because it follows from his evaluative perspective: that is, Rashford takes free school meals to be particularly valuable because of his specific positionality. This is what I will develop and argue next.

I.2.3 — Positional reasons' metaethical framework

I started this chapter suggesting that we should abandon the traditional view that normative reasons can either be subjective or impersonal. Instead, I have started to propose that objectivity has to do, first and foremost, with specific positions agents occupy (but not with agents themselves), to the extent that practical standpoints should be defined in relation to positionality.

I will now argue that there are certain normative reasons that are normative in virtue of being the result of practical reasoning, with practical reasoning being standpoint-relative. That is, I will argue that positional reasons are normative in virtue of a process of construction that starts from one's practical standpoints defined in relation to our evaluative perspectives — those perspectives constrained by positionality that give rise to our evaluative attitudes.

Furthermore, it is my suggestion that, not only are these reasons normative, they are also objective, both in the positional sense. They are reasons that agents can be said to have from specific evaluative perspectives, as long as they are *person-invariant* and *position-relative*. And this is the case regardless of these reasons being subjective or impersonal. In the *Rear Window* example, the assessment of Jeff's positional reason to call the police should be independent of the fact that that reason can be said to be subjective or impersonal. From Jeff's evaluative perspective — and I want to stress that it is from the evaluative perspective, and not Jeff —, Jeff has a positional reason to call the police according to the normative constraints Jeff has to practical reason. From Jeff's evaluative perspective, he has a reason that is objective at the positional level, independently of any further considerations we may make regarding that reason, even if this reason may also have the potential to be an objective reason across all positions (see Chapter II). Understood in this way, positional reasons are *pro tanto* reasons (I will return to this in I.2.4).

Overall, what I will be proposing can be contextualised in a specific constructivist project that takes the evaluative standpoint as a key characterisation of constructivism.[20] One of the advantages of embracing evaluative standpoints and evaluative perspectives — or what we may more generally call, using Bagnoli's (2002) terminology, the 'evaluative characterization' of the situation — as the defining factors of the reasons one has is that it provides a very plausible position-and-agent-centred conception of reasons without having to rely on further metaphysical claims or intuition base explanations of moral reality (see also Korsgaard, unpublished; Peter, 2019b, pp. 57-59; Street, 2006, pp. 142-144). This is important, for this is not a work on metaethics, but one mainly concerned with the topic of justice. In this way, the constructivist view I will be subscribing to is a view that carries fewer other philosophical commitments and that comes closer to, I have been arguing, our experience of normative reality.

I will start by arguing, in I.2.3.1, that we should understand our

[20] As to whether this is exclusionary of some other forms of constructivism see Southwood, 2018; Street, 2008a.

practical standpoints as being defined in terms of our evaluative perspectives and how these are determined by positionality, following what I established in the previous sections. I further develop my argument by first rejecting Christine Korsgaard's Kantian constructivism. After that, I will frame positional reasons in a specific metaethical framework, that of Sharon Street's Humean constructivism (I.2.3.2).

I.2.3.1 — Evaluative perspectives and contingencies

As introduced, my argument now will be that there are normative reasons that are so because of one's positionality. The first step in my argument is to show that we should take positionality not only as determining one's practical standpoint, but also one's evaluative perspectives, and that we should understand the former in relation to the latter. To see why we should do so, we need to see that it is in the context provided by positionality — the context provided by the positions we occupy given our history, culture, social contexts, and biology — that we come to value some things rather than others. It is in this context, and to a certain extent defined by this context, that we develop normative relations by taking some things to be good, bad, required, and by caring about some things rather than others (see Street, 2008a). In a Kantian way, positionality helps determine what we value, in that without positionality we would not develop the judgments that we do regarding what we take to be valuable. To the extent that our judgments and our perspectives are conditioned by positionality, so is what we take to be valuable.

In this way, we build on the argument from I.2.2: the process of construction of one's normative reality starts from the evaluative perspectives resultant from the standpoints we occupy. That is, not only does positionality determine the construction of our standpoints as agents, it also helps determine and construct our perspectives and standpoints as valuers, since what we come to value at every stage in our lives is determined by other normative and non-normative values, judgments, beliefs, norms, and attitudes, independently of what those values might be exactly. This, following Street, would be an evaluative standpoint with a formal characterisation: as a starting point, it is only relevant that we are valuing

creatures, regardless of what we do in fact value. In other words, I will be taking our practical reasons to be constitutive of the exercise of practical reasoning from a practical standpoint — the standpoint of a valuer, given a formal characterisation — defined in relation to positionality.

As an example, we can return to Sen's gender inequality example in India introduced in I.2.1. In this example we can easily find social, historical, cultural, and biological contingencies that helped define these women's practical standpoints defined in terms of their evaluative perspective: in one sentence, these women stopped taking their health to be valuable given their positionality. By disclosing their normative and non-normative positional parameters, we disclose how they practically reason, the agents they are, and some of the reasons they may have in accordance with their evaluative perspectives. Or, in the case of Marcus Rashford, it seems safe to say that it is because of his own particular social, historical, cultural, and biological contingencies that he takes free school meals to be valuable. In both these cases, evaluative perspectives are a construction starting at the positional level.

My proposal will thus be framed in a specific metaethical constructivist framework. More specifically, I will take positional reasons to be better understood within a Humean constructivist framework. The reason for this can be put in the following way. I argued that positionality influences the construction of our standpoints and evaluative perspectives. Although we could say that both Korsgaard's Kantian constructivism and Street's Humean constructivism share the same starting point — that things are valuable because we value (*i.e.*, that we confer value upon the world), and that it is from that standpoint that we come to have reasons —, they diverge on what can be concluded in terms of our practical reasons. Whereas Kantian constructivism defends that, from a purely formal understanding of the attitude of valuing, we can draw substantive views that correspond to moral truths that are universally valid, Humean constructivism holds that we both start and end with a formal characterisation of the evaluative standpoint insofar as we start and end with the fact that we value some things rather than others — whatever these may be. In other words, for Humean constructivism, we cannot draw any substantive conclusions from an evaluative standpoint

with a formal characterisation: the evaluative standpoint is the standard of correctness for the normativity of our reasons by being the evaluative standpoint of fully fleshed out agents. As Street compares both of the constructivist views I have been mentioning, 'Humean versions […] deny that the rabbit of substantive reasons can be pulled out of a formalist hat: to get substance out, we need to put substance in.' (2010, p. 370).

To put it another way, the reason why I reject Korsgaard's Kantian constructivist position is that although it accepts that some contingencies are relevant to help determine one's practical identities, it says it is one's practical identity as a rational agent — *i.e.*, having a normative conception of oneself — that defines one's reasons. Korsgaard's argument that I will consider now runs along the following lines.[21]

In order to have any reasons to act, one needs to have some conception of one's practical identity: what grounds what one has reason to do is what one can rationally dictate to be consistent with one's identity. This self-conceptualised identity can be formed based on several positional parameters, to adopt the terminology I have been using. Korsgaard (1996, p. 120) gives examples like being born into a specific family, being part of a community, being a citizen of a specific country, being a parent of a specific child, etc. Based on positional parameters like these, one then acts in accordance with them — such as, for example, taking care of one's child, fighting for one's country, etc.

The problem, however, is that positional parameters are merely contingent: these can change within one's lifetime, as their importance changes in how one's identity is defined. From here, Korsgaard argues that, given their contingent nature, positional parameters lose practical force, *i.e.*, one stops acting in accordance with them — as we saw before, if being a citizen of a specific country stops being a relevant positional parameter, then one would maybe not find relevant to fight for that country. As a result of the contingent nature of positional parameters, these cannot be taken to attribute normativity to one's reasons on their own.

[21] This does not correspond to Korsgaard's entire argument.

So, if a practical identity is essential for one to have reasons to act, but if one's positionality is not a good definer of one's practical identity, then what attributes normativity to one's reasons? Korsgaard (pp. 120-121) provides the following reply:

> What is not contingent is that you must be governed by *some* conception of your practical identity. For unless you are committed to some conception of your practical identity, you will lose your grip on yourself as having any reason to do one thing rather than another - and with it, your grip on yourself as having any reason to live and act at all. But *this* reason for conforming to your particular practical identities is not a reason that *springs from* one of those particular practical identities. It is a reason that springs from your humanity itself, from your identity simply as *a human being,* a reflective animal who needs reasons to act and to live. And so it is a reason you have only if you treat your humanity as a practical, normative, form of identity, that is, if you value yourself as a human being.

In other words, Korsgaard argues that although contingencies are part of one's practical identities, the content of those contingencies does not matter to define which reasons one has. Yet, one must take some conception of practical identity to be normative to oneself, otherwise one could not be fully an agent. So, if we disregard all the perishable contingencies, what is left for us to take as a practical identity? That, Korsgaard answers, is the fact that we are rational creatures, given the fact that we are human. Then, the source of normativity of our reasons can be found in our practical identity as rational creatures, which we all share — therefore the usage of the term *humanity*. Consequently, it can be said, the only practical identity that has normative relevance is the immutable practical identity that we all share. It is not that other more contingent and local identities will not provide reasons, but the normative force of our reasons — as well as the importance of those contingent and local identities' value — 'springs' from our practical identity as rational creatures (p. 121).

In summary, Korsgaard's view, overall, seems to open the door to the influence of positionality on one's reasons, although these are ultimately completely dependent on one thing: the fact that we are human.

I will now proceed to argue against this view (it should be noted, though, that it is not my goal to dispute Korsgaard's entire argument, my aim will be narrower, as I will express next). Being a human being with capacity

for reasoning may be a pre-condition for having reasons and for the possibility of attributing normativity to some of those reasons, I will not dispute that. From the case I made above, I will also not dispute the fact that one's practical identity may be essential for having reasons. The point of contention is this: the fact that we take our rational capacities as the core attributer of normativity does not mean that other factors that help define the constitution of our practical identities cannot also be — in a very determinant and relevant sense, and not just as a cause of the fact that one is human. Even if, as Korsgaard puts it, '[…] other forms of practical identity matter in part because humanity requires them' (p. 121), these other forms of practical identity still matter, and matter as constituting practical identity and contributing to practical reasoning, as I have argued before. As a result, that means that they have to establish some normativity in a meaningful way, otherwise to say that they also matter as part of our practical identities becomes an unintelligible claim.

To return to the quoted passage, how is it that if one is to ignore one's positionality, one does not 'lose [one's] grip on [one]self as having any reason to do one thing rather than another – and […] as having any reason to live and act at all'? To be human is not just to have the capacity for pure reason. If one accepts that positional parameters affect the practical standpoint, then they have to affect the reasons we have.

To frame my objection in a more holistic way: Korsgaard starts by identifying that those contingencies I have called positional parameters are part of what helps one to develop and construct a practical identity. However, because these parameters are contingent, we should cast these as not adequate sources of normativity. By running this course, Korsgaard is able to reach what we can call the necessary pre-conditions for normativity — that a moral identity is necessary to have other forms of practical identity —, but in doing that, the argument ends up dismissing and losing track of the very initial factors that allowed the establishment of the idea of practical identity and one's reasons.

To put it in another way: let us assume we could make the argument of the sources of normativity by starting from the fact that we have a moral identity that attributes normative force to our reasons and to the reasons that

may follow from our other practical identities. In that case, there would be no need to even mention that we have other practical identities since these do not attribute normativity directly. But surely it would not seem right to claim that our practical identities do not have an impact of their own on our practical reasoning and reasons, one is not an agent in abstract; one is an agent when one has to engage in practical reasoning locally. Insofar as there are contingencies that determine some of our practical identities on which we are able to practical reason, positionality is relevant to establish the normativity of some of one's reasons.

My defence of the role positionality plays in determining some of our reasons against Korsgaard can be formulated more generally, and drawing on some of Street's (2012) criticism of Korsgaard's view. Street critically argues that following Korsgaard's argument leads us to an unsustainable position:

> [i]n asking whether one has reasons to take anything at all to be a reason, one is posing a normative question; and yet at the very same time one is stepping back from and suspending one's endorsement of all values, thereby robbing the question of the standards that could make the question make sense. (2012, p. 50)

In the same vein, my point is that if we are to start from the practical identity or the evaluative perspective to give a coherent meaning to what a reason is, we cannot then draw back into abstraction and hope for *reason* to maintain its meaning for specific agents. For it is the fact that we take some specific things to be good — given our practical identities, and so our positionality as well, which made those specific judgments possible in the first place — that coherently leads us to conclude that some consideration counts in favour of some action in virtue of there being anything being valued at all. It is an agent's position that attributes content, and thus meaning, to the idea that something can be *taken* or *count* in favour of something else.

This is to say that positional reasons are not completely compatible with metaethical views that necessarily impose substantive reasons that may not follow from the position's specificity, as it happens with this version of Kantian constructivism. The metaethical view that seems to be the most coherent with the concept of positional reasons is one where the normativity of one's reasons follows from the standpoints one occupies and the evaluative perspectives one has specifically; otherwise, it would be much harder to see

how positionality would be relevant in determining one's reasons. We can find that conceptually coherent metaethical view in Humean constructivism, as I will present in what follows.

I.2.3.2 — Humean constructivism

Humean constructivism provides the appropriate metaethical framework to understand positional reasons because of the relevance attributed to different standpoints and on how different contingencies can have an impact on the construction of those standpoints and perspectives, and in defining one's normative reasons. To see how this is so, let us start with how Street defines practical reasons:

> […] the fact that *X* is a reason to *Y* for agent *A* is constituted by the fact that the judgment that *X* is a reason for *Y* (for *A*) withstands scrutiny from the standpoint of *A*'s other judgments about reasons. (2008, p. 223)

From this definition there are two things that I find particularly important for explaining how Street's version of Humean constructivism includes positionality as a feature of what one's reasons are (and, thus, that this is the appropriate metaethical framework to understand positional reasons): first, there is the emphasis on the fact that in order for *X* to be a reason, it is so for *A* — and not any *A*. Second, that it is not *A* themself that defines that *X* is a reason, but that it is *A*'s evaluative perspective as a whole.

Before explaining these two points, note that I am slightly altering the focus from the evaluative standpoint to evaluative perspectives. As argued before, we come to take some things to be valuable because of the positions we occupy. As such, the perspectives we develop from these different positions are also evaluative perspectives. It is not so much the standpoint that is evaluative, on my view, but the perspectives we construct from the different standpoints we occupy as agents. And it is from these evaluative perspectives that we engage in practical reasoning. That is, it is *A*'s evaluative perspective (from the standpoints *A* occupies) that defines the reasons *A* has.[22] This shift

[22] Given my focus on the positions agents occupy, rather than on agents themselves, I consider that Bagnoli's (2019) objections against Humean constructivism do not apply to my

to evaluative perspectives merely expands on Street's understanding of the evaluative standpoint and, as such, I will continue following very closely Street's Humean constructivism proposal as the adequate metaethical framework for positional reasons.

I return now to my explanation and will start with the first point I raised before. One of the main features of Humean constructivism is that a reason is *always* a reason for someone, and not just a reason in a vacuum (Street, 2008a, 2012, 2017). In fact, according to this metaethical view — and along the line I have been arguing so far — we cannot have a debate regarding the normativity of reasons without an answer to the question 'from which standpoint?'. This fits with the argument put forward in section I.2.2 that agency cannot be detached from the agent, nor can we fully have agents without their practical standpoints: without this understanding of what it is to be an agent, if we cannot specify from which standpoints we are to evaluate one's possible reasons, we will not have any standards to apply to make that judgment.

On this point, Street writes pithily that to merely say that '*X* is a reason to *Y*' would be the equivalent of stating that 'the Empire State Building is taller' (2012, pp. 50-51), in that both statements would be missing the reference to the standard that would allow evaluation of its correctness. It is the agents who, from the very standpoints that they occupy, can have reasons; it is the content of those agents' evaluative perspectives that can start giving us any indication of what a reason can be at all. Otherwise, as said before, to merely say that 'there is a reason to do something' does not have any practical meaning: there can be no normative conversation unless it is from substantive standpoints and from the perspectives that are built from there.

It is in this way that Humean constructivism frames the definition of practical reasons as a function of evaluative perspectives and takes these as the standard of correctness of what can be taken to be a reason. Humean constructivism therefore, at its core, takes standpoint-relativity to be key in order to understand the normativity problem. We can thus see how Humean

argument — insofar as my view is built specifically on social, cultural and historical contingencies, it does ignore them.

constructivism provides the proper metaethical framework to positional reasons, whose very reason for existence is the practical meaningfulness that comes from the agent's positionality.

We thus arrive at the second point left in my explanation: put in the form of a question, how is it exactly that one's standpoints and evaluative perspectives determines what should be taken to be a reason?

An evaluative standpoint has been defined as the standpoint that comprises an agent's web of normative and non-normative judgments. Following my shift from evaluative standpoints to evaluative perspective, this means that this version of Humean constructivism posits that an agent's coherent evaluative perspective — that follows from the agent's standpoint — is the standard that determines if something is a reason for that agent.

However, one worry that can follow is that this seems to set the criteria very low for what can be a reason. In fact, without further explanation on what 'reasons are a function of an agent's evaluative perspective' means, it seems that Humean constructivism would imply what Gaus calls The Reason Affirmation Thesis (2011, pp. 235-236). The Reason Affirmation Thesis says that we have *R* as a reason *iff* we affirm *R* as a reason. That is, if we are left without further explanation, it seems that it can be said against the Humean constructivist account of practical reasons that all it takes for someone to have a reason is for that person to recognise and affirm that reason as such.

Although Gaus presents the Reason Affirmation Thesis in the context of a discussion on how rationality and reasons relate, I take the Reason Affirmation Thesis to be a test for determining if an account of reasons is able to dismiss objections based on truth relativism (which is different from claims of reasons' relativism). In this way, if the Humean constructivist account would imply the Reason Affirmation Thesis, there would be a strong objection against this metaethical view: The Reason Affirmation Thesis, therefore, should be rejected.

As I will argue next, I believe that on the Humean constructivist account of reasons the Reason Affirmation Thesis should (and can) be rejected (see also Hopster, 2017, pp. 772-773). I will proceed to make this argument following the same strategy applied by Gaus: I will reject the

Reason Affirmation Thesis based on two grounds: one of sufficiency, and another of necessity.

In order to reject the Reason Affirmation Thesis, we need to understand better what it means for one's evaluative perspective to be the standard that determines the correctness of normative judgments. According to Humean constructivism, for 'an evaluative perspective to be the standard of correctness of one's normative judgments' is synonymous with making those normative judgments withstand reflective scrutiny from the evaluative perspective of the relevant agent — in this case, from further normative and non-normative judgments. However, to say that judgments need to withstand scrutiny from one's evaluative perspective does not necessarily make much clearer what the criteria for determining which reasons one can be said to have. In fact, this may only help reinforce the idea that Humean constructivism may indeed imply the Reason Affirmation Thesis.

As a result, we need to understand what Street means by a judgment having to 'withstand scrutiny'. For a judgment to withstand scrutiny from an agent's evaluative perspective is for that judgment to be considered correct according to the agent's other normative judgments and non-normative facts that comprise that agent's evaluative perspective (Street, 2008a, p. 230). This means that, for example (Street provides other similar cases, see p. 229), in order for an agent to say that they have a conclusive reason,

> '[…] it is constitutive of taking oneself to have conclusive reasons to *Y* that one also, when attending to the matter in full awareness, take oneself to have reason to take what one recognizes to be the necessary means to *Y*. One *cannot* take oneself to have conclusive reason to *Y* without taking oneself to have reason to take the means to *Y*, where the force of the *cannot* here is not rational […] but rather analytical or conceptual […]. (p. 228)

That is, by judging that we have conclusive reason to *Y*, anything that leads to *Y* is constitutively also a reason, as defined by the standards we have set that determine that we have conclusive reason to *Y*. As Street (p. 229) further points out, if *Z* is a means to *Y*, it is both irrelevant that the agent does not know that, and that they think they do not have a reason to *Z*. What determines what is a reason is not the agent, but the agent's evaluative perspective. So, if an agent would have a reason to *Y*, the agent would also implicitly have a

reason to *Z*, according to the standard that the agent's evaluative perspective sets. The passage above represents a good explanation on how we should understand that evaluative judgments form the standards to judge other normative judgments.

However, by denying that they have reason to *Z*, according to their own standards, they would be mistaken to think that they do not have a reason to *Z*, but they would not be making a substantive mistake regarding the reasons they have — they would simply be failing to make any kind of normative judgment.[23] The point is that, if one fails at the exercise of reflective scrutiny, one is simply not taking anything to be a reason.

A briefer way, then, to frame the explanation of what it is for a judgment to withstand scrutiny is to say that that judgment has to coherently follow from the agent's evaluative perspective, or, in another formulation, that the judgment is coherent with the other judgments the agent already holds. Once more, then, this view does not postulate any form of substance about what it is for something to be a reason — the substance of our normative reasons is given by the particular and contingent set of values one has as an agent.

We are now ready to address the Reason Affirmation Thesis issue from before. My answer, then, is twofold. First, under Humean constructivism, would affirming *R* as a reason be a sufficient condition for *R* to be a reason? The answer is conclusively that it would not be a sufficient condition, insofar as an agent may fail to engage in the exercise of taking something to be a reason, as in, an agent can be mistaken about what they claim to be their reasons according to the standard that their evaluative perspective sets. Second, would affirming *R* as a reason be a necessary condition for *R* to be a reason? The answer, once more, is also that it would not. In this case, the justification should provide fewer doubts, since *R* can only be taken to be a reason — by the agent or anyone else — if *R* is a reason as determined by the standards set by the agent's perspective as a whole. For

[23] Street compares this to a situation where a child pretends, while 'playing' chess, that a pawn is riding a knight; in this case, the child is not making a mistake, Street says, the child is simply not playing chess, since '[s]he's not doing what's constitutively involved in taking oneself to have a reason.' (2008a, p. 228)

the agent to affirm *R* as a reason does not change anything regarding *R*'s status as a reason: *R* is a reason according to the agent's evaluative perspective, not the agent's opinion. As such, it does not seem possible to accuse the Humean constructivist account of practical reasons of implying The Reason Affirmation Thesis.

To contextualise what I have argued so far, and returning to Marcus Rashford's case from before, we can now provide an answer to the questions I raised at the end of I.2.2. The questions I raised were the following: did Rashford, specifically, have a normative reason to fight for free school meals to continue during schools' closure? If so, to what can we trace the normativity of that reason?

What I have argued is that Rashford did have a normative and objective reason to fight for the maintenance of free school meals during schools' closure.[24] He did so, even if only at the positional level (we will see in Chapter II that this reason could be taken to be normative and objective across positions). And he did have a positional reason because it coherently follows from his evaluative perspective: Rashford takes free school meals to be particularly valuable because of his specific positionality. Furthermore, this positional reason is positionally objective because it is person-invariant and position-relative. That is, any other agent who would share his evaluative perspective (determined by his positionality) would arguably have the same positional reason.

With this explanation, we are now in a better position to define and understand positional reasons. Positional reasons are normative reasons that acquire their normativity from coherently following from specific evaluative perspectives. As it stands, positional reasons overlap with the notion of having a reason within a Humean constructivist account. But the point of introducing a new type of reasons such as positional reasons has to do, not

[24] It should be noted that, on what I am proposing in this dissertation, what Rashford has a positional reason to *fight for* can be *supported* by others who are not Rashford, since the reasons *for supporting* the cause need not be confined to positional reasons. That is, one can have a trans-positional normative reason to *support* the cause while not having a positional reason to *fight* for it. I will expand on this in Chapter II.

with what can be said one has a reason to, but with how relevant those reasons are for determining which reasons we can take to be objective.

Regarding this point of positional reasons being reasons that have claims of objectivity — insofar as they are positionally objective — there is one more important distinction to draw. Given what has been said until this point, this account of positional reasons, given its Humean constructivist framework, could be open to another objection/criticism which would follow along these lines: if an agent's evaluative attitudes are the standard that determines what is a practical reason, then the criteria to determine a practical reason can be dominated merely by our desires, whichever these might be.

The Humean constructivist account of practical reasons, though, seems to escape this objection due to the way Street (2012, pp. 42-44) identifies three differences between the attitude of *valuing* and the attitude of *mere desire* (see also Watson, 2004). This is a fundamental distinction that Street introduces, thus moving Humean constructivism from a traditional understanding of motivation in terms of Humean psychology, and how attitude-dependence is understood.

According to Street, there are three differences between the attitude of valuing and the attitude of mere desiring: first, valuing requires a discipline to commit to both means and ends; second, valuing captures a deeper range of emotional and phenomenological experiences; and third, valuing requires a greater structural complexity. I will briefly expand on these now — this distinction should deserve a bigger attention, which I cannot provide in this work.

The first difference is that valuing involves more than desiring, in the sense that '[t]he attitude of valuing is characterized by a "discipline" that the attitude of mere desiring lacks' (p. 43). Whereas desiring something does not constitutively comprise the desiring of whatever means are necessary to achieve the desired end, valuing something — or, taking something to be a reason —, on the other hand, constitutively involves valuing the necessary means to achieve the valued end.

Here Street borrows from Korsgaard's Civil War soldier example whose leg has to be sawed off (without any anaesthesia available) in order to survive. Street points out that for the soldier to claim that they desire to live,

while having no desire to have their leg sawed off, is an understandable claim, for one can desire an end but not the means to that end; however, if the soldier were to change the previous claim to say that they think they have most reason to live, but no reason 'whatsoever' to have their leg sawed off, the claim would become somewhat unintelligible. In the latter case, for one to have a reason to pursue some end implies having a reason to perform the means to achieve that end — or, to value an end implies valuing the means to that end as well, whereas desiring an end does not imply desiring the means to that end.

The second difference pointed out by Street is that the language of desire does not capture the emotional and phenomenological complexity that the attitude of conferring value on the world requires, namely because we can attribute value to things we do not desire — an example that comes to mind is that a lot of people seem to desire for a sunny day, and especially desire for the absence of rain; it is conceivable that these people would also value a (or several) rainy days given the agricultural needs of their country, the avoidance of drying soils, etc. In this case, then, one would value a rainy day, although one would not desire having to go outside and deal with a rainy day. In other words, and as my example pretends to show, the state of mind of desiring is much simpler than the one of valuing in terms of the range, nuance, and depth of human emotion and feeling (p. 44).

I would also suggest, within this point, that another way to understand this difference has to do with a further distinction: whereas the attitude of mere desire seems to be a reactive attitude (not necessarily as an impulse or an urge), the attitude of valuing can be characterised as being a proactive attitude. In this sense, we could say that the attitude of mere desire lacks the complexity of the attitude of valuing because they represent different forms of interacting with the world. My desire of sunny days seems to be merely an immediate response of displeasure, perhaps a disposition, to the fact that it is raining (or towards the possibility that it will rain) — I want to have what I like/enjoy, and not what I do not like/enjoy. My valuing of rain, contrarily, implies a degree of reflectiveness and deliberation, and then a conscious decision as to ascertaining that it would be *good* — not in terms of my desires, but in terms of my normative relations — that it is raining (or that it will rain).

Lastly, the third difference Street finds between valuing and mere desiring is that the attitude of valuing requires a 'greater structural complexity', as the second difference can be seen as an example of. This, according to Street, has to do with our common use of the term *desire*: desire tends to be directed at a single object or state of affairs, in that one may desire some type of food, life achievement, etc. The evaluative experiences that valuing comprises, on the other hand, Street writes (p. 44), 'often involves experiencing very specific features of the world as "calling for" or "demanding" or "counting in favor of" other very specific things.' Illustratively, what is involved in counting in favour of accepting a favour from a friend who has done us a favour in the past is very different from the simple desiring of a donut.

Here, again, I find useful to return to the distinction I introduced in the second difference: the attitude of valuing comprises, to a certain extent, a level of reflection; it could also be characterised as a deliberative attitude, some attitude that we actively seek within the constraints of our standpoints. It is in this further sense that we can interpret valuing as being structurally more complex than desiring. Taking something to be good entails a web of experiences, personal development, and specific relations between one's identity and the world. Valuing is the result of this web, as desiring might be; but valuing entails actively balancing each part of the web and seeking to find and attribute meaning into the world.

If the distinction between valuing and mere desire can be made in this way, then the reasons one can be said to have, and one's positional reasons, are less open to the criticism that they are merely the result of one's specific whims. One is forced to focus more on the role of one's standpoints, rather than one's subjectivity.

I.2.3.3 — Two further possible objections

To understand positional reasons within a Humean constructivist framework opens up the possibility of more objections that should be considered. I will now consider two further objections.

The first objection I will consider is a standard objection which can be formulated in the famous 'petrol/gin and tonic' example introduced by Bernard Williams (1981). Simply put this is the example: There is an agent who orders a gin and tonic. However, unbeknownst to the agent, petrol is served instead of gin. Given this situation, does the agent have a reason to drink the 'gin' and tonic?

Just like the 'snake' example in the first section, this is a paradigmatic case to discuss the different types of reasons one may have. Specifically, this example is often used — by externalists about reasons, particularly — to make the case that an agent in this situation could not have a normative reason to drink, given the fact that the drink is not actually made of gin.

But internalists can also agree with this conclusion. Williams' own position, for example, is that the normativity of our practical reasons comes from rational deliberation, which involves correcting one's beliefs and motivations if necessary. The normativity of our practical reasons, then, for Williams, is dependent on the correct deliberation about one's beliefs and motivations. This means that if one is motivated to act but the origin of that motivation is based on false beliefs, then one does not have reason to act.

The objection to the view I am defending, then, be it in Williams' internalist version or in realist versions, would be that even if our practical reasons could be somewhat dependent on positionality, our epistemic reasons about practical reasoning are not, since it is the facts and the correctness of one's beliefs that will help determine one's practical reasons. The objection would boil down to diminishing the impact positionality plays in determining one's normative reasons to the extent that the concept of positional reasons would be put into question.

My reply will start by noting that even the most zealous defender of the attitude-independent nature of reasons would acknowledge that the agent in the example above would have a subjective or, at least, a merely apparent reason to drink the 'gin' and tonic, as we saw in section I.1. From this point of agreement, I will argue that these subjective reasons are normatively relevant given how contingent one's epistemic circumstances are. As a result, subjective reasons, as long as they follow the criteria set above, can also be

positional reasons. In this way, positional reasons could then demonstratively be composed by either subjective reasons or impersonal reasons.

As it is clear from the exposition above, the objection pays very little attention to the agent's epistemic and practical circumstances. However, these circumstances are everything the agent has to practical reason with and to make a decision. In order to respond to the objection, it will be easier to frame the problem in a slightly different way. To answer the question as to whether one could ever have a normative reason to drink a petrol and tonic, we need to look at the type of considerations that would normatively matter in the situation. One of those considerations is to ascertain what the agent is in position to know or to justify. Certainly, we cannot disregard the fact that there is only so much we are in a position to know or justify when issues of practical normativity arise. The problem, as Mason (2006) correctly identifies regarding Williams — though the conclusion of what the problem is also applies to the externalist views —, is that

> [Williams'] requirement for rational deliberation mean[s] that [he] seem[s] to be talking not about what *A* has normative reason to do, but about what *A* would have reason to do if he was able to be in the epistemic situation of a god; that is, what *A* would have reason to do if he could know all relevant information and reason perfectly. (pp. 166-167)

In order to see Mason's point, all we have to do is to introduce contingencies into the agent's epistemic situation. Say that, for example, the agent is anosmic. Or that they do not know what an actual gin and tonic is supposed to smell like since they only heard about the drink, and that the hint of petrol could just be what the drink's normal smell might be. To ignore the constraints one faces in practical reasoning would be to ask practical reason to be something that it is not within the reach of agents, but only of gods, to use Mason's suggestive imagery.

We should then ask why would the veracity of one's beliefs matter for the normativity of one's practical reasons. Given the epistemic constraints and the diachronic constraints that one would face in the 'gin' and tonic case, for example, it seems that it should suffice to say that one has reason to believe something if one is justified to believe it.

Following Fabienne Peter (2019a) and applying it to the context of this chapter, I will subscribe to the view that

> Your use of *p* as a premise in practical reasoning is permissible iff you are justified to believe that *p*. (p. 157)

By moving from a knowledge requirement to a justification requirement, we become closer to say that one's epistemic reasons for practical reasoning are dependent on positionality. To see how this becomes the case, we need only follow Peter's application of the above to a similar 'gin' and tonic example: '[…] if you are justified to believe that the glass contains gin, then your use of that premise in practical reasoning about whether to […] drink [it] is permissible […].' (p. 157)

So, on the view I am subscribing to, the truth of a belief is not the requirement for the believer to consider that as a reason to believe. We avoid, in this way, the strange requirement that we would never be able to know 'what a person's reasons are until the truth of the view is known', as Gaus points out, concluding that 'we can understand a person's reasons perfectly well without knowing whether they are correct or incorrect.' (1996, p. 34)

At this point, I believe it would be helpful to return to the example of gender discrimination in India from Sen that I presented in section I.2.2. To quickly recap, the example explored the difference between perceived morbidity and observed morbidity, and the impact this has had on women's health. The example was that women, in certain areas of India, believed that they were diseased less often than men, and, because of that wrong belief, they had a higher mortality rate. Furthermore, it was explained that this fact could possibly be traced to their educational deprivation, and the common social view that gender discrimination is the norm, to the extent that that is the reality they know and experience (*i.e.*, what they take 'normality' to be).

Concomitantly with what was said before, this example also shows how these women's positionality influenced their belief formation about their own health. Although these women's beliefs were wrong, they were justified in holding their beliefs given their evaluative (epistemic and practical) standpoints — their reasons followed from reasoning that could hardly have

been otherwise. If we were to dismiss these views as not normatively significant, we would fail to recognise their claims to justice.

The second objection I will consider can be summarised as follows: although we should accept that some contingencies can affect our evaluative perspectives, this fact does not entail anything regarding the reason we have.

The objection I will consider will be largely inspired by FitzPatrick's (2008, 2014) and Parfit's (2011, Vol. 2, pp. 534-535) objections to Evolutionary Debunking Arguments.[25] However, before I get into the objection, it should be noted that I am not arguing (nor will I) that positionality proves moral realism to be an unsustainable metaethical view (*i.e.*, I am not using positionality as a debunking argument of moral realism). I am merely trying to ascertain that positionality has an impact on the reasons we have. This, contrary to what may seem, does not necessarily presuppose any stance regarding realism or anti-realism (for examples of realist views that accept that positional parameters have an impact on the reason we have, see Copp, 2008;[26] Schafer, 2014).

A possible objection of this kind, then, would run along the following lines: even if positional parameters, or positionality as whole, can have an impact on the content of some of our normative beliefs, other normative beliefs are developed through autonomous normative reflection and reasoning — as it happens with mathematical, scientific and other philosophical beliefs. As such, if we take normative truths to be mind-independent, it may just well be that through our autonomous use of normative reflection we come to grasp and believe these truths, independently of the effects positionality may have on the development of our evaluative perspectives. In other words, the objection is that we may come to discover some normative truths and develop normative beliefs through autonomous normative reflection and reasoning — which are culturally developed and

[25] Some Evolutionary Debunking Arguments say that evolutionary forces have helped determine agents' evaluative standpoints. I have argued, in this chapter, that positionality helps determine agents' evaluative standpoints and perspectives. Given the similarity between these, we can sketch possible objections to the latter based on objections developed to the former.

[26] For an analysis of the extent to which Copp can maintain an externalist view while accepting the role of these contingencies on one's reasons, see Street, 2008b.

trained, as FitzPatrick suggests; meaning that, contrarily to what I have been arguing, our normative reasons would be independent from the constraints positionality places on evaluative perspectives.

As it is clear, this objection puts a lot of emphasis on our capacity for autonomous moral reflection and reasoning. However, given the account of positionality I have provided, the question we need to pose in response to this objection is the following: is moral reflection and reasoning not dependent on positionality just like the rest of our evaluative perspectives — especially considering the appeals to cultural frameworks that allow the development of our cognitive, analytical, and reasoning capacities? Autonomous moral reflection and reasoning seem to fall directly under the category of the methods of construction, which are constrained by positionality. As such, the denial of the role of positionality leads the possible proponents of this objection with the task of defending that we can detach our forms of reasoning from our positions and from our specific practical standpoints.

However hard that challenge would be, the task of the discovery of normative truths through reflection and reasoning that is independent from one's positionality creates an even harder challenge: it would entail an on-going search for those truths, to which there is no guarantee there will be a terminus. The result of this is the unstable position of never knowing, at different points in time, if we do in fact have a reason to *Y* or not. Furthermore, once this objection opens the possibility that positionality may have an impact on our evaluative perspectives, as the objection does, we would be left again in an unstable position of not being able to verify if the normative truths we may affirm are the result of a match between what we believe and reality, or due to construction.

On this issue of verifiability, Parfit writes the following (note, again, that Parfit's aim was to argue against evolutionary forces' impact on one's reasons):

> […] When we ask whether we have reasons to have certain aims, and reasons to try to achieve these aims, we are not asking questions about natural features of the world. Though we could not possibly have empirical evidence for these beliefs, we also could not have such evidence against these beliefs. When we ask whether we can have practical and moral reasons, nothing is relevant except our normative intuitions. If it seems to us to be clearly true that we can

> have such reasons, and we seem to have no strong reason to believe that we can't have such reasons, we can justifiably believe that we can have such reasons. (pp. 541-542)

My reply to this will only reinforce what I have said before. Although we may indeed not have empirical evidence, there is one more degree of justification, at least, that we can provide (and that does not rely on the unreliable notion of normative intuition that we may or may not in fact share): that is, positionality. In any case, there is a further distinction that can be drawn that I take as an advantage of the view I am arguing for: whereas the accuracy of our moral beliefs matching moral reality is not verifiable even from within the realist/non-constructivist framework (or, at least, it has not been demonstrated) — that is, this framework always presupposes further beliefs —, moral truths as understood from a constructivist view can be verified from within its own framework.

In the context of these objections, one last note is warranted: I have been describing positionality and positional parameters as constraints or as contingencies. These terms seem to carry some negative connotations with them. But, as Bagnoli (2002, p. 132, p. 134) correctly points out, rather than seeing these as limitations that we need to overcome, we should understand these constraints as what makes us agents. Transposing this point to my argument, we should understand positionality as contributing to the definition of individuals as agents, and not simply as agents in abstract, but as agents with evaluative perspectives with specific substantive content. To put it briefly, and to co-opt Sandel's famous point (1984): as agents we are not unencumbered selves, nor are our reasons the reasons of unencumbered selves; and we should embrace that fact.

On the view I have been defending, we have reasons that can only have the force that they have because agents are very contingent beings; and just as we saw, these reasons may very well 'merely' be subjective reasons that coherently follow from certain evaluative perspectives. These are still normatively relevant reasons. But, even though it follows from my argument that there are substantive subjective and/or standpoint-relative considerations that matter in defining what one has a reason for, my overall conclusion is

that positional reasons can be subjective reasons or impersonal reasons. In fact, this distinction is not relevant when we are starting to ascertain the objectivity of a reason: whatever reason coherently follows from a specific evaluative perspective — and we are able of having either of these types of reasons — should be up to consideration for objectivity, since they are, at a minimum, positionally objective reasons.

Overall, I have just presented the metanormative framework that provides a better understanding of the concept of positional reasons, which aligns with the idea behind positional reasons that the substantive content of some reasons is a function of particular evaluative perspectives and the positional parameters that give rise to it. In this way, this understanding of reasons avoids the perils of ignoring some substantive views that some agents may have, of which we can only know their relevance after considering them.

I.2.4 — Objectivity, positional reasons, illusions, appearances, and subjectivity

I have argued that the objectivity of a reason has to do, first of all, with specific positions. This was one of the grounds on which I argued that the traditional subjective/objective dichotomy was unhelpful (I.1). At the same time, however, I have concluded that subjective reasons are normatively significant, and that is why we can claim that positional reasons can take the form of subjective reasons or impersonal reasons. This may appear to be contradictory or, at least, to be two incompatible positions to hold at the same time.

Furthermore, I did also point out that Sen, in his definition of positional objectivity, always makes the point of differentiating between positional objectivity and subjectivity, and that the former is not a form of the latter (see Sen, 1993, pp. 128-129; 2010, p. 158). In fact, Sen writes specifically that '[t]he positional variations in observation can hardly be attributed to *subjectivity*, as some might be tempted to do.' Positional objectivity was defined as a view that can be shared by everyone when

inhabiting the same position, and one's subjectivity does not seem to be a sharable position.

But this distinction may not be this clear cut. As Sen acknowledges in his 1993 paper *Positional Objectivity* (pp. 136-137), there may be an overlap between positional objectivity and subjective features. This overlap may occur the more we fine-tune what we take to be the relevant positional parameters to describe a position:

> […] in the special case considered, the subjective characteristics influencing views and opinions would simply be included in the specified positional parameters. The formal possibility of this overlap is a direct result of the parametric form of positional objectivity, which makes the assessment relative to the chosen positional parameters. (p. 137)

Sen writes that the more we fine-tune, the more perspectives that include subjective features could be taken to be positionally objective.

Sen takes this to be, for the most part, a formal possibility, not paying too much attention to it. But this, I believe, should be understood as more than merely a formal possibility: in the limit, considering all the relevant parameters — which may be composed of subjective parameters — may result in a position that is so specific that it is a position that only a specific subject (*i.e.*, subjectivity) occupies it. That is, positionality affects our positions and practical standpoints, but these contingencies are not uniform constraints that we all share to the same extent. These impact us differently since each individual's positionality is differently composed: cultural, social, historical, and biological, constraints can be experienced differently. From the intersection of all of one's positional parameters and positions — such as the ones explored in section I.2.2 —, each individual's positionality has the potential of being fairly unique to that individual, or, at least, to specific groups of people — since persons in different positions will have different experiences, history, and social knowledge.

Although still constituting a position, this is a type of position that is not open to be occupied by other persons in the same way as presented in section I.2.1. How, then, can this subjective position — and the subjective reasons, beliefs, and actions relative to that position — be considered positionally objective? I will offer a detailed solution for this problem in

Chapter IV. For the time being, it should be enough to say that there can be more than one way to share a position: that is, if we manage to identify what the other person's position is and that they do have a certain reason from their standpoint — in the sense of having a reason as determined before —, we (us and the other person) will both end up 'observing' the same things from the same position and identify the same reasons. To reach this type of person-invariance my proposal will be that we will have to engage in forms of imaginative perspective-taking. We would thus exhaust the possibilities of 'sharing' a position with others. We would also establish that subjectivity and positional objectivity are not mutually exclusive, and that, in fact, objectivity may include subjectivity.

At this point it could be helpful to return to the *Rear Window* example from before and to Jeff's situation: Jeff has developed certain beliefs regarding his neighbour and now faces a few decisions, such as calling the police denouncing his neighbour, or continuing to investigate on his own or with the help of his girlfriend. However, as we know, Jeff is on a wheelchair with a broken leg, and probably on painkillers. And, perhaps, these painkillers can lead to some form of mental alterations such as hallucinations. So the question is: is it possible for Jeff to still have positional reason(s) to do any of the things said above, given the beliefs he has developed about his neighbour while under the influence of hallucinatory painkillers? — remember, at this point, we still do not know if in fact his neighbour Mr. Thorwald has killed his wife.

From Jeff's perspective it seems that he could have reasons to call the police, or continue his investigation. However, in this case, Jeff would not have positional reasons to so, since his subjective position — induced by the painkillers — is not a position that any other person could occupy. As such, any of Jeff's reasons following from this practical standpoint cannot be taken to be positionally objective.

This form of subjectivity should be distinguished from two other forms of subjective reasons: those conditioned by subjective psychological states, and those that are positional illusions. In the case of reasons affected by psychological states, these can potentially be positional reasons, since psychological states can be taken to be positional parameters that others can

share. As I will argue in Chapter IV, via processes of imaginative perspective-taking we may be able to reproduce other agent's mental states. If, in that case, we could describe the reasons that would be conditioned by psychological states as position-relative and person-invariant, then these reasons, if also normative from that evaluative perspective, would be positional reasons.

In the case of reasons that arise as a result of illusions that positionality itself creates — such as the already discussed example of that group of women in India — this fact would still not override the classification of their reasons as potentially positional reasons. Once again, these women's positionality is sharable, even though it is their positionality that is leading to a mistake. Whatever reasons may follow from this, once again, would only merely be positional reasons — they are only objective and normative at the positional level, not across positions (that, once again, will be the topic of Chapter II). It is in this sense that positional reasons are *pro tanto* objective and normative reasons.

In this second section, I proposed that there is a type of reasons that arises from one's positionality and coherently follows from the agent's evaluative perspectives: these would be positional reasons. Positional reasons, I argued, are reasons independent of their possible classification as subjective or impersonal, insofar as positional reasons can be of either kind. Furthermore, it also followed from my argument of this chapter that positional reasons should be understood as positionally objective reasons. With the conclusion of this section, it becomes clearer how the initial subjective reasons/objective reasons also is unhelpful: it would lead us to ignore certain subjective reasons that are normatively relevant since they both follow from one's positionality and evaluative perspectives; that is, we would be ignoring positional reasons that just so happen to be subjective reasons.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that there is a type of normative reasons — positional

reasons — that are relevant for claims of objectivity, that escape the traditional view on reasons characterised by the objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy. These reasons' main feature is their dependence on one's positionality and evaluative perspectives.

In order to make this argument, the chapter was divided into two sections. In section I.1, I problematised the objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy. In doing that, I identified a specific problem with the dichotomy: it contrasts two types of reasons that are from different domains, which makes the contrast both unhelpful and misplaced. As a consequence, I argued that the dichotomy should be abandoned.

In section I.2, I proposed that the objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy specifically ignores a type of normative reasons that is dependent on one's positionality. Those reasons, I called, are *positional reasons*. These are reasons that arise from the fact that our evaluative perspectives are constrained by one's historical, cultural, social, and biological contingencies (*i.e.*, positionality), and that are positionally objective.

In order to develop my argument, I started by introducing Sen's concept of positional objectivity as an alternative to the view on objectivity that the dichotomy reinforces, and explored how positionality has an impact on our perspectives (I.2.1). It is in this sense that positional reasons are objective. In I.2.2, I argued that our practical standpoints should be defined in relation to positionality. In I.2.3, I argue we engage in practical reasoning from our evaluative perspectives, and framed positional reasons within a Humean constructivist metaethical view. This allowed me to explain how we can identify positional reasons as being normative reasons that coherently follow from specific evaluative perspectives, and how positional reasons can be either subjective reasons or impersonal reasons — insofar as subjective reasons can also have normative significance for objectivity (or, at least, positional objectivity). Lastly, in I.2.4, I explained how there is no contradiction between positional objectivity, positional reasons, and subjectivity.

After establishing that positional reasons are the relevant type of reasons for an initial understanding of what objectivity is, in the next chapter I will argue for a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality.

II — Objectivity as trans-positionality: the trans-positional account of public reason

I concluded Chapter I by proposing that there are normative reasons that defy the traditional subjective/objective reasons dichotomy. I called these reasons *positional reasons*: that is, reasons that are objective and normative in virtue of their position-dependence.

However, our evaluations of claims of social justice require a standard of evaluation that applies across positions. As such, reasons of justice need to be objective and normative across positions and not just at the positional level. As a solution, in this chapter, I will argue for a conception of objectivity as *trans-positionality*.

In section II.1, I will introduce the conceptual idea of objectivity of trans-positionality: I will argue that, in the same way that there are reasons that are normative and objective at the positional level, there are also reasons that are normative and objective across positions (*i.e.*, *trans-positional reasons*). Specifically, I will argue that the objectivity of these reasons across positions should be understood in terms of the exercise of scrutiny of these reasons from different positions.

Then, in section II.2, I will specifically frame objectivity as trans-positionality within a public reason framework by proposing the *trans-positional account of public reason*. In other words, I will be proposing that the idea of public reason can provide the standard to determine which positional reasons of justice are trans-positional reasons of justice via public justification. On the trans-positional account of public reason, social justice claims should be publicly justified in terms of trans-positional reasons.

In more detail, in II.2.1, I will introduce what I will be calling the trans-positional account of public reason. Then, in II.2.2 and II.2.3, I will develop this account. First, I will argue that public justification should be understood in terms of trans-positional scrutiny. Second, I will determine what should be the acceptable set of reasons for public justification. Namely, I will argue that positional reasons are the reasons that should be trans-positionally assessed, with trans-positional reasons being publicly

justificatory. Lastly, I will argue against having reasonableness (II.2.3.1) or the quality of one's reasoning (II.2.3.2) as the defining criterion of the reasons that should be acceptable for public justification.

By the end of this chapter, I aim to have developed a comprehensive way of conceptualising objectivity as trans-positionality, and of how reasons and claims of social justice can be said to be objective.

II.1 — From positional objectivity to trans-positional objectivity

We saw previously that positional objectivity corresponds to the idea that perspectives can be considered objective as long as they can be reached by anyone who shares that same specific position. Or, in other words, a perspective, or a reason (as I argued in Chapter I) are objective from a specific position if they are person-invariant and position-relative.

As the terminology immediately suggests, this form of objectivity merely corresponds to the objectivity from a specific position, from which person-invariance and position-relativity can be verified. By the end of Chapter I, that was all that could be said about the objectivity of some perspectives.

The aim of this first section is to introduce and discuss the concepts of trans-positionality and trans-positional objectivity. I will start by discussing the concepts and how we can move from positional objectivity to trans-positional objectivity, as proposed by Sen. Then, in II.1.1, I will explain how, on my view, trans-positional objectivity should be understood when applied to the normative domain.

Until now I have been particularly cautious to not label certain perspectives as objective beyond the positional level. This caution is particularly warranted when we consider some of the examples provided in the previous chapter — such as the 'sun and moon' example, or the gender discrimination one. Although these cases were taken to be examples of perspectives that can be labelled positionally objective, they were also examples of how objectivity

from only one position can be reached on the basis of mistakes, errors, falsehoods, etc., from more comprehensive positions. As we saw, positionality introduces observational limitations, which can shape our perspectives incorrectly.

To describe this apparent incongruence between false perspectives that result from positionality and the idea that a positionally objective perspective can be wrong (although still maintaining its objective status), Sen uses the Marxist concept of *objective illusion*[27] or the term *positional illusions* (Sen, 2002; 2010, pp. 161-167). The use of this terminology can be quite useful, for it clearly expresses the idea that objectivity and illusion can coexist until we are able to engage in further inquiry. Until this happens, we are not in a position to dismiss those positional perspectives discussed in the examples mentioned above as being positional illusions. In fact, even after we are able to make this assessment, it does not change the fact that, given a specific set of positional parameters, those positional perspectives were correct insofar as those in that same position could tell. That is, those positional perspectives were confirmed via person-invariance.[28]

So, although we know that there is a chance that positional perspectives may be mistakes born out of positionality, we still need to be able to conclude that they are wrong, and why they are wrong. In order to reach this conclusion, we need to look more closely into what it means to say that something is an objective illusion — that is, that something is both positionally objective and an illusion. For instance, in the 'sun and moon' example, we can say that we are in the presence of an objective illusion because we have been able to observe the objects of observation of the example through other positions. From the collection of these multiple positional observations, we have then been able to assess the beliefs developed in the example against our other beliefs. It is in this way that we

[27] For a discussion on Sen's use of the term *objective illusion* see Baujard and Gilardone, 2019, p. 10; Qizilbash, 2016.

[28] This is especially significant, since, as expressed by Sen, '[…] the role of positionality may be particularly crucial in interpreting systematic and persistent illusions that can significantly influence — and distort — social understanding and the assessment of public affairs.' (2010, p. 168).

come to identify some view as an objective illusion, that is, by exploring and considering the same objects from different positions.

Sen calls this exercise of scrutiny from different positions *the trans-positional assessment* of positionally objective perspectives. The solution to positional illusions — the need to transcend positionality — comes via the trans-positional analysis of each position. This form of assessment amounts to both the internal scrutiny of the position, as well as confronting it with the reasonings and beliefs from other positions. In doing that, what we are looking for is the assessment of different positional perspectives for their coherence (Sen, 1993, p. 130; 2002, p. 467).

We can see that trans-positionality is the adequate way to approach the problem of objective illusions when we look back at the examples provided and come to the conclusion, as Baujard and Gilardone (2019) precisely pinpoint, that '[t]he problem [with positional illusions] is not that the observation is not sincere or ill-thought-out, but rather the lack of access and scrutiny to other positional views.' (p. 10) The need to transcend positionality arises not because positionality may lead to the creation of illusions; this, it seems, is merely a consequence. We need to transcend positionality because each position is an incomplete representation of a whole. The role of trans-positionality is to add more views on that same whole, thus possibly shedding more light on our understanding of that whole.

The exercise of trans-positionally assessing positional perspectives, then, leads to a set of perspectives that are not merely positional, since they can be held across positions. It is at this point that we can make the conceptual move from *positional objectivity* to *trans-positional objectivity*: those perspectives that qualify as positionally objective, and that, in addition, survive scrutiny and critical reflection from a diverse set of other perspectives, become trans-positional objective perspectives — *i.e.*, perspectives that are reached by different persons from different positions. By reasoning from more than one position, the aim is to move from position-relativity and person-invariance to position-invariance and person-invariance.

Note that trans-positionality aims at position-*invariance* rather than position-*independence* (Peter, 2012; Sen, 2012b). By aiming at positional-

invariance, trans-positional objectivity maintains its compromise with positional dependence (Peter, 2012, p. 166), whereas position-independence would be the exact opposite of position-relativity: traditional position-independent conceptions of objectivity involve processes of abstraction from particular points of view, while trans-positionality uses particular points of view to better inform belief formation. As Peter (2012, p. 166-167) explains, '[t]he thought is that aiming for transpositional objectivity accommodates both the benefits that arise from positional reasoning and safeguards against problems arising from positional illusions.'

To put it in another way, trans-positional objectivity is conceptually able to accommodate perspectives that conceptions of objectivity understood as the view from nowhere cannot. If *positional* objectivity is the objectivity of what can be observed from a specific position, then *trans-positional* objectivity should be understood as the objectivity of what can be observed from every position. Trans-positional objectivity aims at a conception of objectivity that replaces the view from nowhere with a view from everywhere, as Anderson (2003) proposes.[29]

II.1.1 — Trans-positionality and normative reasons

Until now, I have been explaining what an account of trans-positional objectivity would be when applied to perspectives, as Sen does. However, my argument in this dissertation regards normative reasons of social justice and the claims they support: as such, I still need to provide an account of trans-positional objectivity that could also apply to normative reasons. My goal for this subsection is twofold: further explain how we can move from positional objectivity to trans-positional objectivity at the normative level, and then show how trans-positional objectivity conceptually applies to normative reasons.

In Chapter I, I argued that, not only our perspectives can be positionally objective, but that so can be our normative reasons — normative

[29] More recently, Ryan Muldoon (2016) has claimed this epitaph to describe his proposal of an alternative account of social contract theory.

reasons understood within a Humean constructivist framework. These reasons I called positional reasons: normative reasons that are (positionally) objective from specific evaluative perspectives. The problem, just like before, is that there is a relevant difference between reasons that are normative at the positional level and reasons that may be normative across positions. That is, positional reasons, although not merely subjective, do not offer sufficient justification for social justice claims, since they are not normative across positions. As we saw with Marcus Rashford's example, we could say that he had a positional reason to fight for schools to be stay open. However, as I flagged at the time, there is a distinction between saying that Rashford had a (positional) reason and saying that that reason would apply across other positions. Whereas Rashford may have positional reasons to fight to keep schools open, other agents in other positions may not have those same reasons to do the same. Our evaluation of social justice claims requires a standard of evaluation that applies across positions in order to label those claims and reasons to be objective.

Before I address what that standard should be specifically (see II.2), I still need to make clear what it means conceptually for a reason to apply across positions and to be objective in the trans-positional sense. Having established in Chapter I that there are normative reasons that are positionally objective, it would be tempting to say that trans-positionality applies to positional reasons in the same way that it applies to positionally objective perspectives — that is, to identify in the same way as before a difference between reasons that are positionally normative and objective, and reasons that are trans-positionally normative and objective. If we were to do this, it would mean that claims of (trans-positional) objectivity of normative reasons would be synonymous with *standpoint-invariance* (see Hopster, 2017). To put it in another way, akin to Sen's and Peter's argument about *invariance* v. *independence* from before, objectivity on a Humean constructivist anti-realist account of objectivity would not correspond to a standpoint that is independent of specific evaluative perspectives; it would, instead, correspond to a standpoint that takes specific evaluative perspectives into account given their normative significance. Insofar as normative judgments are attitude-dependent on this account — that is, that their status as normatively true or

false is attitude-dependent —, the objectivity of these judgments can only be synonymous with these judgments withstanding scrutiny from a diverse set of evaluative perspectives (Hopster, 2017, p. 778). Nothing else can determine their correctness apart from the evaluative perspectives themselves: we can only verify them in accordance with the evaluative perspectives from which they depart. Then, this Humean constructivist anti-realist account of objectivity would directly correspond to the proposal of objectivity as trans-positionality that we saw above, but now applied to reasons.

It is at this point, however, that it may seem that objectivity as trans-positionality applied to the normative realm runs into trouble. Contrary to what happens with, for example, beliefs — where we can easily understand how positions can be transcended insofar as beliefs are either true or false —, the same does not seem to be true regarding one's normative reasons and judgments. If the correctness of an agent's judgments is dependent on withstanding scrutiny from the evaluative perspective of that same agent, how can we claim these judgments to be trans-positionally objective? In other words, we seem to enter into contradiction when we want to say that claims of objectivity are not grounded on the agent's evaluative perspective itself (where we find the source of normativity of the agent's reasons in the first place) but are grounded on other agents' evaluative perspectives. How could we hold, at the same time, that what determines one's reasons is one's evaluative perspective and that the (trans-positional) objectivity of these reasons is determined by the evaluative perspectives of other agents? There seems to be a conceptual conflict between Humean constructivism and an account of objectivity as trans-positionality: the objectivity of normative reasons seems to get us stuck at the level of specific perspectives, standpoints and agents. That is, it seems to get us stuck to merely possible claims of positional objectivity.

This, I claim, is only an apparent obstacle. One possible way to understand objectivity as trans-positionality in this context is to go back to the explanation on why Humean constructivism rejects the Reason Affirmation Thesis (see I.2.3.2). That is, under Humean contructivism, *R* is not a reason because the agent affirms it to be so. *R* is a reason as long as it

coherently follows from the agent's evaluative perspective, regardless of the agent's opinion. As Hopster helpfully puts it, the evaluative perspective[30] corresponds to an 'objective standard that govern[s] whether a normative judgment is correct or mistake […]' (p. 772). And this is so despite the agent's own considerations on the matter.

Following the argument presented in Chapter I, the objectivity of a reason has, first and foremost, its origin in the perspectives that follow from the positions we occupy. What this means is that, although evaluative perspectives are not independent of specific agents, evaluative perspectives can still be shared with other agents. So, reasons, although following from specific evaluative perspectives, can be 'objectivised' in this sense: others, when occupying the same position, would take the same *R* to be a reason to act. It is the evaluative perspective, nonetheless, that 'determines' what a reason is.[31] When this happens, these reasons are positional reasons. The move from positional reasons to trans-positional reasons — that is, from reasons that are normative only at the positional level to reasons that are normative trans-positionally — is done when reasons withstand scrutiny from a diverse set of evaluative perspectives.

Thus, my proposal following the discussion presented in this section is that trans-positionally objective reasons are those reasons that withstand scrutiny from a trans-positional evaluative perspective (*i.e.*, an evaluative perspective comprised by evaluative perspectives from everywhere). These reasons should then be understood as being both (trans-positionally) objective and (trans-positionally) normative — the normativity of these reasons finding its source in our extended (collective) evaluative perspectives.

So, how is it that Marcus Rashford's reason may go from being positionally objective to being objective across positions? The immediate answer is: as the result of trans-positional scrutiny. More specifically, positional reasons, we saw, do not apply across positions because not every agent will occupy the same positions and develop the same perspectives. That

[30] Hopster focuses on evaluative standpoints. But, as I explained throughout I.2.3, I am extending the idea of evaluative standpoint to evaluative perspectives.
[31] I will explain in II.2, in Chapter III, and in Chapter IV, what, on my account, means for others to occupy another agent's evaluative perspectives.

is, because a positional reason has not yet been evaluated from other perspectives, it cannot be said to provide a justification to those other perspectives. This can happen, however, once these have been accessed and scrutinised from other positions and perspectives. [32] What this means is that the assessment of one's reasons across positions — *i.e.*, trans-positionally — can lead those reasons to be normative across positions, since they will have withstood scrutiny from a trans-positional evaluative perspective.

Then, just like with Sen's proposal before, we can make the conceptual move from positional objectivity to trans-positional objectivity: those reasons that can be considered positional reasons and that survive scrutiny and critical reflection from a diverse set of other positions, become trans-positional reasons.

It could be objected that it seems that I have started with a Humean constructivist account of reasons and am now finishing with a Kantian constructivist account of reasons. This objection would be grounded on the claim that I am now proposing that these (trans-positional) objective reasons are normative reasons because they follow from the perspective of any valuer, instead of from the perspective of specific valuers. However, this is not the case: I am not proposing that the substantive content of the perspective is correspondent to that of *any* valuer. What I am proposing is that the normativity of trans-positionally objective reasons follows from the evaluative perspective of specific valuers, they just happen to be all of us. That is, the substantive content of the perspective is correspondent to that of *every* valuer. The difference between these two claims — the Kantian and the Humean — is reminiscent of the difference between what would constitute a view from *anywhere* and what would constitute a view from *everywhere*. So what I am proposing is that, whatever the substance of our (positionally) normative reasons may be, the normativity of our objective reasons is attached to the evaluative perspectives of specific valuers, and not to an idea of a valuer in general, where pure practical reason is the decisive factor of determination of which reasons we have. Objective reasons as normative

[32] I will expand on this issue in II.2.2 and II.2.3.

reasons, thus, are very much still contingent reasons; contingent on everyone's evaluative perspectives.

To quickly recapitulate, in this section I have introduced objectivity as trans-positionality both when applied to non-normative perspectives and to normative reasons. I have thus proposed that in the same way that there are perspectives and reasons that are positional (*i.e.*, person-invariant and position-relative) (see Chapter I), there are also perspectives and reasons that apply across positions, that is, trans-positionally (*i.e.*, person-invariant and position-invariant). As such, in my argument I drew a distinction between reasons that are positionally objective and normative — *positional* reasons — and reasons that are trans-positionally objective and normative — from hereon referred simply as *trans-positional* reasons. I will continue to expand on this account of objectivity as trans-positionality in the next section by proposing that the standard that should determine the trans-positional objectivity of reasons of justice should be that of the idea of public reason.

II.2 — The trans-positional account of public reason

In the previous section, I introduced the conceptual idea of objectivity as trans-positionality. However, much more needs to be said regarding how the exercise of trans-positionality should be understood specifically. In this section, I will propose that the idea of public reason can provide the standard to determine which positional reasons of justice are trans-positional reasons of justice. Specifically, I will propose a trans-positional account of public reasons where social justice claims are justified in terms of public reasons — which, I will argue, are trans-positional reasons.

In what follows (II.2.1), I will introduce a blueprint of what I am taking a trans-positional account of public reason to be. I will then develop the account more thoroughly by focusing on its main parts: public justification as trans-positional scrutiny (II.2.2), and the acceptable set of reasons for public justification (II.2.3). At the end, I will have presented a more comprehensive way of conceptualising objectivity as trans-

positionality, and of how reasons and claims of social justice can be said to be objective — however, this proposal will only be completely fleshed out by the end of Chapter IV.

II.2.1 — Objectivity, public reason, and the trans-positional account of public reason

So far in this thesis, objectivity has been characterised as always being dependent on what we all are able to see, think, and understand together, that is, dependent on the positions agents occupy — being it from specific positions that only a few occupy or trans-positionally. Objectivity as trans-positionality, as presented before, can be understood as a human collective endeavour in which our search for objectivity comprises the trans-positional assessment of reasons of justice for their justification across positions by agents situated in different positions.

This understanding of objectivity as trans-positionality is shared and explicitly suggested by Sen, whose proposal that political and ethical objectivity is connected to the exercise of public reasoning has its foundations on his interpretations of the works of Adam Smith, John Rawls, and Jürgen Habermas. Sen argues that these authors share the idea that objectivity '[…] is linked […] to the ability to survive challenges from informed scrutiny coming from diverse quarters' (2010, p. 45). What Sen draws from this interpretation is that public reasoning should play a specific role: that of guaranteeing the scrutiny — the examination of the correctness[33] — of our ethical and political proposals; that is, guaranteeing a form of impartiality (in this chapter I will leave aside this claim of impartiality, I will return to it in Chapter III). More specifically, Sen understands public reasoning

> […] as a way of extending the reach and reliability of valuations and of making them more robust. The necessity of scrutiny and critical

[33] It should be noted that the word *correctness*, in this context, is not synonymous with the concept of *truth*. Sen does not think that ethical and political objectivity is related to moral truths. Sen writes that '[t]he case for reasoned scrutiny lies not in any sure-fire way of getting things exactly right (no such way may exist), but on being as objective as we reasonably can.' (p. 40) Thus, I use the word *correctness* because Sen associates objectivity with a correct form of reasoning that we have to go through, which can only be guaranteed via public reasoning.

> assessment is not just a demand for self-centred evaluation by secluded individuals, but a pointer to the fruitfulness of public discussion and of interactive public reasoning: social evaluations may be starved of useful information and good arguments if they are entirely based on separated and sequestered cogitation. Public discussion and deliberation can lead to a better understanding of the role, reach and significance of particular functionings and their combinations. (2010, pp. 241-242)

These represent the core ideas that Sen puts forward regarding the relation between objectivity as trans-positionality, our capacity to forward our views publicly and for these to be able to sustain scrutiny. Unfortunately, Sen does not go into great length to provide a definition or account of what he means by *public reasoning* — as Baujard and Gilardone (2013, 2019) have noted, Sen provides only a 'vague' notion of public reason in spite of the number of times this or related terms are used.[34]

Although providing only a somewhat vague definition of public reasoning, and its relation to objectivity, Sen's work constitutes a good starting point to build on. As Baujard and Gilardone (2019), once again, correctly identify, we should not be preoccupied with what the content of a trans-positional view might be, nor if it is attained and attainable; the issue at hand is about how we can overcome the limits that are associated with positionality.

Allow me then to reframe Sen's suggestions to the discussion of the first section of this chapter and my overall argument. As we have seen, social justice requires a standard of evaluation that applies across positions: reasons need to be normative across positions. Positional reasons, however, are normative only for specific positions. As such, they do not qualify as providing sufficient justification for social justice claims. Objectivity, as defined above, provides that standard; and it provides that standard via public

[34] Baujard and Gilardone (2013, p. 26; 2019, pp. 11-12) add to this point by showing how many times the terms *deliberation*, *public discussion*, and *discussion* feature in Sen's *The Idea of Justice*. And even though these are mentioned abundantly — and thus hinting strongly at the importance they have in Sen's book — their meaning is never precisely developed. Interestingly, Sen believes this not to be a problem. In a footnote, Sen writes that '[it] is possible to define in different ways the reach of "an open and free framework of public reasoning", and the differences in formulation may be quite significant in seeing the precise […] distinction between Rawls's use of this approach and the uses made by others, including Kant and Habermas. I shall not, however, go further into these issues of differentiation here, since they are not central to the approach of this book.' (2010, p. 196)

reason: in other words, the idea of public reason provides that standard, as public reasons are normative reasons that all citizens can share (I will expand on this throughout the section). Specifically, public reason provides that standard of justification when understood as trans-positionality.

This is what I will propose in this section: an alternative account of public reason centred on the objectivity of justice reasons and claims that I will call the *trans-positional account of public reason*. I will start by introducing the idea of public reasoning. Then I will present a blueprint for the trans-positional account of public reason and how it is different from more traditional accounts.

The idea of public reason has a strong tradition and has been used as a solution for specific problems within the literature. Whichever new versions and accounts of public reason may arise, they will always need to be confronted by its more traditional counterparts — at least regarding what they conceptually aim to do differently. This is to say that the account of public reason I will be proposing can be best understood initially in opposition to the way public reason is normally referred to.

Traditionally, accounts of public reason deal with the problem of public justification of moral and political rules:[35] given the disagreements that citizens have in relation to how their common lives should be organised, and their different starting points, public reason supposedly helps provide an answer to the problem of how moral and/or political rules can come to be considered just (or legitimate, on other accounts) to those citizens. On this view, the justice (or legitimacy) of principles, rules, and decisions is dependent on the endorsement of the justifications presented in support of those by everyone as free and equal citizens — in other words, justifications need to appeal to public reasons, and only arguments based on these public reasons should be admissible. In short, public reason is thus a theory of what justifies particular claims of justice (or legitimacy); it is a standard of evaluation of these claims.

[35] See, for example, Gaus, 2011; Larmore, 1996, 1999, 2002; Rawls, 1993, 2001; Vallier, 2014.

More specifically, an account of public reason then answers the question of what reasons can do the job of justification.[36] Justification, on these conceptions of public reason, presupposes the use of sufficient reasons that reference a common point of view — a point of view that is shared by all those involved — from which principles, rules, or decisions are consensually agreed upon. This is known as the consensus view of justificatory reasons. On another view, agreement does not presuppose consensus, but merely convergence. I will return to both these views in more detail later (II.2.2 and II.2.3).

I will make the case for a different account of the use of public reason. This account, which I shall call the trans-positional account of public reason, corresponds to the exercise of public justification where different positional reasons are trans-positionally assessed. To make the distinction sharper: the trans-positional account of public reason is concerned with the process of how to move from positional objectivity to trans-positional objectivity — so it has to do with the process of trans-positional assessments and the collective transcendence of positionality; it has to do with the objectivity of our reasons and claims of justice.

Although following roughly the same idea of public reason as presented before, the trans-positional conceptualisation of public reason entails three main differences regarding 1) what public reasons are, 2) public justification, and 3) the reasons that we should accept for public justification. I will expand properly on these points throughout the rest of the chapter, but this is the gist behind my account: 1) whereas, in traditional accounts of public reason, public reasons are those reasons that are accepted for public justification, on the trans-positional account, public reasons are the end product of the public justification process (see also Landemore, 2012, p. 23). What this means is that public reasons traditionally are those reasons that can be used — the inputs — for public justification, whereas my proposal is that public reasons are the product — the outputs — of public reasoning.[37] Public

[36] Notably, Enoch (2013, 2015) disagrees with this view.

[37] Baujard and Gilardone (2019) propose something not too distant from this in the context of how we should understand Sen's approach to justice: they propose that positional views should be taken to be the inputs of public reasoning, and that public reasoning - by targeting interpersonal comprehension and assessment of moral and political claims – will yield

reasons are, in this context, what I have called before trans-positional reasons (see II.1).

2) I will take public justification to correspond to the exercise of trans-positionally assessing other positions: as defined above by Sen, this is the idea of engaging in the public scrutiny of reasons and claims exercised by different individuals and divergent perspectives with the aim of being accepted by all. Furthermore, this corresponds to the understanding that public reason corresponds to the ideal of how citizens should deliberate together about how to evaluate, judge, and decide about reasons and claims of justice. To put it in another way, our evaluations, judgments, and decisions about justice claims are grounded on the exercise of public reasoning.

Importantly, however, instead of embracing either the consensus view or the convergence view of public justification, the trans-positional account embraces neither. The view that should be subscribed under this account of public reason is what I will call the perspective-understanding view. In brief, the perspective-understanding view corresponds to the view that what should be required for a reason to be a *publicly* justificatory reason is that others understand that reason in their context in order to, subsequently, appropriately evaluate/scrutinise them. On this view, we do not need to reason from the same premises as with the consensus view, nor reach convergent positions; all we need to agree on and accept are the reasons others can be said to have according to their evaluative perspectives. Again, the point is not only about which reasons all can accept — either by shared agreement or joint agreement (see Ferretti, 2019) —, but understanding and accepting reasons because of the evaluative perspectives from which they arise.

In this way, the trans-positional account of public reason deals with public justification and acceptance differently: if reasons are accepted — that is, if they pass the process of trans-positional scrutiny —, then, whatever follows, these reasons will become public reasons, as defined above. To put it in a simpler way: although on both interpretations of public reason reasons are public reasons if everyone can embrace them, on the trans-positional

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outputs that correspond to a transpositional view (*i.e.,* a reasoned agreement) on justice (p. 12).

account our embrace of public reasons is the result of our collective, inclusive, view. Consequently, on this view, we do not accept reasons because they are public; they are public because we have accepted them after exercising trans-positional scrutiny. Public reasons are those reasons that are labelled to be public because they have passed public scrutiny, and, as a result of that, are now the reasons we publicly accept, thus being trans-positionally objective and trans-positionally normative.

3) We are thus left with the question about which reasons should be part of acceptable set of reasons for public justification. Rather than public reasons, as traditionally defined (and as explained before), on the trans-positional account of public reason the reasons that should be taken as the inputs of the process of public justification — that is, the process of trans-positionality — are those I have called positional reasons. I will return to this in II.2.3.

In summary, and to put the trans-positional account of public reason in the macro context of this dissertation, in Chapter I, I argued that there are normative reasons, reasons that coherently follow from one's evaluative perspectives, that are also positionally objective reasons. These positional reasons, however, as the name suggests, are only normative and objective from specific positions — at least until further inspection. In any case, these constitute a first pool of normative and objective reasons to consider.

In the present chapter, I have started to present what is necessary in order for reasons to be normative and objective despite their initial positional background: there needs to be a trans-positional assessment of each evaluative perspective and the reasons that follow from it.

As a result, what I am proposing with the trans-positional account of public reason is that we engage in processes of trans-positionally scrutiny of positional reasons as a way to guarantee that they are publicly justificatory. The trans-positional account of public reason then can be understood almost like the description of a mechanical process: Positional reasons, understood as the inputs of public reason, are publicly scrutinised by other positions. Whatever results from this trans-positional assessment of positional reasons will be the outputs of public reason: these trans-positional reasons — or

public reasons — are the normative and objective reasons that coherently follow from the objective perspective that is encapsulated by the exercise of trans-positionality. To go back to the metaethical language from Chapter I, a reason is a public/trans-positional reason when it coherently follows from our collective evaluative perspective.

In what follows, I will start to develop the trans-positional account of public reason just introduced. I will start, in II.2.2, by arguing for an understanding of public justification on the basis of public reasoning as trans-positional scrutiny.

II.2.2 — Public justification, public reasoning and trans-positional scrutiny

We have seen that positional reasons are normatively relevant. If these reasons are indeed relevant, it means that the claims they support, from the standpoints from where they arise, are justified. But again, the fact that reasons may be justificatory from a specific standpoint does not mean that they should be taken to be justificatory for all positions. As such, these reasons and claims need to provide justification and be justified trans-positionally. In order for trans-positional assessments to occur, reasons need to be presented and defended publicly. It will be from this public standpoint that we are able to evaluate reasons and claims of justice. The result of this is that the exercise of justification needs to be made publicly on the basis of reasoning. That is, justification should proceed on the basis of public reasoning, where public reasoning is understood as entailing the exercise of trans-positional scrutiny. In this subsection, I aim to articulate in more detail what I just described: specifically, what it means for reasons to justify on the trans-positional account of public reason.

I will start by explaining why justification should be made on the basis of public reasoning by presenting a neutral account[38] of public reasoning. I

[38] As I will argue in Chapter III, there are other characteristics attributable to public reasoning that are relevant for our capacity to make trans-positional assessments, in the context of the account of objectivity as trans-positionality that I am proposing in this dissertation. However, on a different account, this does necessarily need to be so.

will then explain how *public* justification amounts to the exercise of public reasoning understood in terms of trans-positional scrutiny.

Public reasoning can be divided, mainly, into two components: reasons and publicity (Peter, 2009, pp. 31-36). Firstly, reasons seem to be a necessary feature of public reasoning, since they are able to justify the different claims that are made. Given that disagreements about claims are bound to exist, reasons (which support those claims) are the object of discussion and evaluation.

Secondly, public reasoning also implies publicity, in that reasons need to be presented publicly.[39] To say that reasons need to be presented publicly is to say that reasons for certain claims are to be voiced and discussed publicly; it is to say that deliberation on those claims is to be made openly, instead of privately — we are to engage in the process of reasoning collectively, to open our reasons and claims to different challenges. Another way to put this idea is to focus on the need of giving reasons to others — of making explicit one's evaluative perspectives and reasons —, to the extent that those others are supposed to participate in a discussion of those reasons. What is achieved in giving reasons is that, by disclosing the reasons that follow from specific positions, we provide a source of information to others: we try to transmit the specific knowledge each position yields and that may be otherwise inaccessible to others that do not share the same positions; we widen the pool of available information in each position and about each position (Baujard and Gilardone, 2019; Sen, 2010; Young, 1993, 1997, 2000).

But perhaps more importantly, when we present reasons publicly, we do more than just convey information to others. Insofar as reasons provide justification — as we saw in Chapter I —, when we present reasons publicly these reasons also need to be seen as justificatory reasons to those with whom we are going to reason. Publicity, then, requires us to provide reasons that justify not only privately, but also publicly.

[39] This, in turn, raises a question regarding which reasons can be acceptable for public discussion. I will address the former now, and focus on the latter in the next subsection (II.2.3).

Initially, to say that a reason *publicly* justifies, following Gaus,[40] is to say that both one's reasons and claims are '[…] stable in the face of acute and sustained criticism by others and of new information.' (1996, p. 31) From this definition, one's reasons publicly justify if one's viewpoint does not commits one to revise one's reasons. On my interpretation, what results from this definition of public justification is that one's reasons and claims of justice are to be analysed having others as the evaluators of correctness and validity (I will explain this in the next paragraphs), rather than having the idea of truth as reference.

There are two ways to understand this process of public justification in the present context, I will suggest:[41] the first way would be to understand it as an agent's reasons and claims having to be scrutinised by other standpoints and by confronting them with other perspectives. On this view, we have other perspectives as the standard of validity of an agent's reasons and claims. I will call this the *validity view*. The second way to understand the process of public justification is that others in different standpoints can help scrutinise an agent's reasons and claims according to the agent's own standpoint (*i.e.*, at the positional level). On this second view of public justification, we still have the agent's evaluative perspective as the standard of correctness of the agent's reasons, however others help verify that the agent's claimed reasons do indeed follow from the agent's evaluative perspective — that is, if what an agent claims to be reasons really are the agent's normative reasons. I will call this understanding the *correctness view* of public justification.

Although these two understandings can be taken to lead to opposite views on public reason in what concerns the acceptable set of reasons for public justification[42] — which I will address later —, I will argue that both of these understandings of the process of public justification are necessary for reasons to be justificatory trans-positionally.

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[40] Gaus' definition is about openly justified belief systems. Here I am taking *publicly* and *openly* to mean the same, and I am applying the definition to reasons.

[41] I will introduce these views now and expand on them in the subsequent paragraphs.

[42] These two positions, broadly construed like this, can lead us to separate paths: to what is known as the consensus view of public reason, or the convergence view of public reason. I will expand on these views and raise problems against both in II.2.3.

On the validity view, the process of public justification corresponds to having other positions as the standard of validity of one's claims: that is, one's positional reasons are trans-positionally assessed by every other position; these reasons are assessed for their validity as reasons, given the evaluative perspectives of all others — but they are not being assessed for their status as positional reasons for that agent. One representation of the validity view of public justification is what happens in the 'sun and moon' example when we have it open for scrutiny. Here, those who would claim that the sun and the moon have the same size would have their claim scrutinised trans-positionally by the mutual exchange of reasons and diverse viewpoints.

This view on public justification and the role of scrutiny seems to correspond to the way Sen introduces public reasoning in the trans-positionality context: we present our reasons and claims publicly so that these can be the object of scrutiny exercised by different individuals and divergent perspectives. The aim of this exercise is to avoid and eliminate parochialism of values and biases, and that single perspectives are not imposed on others. Positional perspectives are thus put into a wider context.

As such, the validity view of public justification can be understood as a form of assessment of one's positional perspectives by other positional perspectives. The validity view answers the question: can a certain claim survive the scrutiny imposed by other perspectives? Understood in this way, public justification proceeds on the basis of public reasoning, with public reasoning entailing trans-positional scrutiny/assessments.

There is, as we saw, a second view — the correctness view —, which should be understood complementary to the validity view, and not contrastingly, as it would normally be.[43] This is the view that the process leading to public justification also provides the mean for other standpoints to help scrutinise if one's purported reasons do withstand scrutiny from one's own evaluative perspective. That is, public reasoning as a way to verify if reasons are indeed reasons from that agent's evaluative perspective.

On this view, then, what we have is a different form of scrutiny being exercised by other standpoints. One's reasons and claims are still being

[43] I am alluding, once more, to the consensus view vs. convergence view debate.

assessed, but here we are looking for scrutiny exercised by other evaluative perspectives but according to the standards set by the one's evaluative perspective. We want to try to answer the question: is that reason really a reason for that agent?

According to the definition of reasons advanced in Chapter I, we saw how one's evaluative perspective defines one's positional reasons. One's evaluative perspective is, therefore, the standard of correctness of one's normative reasons at the positional level: since there cannot be substantive normative mistakes about one's own reasons, *R* either is or is not a reason according to its coherence with the evaluative perspective of the agent. I take this feature to be a fundamental reason for having public reasoning as a requirement of objectivity. More explicitly: under the account of normative reasons developed in Chapter I, the only way to know what indeed constitutes a reason is by engaging in the scrutiny and understanding of the agent's evaluative perspective. Therefore, my point is that part of this scrutiny can only be done by anyone other than the agent who claims to have certain reasons, since that agent may not be in the best position to exercise scrutiny on their own positional reasons. As we saw, it is irrelevant for the definition of one's positional reasons if that agent affirms having *R* as a reason. *R* is only a reason if it withstands scrutiny from the agent's evaluative perspective. In this way, the more scrutiny is exercised, the more certain we can be as to whether *R* follows coherently from that agent's evaluative perspective. This is the second way in which public justification can be understood in terms of public reasoning as trans-positional scrutiny.

In short, and returning to the Marcus Rashford example once again, the understanding of public justification that I just proposed can be put in the following way: Rashford claimed that schools should have continued to stay open throughout the summer holidays so that poor children would have access to a free meal every day. As we saw in I.2.2, Rashford also provided specific reasons of justice in support of his claim. We now want to ascertain as to the objectivity of these reasons across positions. That is, are these reasons trans-positionally objective? In order to answer this question, my proposal is that we need to scrutinise the extent to which these reasons publicly justify his claim. As such, we are to publicly scrutinise this claim and its reasons trans-

positionally in two ways. The first way is that we should evaluate their validity from other perspectives: is there anything we can say against it from our perspective? The second way is that we need to verify if those reasons are positional reasons in the first place. What I am proposing then, and what I will continue to argue for throughout the chapter, is that if these reasons withstand trans-positional scrutiny, then these are trans-positional reasons of justice. To not engage in one of these two forms of scrutiny is to fail to recognise both the normative relevance of positions and perspectives, and also the limitation of those same positions and perspectives.

However, I am not yet able to fully make this conclusion, since we saw before that publicity implies reasons to be presented publicly (which I have just written about), but also that this fact opens questions regarding which reasons should be accepted for public justification. That is, which types of reasons can be given to others in order for reasoning to be public? Or, rather, which reasons should we accept others to participate with in public reasoning? This is the topic I will address next.

As for what I have said until now, we can conclude that public justification should be done in terms of the public trans-positional assessment of positional perspectives and reasons (that is, via public reasoning) because public reasoning will: (1) provide the means for relevant information and reasons to be shared — that is, these become available via public reasoning; (2) allow others' standpoints to be accessed (I will address this point in more depth in Chapter III); (3) in doing (2), public reasoning is the means for both self-scrutiny and the scrutiny of those standpoints by other standpoints — we become able to judge if someone truly has practical reasons for the claims they make; lastly, (4) provide a better representation and understanding of the social world, by requiring that positional views are scrutinised by every position.

II.2.3 — Reasons for public justification

As we have seen, public justification is made in terms of reasons. In this way, reasons can be understood as the inputs of public justification: these are the

materials that are the object of public reasoning, that that is going to be publicly trans-positionally assessed. So, the question now facing the trans-positional account of public reason regards the reasons that should be given and accepted for public justification, and what should be the criterion to define that set of reasons.

Traditionally, we have two main answers. The first answer is a Rawlsian one: the reasons that can be justificatory are those that are reasonable. That is, those reasons that will lead to public reasoning based on reasons we share in consensus (see II.2.3.1). The second answer is Gausian: the reasons that are justificatory are those that are sufficient reasons according to the quality of individual deliberation. That is, those reasons that will lead to public justification based on the convergence of the reasons that different agents have (see II.2.3.2). I will propose that we should reject both these answers and, instead, take positional reasons to be the reasons with which we engage in public reasoning, being trans-positional reasons those that publicly justify. Instead of adopting either the consensus or the convergence view, I will be proposing the perspective-understanding view.

The organisation of this subsection is the following: I will start by presenting what I believe should be the structure of the trans-positional account of public reason and the criterion to define the acceptable set of reasons. Following that, I will look into the two other options — reasonableness and consensus view (II.2.3.1), and the quality of individual deliberation and convergence view (II.2.3.2) — and argue against both.

The answer to the question of which reasons are justificatory, on the traditional views I introduced, can be put very simply as: those reasons that can take place in public reasoning are justificatory reasons, *i.e.*, public reasons.

The view I am proposing for a trans-positional account of public reasons is slightly more nuanced. My proposal is that we should be able to participate in public reasoning with those reasons that we have seen are objective and normatively relevant at the positional level. In other words, positional reasons should be taken to be the inputs of public reasoning. In turn, it is the exercise of trans-positionally assessing positional reasons that

will yield reasons that are justificatory reasons across positions — they are, in this sense, public reasons. On this view, then, public reasons are trans-positional reasons, and correspond to the output of the exercise of public reasoning.

As such, I first need to explain why positional reasons should be the inputs of a process of public justification, and then how it is that trans-positional reasons are justificatory reasons on the trans-positional account of public reason.

My suggestion is that the criterion to decide which reasons should be acceptable for public justification corresponds precisely to the criterion which defines what a reason is: that is, from Chapter I, whatever coherently follows from each evaluative perspective — or, as I have defined within the objectivity context, those reasons that can be considered positional reasons. In fact, as I will argue later (see specifically subsections II.2.3.1 and II.2.3.2), there should not be any other limit to the acceptable set of reasons, other than the criterion that defines reasons as positional reasons.

Let me explain the claim I just made in a more systematic way. First, why should positional reasons be the inputs of public reasoning? My answer to this question is straightforward: if we have found positional reasons to be both normatively relevant and positionally objective, then these reasons need to be considered for trans-positionally objective reasons. They constitute the first potential candidates at being considered trans-positionally objective insofar as they already are, at the very least, positionally objective.

Second, should there be a further constraint on the set of positional reasons? To add a further constraint on the reasons we should take to be meaningful for public reasoning would imply a form of internal contradiction, where we would be deeming reasons that we took to be normatively relevant and (positionally) objective to be normatively irrelevant and not objective. In other words, reasons that we already take to be normative and positionally objective reasons would be taken to be inadmissible on grounds that defy the criterion set to determine which reasons are normatively and positionally objective relevant in the first place. The only procedure that could undermine the possibility of these reasons to be trans-positionally objective is the

procedure of public reasoning itself, *i.e.*, the process of trans-positional scrutiny.

Third, should there be a lesser constraint than what defines a reason to be positional? My answer to this question is that there should not be. Without wanting to repeat myself, if reasons are not, specifically, positional reasons in the first place, they cannot be taken to be trans-positionally objective: these are reasons that would never pass either or both the validity and the correctness views of public justification, and therefore would never be accepted by others as public reasons.

Given these three reasons, positional reasons are the reasons with which we should engage in a process of public justification; these are the reasons that we are to trans-positionally assess for their validity and correctness.

However, defendants of the consensus view and defendants of the convergence view will probably object that this would imply holding two opposing views of public justification at the same time. My response to that possible objection is that it does not constitute a problem for the trans-positional account of public reason. It is not a problem because the consensus and the convergence views arise as answers to the problem of the legitimacy of rules, and to define grounds on which rules can be imposed on others while the aim of the trans-positional account of public reason is not that. As such, there is no clash between understanding public justification as implying both the validity view and the correctness view on the trans-positional account of public reason. By holding these two views at the same time as necessary forms of scrutiny, the trans-positional account of public reason is not led in the direction of either the consensus view or the convergence view of justificatory reasons.

The view that I propose to be adopted, instead, is what I will call the *perspective-understanding* view. On this view, like I introduced before, the reasons that should be accepted are those that agents give according to their own evaluative perspectives and that other agents are able to identify and understand as justificatory from those evaluative perspectives. The question determining which reasons are accepted should not be ‘do I have a reason to agree’, but rather ‘do I see the other as having a reason to hold that view’. If

the answer is positive, then there are no reasons to not see those positional reasons as potentially justificatory reasons.

In other words, the perspective-understanding view corresponds to the view that what should be required for a reason to start being considered as publicly justificatory is that others understand — and thus agree and accept — that reason from its primary/original evaluative perspective. Only then will we be able to appropriately engage in trans-positional scrutiny. In this way, we do not need to be able to reason from the same premises as with the consensus view, nor reach convergent positions: acceptance is not based on shared agreement or joint agreement; acceptance comes from understanding the evaluative perspectives that give rise to those reasons

I am thus left with having to explain why trans-positional reasons are justificatory reasons. My explanation is that, once we engage in the exercise of public justification by trans-positionally assessing in the way I have been proposing, the reasons that will withstand scrutiny from this trans-positional evaluative perspective — the collective evaluative perspective resulting from specific valuers engaging in public reasoning — will be reasons that are public. These reasons will be public to the extent that all citizens need to take them as objective and normative in the trans-positional sense. In this way, a reason of justice is trans-positionally normative and objective if, from a trans-positional standpoint, that reason withstands scrutiny in accordance with both the validity and correctness view. Consequently, we can consider trans-positional reasons to be public justificatory reasons.

I will now continue to establish the position I just put forward — that the criterion for the acceptable set of reasons is one's evaluative perspective — by arguing against two other possible candidates: the first, reasonableness, for being exclusionary; the second, individual good reasoning, for being 'too abstract' (see also Ferretti, 2019, pp. 13-31).

II.2.3.1 — Reasonableness and the consensus view

I have mentioned that I will consider two other possible criteria to the reasons we should accept for the exercise of public reasoning: *reasonableness* and

individual good reasoning. From these two, I will start with the concept of reasonableness introduced by Rawls (1996, 2001) and part of the Rawlsian tradition of political liberalism. Reasonableness can be reduced to two mains ideas: one, the acceptance that political society is a fair system of social cooperation for mutual benefit between free and equal people; two, the acceptance of the burdens of judgments, and the fact of reasonable pluralism that follows.

There is a lot that can be unpacked in this definition, but it is not my intention to focus on the definition itself (this has been done thoroughly in the past[44]). In what follows, I will instead focus critically on the fact that reasonableness, as the criterion for the acceptability of reasons, imposes an *a priori* substantive constraint on reasons, and the consequences that that brings for public reasoning and objectivity.

Reasonableness is a characteristic normally attributable to citizens, and/or citizen's comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions. The way it should be applied to reasons may not be always clear, but, following Boettcher (2004), I will take an agent's reasons to be reasonable if

> […] in offering what she considers to be the most reasonable argument, a reason-giving agent hopes to combine valid reasoning with the best interpretation of a *pro tanto* justified political conception and the most accurate survey of the facts and circumstances relevant to the case at hand. In seeking an argument that could be accepted by others as reasonable, the agent should also consider whether an addressee, similarly committed to seeking fair terms of cooperation, could recognize that the agent's claims and arguments are consistent with the burdens of judgment and political liberalism's fundamental ideas of society and the person. (2004, pp. 614-615)

To better understand reasonableness as the defining criterion of which reasons should be acceptable for public justification, we need to look into the Rawlsian view on the structure of public reason, since it is impossible to detach reasonableness as a criterion from the consensus view of public reason — to the extent that the structure of public reason conceptualised as consensus helps determine which reasons should be acceptable for public reasoning.

[44] See, for example, Brower, 1994; Ferretti, 2019; Friedman, 2000; Gaus, 1997, 2010b; Habermas, 1998; Quong, 2010.

The consensus view holds that the justification of political decisions requires agreements based on a single shared set of reasons. The single shared set of reasons corresponds to the type of reasons called *public reasons* — in the Rawlsian sense. That is, reasons that all reasonable citizens can endorse. So, on this view, the reasons that are admissible for public justification — those reasons that all reasonable citizens may accept — are *reasonable* reasons: those reasons that are given with the belief that others could accept, according to a common standpoint that is shared by all. From the start, then, these are reasons that do not necessarily correspond to those that people sufficiently, or conclusively, have; they correspond to the reasons that can be given — to reinforce, those reasons that we believe others would accept.

This idea of only accepting reasons that are in accordance with the reasons of others is grounded on the argument that we have to treat others with respect as free and equals citizens. This means that we recognise that we owe justifications — we need to give arguments grounded in good reasons — to other citizens for the rules and policies that may be imposed on them. This is what treating others with respect as free and equal citizens means, it is argued.

Given this description, the consensus view, thus, implies a substantive constraint — materialised in the idea of reasonableness — on the reasons that can be accepted for public justification, since the reasons all reasonable citizens would agree on are the same in virtue of their substance. In other words, any reason that falls outside of the scope of what is reasonable — any reason that cannot, in this sense, be given — should be deemed irrelevant for public justification. This is to say that, on this view, the reasons we should accept for the exercise of public justification would be determined aprioristically by their possible categorisation as reasonable (in order to treat others with respect and as equal citizens).

I will argue now against this view by focusing on its exclusionary nature. But I will not focus on its exclusionary nature in general — that has been done extensively before.[45] I will focus specifically on its undemocratic exclusion of positional reasons. My argument against reasonableness as a

[45] See, for exemple, Ferretti, 2019, pp. 20-21, 82; Gaus, 2011; Young, 2000, pp. 38-40.

criterion will be the following: reasonableness focuses on reasons that can be given to others, not the reasons one can be said to have. This is justified on the need to treat others with respect as free and equal citizens. However, this view fails what it claims to do in terms of treating others with respect by demanding reasons to be position-invariant even before the process of public justification takes place. For that reason, the reasonableness criterion will lead to the exclusion of positional reasons illegitimately. Reasonableness then should be rejected, since we should be focusing on the reasons people have, and not the reasons that can be given to others.

As I mentioned, proponents of the consensus view and of reasonableness, introduce a distinction between the reasons one has and the reasons one is able to give (see also Ferretti, 2019, pp. 71-93). The latter are the ones they think relevant for public reason.

This distinction can be made more precise by looking at another distinction about reasons. There are, typically, three different types of questions about reasons (see Gaus, 2011; Schroeder, 2008): 1) what reasons are — metaethical or metaphysical question about reasons; 2) what reasons there are — the question about the substance of the reasons that support certain beliefs; 3) what reasons a person can be said to have — which is a question about the reasons anyone can say to hold. The reasonableness criterion seems to be devised with the second type of questions about reasons in mind — it defines which reasons, substantively speaking, are acceptable reasons to be given. For example, Quong (2014), one of the proponents of this view, explicitly mentions that the reasons that we should focus on for public reason are those that deal with the question about the substance of the reasons that support certain beliefs, instead of those dealing with a question about the reasons anyone can be said to hold. In other words, according to Quong, we should focus on the reasons that answer the second type of questions, while reasons that answer questions of type 3) are not relevant for public reason.

The focus on reasonable reasons as public reasons (in the more traditional sense) is justified, as mentioned before, by arguing that this is how we can treat others with respect as free and equal citizens, and that it promotes stability and cooperation. It is by giving reasons that we can envision others

accepting, from what we can take as a common standpoint, that we acknowledge other citizens' interests. Scanlon (2000, pp. 32-33, 192), for example, claims that this is one of the essential features of his reasonable rejectability test. That is, by caring about reasons[46] that no one could reasonably reject, we have to extend our considerations outside of our own standpoints by considering others' standpoints as well — we consider how others would take these reasons. It is not the reasons we have that matter, but those that can be labelled reasonable based on their substance: it is because we need to treat others with respect that we should focus on the reasons that there are, and not on the reasons one has.

This justification, however, fails, by presenting an extremely narrow understanding of what it is to treat others with respect. In order to argue how this justification fails, and how it is a mistake to focus on the reasons that there are (rather than on the reasons that one has) for public justification, we need to look at how the transition between *having reasons* and *giving reasons* is accomplished.

This transition can be described thus: according to Rawlsian political liberals, we start from the fact that there is a plurality of views, insofar as each person reasons from their own standpoints and develop their comprehensive doctrines. From this fact of plurality of views — of individual practical reasoning —, disagreement arises: naturally, people that reason from different standpoints and have different comprehensive doctrines end up disagreeing about what should be done. They disagree because the reasons each one has are different. To a certain extent, this is a very similar starting place to the one I presented in Chapter I. The Rawlsians then operate a shift by disregarding and moving away from their starting point. Because their goal is to solve the disagreement problem, they ask us to ignore our initial practical reasoning stances and comprehensive doctrines, and to instead adhere to other ones imposed by the intersection of what others, together, consider to be acceptable. Anything that cannot be accepted by others is irrelevant. We have, thus, moved from focusing on *having* reason to *giving* reasons (or from the reasons one has to the reasons that there are).

[46] Scanlon is concerned with principles, I am adapting this criterion to apply to reasons.

At this point it is helpful to consider Habermas' (1998) critique of Rawls' use of the reasonable. Habermas argues that what we take to have reason to do and believe is dependent on our plural starting points, and our participation in public reasoning is as well. If citizens are constrained by their starting places, they cannot by themselves transcend their perspective (p. 90). Only if citizens are able to occupy a moral point of view that is independent and prior to the development of each individual view and comprehensive doctrine can citizens be expected to develop an overlapping consensus, Habermas argues. To the extent that we are conditioned by our own starting places, and following Habermas argument, the Rawlsian move from *having* reason to *giving* reasons requires a feat of abstraction from oneself that is not possible.

So my argument is the following: by asking to give up one's starting place, what ends up happening in this process is exactly the opposite of what is claimed by the Rawlsians. That is, by abstracting from the reasons each person has, we demonstrate the opposite of respect for them, and we do not take other persons' interests into account. By abstracting, in fact, we completely disregard others (see also III.1).

Brower (1994, pp. 14-15; see also Christiano, 2008; Raz, 1998) interestingly argues that '[t]he notion behind equal respect is that one considers justifications others feel are important.' As such, we fail to treat others with respect when we fail to take their justifications as being important, since, Brower writes, '[…] to treat persons with equal respect is to consider their points of view, where this includes their evaluative claims and justifications.'

From Brower's suggestion that equal respect entails considering others' viewpoints in their own context, we can start seeing how the Rawlsian equal respect argument is too narrow in its conception of respect.[47] That is, with the reasonableness criterion, we fail to treat other with respect since we

[47] At the same time, this is also a problem for Sen. Sen's main reason for embracing Scanlon's idea of reasonable rejectability is the proximity of the proposal to Adam Smith's *impartial spectator*, insofar as the arguments for or against reasonable rejectability '[…] can bring in different moral perspectives [from different societies, nations or polities] if they are judged to be reasonable, rather than confining attention to the lines of thinking of the involved parties themselves.' (Sen, 2010, p. 200)

focus on which reasons can be given out of supposed respect for others, and we end up disrespecting the reason-giver by ignoring their evaluative perspectives and their positional reasons. We deem these normatively irrelevant — or, at least, that reasonableness is normatively more relevant. This happens because other persons' acceptance of one's reasons — that is, other persons' evaluative perspectives — becomes the standard that determine which reasons one can give (which are not necessarily the same set as the positional reasons one has). We move from the normativity of the reasons one has which are determined by one's evaluative perspectives to the reasons that one is 'allowed' to have, which are determined by other agents' evaluative perspectives. That is, the fact that someone might have a sufficient reason to declare my reason as not acceptable implies that what determines my reason *qua* reason stops being my evaluative perspectives and positionality. In other words, if one is to say that there is a set of reasons that should be allowed in the exercise of trans-positional scrutiny, and that that set is determined by how those reasons are accepted by all who are taken to be reasonable, that is the equivalent of saying that we should leave to others the definition of what one has a reason for — in that it is dependent on other persons' acceptance of those reasons as reasonable.[48] I have already argued against a similar position when I argued in Chapter I against Korsgaard's Kantian constructivism.

The problem, then, is that reasonableness as the criterion to define which reasons are acceptable for public justification leads us to have a criterion that determines that reasons should be position-invariant in order to participate in a process that is supposed to yield positional-invariance. In other words, the reasonableness criterion requires that positional reasons need to be trans-positional reasons without any scrutiny having taken place yet.

On this view, it would be reasonableness, and not trans-positional assessments, that would end up defining which reasons are objective. This, however, would be inconsistent with the idea public justification, and also with another Rawlsian claim — the claim that public reason represents the

[48] Brower (1994) makes a similar point in relation to each person's conception of the good. See also Gaus, 2011, pp. 17-20.

exercise of reasoning together. Another way to frame this is to say that the criterion of reasonableness will lead us to dismiss reasons on the basis of an *a priori* disagreement with their substance, without exercising any form of scrutiny as to ascertain their grounds.

We can find a similar critique being presented against Rawls by Michael Saward (2002),[49] who argues that

> […] 'public reason' […] is not an injunction *actually* to reason (deliberate, debate) in public with fellow citizens. Rather, it appears to be about content – a set of guidelines about how to think about fundamental issues in the 'public political forum'. […] So on this view public reason is a 'thing' rather than a process, something 'given' rather than created or practised. And if that is the case, no actual deliberation takes place. (p. 116)

Public reason thus understood, constrained by the idea of reasonableness, can only be equated with reasoning together in metaphorical terms, at best: it is not actual collective public reasoning and deliberation that leads to justification. Conversely, the conception of public reason I am putting forward requires actual reasoning together to reach trans-positional objectivity. From having reasonableness as a criterion to define which reasons should be accepted for public justification, we would end up with a deeply non-democratic and non-deliberative account of objectivity, that leaves out important normative (and positionally objective) reasons. With reasonableness as the criterion, only reasons that follow from the 'reasonable position' would be considered.

So, from all that has been said so far, it seems that the root of the problem with the reasonableness criterion is that it focuses on the wrong type of reasons from the very start. Because, although we ultimately should indeed be concerned with the reasons that there are, we can only take some reasons' substance to be meaningful by public reasoning and deliberating over the reasons we have. What this means is that, as with the case of the 'moon and sun' example, there is a possibility that one may be positionally justified to hold an undesirable belief such as that one has a reason to kill infidels (see Quong, 2014). Although neither of these beliefs would probably survive the process of public reasoning, whatever the results from the public reasoning

[49] See also Habermas, 1995, p. 128; Landemore, 2012; Friedman, 2000.

process may be, we are only in a position to dismiss these beliefs by engaging with them. So, it is through public reasoning — and only at that point — that we can try to reach and settle the substantive claims that Quong and other liberals wants to focus on for their accounts of public reason. In this way, we should not impose any type of *a priori* substantial limit on the set of reasons to be used as input of public reasoning. For, as Landemore eloquently summarises after criticising the Rawlsian tradition of the idea of public reason, '[i]f voices and views must be ignored at any point, I trust that this will be a conclusion reached at the end, not at the beginning […]' (2012, p. 23)

After having argued against reasonableness as a fitting criterion to determine the acceptable set of reasons for public justification, in what follows I will argue against defining the quality of one's reasoning as that criterion.

II.2.3.2 — Individual good reasoning and the convergence view

The other criterion to decide which reasons should be part of public reason I will consider comes from Gerald Gaus (2011). I will start by explaining Gaus' account of sufficient reasons — those reasons that, according to Gaus, should be acceptable in public reasoning. Following that explanation, I will present three objections to this account.

Previously I argued against using reasonableness as the criterion to define which reasons should take part in deliberation. Gaus also disagrees with that criterion. The restriction Gaus imposes, in turn, on the reasons that are acceptable — here understood as those reasons that are sufficient reasons — is related to the quality of an individual's deliberation process. More thoroughly, Gaus defines a sufficient (justified) reason in the following way:

> Alf has a sufficient reason *R* (to act or believe) only if he has arrived at *R* by following the norms of good reasoning and there is no equally accessible (to him) defeater of *R*. (2011, p. 246)

Later, after considering the constraint that time imposes on one's capacity to exercise good reasoning (and some other consideration not

relevant for our purpose), Gaus builds upon the previous definition to propose a new and final version of what he calls 'the reasons one (provisionally) has':

> Alf has (provisionally) a sufficient reason *R* if and only if a "respectable amount" of good reasoning by Alf would conclude that *R* is an undefeated reason (to act or believe). (p. 250)

I am raising these two versions of the same definition because there are some considerations regarding the accessibility of reasons that are important to keep in mind, and which are merely implied in the final definition. In the first definition, Gaus makes two important claims (pp. 245-246), which provide important insight for the final definition: the first claim is that if we can base our beliefs and actions on better reasons than the ones we have, we should; the second important claim is that basing our beliefs and actions on better reasons can only be done if those better reasons are accessible to the agent — that is, whether or not a reason is accessible to an agent in deliberation is a condition for the possibility of finding and having sufficient reasons.

These two claims together amount to the following picture of what it is to have a sufficient reason on Gaus' account: say that for agent *A* — to believe ß —reason R_1 and reason R_2 are equally accessible, where R_2 is a defeater of R_1. Gaus' argument is that it is 'unjustified' for *A* to believe ß based on R_1 (and to take R_1 to be a sufficient reason to believe ß) because, says Gaus, *A* 'simply has failed to see that there is a reason, *just as accessible* as R_1, which defeats it' — that is, R_2.

So, the status of a reason always has the agent at centre stage, in that the question should be if the agent can reason well according to what is available to them. It is by this standard that '[…] actual agents can have access to sufficient justifications for what they believe and do […].' (2011, p. 247). Good reasoning, although vaguely defined on purpose, amount to one's correct use of epistemic norms/rational deliberation. Good reasoning will be achieved by an agent, Gaus writes, 'who is competent at following a set of norms about how to go about reasoning – epistemic norms. […] A reason *R* to believe ß, or to perform act φ, arrived at through following these norms — rational deliberation — is a good reason.' (pp. 244-245)

In addition to the standard of rational deliberation, in defining what a sufficient reason consist of, is the concept of 'instrumental rationality'. According to Gaus, an agent's action φ is considered to be instrumentally rational '[…] only if [that agent] soundly chooses φ because he believes it is the best prospect for achieving his goal, values, end, *G*.' (p. 62) This means that one's reasons need to be aligned with 'at least minimally sound beliefs (ones that are not grossly defective from an epistemic viewpoint), and the deliberation leading to action must not be grossly defective.' (p. 62); at the same time, one's reasons need also to be aligned with one's goals, values, ends, etc., or with what we can call one's evaluative perspectives.

Simply put, then, for Gaus, a person has a sufficient reason at a particular moment in time if they have engaged in a reasonable amount[50] of internal rational deliberation, given (1) the amount of information that is available until that moment to that person, and (2) their current set of beliefs.

Contrary to the reasonableness criterion previously considered, on Gaus' account there are no substantive restrictions on the reasons one can have for public reasoning. In this case the criterion for the acceptability of reasons equates with the reasons a person can be said to have, and not with what reasons there are.

I will now proceed to raise three objections to this account of sufficient reason understood as a criterion for which reasons are acceptable for public reason. The three objections I will be making all result from the postulation that one's sufficient reasons are discoverable by following the norms of good reasoning in the way defined above. These objections will be that with Gaus' criterion: 1) some positional reasons will be ignored; 2) we may not be able to engage in the scrutiny of one's reasons, which has implications on the exercise of public justification; 3) there can be no claims of positional objectivity.

It should be noted that with these objections, I do not intend to deny that reasoning and deliberation can help determine one's reasons and sufficient reasons — the definition of what constitutes a reason presented in Chapter I clearly includes the need for a reason to withstand scrutiny from

[50] Instead of an exhaustive or perfect amount.

one's own evaluative perspective. My disagreement, then, is not with the claim that deliberation should help define which reasons should be accepted for public reasoning, but with the claim that the quality of deliberation should.

My first objection is that to have the quality of one's reasoning — *i.e.*, a merely epistemic criterion — as the criterion defining which reasons are acceptable for public reasoning ignores some positional reasons (which are normatively relevant). In other words, from its definition, we have seen how Gaus' account of what constitutes good reasoning rests, mostly, on epistemic requirements (*i.e.*, one's competence at following epistemic norms) to access defeater reasons, given one's epistemic position[51] — in fact, Gaus' core disagreement with the consensus view rests on the fact that it ignores reasons that can be said to be epistemically justified from each agent's evaluative perspective. Given this emphasis on epistemic requirements, I will argue that such a criterion to define the acceptable set of reasons for public justification ends up being insufficient, since it fails to consider the normative importance of positionality. That is, the criterion should take other considerations — besides one's epistemic access to reasons — to be meaningful. These other considerations can be summarised in what constitutes positionality (see Chapter I).

In order to show how Gaus' account fails to take into consideration the role positionality as a whole plays in determining the sufficient reasons one has, I will proceed in the following way: following the discussion between Baccarini (2013) and Gaus (2013), I will be using the extreme, but useful, example of Goebbels in order to argue (contra Gaus) that, whatever the status we attribute to the quality of Goebbels' reasoning, it fails to be representative of the entire set of positional reasons that he had. To merely focus on the fulfilment of the required epistemic conditions would be to leave out a set of reasons that are normatively relevant. This will then constitute an example of how we will fail to have fully plural representations of perspectives if we subscribe to the individual good reasoning criterion.

Goebbels, just like Caligula, is often used as a challenge case against internalist views. These are normally invoked because they represent clear,

[51] See also Baccarini, 2013, pp. 30-31; Enoch, 2013, pp. 156-157.

but extreme, cases of agents we cannot but distance ourselves from. Since nothing seems to justify their actions, beliefs, or reasons, and since we seem to not be able to understand them — even if it is the case that what they believed/did followed from their evaluative standards —, these are seen as examples of how some reasons internalist views fail.[52] However, these cases seem to be somewhat easily incorporated by authors like Gaus (or Street, 2009). In order to accommodate the Goebbels challenge to his internalist view, Gaus argues that, even in the case of someone like Goebbels, it is paramount to take one's standpoint as relevant to determine which sufficient reasons one has. More specifically, Gaus' arguments emphasise the need[53] — somewhat akin to the core ideas I am defending in this work — to '[…] have some beliefs about how things looked *to* Goebbels, we need to think about his participant perspective' (2013, p. 76).[54] Furthermore, we need to understand if 'Goebbels exercised the required level of good reasoning and yet reached the conclusion that he did no wrong' (p. 77), in accordance with Goebbels' system of values. That is, according to Gaus, we need to be able to say that Goebbels fulfilled one of the following requirements: 'Goebbels either (*a*) believed he was wrong, or (*b*) could have come to that conclusion.'[55] (p. 76)

Here, Gaus alludes once more to the accessibility-via-good-reasoning requirement in which the sufficient reasons one has are determined by one's ability to access them via deliberation/good reasoning. The question I believe merits our attention in response to this is the following: why should it matter if one is (or is not) a model of good reasoning in order to determine the sufficient reasons one has (and so the reasons that could be featured in public reasoning)?

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[52] Most cases like the ones mentioned fit into the category of the philosophical characters that Street (2009) has called ICE — ideally coherent eccentrics.

[53] The 'imperative' would probably be more precise, given the use of the word 'must'.

[54] It should be noted that the context in which Gaus is making this point regards the attribution of moral responsibility. For the purposes of my argument, I will disregard that and merely focus on what Gaus means by the need to think about the other's perspective, and what good reasoning requires.

[55] For further context: 'If something like [this requirement] does not hold, Goebbels would still have been a disaster for mankind — a moral moron or ignoramus who spurred countless horrors, but without knowing they were moral horrors. Perhaps he knew that people called him immoral, but he simply could not reach that conclusion.' (2013, p. 76)

From the Goebbels discussion, we are now in possession of a different formulation of the accessibility-via-good-reasoning requirement. This means that, in order to answer the question I just posed, we only need to look into this different formulation of the requirement — to wit, we can say that *A* does not have reason for ß or φ if either of the following conditions are true for *A*: (*a*) *A* believes they were wrong, or (*b*) *A* could have come to the conclusion that they were wrong.

If we assume, for the sake of argument, that Goebbels was genuine about his views, then it seems that neither (a) nor (b) could come to be true — that is, Goebbels could not believe he was wrong, and he could not have come to the conclusion that he was wrong.

Starting with (a): in Chapter I, we saw that what determines one's reasons are those reasons' coherence with the agent's evaluative perspective. If Goebbels truly had a coherent evaluative perspective, as we are assuming he did — otherwise it would be pointless to engage in this exercise —, what he believed about his own reasons does not seem relevant to determine if he was in fact wrong, *i.e.*, if he did not have a reason. We saw in Chapter I, through the rejection of the Reason Affirmation Thesis,[56] that affirming *R* as a reason does not make that *R* a reason. Similarly, we can now use the idea behind the Reason Affirmation Thesis with the goal of verifying if one believing that *R* is a reason is sufficient or necessary to have *R* as a reason — that is, we can use something that we can adapt and call the Reason Believing Thesis.

In this case, according to the definition of reasons we saw in Chapter I, it is not because one believes that *R* is a reason that *R* becomes a reason for the agent — that is, the Reason Believing Thesis should be rejected on the same grounds as the Reason Affirmation Thesis was in Chapter I (see section I.2.3.2). In this way, on this first condition, we cannot conclude that what is a reason for Goebbels is dependent on his ability for good reasoning since whether the quality of Goebbels' reasoning would lead him to believe he was wrong or right would not determine which reasons or sufficient reasons he actually had.

[56] The Reason Affirmation Thesis says that we have *R* as a reason *iff* we affirm *R* as a reason.

Could, on the other hand, Goebbels have come to the conclusion that he was wrong (through the exercise of good reason) [(b)]? An answer to this question can only be given by answering another question: according to whom could he have come to the conclusion that he was wrong? Once again, in Chapter I it was established that the matter on which Goebbels would be wrong about would be his own normative judgments; it was his own web of other normative and non-normative commitments — his evaluative perspective — that set the standard against which we assess if a specific *R* would indeed be a reason. As we have seen before, Gaus would agree with the claim that it would be according to Goebbels' own evaluative perspective that he (or anyone) could come to the conclusion that he was wrong. But if that is the case, then it is unclear what exercising good reasoning (as defined before) necessarily has to do with defining which reasons that person should be able to put forward publicly. And, to a certain extent, Gaus seems to agree with this too: in his reply to Baccarini, Gaus claims that what we should accept to be a reason to be a Nazi for a bus driver should not be the same for Goebbels (in his role as a politician): we should require different levels of deliberation from each. Although we may agree that we need to be more demanding with politicians in civil society, this demandingness comes with the exercise of scrutiny; it does not, however, seem to say anything regarding the criterion that defines which reasons should be acceptable for public justification.[57]

In either the bus driver's or Goebbels' case, given the role positionality would have had in determining what they should do, it seems that no amount of good reasoning could uncover reasons that would defeat their existing reasons to be Nazis and to act accordingly: for Goebbels, that was who he was and what he valued at that moment in time, in accordance with his positionality. Similarly to the case of a perfectly coherent Caligula, this was what followed from Goebbels own coherent evaluative perspective — assuming, again, that that is true.

[57] Once again, my discussion is not about the legitimacy of rules and policies as is Gaus'. As such, my objections may only apply in the context of the discussion of the trans-positional account of public reason, and not of public reason as traditionally conceived.

Good reasoning, nonetheless, could have an impact in one's own scrutiny of one's reasons: that is, it can help one analyse to what extent does a specific *R* coherently follow from one's evaluative perspective. This, like I said at the beginning, is not what I am objecting to. What I am objecting is the claim that what determines this *R* to be a reason that should also be featured in public justification is solely dependent on epistemic requirements.

As such, the answer to the question with which I started examining requirement *b)* seems to be that Goebbels could not have come to the conclusion that he was wrong — at that moment in time, at least —, since no amount of good reasoning could change his other normative commitments. It would be plausible to say, however, that the answer to the question above could become that 'he could have', insofar as we can conceive that, at a later point in life, Goebbels could have changed his evaluative perspective. Nonetheless, the reasons that he would have at this later instance do not change the reasons he had before. These positional reasons, regardless of the quality of one's deliberations, are normatively relevant reasons that should feature in public justification.

I will now add two further insufficiencies with Gaus' account of sufficient reasons as a defining criterion of the acceptable set of reasons for public reasoning: in turn, these will be regarding the level of scrutiny it allows, and possible claims of objectivity that may follow from the account. These last two objections address specifically the exercise of public justification itself — both in the sense represented by the validity view, and the correctness view.

My second objection, more specifically, has to do with the exercise of scrutiny in public justification and how it should impose constraints on the acceptable set of reasons. As we saw earlier in the chapter, to determine what indeed constitutes a reason for someone requires engaging in the scrutiny and understanding of the agent's evaluative perspective — scrutiny done by others is required in order to know if a reason does indeed follow from the agent's evaluative perspective, since that individual may not be in the best position to exercise scrutiny on their own reasons. I called this the correctness view of public justification.

Part of my proposal has been that the idea of an evaluative perspective withstanding scrutiny requires engaging in public reasoning, since it is through public reasoning that we can put someone's reasons to test and engage with their evaluative perspectives to understand them better. So my second objection will be that, if it is the case that part of what determines one's reasons or sufficient reasons is the quality of one's own deliberation, one worry that follows is that the exercise of scrutiny seems less achievable: it seems that no one will be in a position to provide it, since no one will be able to know which reasons some other person has access to (or should have uncovered) from their own standpoint (see also Ferretti, 2019, p. 27). As a result, it seems that these reasons cannot publicly justify — even if we simply understand public justification in Gaus' terms —, as public justification seems to entail the participation of others as evaluators of the correctness of one's reasons.

To put the point another way: as they stand in this account, reasons will fail to be intelligible — which Gaus takes to be necessary for 'open justification' (Gaus, 2011, pp. 279-283; see also Vallier, 2014, 2019). Following Vallier's definition of intelligibility — to which I believe Gaus would subscribe —, 'A's reason R_A is intelligible for members of the public if and only if members of the public regard R_A as epistemically justified for A according to A's evaluative standards.' (2014, p. 106) In order to feature in public justification and to be taken as reasons, reasons need to be scrutinised, understood, and intelligible to others as following from the agent's evaluative perspective: we need to be able to reason, as Vallier puts it, 'from the standpoint of others. If I cannot see your purported reasons as reasons for you even according to *your own* evaluative standards, then I cannot reason from your standpoint by definition.' (p. 107). Although intelligibility as a requirement can be said to have some insufficiencies in the context of the view I have been developing,[58] it constitutes nonetheless a minimum requirement to be met in order to take reasons to be part of the acceptable set of reasons for public justification.

[58] I will not pursue this here.

Going back to one of the previous examples: how can we determine which reasons a bus driver can be said to have for being a Nazi, but that a politician cannot? That is, how do we determine the adequate level of deliberation necessary to determine the quality and the right amount of deliberation according to each agent's context? This seems to be an exercise that is completely inaccessible for anyone that is not the person — whom we cannot take as being a completely reliable source. In this way, by failing this minimum requirement, Gaus' account runs the risk of not being able to reject the Reason Affirmation Thesis (see Chapter I, section I.2.3.2) as it supposed to.

In summary, if we are indeed unable to exercise such scrutiny and find reasons intelligible, we will fail to verify which reasons one has, and, moreover, we will not be able to trans-positionally assess any positions in virtue of this problem.

Following from this scrutiny problem there is one other, which constitutes my third and final objection: with this criterion we will fail to characterise any position as being positionally objective. This is a problem because trans-positional objectivity is achieved by assessing positionally objective perspectives. Remember that, as defined before (see I.2.1), positional objectivity corresponds to a view that is *person-invariant* and *position-relative*. The problem with the criterion under analysis is that each view becomes a hermetic individual position: each view becomes *person-variant* and *position-relative*.

Although the position I have been defending may suffer, in the limit, from a similar problem, nothing seems to point for that to be necessarily so (see Chapter I, section I.2.4). Whereas with the account Gaus proposes, this seems to necessarily follow according to what we just saw with the previous objection: claims of objectivity from each position will be harder to make and assess, since each position is its own atomised position. In other words, it follows from this criterion that there can be no positionally objective reasons/perspectives insofar as the criterion cannot overcome a *person-variance* problem imposed by the fact that the reasons one has cannot be scrutinised.

To go beyond the scrutiny issues already raised, further evidence of the person-variant nature of the account can be found when we understand it in its public reason context: Gaus' account of sufficient reasons serves as the basis for his conception of public reason. One of its features is its divergence from the traditional Rawlsian conceptions regarding the structure of public reason. More specifically, and as we saw before, there are two main opposing views on what should be the structure of public reason: on the one hand, there is the Rawlsian consensus view — where the justification of political decisions requires agreements based on a single shared set of reasons (II.2.2.1); on the other hand, there is the convergence view (see Gaus, 2011, Vallier, 2014) — according to which the justification of political decisions need to be accepted by all affected, regardless of the reasons each agent bases themselves on to accept it (*i.e.*, participants can provide a wide and diverse set of reasons between them when accepting a political decision). In fact, participants can even accept political decisions based on reasons derived from their own comprehensive doctrines. In brief, although all must accept a political decision that concerns them, on the convergence view, justification does not need to be based on a single shared set of reasons (at the same time that reasons need to be intelligible).

Comparatively, then, the consensus view imposes a quite narrow range of acceptable reasons for public reasoning, whereas the convergence view allows a wider variety of reasons. Going back to the person-(in)variance issue we started with,[59] we can conclude that while the consensus view requires reasons to be shared in order to generate political agreement, thus opening the door for the possibility of reasons and standpoints to be person-invariant, the convergence view does not seem to satisfy the requirements for reasons and standpoints to be person-invariant — as it is its aim.

Although this may be the aim of the convergence view, the result is that it ends up missing something that is normatively important: as an account of reasons that applies to all, it cannot start to guarantee the positional objectivity of some reasons, since they cannot be said to be person-invariant.

[59] Again, this is important to determine which perspectives and reasons can be positionally objective, since positional objectivity requires person-invariance (and position-relativity).

Reasons that fail to be person-invariant are merely subjective reasons, but not positional reasons. As such, these reasons cannot be used for public justification in the trans-positional account of public reason.

As we have seen until now, both the trans-positional account of public reason and Gaus' account put an emphasis on the relevance of all evaluative perspectives for the exercise of public justification. But, in the latter case, this seems to come at a cost: that of atomisation and person-variance, as we just saw. At the same time, the trans-positional account of reasons does not face the atomisation, nor the person-variance problems; nor does it need to subscribe to the consensus view, as argued before.

I thus conclude section II.2. In it, I developed a trans-positional account of public reason defining that social justice claims should be publicly justified in terms of trans-positional reasons. On this account, public justification happens when we engage in trans-positional scrutiny of positional reasons. The outcome of that exercise determines which reasons are trans-positional reasons, and thus publicly justificatory reasons.

In II.2.1, I provided a blueprint for the trans-positional account of public reason. After that, in II.2.2, I argued for an account of public justification on the basis of public reasoning understood as trans-positional scrutiny. There, I proposed two understandings of public justification that should be taken complementarily: the validity view and the correctness view. My argument was that both these views of public justification are necessary for reasons to public justify, given the normative relevance of positions and perspectives, and also its limitations. In II.2.3, I looked into what should be the acceptable set of reasons for public justification. There, I argued that positional reasons should be those reasons, and that trans-positional reasons are justificatory reasons. Lastly, I considered two of the main criteria to define the acceptable set of reasons — reasonableness and individual good reasoning — and argued against both.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued for a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality in what pertains reasons of justice. In section II.1, I introduced the conceptual idea of objectivity as trans-positionality and the concept of trans-positional reasons — reasons that are normative and objective across positions. In section II.2, I developed the conception of objectivity as trans-positionality within a public reason framework where social justice claims should be justified in terms of trans-positional reasons. Throughout the section, I developed the trans-positional account of public reason in more detail by 1) providing an account of public justification understood as entailing public reasoning as trans-positional scrutiny (II.2.2); 2) arguing that positional reasons are the materials with which we should engage in public justification, with trans-positional reasons being justificatory reasons, and the perspective-understanding view as the correct view of the structure of public reason (II.2.3). In order to make my argument, I rejected both the Rawlsian view of reasonableness and consensus (II.2.3.1) and the Gausian view of individual good reasoning and convergence.

In the next chapter, I will continue to develop my account of objectivity as trans-positionality by answering the question of how we achieve (trans-positionally) objective assessments of justice.

III — Trans-positional scrutiny: detachment vs. engagement

At this point it might be helpful to make a quick recap of what I have argued so far and see how Chapters III and IV fit within the overall argument. Very briefly, in Chapter I, I argued that there are normative reasons that are dependent on one's specific evaluative perspectives. These were called positional reasons: reasons that are objective and normative, albeit only at the positional level. In Chapter II, I developed a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality, centred on what I have called the trans-positional account of public reason, which helped determine which reasons are objective across positions. In short, I proposed that the process through which we are able to reach trans-positionality starts with positional reasons being scrutinised for their validity and correctness (see II.2.). The results of this process, *i.e.*, the reasons that are able to survive public scrutiny, are trans-positional reasons — those reasons that are normative and objective across positions. This is, in broad strokes, what I have argued until now.

Following this argument for a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality centred around the trans-positional account of public reason, what I will propose in the next two chapters is to respond to the question of how to engage is the exercise of trans-positional scrutiny. Or, to put it in another way, of how to achieve objective assessments of social justice.

Briefly, we can have two understandings on how to exercise trans-positional scrutiny. On the one hand, drawing from traditional conceptions of objectivity as impartiality,[60] objective assessments require *detachment* from oneself and from others. On this view, we are to detach in order to eliminate any biases. On the other hand, I will propose, we can understand objective assessments as requiring *engagement* (in opposition to detachment) with other positions, with the goal of improving our understanding of them.

In Chapters III and IV, I will explore these views. I will start by explaining and arguing against the detachment view in abstract, in section

[60] Here I have specifically in mind Rawls' and Nagel's conceptions, as I will expand in III.1.

III.1. I will then specifically argue against the detachment view understood as Rawls' original position and veil of ignorance (III.1.1), Nagel's view from nowhere (III.1.2), and Sen's conception of open impartiality and impartial spectator (III.1.3).

Contrastingly, in section III.2, I will argue in favour of what I called the engagement view. I will propose that an engagement view of trans-positional assessments entails: democratic engagement (III.2.1) and imaginative perspective-taking (this last one will be topic of Chapter IV).

III.1 — The detachment view

The detachment view of objective assessments, as I started to introduce before and will show next, draws specifically from conceptions of objectivity as impartiality. That the requirement of detachment can be traced to these conceptions of objectivity determines that we take them as our conceptual starting place in order to then analyse what detachment entails. As such, I will start by drawing the connection between conceptions of objectivity as impartiality and detachment, and I will subsequently argue against the requirement of detachment.

Traditionally, conceptualisations of objectivity are built around the idea of impartiality — as we have seen at the beginning of Chapter I with what regards to the subjective/objective reasons dichotomy. To take impartiality to be key in our understanding of what it is to be objective not only is a prevalent view, it is also a quite intuitive one. At its core, the idea is that we should not give special weight to our own desires and interests. To do otherwise would be for one to be biased, mistaken, parochial, and therefore not-objective (to not say subjective). On this view, biases, mistakes, and parochialism of values are to be avoided in order to be objective.

Given this problem, the question becomes how are we to avoid biases, mistakes, and parochialism of values. Impartiality, it is proposed, asks us to *detach* ourselves from these biases, mistakes, and parochialisms. What is claimed, in other words, is that we should aim at occupying a neutral stance

by means of detachment.[61] Ultimately, that is what objectivity corresponds to, or demands of us, according to this conceptualisation of objectivity.

We can find evidence of the predominance of this prescription in the interchangeable usage of the terms *impartiality*, *detachment*, *neutrality*, *distance* — to name a few. We can find further evidence when we consider the array of mechanisms commonly invoked to guarantee what can broadly fit into what Cottingham (1983) has called the impartiality thesis: we have, among others, the *impartial spectator*, the *ideal observer*, the *veil of ignorance*, the *view from nowhere*, the *impersonal standpoint*, *god's eye*, the *third-person spectator*, and the *disinterested judge*.

Later I will look more closely into the specific proposals of Rawls, Nagel, and Sen that fit into this general description. For now, it is enough to consider this general description, which allows to more easily pinpoint where I believe the argument goes wrong: that is, the idea that not giving any special weight to our desires and interests[62] is taken to imply that we need to adopt an impartial standpoint, that we need to detach from ourselves (and from others). In other words, this position rests on a fake equivalence between being unbiased and being detached.

I will now present two initial arguments to support the above claim: the first is that detachment does not guarantee unbiasedness — in fact, it may lead to other biases. To show this, I will argue that detachment leads to the impossibility of adequately considering all of one's relevant normative reasons with which one is to engage in public justification, and, thus, that it leads to an inability to exercise public justification (*i.e.*, trans-positional assessments). The second argument is that *engaging* (that is, not being detached) does not necessarily imply partiality.

My first argument aims to show that detachment does not guarantee unbiasedness; in fact, it may lead to some forms of bias.[63] The reason why detachment does not guarantee unbiasedness is because it requires an actual detachment from one's standpoint and, also, from all other standpoints —

[61] See also Young, 1990, pp. 99-102.
[62] This already can be taken as a controversial claim. See for example Friedman, 1989, 1991.
[63] This point will hopefully become more evident in my discussions of Rawls (III.1.1), Nagel (III.1.2), and Sen (III.1.3).

otherwise, we would not be able to separate our contingent selves from the content of our judgments. To be detached, or unbiased, in this sense, is to be able to consider things as they are, rather than how our contingent selves might see them (or wish them to be). The problem, as I see it, is that by detaching ourselves from any positions, we do not have access to how things 'look' from other positions: we do not, and cannot, know, consider, or understand, what should be taken to be normatively relevant for practical reasoning. So, ironically, while the goal is to consider things as they are in order to develop better judgments and decisions, due to detachment we are to dismiss the materials with which we do engage in practical reasoning (see Chapter I, section I.2.2), leaving us with very little to rely our judgments on.

The irony strikes particularly hard when we consider that, because of detachment, we end up embracing another type of bias, now towards what we may call an impersonal standpoint. As an illustration of what I am trying to express, imagine a visit to planet Earth by extra-terrestrial beings — call them Martians. These Martians, it can be argued, embody a very detached standpoint. Supposedly, they have no biases or prejudices in what concerns human affairs. What would their representation of our world, from their detached standpoint, be? We can only conjecture, but it seems safe to claim that their representation of our world could not be a complete one, for knowing too little (perhaps nothing) about our world would lead them to have no grounds on which to make relevant judgments. They would only manage to form a partial (as in, only in part) understanding, given their absence of knowledge in what pertains to humans. They would not be unbiased; they would be biased towards their way of understanding the world.

Furthermore, remember that the conception of objectivity as trans-positionality requires that agents occupying other positions are to engage in the scrutiny of other positions. What kind of scrutiny, on either the validity view or the correctness view (see II.2.2), would these Martians be able to do? Given that they do not possess any information whatsoever, they are not able to practical reason in a relevant way to humans, and they are not equipped to scrutinise any positional reasons or perspectives — they would not know what any of that would mean, substantively speaking. They would not be able to consider the validity or the correctness of positional reasons.

Some may object that this is a too extreme version of what detachment is supposed to be. We will see later that even in slightly milder proposals, detachment leads to precisely the same type of problems. But before moving to the arguments of specific authors and considering these milder proposals, we can consider a more 'human' example than the one I just presented.

Consider, once again, Sen's 'three children and a flute' example (2010, pp. 12-15). To recapitulate, the example features three children (Anne, Bob and Carla) with different claims on a flute. Anne argues that, from the three, she is the only one who knows how to play it. Bob claims he should get the flute because he has no other toys to play with, due to being very poor. Lastly, Carla defends that the flute is the result of her labour. All seem to present good arguments for their respective claims on the flute and, says Sen, 'we may not be able to identify, without some arbitrariness, any of the alternative arguments as being the one that must invariably prevail.' (p. 14) Later, Sen adds the following:

> […] even entirely impartial judges, who are not moved by vested interest or by personal eccentricity, may see the force of several disparate reasons of justice in a case like this, and they may well end up differing from each other on what decisions should be taken, since the competing arguments all have some claim to impartial support. (p. 201)

It should be noted that the point Sen is trying to make is that there may not exist one unique right answer as to what the judge's decision should be, and that none of these claims can be rejected on the grounds that they do not have impartial justifications. However, I want to use the quoted passage to raise a different point: just like with the Martians, 'entirely impartial judges' would not be competent to make an assessment of the claims, nor make a decision: they cannot truly see the force of any of these reasons because they have not created the conditions to see them — they do not have the necessary information to properly engage in trans-positional assessments: neither on the validity view, nor on the correctness view. In order to be able to do that, I have been arguing, reasons need to be understood in the context of the evaluative perspectives from which they follow, and the agent's positionality. In abstract, reasons are not reasons. What this means is that, just like the Martians, entirely impartial judges — judges that are entirely detached from

the subjects they are judging — are not able to properly assess the normative force of a reason given that the source of the normativity of those reasons are unbeknownst to them.

Given these problems, we should ask why engage in this detachment exercise in the first place. The answer would be: to guarantee that the participatory parties are not biased. Which leads us to my second argument against the equivalence between being unbiased and being detached: as I stated above, this equivalence assumes that we should detach because engaging (that is, not being detached) implies being partial. At this moment, I will merely sketch an argument on why this should not be taken to be true.

First and foremost, we need to ascertain clearly what is entailed by partiality that we take to be problematic. Very briefly put, the problem of partiality, of prejudice, of bias, seems to arise when we, covertly influenced, clouded, 'infected' by our own desires and inclinations, make assessments, judgments and decisions that result in some form of favouritism.

Having identified what we take to be problematic with partiality, two points should be made in order to reject the equivalence: the first point is that none of what was just raised regarding partiality seems to say anything about knowing other positions well, and what is required for that to happen. The fact that we make the effort to engage with others does not imply we will play favouritism based on our desires or inclinations. There may be a risk, but it does need to be necessarily so.

The second point is that guaranteeing unbiasedness might have very little to do with one's detachment. In fact, in the way I have been arguing for a trans-positional conception of objectivity, I have already started to argue for mechanisms that avoid those biases. In a first instance, we have the concept of positional objectivity. From it, we have that something is positionally objective if others in the same position verify it. For something to be positionally objective, then, it is already to eliminate some forms of bias.

However, there may still be some positional biases left to eliminate. Nonetheless, positional objectivity is only the start of the process towards trans-positional objectivity that I proposed: that is, by entering the process of trans-positionality, by its very definition, we overcome positional biases by engaging in public justification. The agents taking part in public reasoning by

trans-positionally assessing other perspective enforce positional scrutiny on every position. That is how we transcend our positional perspectives and positional reasons towards a more objective standpoint.

I have now provided two arguments against the requirement of detachment. I will continue to argue against the detachment view discussing different specific positions we can find in the literature in its support. By discussing the proposal of specific authors, we will see how we should conclude that we should reject the detachment view of objective assessments.

In what follows, I will consider and argue against three of those well developed and established positions, each representative of a specific conception of objectivity that requires forms of detachment: John Rawls' original position and veil of ignorance (III.1.1), Thomas Nagel's view from nowhere (III.1.2), and Amartya Sen's open impartiality and impartial spectator (III.1.3).

III.1.1 — The original position and the veil of ignorance

Perhaps the most well-known mechanism, and argument, for the detachment of the parties involved in decision-making comes from Rawls and his *original position* and *veil of ignorance*. The original position is part of a thought experiment designed as a standpoint to ensure that the fundamental principles of justice are defined fairly. In this context, the original position represents a standpoint where the parties reasoning about the fundamental principles of justice are taken to be free and equal. In order to guarantee the fairness of this process — that is, in order to guarantee that all parties are indeed represented as free and equal citizens —, the original position features another conceptual mechanism: the veil of ignorance. The veil of ignorance aims at ensuring the impartiality of judgments in the original position by depriving each party of the knowledge of their specific real positions in the world: each party is to ignore their personal, social, historical, and economical circumstances and characteristics — such as one's race, gender, religious affiliation, wealth, and conception of the good. The veil of ignorance, then, is supposed to ensure that

one's judgments are not influenced by one's actual position in society. In other words, the veil of ignorance aims at ensuring the impartiality of judgements in the original position by requiring that each party detach from their own positions and from that of others.

In what follows, my aim is to ascertain as to whether this mechanism of detachment (in service of Rawls' version of objectivity as impartiality) should be part of how we can be objective in our assessments and judgments of reasons and claims of justice. As a result, I will not be focusing on the more traditional debates regarding the original position's relevance or fairness in its purpose to define principles of justice, nor will I focus on debates regarding which choices one would, or would not, make when in the original position.[64]

The connection between Rawls' conception of impartiality and a conception of objectivity is not the mere possibility that a conception of objectivity may reference the original position and veil of ignorance as a tool to guarantee impartiality. The connection between these two is, at least, suggested by Rawls, who argues that the original position is an objective standpoint (1999, pp. 453, 514; see also 1993), since it is the adoption of 'this general standpoint' that everyone can adopt that allows us to transcend our particular circumstances, attachments, and interests.

For the purpose of the discussion of this chapter, what this means is that on this conception, not only objectivity requires impartiality (in that we are objective because we are impartial), but also impartiality requires detachment. In fact, the entire thought experiment of the original position aims at completely detaching each party from all the information about their positions in the world. The goal, again, is to guarantee the unbiasedness of judgments. As Rawls writes, '[…] to see our place in society from the perspective of this position is to see it *sub specie aeternitatis*: it is to regard the human situation not only from all social but also all temporal points of view.' (1999, p. 514). It is the adoption of the original position that leads us to detach and, therefore, transcend our supposed partialities.

[64] These have been done thoroughly before. See, for example, Cohen, 2015; Harsani, 1975; MacIntyre, 1981; Sandel 1982; Sen, 2010.

Clearly, then, the entire argument rests on the assumption that one's detachment from one's circumstances (and from those of others as well) guarantees unbiasedness. The assumption, in other words, is that if the parties in the original position had knowledge of their beliefs, values, desires, circumstances, and those of the other parties, that would make each party necessarily biased in the critical assessments they are supposed to produce.

However, there is very little to lead us to believe that this assumption should be taken to be necessarily true. My argument will be that by asking to be detached in this specific manner, what is really being asked is for us to detach ourselves from the information that we need to seek, that we need to have, that we need to understand, and that we need to scrutinise. When we do detach, however, we fail to do all this. As such, and contrary to what Rawls writes in the passage quoted above, this conception of impartiality regards the human situation from a point of view that excludes all social and temporal points of view due to its focus on detachment.

The possible pervasive effects introduced by the original position and the veil of ignorance have been the object of much attention before. Sen (2002, 2010), for example, critically calls Rawls' conception of impartiality a form of *closed impartiality* — this is to be understood in opposition with *open impartiality*, which Sen proposes alternatively (see III.1.3). Sen argues that Rawls's impartiality is designed to only apply to a specific focal group, that is, it applies only within a specific society. This fact leads Sen to identify three main issues that make a closed conception of impartiality problematic: procedural parochialism, inclusionary incoherence, and exclusionary neglect. Here I am mostly interested on the first one.

Procedural parochialism corresponds to the criticism that closed impartiality, while aiming to eliminate partiality, does so only towards the vested interests within a focal group, leaving the shared prejudices and biases of the focal group itself unchecked (Sen, 2002, p. 447; see also Friedman, 1989). The consequence is that the impartiality of the results of applying the original position and veil of ignorance is only true according to the standard of the society it applies to; the results cannot be considered openly — *i.e.*, globally — impartial. In order for impartiality to be open impartiality, these

parochial vested interests and biases need to be the object of scrutiny from perspectives outside of the focal group.

On Sen's objection, Rawls' conception of objectivity fails because it fails to eliminate biases by not allowing all positions to be the object of scrutiny. We have a first instance on how scrutiny fails on this conception. But, as I made clear, my aim at this point is not to question objectivity as impartiality itself, but to question that we take objectivity of assessments to require detachment. The main problem, as I see it, is that the exercise of scrutiny fails on Rawls' view precisely because of the focus on detachment (via the original position). Namely, it fails because the source of normativity of reasons is moved from one's reasons to the veil of ignorance. In other words, Rawls' impartiality does not lead to what it claims, even within the focal group — not even if, instead, we consider the entire world as one focal group. And it fails because the veil of ignorance would require us to practical reason without the materials that allow us to exercise practical reasoning. In that case, given the focus on detachment, scrutiny cannot take place since there is nothing to scrutinise; and, as a result, detachment does not guarantee impartiality.

To identify that all the information that the veil of ignorance is supposed to veil — gender, race, class, etc. — may have motivational influence in normative reasoning is not new (see for example Friedman 1989, pp. 654-655). I have also already argued relatedly for this position in Chapter II, following Habermas. But, in Chapter I, I have argued for more than this: in that chapter, I argued that these positional parameters, the ones that the veil of ignorance is supposed to hide, help define one's practical standpoint and one's positionally normative reasons. Not only do those positional parameters have a motivational influence in our normative reasoning, they also have a *normative* influence in the definition of one's *normative* reasons (*i.e.*, positional reasons).

By veiling one's positional parameters, we are veiling one's evaluative perspectives, and one's capacity to have positional reasons. In this case, it would be the veil of ignorance determining what is normatively relevant and what one's normative reasons would be, instead of one's

evaluative perspective. This, of course, would imply that some positional reasons are normatively irrelevant.

As a result of shifting the source of normativity of one's reasons, we are left with nothing to scrutinise, since there would be no positional reasons to consider. On the original position, we would be impartial by being detached, but we would also be incapable of making critical assessments and decisions. From the standpoint of the original positions there are no other positions to consider: it represents the denial of the normative relevance of positionality, as argued in Chapter I.

III.1.2 — The view from nowhere

Another clear case of a defence of objectivity that requires detachment can be found in Nagel's *The View from Nowhere* (1986). In fact, detachment also encapsulates Nagel's conception of objectivity: to be objective is to be detached, it is to view things from a standpoint freed of attachments. In other words, for Nagel, objectivity is a perspective that can be adopted by anyone, a view from nowhere.

What Nagel proposes is that, in order to adopt an objective standpoint, we have to undergo a process of detachment from our initial views: we need to be able to distance ourselves from our particular and subjective[65] perspectives. According to Nagel, we need to engage in this process of detachment because we are only capable of having a partial understanding of the world that surrounds us since our initial perspectives are dependent on external information that we perceive and apprehend — we are both dependent on the world and on our perception of it. Since we start from an initial perspective that is partial and inaccurate, in order to understand the world, it is not enough to just extensively explore it from the same standpoint.

Nagel's starting point cannot be said to be too distant from the starting point of the position I have been defending until now; the conclusion, however, is almost diametrically opposed. Our two positions start to clearly

[65] Subjective, for Nagel, means pre-reflective, in the sense that these views have not yet been 'subjected to a particular kind of critical examination.' (Thomas, 2009, p. 11)

distant themselves from one another when Nagel argues that our understanding is only properly improved when we consider the world and its relations from a detached stance — a detached stance from both ourselves, and the world.

More specifically, Nagel's argument is that we need to progressively detach ourselves from our initial beliefs in order to reach a higher objective stance. We do that by actively comparing those initial beliefs with alternative ones — in that we are supposed to explore standpoints that are not necessarily our own. By constructing new beliefs, we transcend our particular positions. In other words, we should evaluate our beliefs, and then proceed to reject, maintain, or add other beliefs, aiming specifically to reject the ones we consider to be 'false subjective appearances'. Ultimately, we should formulate a centerless conception of the world, one that contains '[…] ourselves and other beings with particular points of view' (1986, p. 140).

Gaus (1990, pp. 198-199) characterises this definition of the objective standpoint as being Archimedean, describing, with particular precision, the conception of objectivity that Nagel proposes in the following way:

> […] Nagel still strives for a more thoroughgoing objectivity in which one does not merely recognize a multiplicity of perspectives, none of which is essentially privileged, but one in some sense views things abstracted from any particular perspective at all. (p. 198)

I take this description to showcase that Nagel moves between two formulations of what a centerless conception of the world means: on the one hand, that it means that all perspectives are considered and given equal weight; on the other hand, that it corresponds to a view where we consider all the elements that all have in common. These are meant to mean the same; I will propose that they do not.

In order to make my argument, I will first show that whatever reading one makes of Nagel's conception of objectivity, it always implies absolute detachment — rather than milder forms of detachment (I will return to this point). The consequence of defending that objectivity is achievable by absolute detachment implies, as I will argue afterwards, that objectivity can only correspond to a view that considers what people have in common, but cannot correspond to a view that considers all standpoints — since absolute

detachment implies not being able to recognise all standpoints. If my objection holds, this is yet another case where the requirement of detachment leads to the impossibility of adequately considering all of one's relevant normative reasons, and the inability of engaging in public justification.

Before I argue that Nagel's view from nowhere always implies absolute detachment, it should be noted that Nagel claims that this is not the case. Nagel considers that to always conceive the world objectively in absolute detached terms leads '[…] to false reductions or to outright denial that certain patently real phenomena exist at all' (1986, p. 7), and that doing so is a form of 'objective blindness'. This, Nagel argues, is because the importance of how perspectives (or what I have been calling positions) inform our beliefs, knowledge, and understanding, has different degrees of relevance depending on the subject matter. However, it will follow from my argument that these considerations end up playing a very limited role on how objectivity should be understood for Nagel, as we will see. Although Nagel makes this distinction, doubts arise regarding the difference between these possible different forms of objectification, and how they play out when accounted for the appropriate domain of knowledge.[66]

On this issue, Jonathan Dancy (1988, 1994), and later Alan Thomas (2009), provide helpful interpretations of Nagel's proposal. Both authors interpret the existence of two different models of seeking an objective understanding — what they call the Hegelian model and the Cartesian/absolute model — and provide good and clear developments of how these models may be understood.[67] Unfortunately, I do not have the space to properly engage with the much-needed clarity and nuanced arguments these two authors provide on this topic. I will, nonetheless, consider their interpretation of the existence of a dual model of objectification, and that the existence of a dual model may be the best interpretation of Nagel. However, I will argue that whatever reading we make

[66] Indeed Dancy (1988, 1994) criticises several times how Nagel seems to conflate the two different approaches and ends up using them indifferently.
[67] Dancy and Thomas express opposite views on the possibility of running two models of objectification for different topics at the same time. This issue will not be explored here.

of Nagel's conception(s) of objectivity, they entail the same process of detachment.

Part of what follows from Dancy's and Thomas' discussions of Nagel is that there may be two forms of transcending subjectivity — *i.e.*, of detachment — through the exercise of *critical reflection* within Nagel's view from nowhere. That is, depending on the context, the process of detachment characterised by critical reflection[68] should be understood differently. It should be understood either as *detachment* or as *disengagement*. Thomas explains that

> […] for the Hegelian model the issue seems better expressed in terms of a reflective disengagement from a previously engaged perspective. We have to balance continued commitment to a set of "subjective" beliefs with a more disengaged insight into those very same commitments. That is a subtly different way of thinking about increased reflectiveness, but it does not seem to involve complete detachment from the subjective. That reflection here does not involve detachment is connected to the fact that in this model we do not renounce the subjective because it is intrinsically erroneous, as in the Cartesian model. Instead, we retain our commitment to our subjective starting-point even as reflection transforms it. (p. 22)

In this passage,[69] what Thomas is saying is that the meaning of *critical reflection* — the process through which we leave our subjective positions behind — can either be taken to constitute a form of detachment or a form of disengagement. In the former, we take subjective views to be erroneous and we are to disregard them; in the latter, we evolve from view to view without completely dismissing the ones we leave behind. So, dependent on the topic of knowledge, the objective standpoint either implies that we absolutely detach or that we merely disengage; that is the claim.

It is against this claim that I will argue specifically. Although Thomas' interpretation might be the closest and the most charitable to Nagel's intentions, I do not think that *critical reflection* can have two different meanings. Why is this important for my argument, one may be asking? The answer is that by showing that *critical reflection* only has one meaning —

[68] Remember that, according to Nagel, we move from a subjective standpoint to a more objective standpoint by questioning our initial views.

[69] As I mentioned, I do not have the space to properly contextualise and engage with Dancy's and Thomas' analysis and arguments. As such, I will not enter too much into the terminological details of the quote. I will focus only on the distinction it tries to draw.

that of absolute detachment —, that collapses the possibility of the view from nowhere being able to include any type of positional perspectives. As such, we cannot conclude that objective assessments should be exercised by means of detachment.

As such, my argument is the following: Nagel's conception of objectivity as the view from nowhere always requires the capacity to see the world impersonally in order to deem a perspective to be objective. And this is something that cannot be rejected by either model of objectification suggested by Dancy and Thomas, if we are to follow Nagel's arguments, since the capacity to see the world impersonally is fundamental for '[…] trying to discover the objective nature of reality' (1991, p. 10). The capacity to see the world impersonally is the capacity for us to remove ourselves from our own positions. When doing so, we inhabit the impersonal standpoint. In other words, in the impersonal standpoint we are to consider all the existing perspectives, without prioritising our own. To do that, we need to consider the 'raw data' — that is, 'desires, interests, projects, attachments, allegiances and plans of life' (1991, p. 11) — that is intrinsic to personal standpoints of all individuals and find which ones are common between them. The 'raw data' that is common between individuals is called impersonal values.

This new description of Nagel's arguments does not seem too different from the initial description, apart from the different terminology. However, this new description helps making clear what it means for objectivity to correspond to a centerless conception of the world (or, what it means to detach). In order to formulate a centerless conception of the world, these impersonal values are the only ones that truly matter, in the sense that an impersonal standpoint is one that represents any person. It is a standpoint that is a third-person point of view, in which we abstract from ourselves and become just another self, one among others — an objective self. Then, in order to declare a perspective or form of thought as objective, it needs to be as independent as possible from the constitution and the position of specific individuals; it needs to be the view from nowhere.

As such, and in contrast with Dancy's and Thomas' interpretations, the introduction of the impersonal standpoint, in my reading of Nagel, suggests that there needs to be a renouncement of those positional

perspectives that can be labelled subjective — remember that the renouncement of the subjective is one of the elements used by these authors to characterise the difference between what constitutes *detachment* and what constitutes *disengagement*, as we saw in the passage from Thomas quoted above. In fact, as both suggest, in this model there does not seem to be any renouncement of the subjective because of it being erroneous; rather, I am arguing, the renouncement of the subjective would happen because the existence of the subjective in an objective perspective would make a centerless conception of the world impossible.

If there is no relevant difference between disengagement and detachment, then our capacity to consider and assess positional perspectives are either absent or irrelevant. On this conception of objectivity then, an objective standpoint always implies detachment from some subjective — but nonetheless positionally relevant — perspectives. Hence, Nagel's worry that objectivity should entail different levels of detachment according to different fields of knowledge ends up always being reduced to absolute detachment.

So far, I have argued that Nagel's conception of objectivity implies absolute detachment. And to that extent, some positional perspectives are to be left behind and be dismissed. If that is so, we cannot take the claim that *objectivity as the view from nowhere considers all standpoints*, and the claim that *objectivity as the view from nowhere considers only what people have in common* as meaning the same. Instead, these should be taken as two different claims that are incongruent with one another: for what is common between all — the raw data, as Nagel calls it — corresponds to the intersection of what all standpoints share, leaving out what some standpoints take to be relevant but that is not shared by all. As a result, it cannot be said that all standpoints are considered.[70]

However, Nagel argues that subjective perspectives are not absent from consideration, since the impersonal standpoint can incorporate them. The impersonal standpoint describes in impersonal terms the first-person perspectives of specific individuals, including facts about those same

[70] This argument is reminiscent of the arguments raised against reasonableness in Chapter II (see II.2.3.1).

individuals, according to Nagel. This argument, in my opinion, also fails, as I will show next.

In the context of explaining that a personal perspective is important for how we conceive the world, but makes no difference in what actually happens — leading to the conclusion that a personal perspective can be conceived impersonally —, Nagel writes the following example, in *The Possibility of Altruism* (1970):

> I can conceive impersonally my house burning down, and the individual T.N. standing before it, feeling hot and miserable, and looking hot and miserable to bystanders, and seeing their sympathetic looks, etc. If I add to all this the premise that I am T.N., I will imagine *feeling* hot and miserable, *seeing* the sympathetic bystanders, etc.; but this is not to imagine anything happening differently. Anything which I can imagine feeling, I can imagine being felt by the person impersonally described, who I in fact am. Anything I can judge or believe about my own situation, experiences, actions, I can judge or believe about him, without any alteration in what is being believed to occur. (pp. 103-104)

In this example, Nagel considers himself in a third-person, impersonal, detached perspective. Although he applies this perspective impersonally to himself, Nagel claims it can be applicable as an impersonal perspective on any person, since impersonally 'one is just a person among others' — an expression Nagel uses often.

The task now is to determine if a process of self-oriented perspective-taking[71] — of projecting ourselves imaginatively into the perspective of others (namely, emotions, desires, beliefs) —, like the one the example presents, constitutes a true understanding of the other and a form of considering subjective perspectives, or if it only provides a better understanding of oneself. As I will argue in Chapter IV, a process of self-oriented perspective-taking cannot yield knowledge of the other, much less if that process of understanding the other through imagination is made impersonally, as in the case described above by Nagel. A process of self-oriented perspective-taking focuses on the experience of one's own mental states and on the projection and attribution of those states to others, rather than on one's ability to experience the mental states of others. The only reason

[71] More on this in Chapter IV, section IV.3.

Nagel is able to impersonally conceive the personal, in the 'burning house' example, is because he is impersonally conceiving his personal self — which is the only self he has access to. As we will see in Chapter IV, this is precisely a violation of one of the conditions to successfully engage in any form of perspective-taking: the absence of self-other differentiation, insofar as the *other* is the *self*, in this case. To recast in impersonal terms the positional perspective of others with any accuracy and consideration would be impossible, otherwise, since we do not occupy the same positions, nor share the same positional parameters and evaluative perspectives.

In a way, the maximum common denominator that the impersonal standpoint is supposed to be — by being essential for a formulation of a centerless conception of the world by only considering the 'raw data' that is common between all individuals — becomes a minimum common denominator. That is, it reduces the knowledge of the other to impersonality due to detachment. Thus, an impersonal perspective that transcends all positional perspectives does not seem capable of conceiving and understanding specific desires, interests, projects, attachments, and plans of life that are different in different positions. In short, it cannot conceive and consider all positional perspectives by not being able to understand standpoints other than those that can be shared.

Just like with Rawls before, detachment as a requirement of objectivity as postulated by Nagel is incompatible with a conception of objectivity as impartiality. Detachment, once again, is an obstacle for the capacity to exercise objective assessments, rather than a condition for it.

Next, I will consider Sen's version of the requirement of detachment for objective assessments.

III.1.3 — Open impartiality and the impartial spectator

We saw earlier in this section some of the objections raised by Sen against the Rawlsian original position and veil of ignorance: Sen labelled this type of impartiality *closed* impartiality. Instead of closed impartiality, Sen proposes

that we should focus on *open* impartiality (2002, 2010) to guarantee the objectivity of our judgments.

Whereas closed impartiality refers only to a focal group — the relevant perspectives come from the members of a specific society —, open impartiality considers viewpoints from outside of the focal group, which includes a diverse range of unprejudiced and unbiased perspectives, from impartial spectators that are not confined to a specific society, Sen claims. In other words, open impartiality is a conception of impartiality that aims at eliminating biases, prejudices, etc., in relation to the viewpoints of those that belong to the group and those outside of the group.[72]

In his body of work, Sen puts a strong emphasis on the inclusion and on giving appropriate attention to every viewpoint, as it should be clear by now. And that is what open impartiality aims to preserve. However, in order to guarantee these goals, Sen founds his conception of open impartiality on Adam Smith's *impartial spectator*. It is with this move — which I take to be quite at odds with most of Sen's overall project — that Sen inadvertently ends up following on the footsteps of Rawls and Nagel, as I will show. The justification on why Sen invokes Smith's impartial spectator is not distant from the project of this thesis, as it will become clearer in Chapter IV; but it is quite unclear as to why Sen — again, given his project —, argues that impartiality as detachment should be a requirement of objectivity. I will thus argue against the need of invoking any type of impartial spectator. In order to do that, I will start by explain Sen's use of the impartial spectator.

As mentioned, Sen's conception of impartiality is predicated on Adam Smith's impartial spectator. Without getting into too much detail, for reasons that will be clear shortly, Adam Smith's impartial spectator (1976, originally 1759) can be described as a thought-experiment that is intended as a way for us to judge our sentiments as if detached from our own positions. It requires us to evaluate our own conduct by imagining how others (*i.e.*, spectators) would judge us. By being detached parties, these spectators are able to be disinterested judges — and so, they are impartial spectators.

[72] Sen uses *group* to refer to, for example, nationality, class, profession, etc. *Group*, then, can be said to correspond to what I have been calling one's positions (social or otherwise).

Sen interprets Adam Smith in the following way:

> Adam Smith's insistence that we must *inter alia* view our sentiments from 'a certain distance from us' is motivated by the object of scrutinizing not only the influence of vested interest, but also the impact of entrenched tradition and custom. (2010, p. 45)

The idea of open impartiality achieved via the impartial spectator, then, is that biases or partialities need to be identified, and overridden; for that, we need 'to examine the perspective of differently situated spectators — from far and near — to overcome partiality in general', Sen writes (2002, p. 446).

Since persons that are part of the same focal groups tend to share, in some ways, similar experiences, prejudices, and beliefs, Sen's argument is that through the scrutiny of the impartial spectator it will be possible to reach more objective judgments and decisions. The reasoning is that, by aiming at invoking perspectives from disinterested, uninvolved people from all possible societies — that is, by considering perspectives from different positions that would normally not be considered — we would be able to dismiss 'local parochialism of values'. Sen considers that this is the best way to establish objectively the scrutiny of values that are specific of a particular society, in contrast with Rawls' closed version of impartiality (see III.1.1).

Invoking the impartial spectator, then, aims at enabling us to see positional judgments through the eyes of others (Gilardone, 2015, p. 228). The perspective of several impartial spectators should be taken to, ultimately, embody the trans-positional view: it is claimed that it represents a subject-centred impartiality that considers the positional views of others, being a device intended for critical scrutiny and open public discussion.

This is how Sen conceives open impartiality, and how the impartial spectator device is raised. Strangely enough, though, the impartial spectator that Sen links to Adam Smith cannot be said to be Adam Smith's impartial spectator, as many have noted before.[73] What may explain this is the fact that Sen invokes only some of the features of Smith's impartial spectator, while, as Shapiro (2011) states critically, '[…] never tell[ing] us what makes an observer impartial, other than that the ingredients include distance and, sometimes, ideas from other cultures.' (p. 1258) Bréban and Gilardone (2020;

[73] See Bréban, Gilardone, 2020; Forman-Barzilai, 2010; Gilardone, 2010; Shapiro, 2011.

who, in turn, acknowledge Martins, 2012) find a different justification: that Sen has his own project and uses Smith's impartial spectator in service of that project. I believe both of these can be, and are, true — even though neither helps making Sen's conception of open impartiality easier to assess.

So, what can be said to be Sen's version of Smith's impartial spectator? What Sen proposes is that the exercise of public reasoning[74] be characterised by open impartiality, where, in order to invoke views from outside of the focal group, we are to imagine what those other positions would say. In order to do that, we are to become disinterested, detached, distanced, that is, impartial spectators of our own views and positions so that we can consider other various possible views. So, when putting forward a claim of justice, we should consider whether an impartial spectator would agree with us, and if so, our claim is impartial. In a sentence, Sen's impartial spectator is '[…] a device for reasoned self-scrutiny.' (2012, p. 104)

From this description, we can identify that Sen maintains one key feature of Smith's impartial spectator: that is, the use of imagination. Sen specifically writes that

> [t]here may not, of course, be any really impartial spectator in the world, but we can persuade ourselves to look at the values and priorities that others have, and then examine them all with as much objectivity as we can bring into the exercise. Attempts at being objective can be helped by our putting on other people's hats – even their identities – and asking ourselves: how would our choices, our values look to them?' (2012, p. 104)

In Chapter IV, I will also argue that the use of imaginative perspective-taking can help in our quests for the objectivity of our assessments. But there is a problem that Sen faces when arguing that we should detach by engaging in the form of imaginative perspective-taking proposed above: the problem is that detachment through imaginative perspective-taking clashes with Sen's previous argument about the need to include and consider every standpoint (in order to eliminate all types of biases, prejudices, etc.).[75] I will try to show this next.

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[74] Rather than individual, as with Smith (see Bréban, Gilardone, 2020, p. 267)

[75] It could be said that this happens because Sen invokes the impartial spectator without invoking the role that sympathy should play in the process of imagination, as proposed by Adam Smith (for an argument on how sympathy is 'the missing piece' in Sen's conception

The reason why the use of the impartial spectator clashes with the aims of including and considering every standpoint is that the impartial spectator reverses what the process of imagination is supposed to be. As a consequence, the impartial spectator does not contribute to any form of meaningful scrutiny.

To better understand why, we need to go back to the idea of the impartial spectator as both Sen and Smith understand it. In the words of Raphael (2007, p. 35), the impartial spectator '[…] is not the actual bystander who may express approval or disapproval of my conduct. He is a creation of my imagination. He is indeed myself […]'. With the risk of repetition, behind the idea of the impartial spectator is the idea that when we judge ourselves, we should do it as the impartial spectator would, we should see and judge ourselves through what we imagine are the eyes of others.

The way I phrased the end of that last sentence may seem substantively odd, and it may start to raise some questions regarding what is really entailed by the mechanism of the impartial spectator. To that point, Raphael's (1975) discussion of Smith's impartial spectator is particularly incisive when he critically describes what is involved in the imaginative exercise of the impartial spectator:

> [a]n ordinary spectator approves of an agent's conduct if he finds that, after imagining himself in the agent's shoes, he would feel and act as the agent does. An agent who consults his conscience has to imagine himself in the position of an uninvolved spectator while retaining his present knowledge of the facts. He has to imagine that he is an uninvolved spectator who in turn imagines himself to be in the position of the involved agent; and having performed this feat of imagination doubling back on its tracks, the agent has to ask himself whether the feelings that he imagines he would then experience do or do not correspond to the feelings that he actually experiences now. (p. 99)

With this passage, Raphael intends to show that this is too complicated of a thought experiment to be common practice. The point I want to make following Raphael's passage above is that there is no exercise of scrutiny involved in that exercise of imagination, as is claimed by Sen; and even if there was, it would not be worth engaging in it. The problem is the following:

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of justice, see Bréban, Gilardone, 2020). Instead of this possibility, I will argue that there are other problems directly related to the idea of detachment.

without going into unnecessary details at this point, a normal process of imaginative perspective-taking (see Chapter IV) — of putting oneself in another's shoes, hats, etc. — is different from the imaginative process entailed by the impartial spectator. The difference is that instead of the spectator being the one who is to imagine how it would be in the agent's situation, it is the agent that is to imagine how the spectators would judge the agent. If again this sounds odd, or confusing, it is because it is, and unnecessarily so.

As we have seen, Sen's idea of justice entails the use of public reasoning for critical assessments of one's own values and those of others in order to identify injustices. Sen (2012a) writes that '[s]ubjecting our values to scrutiny by asking probing questions, drawing on many sources, may be a good beginning. Broadening the exercise by considering the perspectives of others — from far as well as near — would make sense here […]' (pp. 107-108). On this view, which is to a large extent very close to what I have been defending in this thesis, it is unclear why we should invoke an impartial spectator for the exercise of scrutiny — an exercise where we imagine what others would think of our own positions. Scrutiny has already been established as an exercise that we rely on others to do on us, and us on others. From what has been presented until this point, that is the entire motivation behind public justification as entailing trans-positional scrutiny — and that is so for me, as it is for Sen, if I understand Sen correctly. Self-scrutiny may be something we should aim to do, and to be able to publicly justify ourselves is already part of that process. But it does not seem to entail that we are required to detach from either ourselves or from others.

Furthermore, it is unclear how the impartial spectator can help bring in perspective from everywhere. What seems to be the claim is that other perspectives would be considered if, as Sen says, we should try other agent's hats. The problem is that, with the impartial spectator, the hats we would try would not be those of other agents. This is so because Sen does not say anything about what might be necessary to know and understand others — in fact, this is one of the main differences we can find between Sen's impartial spectator and Smith's. As a result, we are left to wonder how we can imagine what our conduct would be in the same situation another agent is in if we

cannot fully know what that situation is, and what is like to have the specific attributes that other person has.

Invoking the impartial spectator, then, amounts simply to resort to our own vision of the situation, and our own vision of what others may potentially think. In other words, as a result of our incapacity to understand other positions — since, again, Sen's impartial spectator does not say anything about it; in fact, it specifically asks us to detach from ourselves — we are only capable of formulating other standpoints by basing them on our own views. This cannot be said to represent any form of scrutiny from everywhere, nor from anywhere.

Lastly, and as a consequence, we can also add that the impartial spectator does not add much in terms of guaranteeing the elimination of biasing factor, and parochialism of values.[76] Since we imaginatively have to fill up the positions of others with our own views of what others think, 'impartially' or otherwise, we become susceptible to bias and prejudice from our ascription to others of our own views of the world.

In conclusion, allow me to reinforce my objection to Sen's requirement of detachment, via impartial spectator, by briefly putting my point in a different way. To the extent that it is unclear, in my reading of Sen, at which point the impartial spectator should come into play, there are two possible understandings that I will consider. If, on the one hand, the impartial spectator exercise is to apply to one's own participation in public reasoning, that means that we are to detach from our own evaluative perspectives. On this reading, we would face the problem addressed in Chapter I regarding Korsgaard's position, the reasonableness problem from Chapter II, or what I have addressed in this chapter regarding Rawls's and Nagel's proposals: if we detach from our specific evaluative perspectives and from our positionality — as the impartial spectator requires us to do — we are left with no materials for practical reasoning. From there, there is nothing to be said, to be evaluated, there is no substance; to rehash one of Street's points from

[76] Here we are back at the problem already identified several times: the merely assumed implication that there is a relation between particular positions and the problems of partiality, bias, and prejudice; and that with a process of detachment these problems can be eliminated.

Chapter I, the rabbit of substance cannot be pulled out of a substantively empty hat.

If, on the other hand, we are to take the impartial spectator as part of the exercise of public justification, then it is unclear what it will achieve, since trans-positional scrutiny is supposed to provide that scrutiny we are aiming for: scrutiny that indeed corresponds to the inclusion of the perspectives of others, both from far and near, to use Sen's own language. If we are to be able to trans-positionally assess, we need to access different positions. The impartial spectator, instead, merely represents what we would think other positions would see, not what they actually do.

Based on these reasons, it is not clear how detachment via impartial spectator helps achieving trans-positionality: if trans-positional assessment is the examination of positionally objective positions, a trans-positional assessment has to consider and examine the content of *all* positionally objective positions. By invoking the impartial spectator, as with Rawls' and Nagel's proposals before, a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality would fail precisely to consider and examine all the relevant positions and reasons.

With my arguments against Sen's impartial spectator, I end this section on impartiality and detachment. In it I argued against the commonly held idea that impartiality as detachment should be a requirement of objective assessments. I started the section by providing a general argument against this idea. Following that, I argued against the specific conceptions of impartiality as detachment of Rawls (III.1.1), Nagel (III.1.2), and now Sen (III.1.3). In the section that follows, and until the end of this chapter, I will propose an alternative to the detachment view: I will propose that rather than detaching ourselves, trans-positional scrutiny requires us to engage.

III.2 — The engagement view

So far, I have been arguing against detachment as a requirement of objective assessments. The alternative I will now defend is something that I call the

engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny: that is, the exercise of trans-positional assessments, rather than requiring detachment, should require engagement with other positions in order to successfully manage to transcend them. The engagement view will be predicated on the need to understand other agents' positionality, positional perspectives, and positional reasons: understood in this way, objectivity as trans-positionality requires us to engage in order to be in a better position to exercise trans-positional assessments.

In this section, I will start by introducing the engagement view and why we need to engage. Then, in III.2.1, I will develop the engagement view by proposing that engagement should be understood as involving *democratic engagement*. However, my account of the engagement view will only be completed in Chapter IV, where I will propose that engagement should also require *imaginative perspective-taking*.

As I argued in Chapter II, trans-positionality should be understood as requiring engaging in public justification, where we are to trans-positionally assessment other perspectives and respective reasons. At the time, I proposed that we can conceive of two complementary views of public justification (see II.2.2): on the validity view, one's reasons and claims are put up to the scrutiny of other standpoints according to the evaluative perspectives of those standpoints; on the correctness view, one's reasons and claims are scrutinised by other standpoints, which should verify if those reasons and claims follow from one's evaluative perspectives. This means that the exercise of public justification entails making trans-positional assessments, that is, it entails engaging in the exercise of scrutiny of claims, positional reasons, evaluative perspectives, and positional parameters. This, in turn, imposes certain requirements that fall under what we can call the conditions for the possibility of trans-positional scrutiny.

What are the conditions for the possibility of exercising trans-positional scrutiny? Since we can only scrutinise what we know and understand, the conditions for the possibility of trans-positional scrutiny are those elements that improve our capacities to develop knowledge and understanding of other agents' evaluative perspectives. In other words, we need to know which positional parameters are relevant to determine each evaluative perspective in order to be able to assess reasons according to 1)

correctness — that is, in order to establish if specific positional reasons coherently follow from the evaluative perspectives in question —, and 2) validity.

This point can be made more explicitly, for it is crucial in the definition of what we should take to be objective: say we want to scrutinise Othello's reasons to kill Desdemona, in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Now consider doing the same exercise with Iago's reasons to set in motion the plan for Othello to kill Desdemona. While in the case of Othello we can start to exercise scrutiny on his reasons, and ascertain any normativity they may have, for we can take those reasons in their context — we can know and understand some of his relevant positional parameters (or we can start to discuss which may be relevant, at least) —, with Iago we cannot. The access we have to one character is very different to the access we have to the other. Joan Didion starts her 1970's book *Play It As It Lays* with 'What makes Iago evil? some people ask […]', and indeed we have to ask, only to return with possible conjectures as to what the character's reasons and motivations might be.

In order to do more than just come up with conjectures, for our goal is to ultimately be able to make judgments and decisions that can be labelled as objective, we need to engage with agents and their positions in order to be able to make trans-positional assessments. To not engage is to fail to do what we should do in order to be objective. I will propose next that an engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny should be understood as combining, at least, two ideas: democratic engagement (III.2.1), and imaginative perspective-taking (which will be the subject of Chapter IV).

III.2.1 – Democratic engagement

In Chapter II, section II.2.2., I alluded to the fact that public reasoning[77] can be understood in different ways — at the time, I only present what I called a neutral account of public reasoning. Now I will focus on what may be taken to be a positive account. What this means is that public reasoning as trans-

[77] Remember that, according to the argument in Chapter II, public justification is made on the basis of public reasoning (as entailing trans-positional scrutiny) (see II.2.).

positional scrutiny can be further understood in, at least, two ways: by employing detachment — as Sen's impartial spectator may be taken to be an example of —, or, alternatively, as a process through which we try to engage with other positions. Although both are forms of exercising public justification, these are different forms of participation in that exercise. The result of what we take this exercise to be, thus, changes substantively.

What differentiates the engagement view from others is what it tries to achieve with the same methods. That is, the engagement view, I will argue, entails a richer form of inclusive public deliberation: what I will call, *democratic engagement*. Briefly, democratic engagement corresponds to a form of democratic deliberation that features different forms of exercising deliberation itself. More specifically, in this subsection, I will argue that trans-positional scrutiny requires that we engage in an all-inclusive form of democratic deliberation that relies on different forms of communication to learn about other positions. Then, in III.2.1.1, I will consider a few limitations to this view.

When we deliberate publicly, we can use different methods to exercise that deliberation. The forms of deliberation within the context of public reason and deliberative democracy traditionally tend to focus on the exchange and the debate of arguments. Many have argued against the sole focus on this type of deliberation for its exclusionary nature.

Young (1993, 1996, 2000),[78] for instance, has showed some of these limitations. I will highlight only the most relevant for this work: namely, the consequences of privileging argument as the preferred form of communication in deliberation over other forms.

Young does not deny the importance of the use of argumentation in deliberation but argues that '[…] there are reasons to be suspicious of privileging argument, and especially certain interpretations of what good argument means, […]' (2000, p. 37). One of the reasons for suspicion comes from the fact that deliberation presupposes the existence of both premises and specific discursive normative conceptual frameworks — necessary for the

[78] See also Gutmann, Thompson, 2004; Sanders, 1997.

exercise of deliberation — that should be accepted by all. As a consequence of these communicative constraints, there are forms of expression of needs, interests, and claims that are excluded. Every form of expression that falls outside of this required shared understanding is automatically disregarded, Young argues. Problematically, deliberation is not culturally neutral and universal (Young, 1996, p. 123; 2000), since our positionality[79] influences our understanding and forms of communication.

Another problem Young finds with the focus on argumentation is that deliberation as argumentation is agonistic (1996, p. 123). As a result, to focus on this mode of deliberation may change the aim of deliberation from mutual understanding to winning the argument. Hence, to say that the point of deliberation is to find the best reasons (as a function of the best arguments presented) entails simply that no one was able to advance another counterargument and, thus, ended up conceding defeat. Young's point is that, seen in this way, the idea of deliberation becomes adulterable by power dynamics.

The sole focus on argumentation, and on the requirement of a shared understanding that enables the process of deliberation, seems to work as an obstacle. What is required, Young argues, is the need for communication that is not solely based on argumentation and on the presentation of reasons. Young powerfully proposes that we should take difference to be a resource. Given the problems that positionality imposes on our understanding of other positions, there is the need to understand, first and foremost, cultural meanings, socially structured experiences, ways of life, and different points of view (this is, in part, what I will call, in Chapter IV, the necessity to know the other's life narrative and characterisation). Only then will be possible to take the exercise of deliberation to be meaningful.

The answer, then, is to focus on other forms of communication in political participation and public interaction, other forms of communication that can better disclose information and help seeking a better understanding of each standpoint and positional reasons, to put it in the context of this work. Other forms of communication that have been purposed and that can

[79] Young writes specifically about social positions.

contribute to these goals are, for example, discourse, dialogue, testimony, narrative, and rhetoric.[80]

Sanders (1997), for example, argues that *testimony* can help different and specific perspectives to be made public and to be heard with persons sharing those perspectives in a way that makes their own stories the object of the communication. Young (2000, pp. 72-77), complementarily, argues that *narrative*, as part of political communication, 1) allows persons to express their claims in ways that they would not manage to do otherwise under the prevailing normative discourse; 2) makes it easier for persons that share collective affinities to get together and express their problems; 3) provides a way for a better understanding of other experiences; 4) reveals the source of values, priorities, and cultural meanings; and, lastly, 5) reveals social knowledge from particular points of view.[81]

From these insights, my argument is that, through the use of these different forms of communication, we should understand the exercise of public reasoning (as trans-positional scrutiny) as a form of engagement — rather than detachment — in which we actively seek to improve our understanding of other positions in order to improve our capacity for scrutiny.

Communication, in any of the previous forms, should be at the heart of the practice of public reasoning, and is especially crucial in achieving a trans-positional perspective. To put an emphasis on communication, however, is to put an emphasis on something that is not necessarily trivial. Although it is true that communication is the means through which we can propose, debate, and evaluate reasons with others, communication can also play a second role, that of helping understand others. It allows for the possibility of learning and discovering about other positions by widening the pool of available information in each position and about each position.[82]

First and foremost, communication is the means through which we give our reasons to others, and it gives the possibility of doing this in a way that we are able to contextualise our reasons according to the positions we

[80] See Baujard, Gilardone, 2013, pp. 26-27; Bohman, 1996; Gallagher, 2006; Gomes, 2015; Hutto, 2006; Sanders, 1997; Sen, 2010; Young, 2000, pp. 62-77.
[81] For discussion, see Morrell, 2010, pp. 139-157.
[82] See also Baujard, Gilardone, 2019; Sen, 2010; Young, 1993, 1997, 2000.

occupy. We are able to reveal what we take to be our relevant positional parameters.

Second, when this happens, others have a better possibility of starting to understand our positionality, how that positionality may have led to the construction of a specific evaluative perspective, and how the reasons that are being presented relate to that evaluative perspective. This also applies to the possibility of understanding experiences that go beyond the experiences of those scrutinising. Insofar as there is asymmetry of information between those involved in a process of trans-positional scrutiny, communication can provide some access for others to start learning about those experiences, aims, events, and positions. From here we are in a better position to start understanding other evaluative perspectives and reasons, even if somewhat distant from our own (see also Young, 1997, p. 354)

It is in these ways that we can say that communication allows for the broadening of the pool of available information. And it can do this in all directions, and not just in one. In other words: as just presented, we normally consider that the pool of available information is broadened by communication because more information can be added from those who are providing information to those receiving it. But the pool of available information can be widened in another way: by having those receiving the information communicating between themselves. That is, communication can improve scrutiny if different positions are introduced and communicated between each other (see also Baujard, Gilardone, 2019; Sen, 2010). This may be best understood by considering the example of any form of academic evaluation in which a panel is formed to interview/question a candidate. In this type of situation, after the panel has finished engaging with the candidate, the panel can get together, and each member of the panel engage with each other. They can deliberate on their evaluations and decisions together, having the inputs from the candidate, but also from the other members of the panel. Then, by broadening the pool of available information, communication can lead to a better exercise of trans-positionality, with improved individual and collective reflection.

Public reasoning as trans-positional scrutiny, thus understood, can start addressing the worries put forward by the proponents of the impartial

thesis seen above: complementarily to what I said above, it can help put positional perspectives into a wider context, where issues of parochialism of values and biases can be more easily eliminated. Via public reasoning, not only do those positions become known and comprehensible, but they can also be assessed and evaluated by the contra-balance of other positional perspectives and by other perspectives on that specific positional perspective.

But, as foreshadowed before, my argument is that even to use different forms of communication to improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions is not enough, and that there are reasons to frame this as not merely a form of engagement, but as *democratic* engagement with other positions. So, my argument will be that public reasoning, when taken to require a form of democratic deliberation, corresponds to a specific way of having access and interacting with other positions by becoming an embodiment of collective practical reason, by promoting practical reason, and by being the conclusion of practical reason.

In order to define what makes a form of deliberation democratic, a good starting place is to look at *deliberative democracy*. At its core, deliberative democracy corresponds to a form of democratic decision-making — as opposed to the idea that democracy corresponds to the aggregation of individuals preferences and majority rule — derived from the results of public reasoning exercised by free and equal citizens. By only focusing on the process, rather than on its decision-making aim, what we are left with is the understanding of public reasoning as a form of dialogical deliberation, in which political equality — as the interests of each citizen receiving equal consideration[83] — appears as a main feature.

Furthermore, with its focus on a specific type of deliberation based on reasons, rather than individual preferences, deliberative democracy can be said to correspond to a form of collective engagement in practical reason (Peter, 2012, p. 166; Young, 2000, p. 23. See also Chapter II), to the extent that what we should do is determined by the process of deliberation. This also corresponds to the trans-positional account of public reason presented in

[83] See Christiano, 1996, 2010; Peter, 2017; Sen, 2010. See also Section II on what equal consideration should entail.

Chapter II, in which I started to argue for public reasoning as a collective form of practical reason.

From these insights, we can say that democratic deliberation corresponds to a form of engagement in practical reason characterised by inclusive dialogical deliberation. But there is more that we can add to this. Following Anderson (2003),[84] who identifies three dimensions of deliberative democracy, we can break deliberative democracy as a collective form of practical reason into three different parts: (1) as an embodiment of collective practical reason; (2) as promoting practical reason; and (3) as the conclusion of practical reason.

(1) A deliberative conception of democracy promotes the values of universal political equality, as mentioned before, but also the values of freedom of speech, assembly, and the press, which enable collective deliberation and evaluations. In this way, argues Anderson, democracy becomes a 'dynamic institution' that promotes a collective process of reasoning and decision-making. In other words, deliberative democracy embodies experimentalism rather than a dogmatic structure. To this point, Anderson writes, '[l]earning from experience, trying out different policies to see what works, and acting in accordance with discussions and deliberations about how to live together, are all paradigmatic exercises of practical reason.' (p. 250) On this view, deliberative democracy can be seen as an embodiment of collective practical reason for its inclusive and collaborative form of deliberation about what we should do.

To Anderson's point about learning from experience, there is a deeper way in which a democratic form of deliberation can correspond to the embodiment of collective practical reason: we can learn from the experience of other positions in a way that improves our practical reasoning.

I see this manifesting in two ways: on the one hand, by communicating, we learn from the experience of others about their positions; on the other hand, we learn from experiencing the other's position by

[84] Anderson identifies this in the context of Sen's work. Although I have also been using Sen's work as the framework, Anderson's contribution is relevant in spite of it.

engaging in imaginative perspective-taking. In Chapter IV, I will expand on the latter; for now, I will only focus on learning from the experience of others.

What do I mean by learning from the experience of others through communication? Before, I argued for communication as a way to help us getting to know and understand other positions — even if only to the degree to which we are able to overcome the asymmetry of experiences separating each party (I will return to this). But there is something else that a democratic type of deliberation can add to this point, which is the possibility of learning from the experience of a diversified set of other positions, which is related to deliberative democracy's epistemic interpretation.

In line with the main epistemic arguments in favour of deliberation, we have the claims that deliberation can enlarge the pools of ideas and information, and that it can weed out good arguments from the bad. In Chapter II, I provided an argument for a version of the latter. As for the former, I argued that much in this chapter. Now the question is why deliberation that is *democratic* adds anything.

As we will see, we are often faced with the problem of understanding different positions that are not our own. Even though 'difference is not total otherness', the more different the positions we occupy, the harder it will be for us to understand other agents' positions. Communication, as argued before, can help start crossing that bridge by making a wider amount of information more accessible. To deliberate democratically can help further achieve this. One first argument for why this is the case is advanced by Young (2000), who argues that

> [i]f discussion reflects all social experience, and everyone can speak and criticize freely, then discussion participants will be able to develop a collective account of the sources of the problems they are trying to solve, and will develop the social knowledge necessary to predict likely consequences of alternative courses of action meant to address them. Their collective critical wisdom thus enables them to reach a judgment that is not only normatively right in principle, but also empirically and theoretically sound. (pp. 30-31)

Young's point can be complemented with Landemore's (2012) more recent epistemic defence of deliberative democracy.[85] Landemore presents an

[85] Here I am only interested in her defence of deliberative democracy, and not with majority rule/aggregative.

argument for the epistemic value of democracy which is based on the idea that group thinking and deliberation make good/better decisions. That is, collective intelligence gives epistemic value to democracy. Furthermore, Landemore argues that, in order to improve our collective intelligence and decisions, we need to aim at having cognitive diversity. In Landemore's own words,

> I argue that in an open liberal society, it is simply more likely that a larger group of decision makers will be more cognitively diverse, and therefore smarter, than a smaller group. I thus attribute the epistemic superiority of democracy not only to the sheer number of decision-makers, but also to the qualitative differences that, in liberal open conditions, this great number of decision makers is likely to bring with it. (p. 7)

Landemore provides an argument for why deliberation that is all-inclusive can lead to better decision-making. That is, the inclusion of more members provides better outcomes in problem-solving than fewer but smarter members. According to this author, we should thus aim to maximise cognitive diversity — that is, maximise the difference in the way people will approach a problem or a question[86] — of deliberating groups, rather than maximising individual ability. So, Landemore argues, 'the more inclusive the deliberation process is, the more cognitively diverse the deliberating group is likely to be, on average'. (p. 90)

In short, Landemore argues that inclusive deliberation can lead to the manifestation of collective intelligence, and to widening the pool of available information, to weeding out of good arguments from the bad, and that it can lead to a consensus on the best answer.

For this work, I want to specifically draw a parallel between Landemore's argument for the epistemic benefits of cognitive diversity associated with deliberative democracy and the quality of scrutiny for the trans-positional account of public reason. My point is that more than weeding out good arguments from bad, all-inclusive, cognitively diverse, democratic

[86] According to Landemore (p. 102), following Page (2007, p.7), we should aim to maximise four types of cognitive diversity: 'diversity of perspectives (the way of representing situations and problem), diversity of interpretations (the way of categorizing or partitioning perspectives), diversity of heuristics (the way of generating solutions to problems), and diversity of predictive models (the way of inferring cause and effect).'

deliberation can also lead to better levels of scrutiny on the validity view of public justification (see Chapter III, section III.2.1).[87]

At this point it is particularly helpful to refer to Sidney Lumet's 1957 film *12 Angry Men*, as Landemore also does to give an example of her argument. I shall do the same to advance my argument that all-inclusive, cognitively diverse, democratic deliberation can also lead to better levels of scrutiny. At some point in the film, some jurors are debating as to whether the defendant could have stabbed his father with a switchblade — given the height difference, the issue regards with what kind of motion a smaller person would stab a taller one. Juror 3 tries to show through mimicry that a shorter person would stab a taller person with a 'down and in' motion. By demonstrating this, juror 3 aims to further his claim that the defendant is guilty. Juror 12 corroborates this claim. At this point, and in disagreement, juror 5 argues that no one who knew how to use a switchblade would handle it the way jurors 3 and 12 were suggesting; instead, one would use it 'underhanded' and stab with an upwards motion.

This particular moment in the film is a clear example of how scrutiny can improve when it is democratic in the sense explored until now. In this scene, we have different agents, that occupy different positions, providing different inputs; the diversity of inputs, to put it another way, comes from the existence of cognitive diversity in this group of jurors. Juror 3's claim is displayed for everyone to assess — including the audience of the film. We, and the rest of the jurors, see that maybe a person of smaller stature would not stab someone taller with a down and in motion; even juror 3, when trying to prove his claim, seems to start doubting it. But the plausibility of the claim resists. Then Juror 12 — an advertisement executive — adds timidly to the scrutiny, accepting the point just made by juror 3. Juror 5 — someone who had experienced a different type of upbringing — joins the scrutiny process by explaining that, according to his positionality, juror 3's claim does not

[87] It should be noted that I am not subscribing to Landemore's argument that deliberative democracy is instrumentally good. My point is merely proceduralistic; if the outcomes expected from democratic procedures are good, or not, goes beyond the scope of my argument.

seem to hold water. This process of scrutiny seemed to have been improved by democratic deliberation.

Of course, this is just a scene from a film, constructed with a specific narrative for dramatic purposes — as an example it can be taken as being merely anecdotal. But we can look at other examples, less conveniently framed. In the past two chapters I have mentioned the example Sen gives regarding gender inequality in India represented by the perceived morbidity of women versus men's in spite of their mortality rates. On this example, it is by introducing democratic deliberation that we can more appropriately start to scrutinise the problem at hand: without it we would probably not even be in a position to identify the problem and use it as an example. It is democratic deliberation that helps identify certain features as being salient and allow us to assess and identify certain claims of justice.

More generally, from these examples, and applying Landemore's argument to the quality of scrutiny we can exercise, the epistemic benefits of democratic deliberation come not only from the inclusion of diverse positions, but also from the diversity of reasoning processes (Landemore, 2012, pp. 141-142). We can say that democratic deliberation has epistemic value by helping us learn from other positions, which can improve the level of scrutiny in trans-positional assessments.

In summary, democratic deliberation, by corresponding to the embodiment of collective practical reason, allows us to access and improve our understanding of other positions.

(2) Anderson also suggests, following Sen, that deliberative democracy promotes practical reason. According to their suggestions, it does this in two ways: the first is by allowing people to learn from each other — which I have addressed in the point before on the embodiment of collective practical reason; the second way is that it promotes practical reason due to its transformative role.

More specifically, Anderson connects this transformative role to the capacity of deliberative democracy to 'change people's perceptions about what is feasible' (p. 250). But democratic deliberation's transformative role and fostering of collective practical reason goes much deeper than this. In

light of the epistemic benefits just discussed, democratic deliberation allows us to transcend our own positionalities.

What this means is that when we practical reason together, democratically, agents' evaluative perspectives can be altered by the introduction of new information that they could not have possessed otherwise. Through democratic deliberation agents can develop their perspectives from one another and develop 'a common framework of reasons' to exercise their deliberation, as we saw in (1). Through deliberation, a framework of reasons is developed by all its participants trans-positionally, thus forming an objective standpoint.

(3) Lastly, Anderson suggests that deliberative democracy should be understood as the conclusion of practical reason. Anderson gives the example of two individuals who hold positionally objective judgments, whom, however, have conflicting claims. Although these will always be two conflicting positions, deliberation can provide, she writes, 'a path from one position to the other that is reasonably described as a process of *learning*: of grasping an alternative previously unimagined, discovering its feasibility, trying it out and finding it more satisfactory than what one did before, [etc.].' That is, a position that we have more reason to take as being superior. Anderson adds that '[i]f all learning paths ultimately lead to this position, that would vindicate its claim to universal value (p. 251).

Anderson's example helps reiterating the point I made before on how democratic deliberation promotes and embodies collective practical reasoning, and thus objectivity as trans-positionality, by having all-inclusive trans-positionality as its goal. As argued before, by deliberating democratically we can make all-inclusive trans-positional assessments and move from positionally objective standpoints and positional reasons to trans-positionally objective standpoints and trans-positional reasons. This is ultimately the goal of engaging in publicly democratic deliberation within the trans-positional account of public reason.

By breaking into these three ways the connection between democratic deliberation and collective practical reason, I have made a case for understanding democratic deliberation as a specific form of engagement with others that should be a requirement of how we engage in trans-positional

assessments. Next, I will consider a few limits of my account of democratic engagement.

III.2.1.1 — Limits of democratic engagement

Taken together with a diverse use of forms of communication, democratic deliberation constitutes what I have called democratic engagement. However, democratic engagement has its limits. For example, Young (1997) argues that there is another form of asymmetry — and not only asymmetry of information — that needs to be recognised: there is a limit to our capacity to understand other positions, even when we are told about those. Young's argument is that other positions and experiences can be so widely different from ours that we have to recognise those differences and the limit of our capacity to understand them. Young specifically gives the example of trying to understand the position of someone in a wheelchair, and how there is only so much that those who are not in a wheelchair will be able to understand about that experience.

If democratic engagement has its limit on the differences between the positions we occupy, if we can only get to understand positions that we already have some experience of, it could be objected that we should start to rethink the case for democratic engagement to a certain extent. One alternative that is normally given is that we should focus instead on the idea of putting oneself in the other's shoes — as with Sen and Smith before. But interestingly, it is precisely when arguing against this possibility that Young argues for the need to recognise the asymmetry mentioned above: it is due to this asymmetry that the entire perspective-taking project fails, she argues. The solution, for Young, is the reinforcement of the role of communication to understand others when it does work, and to humbly acknowledge its limits when it does not.

Walker (2003), similarly, also argues against the perspective-taking project, and in favour of what she takes to be a 'largely neglected' position in moral philosophy: that of the second-person, achievable through communication. Walker takes as evidence of this neglect the way authors keep referring to the idea of taking another's position. These exercises, Walker labels, constitute thinking *for* others, rather than thinking *with* others.

Thinking with others, Walker suggests, requires talking and listening to them, and that 'asking, telling, repeating, mutually clarifying, mulling over, and checking back are the most dependable, accessible, and efficient devices for finding out how it is with others' (p. 44).[88]

Even at the risk of not yielding a perfect understanding of positions very distant from ours, we can still conclude that communication is a good source of information; through it we can, at least, start trying to understand the other agents' perspectives from the most reliable source: the source itself. And we can do this, and to a certain extent start bridging the gap between different positions, when we communicate and think *with* others, as Walker proposes. The more we engage with other positions, the closer we may get to understanding them. This is why we should not rethink our commitment to communication as one could have objected: my claim was never that democratic engagement could give understanding of other positions; the claim was that democratic engagement helps create the conditions for the possibility of that understanding.

In this way, democratic engagement is necessary to guarantee that trans-positional assessments are exercised appropriately — *i.e.*, it is a requirement for our capacity to have publicly justified reasons. Furthermore, democratic engagement can start to help moving away from the traditional third-person approaches that we saw with Rawls and Nagel, and start to develop an approach to objectivity as engagement, predicated — so far — in a second-person approach. And, mostly, it can produce a form of public justification that does correspond to reasoning publicly, thus helping to move from positional perspectives to trans-positional perspectives.

This, however, is not sufficient, but merely necessary, for, as we will see next in the next chapter, there is one more way to help us improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions with the goal of being objective in our assessments: namely, the use of imaginative perspective-taking.

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[88] In Chapter IV, I will argue that both Young's and Walker's objections to the suggestion that we should engage in perspective-taking are overstated; I will argue that the objections only consider one form of perspective-taking, and that there is something to be gained in engaging in other forms of imaginative perspective-taking. This, however, I will also argue, should not be taken to be an alternative to communication, but a complement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that the exercise of trans-positional scrutiny requires us to engage with other positions in order to create the conditions for successful processes of trans-positionality. I argued for what I have called an engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny by, first, arguing against more traditional views that propose that objective assessments entail detachment (III.1). After that, in section III.2, I positively argued for the alternative engagement view. On this view, objective scrutiny should be understood as requiring democratic engagement (III.2.1): an all-inclusive form of deliberation that makes use of different forms of communication in order to improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions. In the next chapter, I will argue that an engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny should include one more way — complementarily to democratic engagement — of improving our knowledge and understanding of other positions: that is, that we should engage in processes of imaginative perspective-taking.

Chapter IV — Imaginative perspective-taking

I finished the previous chapter by proposing that trans-positional scrutiny should be understood as requiring what I called an engagement view. The engagement view corresponds to the view that, in order to be objective in our assessments, we need to engage with other positions, rather than detach from them — by doing this, I argued, we would be creating the conditions for better levels of scrutiny of those other positions.

As part of the engagement view, I proposed that we should engage with other positions through democratic engagement: engagement that is predicated in democratic deliberation that features different forms of communication. However, as mentioned in Chapter III, this can only provide us with knowledge and understanding of other positions to a certain extent, at which point the difference between positions leads to a collapse in our capacity to understand what is too differently situated.

My argument in Chapter IV will be that the engagement view should also include engagement in different forms of *imaginative perspective-taking*, which should be taken complementary to democratic engagement and that may help us improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions. Specifically, my argument in this chapter will be that different forms of imaginative perspective-taking can help improve understanding of other positions in different ways by putting us in a better situation to make trans-positional assessments.

The chapter will be organised in the following way. In IV.1, I will set the terminology I will be using: that perspective-taking should be divided into two different forms — *other-oriented* and *self-oriented* —, that I will only consider simulations characterised as *high-level*, and that imagination will be taken to mean *deliberative imagination*. After explaining the terminology, in IV.2, I will explain what constitutes forms of other-oriented perspective-taking and the necessary conditions for it to be successful (IV.2.1). I will then suggest, in IV.2.2, that we should further distinguish between two forms of other-oriented perspective-taking: that is, depending on the positions we want to understand, we should either engage in *empathic perspective-taking*, or

non-empathic perspective-taking. Lastly, in IV.3, I will argue that we should also engage in self-oriented perspective-taking, although it can hardly be said to improve our understanding of other specific positions. However, as I will propose, it can make us consider positions that we would not otherwise consider.

My overall argument for the need to engage in different forms of imaginative perspective-taking will rest on the argument that by engaging in perspective-taking we can access knowledge — specifically, *phenomenal knowledge* — of other positions that we would not manage to access otherwise. In other words, my main argument is that perspective-taking will allow us to access knowledge that we would not access otherwise by allowing us to experience other positions.

IV.1 — Imagination and perspective-taking

We commonly read, even within the literature in moral and political philosophy, that there is a need to better understand others and that we need to put ourselves in other people's shoes — or, perhaps, some variation of this sentence. These claims can be translated less metaphorically to the idea that we should imaginatively put ourselves in the place of the other in order to understand that other. In this thesis, expressions with claims like this have already been mentioned regarding Adam Smith or Amartya Sen. Other times, the same idea has been expressed with reference to the concept of *empathy*. In both cases, *trying on other people's shoes* or *empathy* correspond to the claim that we should engage in some form of *imaginative perspective-taking* — imaginative perspective-taking being a process in which, with the use of imagination, we mentally construct the other's experience, by simulating being in their situation.

The problem with the taking all of these different terms and ideas to be equivalent, as we find them in most of the literature, is that they all end up being used quite loosely (for a literature survey see Morrell, 2010, pp. 67-100). What I mean by this is that most of the attempts to bridge the areas of philosophy of mind and social cognition with moral and political philosophy

on the topic of imagination and perspective-taking — either by those proposing some form of engagement in imaginative perspective-taking or by those that oppose it — can be characterised by an overall simplification of the topic. The problem, as I see it, is that it is rarely acknowledged that *imaginative perspective-taking* can be understood in different ways: namely that imaginative perspective-taking can either be understood as *other*-oriented or *self*-oriented (Coplan, 2011a, 2011b; See also Goldie,[89] 2011). Briefly, the difference between these two is the following: on other-oriented perspective-taking, we aim to imaginatively put ourselves as the *other* in the position of the other, *i.e.*, we imagine being the other person in their position; on self-oriented perspective-taking, we aim to imaginatively put ourselves as *ourselves* in the position the other, *i.e.*, we imagine what *we* would think, feel, do, if we were to be in another's position.

I will return to this distinction at length throughout the chapter,[90] but its mere enunciation already gives enough evidence that both arguments for and against imaginative perspective-taking can fail or succeed for different reasons and depending on what type of imaginative perspective-taking we are considering.

There are several other distinctions that should be drawn — such as between *empathy* and *simulation*[91], *high-level simulations* and *low-level simulations* —,[92] but I take the other-oriented/self-oriented distinction to be the fundamental background distinction that should condition the rest of the debate. The reason has to do with the kind of understanding of other positions that each type of perspective-taking, if successfully exercised, can give us. As I will argue, we should take other-oriented perspective-taking to be the preferred form of perspective-taking for successful trans-positional assessments, since it is the type of perspective-taking that can give a better understanding of other positions.

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[89] Goldie uses a different terminology than the one I am following. Instead, Goldie uses *empathic perspective-shifting* and *in-his-shoes perspective-shifting*. The distinction is, nonetheless, fundamentally the same.

[90] Section IV.2 focuses on other-oriented perspective-taking, whereas, in section IV.3, the focus is on self-oriented perspective-taking.

[91] As in Simulation Theory.

[92] I will expand on these distinctions in the next paragraphs.

Nonetheless, before I develop my argument for this chapter, there are three more distinctions I should make from the outset. The first distinction is between perspective-taking characterised as a form of *high-level* simulations or as *low-level* simulations.[93] In this work, I will only consider forms of high-level simulations, since low-level simulations can only give us information about the other at a basic emotional level. In other words, the information we can gather about others is related to how we perceive the other is feeling in terms of what can be called *basic emotions* — such as fear, anger, happiness, sadness, etc. And, although this gives us some information about the other, it does not entirely help understand their positions. By deciding not to focus on conceptions of low-level simulations, I will not consider probably more recognisable accounts of empathy, such as Husserl's (1960), Stein's (1989), and Scheler's (1954).

The second distinction I want to make relates to the imagination part of the exercise of imaginative perspective-taking: that distinction is between *deliberative* imagination and *spontaneous* imagination. Throughout this chapter, *imagination* will be used to mean specifically *deliberative* imagination. Following Spaulding (2016a), deliberative imagination represents '[…] conscious quasi-sensory mental events that are under our voluntary control. They are under our control in the sense — and to the extent — that we can choose whether to imagine (initiation) and how the imagining goes (elaboration).'[94] (p. 210)

Defined in this way, imagination corresponds to a mental event over which we have perfect control, in the same way that we have control over any other thought experiment. To only focus on imagination as deliberative imagination allows us to focus solely on processes of perspective-taking that involve mental states of a relatively complex nature, quasi-sensory information, consciously accessible, guided by knowledge, and that we can control voluntarily. This is important because, in order to try to better

[93] See Goldman, 2006, pp. 147-150; Stueber, 2006, pp. 131-172.

[94] Deliberative imagination thus conceived contrasts with 'spontaneous imagination'. The latter, according to Spaulding, corresponds to 'quasi-sensory mental representations over which we have relatively little control. […] Spontaneous imaginings include mental events such as daydreams and dreams, in which we simply find ourselves immersed.' (2016a, p. 210)

understand other positions in the way I have been arguing for, we have to, precisely, undergo a conscious and intentional exercise of seeking the information we need. This is predicated on the fact that understanding another agent's positions is a complex process in which we want to be able to justify *why* something is the way it is, and not just *that* something is the way it is. Take for example our attempts at trying to understand the position of those being represented by the Black Lives Matter movement (to the extent that we can take them as one position): to understand their position and to scrutinise their reasons is not sufficient to be able to justify *that* they are, for example, angry or revolted; we need to able to assess *why* that is. In order to do that, we need to consciously and intentionally seek that information, or we will not have it. In order words, by focusing on deliberative imagination we can focus solely on high-level simulations (as described before).

The third and last distinction has to do with the aim a process of imaginative perspective-taking should have. Traditionally, discussions on imaginative perspective-taking attribute to these processes two purposes: understanding others, and prediction of others' behaviours. In this work, I will only focus on the role imaginative perspective-taking can have to improve our understanding of others, and not its role for behaviour prediction. The claim that it is possible, through imagination, to predict someone else's behaviour is much stronger than the claim that imagination can help us understand them. Prediction seems to presuppose full understanding, while understanding does not seem to presuppose, at least logically, that we are able to predict another's behaviour. In order to argue for the predictive capacities of perspective-taking would require proving that imagination is capable of giving us accurate and almost complete understanding of the other (see Goldie, 1999, p. 416) — which is not the task I am proposing to pursue. Once again, my claim is more modest: I am claiming that engaging in different forms of imaginative perspective-taking can help us improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions. Since I do not have the space to further pursue this issue, I will simply set it aside by saying that one's capacity to predict another's behaviour is not necessarily relevant in the exercise of trans-positional assessments of one's evaluative perspectives and reasons.

After setting the debate and the terminology, in this first section, I will argue next that different forms of imaginative perspective-taking can help us improve, in different ways, our understanding of other positions. I will start with other-oriented perspective-taking, in section IV.2; in section IV.3, I will focus on self-oriented forms of perspective-taking.

IV.2 — Other-oriented perspective-taking

As we just saw, there are two ways to conceptualise processes of imaginative perspective-taking, either as other-oriented or as self-oriented. I will start by considering other-oriented perspective-taking, and I will consider what I take to be two possible understandings of other-oriented perspective-taking: on the one hand, other-oriented perspective-taking that involves affective matching (also known as empathy — I will call it *empathic perspective-taking*), on the other hand, other-oriented perspective-taking that does not involves affective matching (let me call it *non-empathic perspective-taking*).

I will start by introducing other-oriented perspective-taking and the conditions for it to be specifically *other*-oriented (IV.2.1). After that, in IV.2.2, I will argue that we should engage in forms of empathic perspective-taking (IV.2.2.1), and also in forms of non-empathic perspective-taking (IV.2.2.2).

IV.2.1 — Conditions for other-oriented perspective-taking

As I have briefly introduced, other-oriented perspective-taking corresponds to the idea that we are to imaginatively represent ourselves as the other we are trying to understand — that is, from the other person's point of view — in their position. We aim to simulate the other's experiences as if we are the other.

In order to conceptualise other-oriented perspective-taking, I will start from Amy Coplan's (2011a, 2011b) conception of empathy. Even though my point is about other-oriented perspective-taking generally, and not necessarily

about empathy at this moment,[95] Coplan's conception is a good starting place for it focuses on high-level imaginative processes of perspective-taking that are other-oriented and that aim at knowing and understanding other persons' positions.

Coplan defines empathy as '[…] a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation.' (2011a, p. 5) By *complex*, Coplan means that empathy is a process that is both cognitive and affective; by *imaginative*, the author means that the process '[…] involves the representations of a target's states that are activated by, but not directly accessible through, the observer's perception.' (p. 5); and, lastly, *simulation* is intended to signify that an observer is to mentally 'replicate or reconstruct' the other's experiences while maintaining self-other differentiation.

For now, I will disregard the complex part of the definition, since the nature of a process of other-oriented perspective-taking need not be defined as involving both cognitive and affective processes (I will return to this in IV.2.2 and IV.2.3). In what follows, I will discuss this definition in detail in order to later argue that we should engage in forms of other-oriented perspective-taking to try to know and understand other positions in the context of the engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny.

I will start with Coplan's claim that an imaginative process is to be activated by perception: that is, that one's imaginative representation of another individual's mental states has as their trigger one's perception of the individual whose perspective one aims to imaginatively take. Although I will accept most of the rest of Coplan's definition, this will be a point of disagreement that needs to be addressed since it clashes with the idea that imagination should be understood as deliberative imagination: there is an incompatibility between imagination being both 'under our voluntary control' and 'activated by perception'.

As we have seen, imagination, in order to be considered deliberative, needs to be a process in which we control its 'initiation' phase — that is, if

[95] Later in this section, I will mostly subscribe to this definition as the definition of empathic perspective-taking. However, there are other forms of other-oriented perspective-taking that I will also take to be relevant.

we decide to imagine — and its 'elaboration' phase — that is, how the imagination unfolds. If it were the case that the imaginative process needs to be ignited by perception, as Coplan suggests, then it seems that we would lose some control over the 'initiation' phase. Imagination would become only partially deliberative. In turn, if the imaginative process were to only involve partially deliberative imagination, it would preclude us from fully engaging in imaginative processes when we cannot engage perceptually with others.[96] This first issue could be enough to fully dismiss perception as the relevant form of activating the simulation process.

But we can pursue this disagreement more thoroughly: does imaginative perspective-taking need to be activated by perception at all? The answer, it seems, cannot be positive. An example that perspective-taking need not be triggered by perception can be seen in the impact that Victor Hugo's *Le dernier jour d'un condamné* (1829) arguably had in nineteenth-century's European discussion about the death penalty. With Victor Hugo's description of the horror that was to be a person condemned to the death penalty, European society understood the inhumanity of that punishment by imagining and simulating the convict's suffering.

Going in a similar direction as this example, Maibom (2007) writes that simulation processes that generate empathy complement '[…] the other routes to empathy by producing empathic reactions when the subject's affect is not directly perceptible […]' (p. 172). Maibom expressly draws a distinction between simulation-based empathy, and belief and perception-based empathy. At the core of the difference is that a belief about the emotions of others does not necessarily produce empathy, whereas the simulation of emotion, when it is successful, normally does. In this way, simulation-based empathy, she writes, '[…] is an ideal method for creating understanding of others' psychological states and allowing us to resonate with them.' (p. 173)

[96] In fact, Coplan's definition of empathy seems to be at odds with a later passage on the same work, in which the author makes a similar point to the one I just made. Coplan says that to adopt the perspective of another person involves a great 'effort and regulation', especially if we fail to identify with them. As such, Coplan writes, '[…] empathy is a motivated and controlled process, which is neither automatic nor involuntary and demands that the observer attend to relevant differences between self and other. This makes it a top-down process, that is, one that must be initiated by the agent and generated from within […].' (p. 14)

According to Maibom, then, we do not need a perceptual access to others in order to imagine and simulate their positions.

What seems to be the main issue with Coplan's claim is a conflation between what can be called *basic empathy* (*i.e.*, low-level empathy) and *reenactive empathy* (*i.e.*, high-level empathy), to use Stueber's terminology (2006). Stueber defines *basic empathy* as '[…] a quasi-perceptual mechanism that allows us to directly recognize what another person is doing or feeling' (2006, p. 147), being in this way 'the primary perceptual mechanism' for our interpretations of others. However, basic empathy, as I mentioned before, can only provide low-level information about the other. That is, information that is related to basic emotions — we perceive the other as being happy, sad, fearful, etc. The focus on basic empathy leads to an understanding of others that is very limited if we only have access to these pieces of information.

Once again, what is required is that we are able to explain and understand *why* — *i.e.*, the reasons — the other is feeling in a specific way. In order to achieve it, Stueber argues that we need to engage in *reenactive empathy* instead, which is the use of our cognitive, emotional, and imaginative capacities '[…] to model and understand the experience of others.' I am going to ignore some very substantial differences in Stueber's and Coplan's definitions, which are irrelevant for the present argument. The distinction between basic and reenactive empathy is important at this point because it makes clearer why a definition of empathy that focuses on being activated by perception can lead to a less successful understanding of others.

With this main disagreement with Coplan's definition out of the way, we can focus on the rest of the definition and the conditions set by it, and what sets other-oriented perspective-taking apart from other forms of perspective-taking.

As we have seen before, there are different types of simulations process, *i.e.*, we can try to replicate or reconstruct other's experiences by simulating ourselves as the other or as ourselves. Apart from the direction of fit itself, other-oriented perspective-taking is normally set apart by explicitly requiring *self-other differentiation*, and the avoidance of *projections*/*inferences* from self to other — there is a third difference that is not relevant at this point (see IV.2.2). I will explain both features, specifically

arguing that other-oriented perspective-taking should aim at avoiding inferences from self to other. However, I will also argue that avoiding inferences from self to other cannot be what distinctively differentiates other-oriented perspective-taking from self-oriented perspective-taking.

Self-other differentiation corresponds to the need to be aware of the differences between the self and the other, not allowing for any form of conflation between them when engaging in other-oriented perspective-taking (Coplan, 2011a). This is what Scheler (1954, pp. 18-36) called *emotional identification*, a situation in which '[…] I live, not in 'myself', but entirely in 'him', the other person — (in and through him, as it were).' (1954, p. 19)

One of the problems of engaging in self-oriented perspective-taking, as we will see in more detail in IV.3, is that we end up projecting our own beliefs into others, since part of the simulation process involves using our minds as a model for the process of perspective-taking. The risk, then, is that there may not to be any differentiation between self and other, given the underlying assumption that the other is similar to us — which motivates our use of ourselves as a model. By failing to distinguish between self and other, we contaminate our imaginative processes with our own perspective, thus failing to reproduce with any accuracy the experience of the other. Recall that this was the problem I identified with Nagel's suggestion that it would be possible to recast in impersonal terms what is subjective (see Chapter III, section III.1.2).

Similarly, we can also face a lack of self-other differentiation when engaging in other-oriented perspective-taking. Though, the problem that we may face now is not the result of projection, but of *introjection*. When we engage in other-oriented perspective-taking, but fail to have a clear self-other differentiation, we '[…] introject the other's desires, feelings, and thoughts, substituting them for [our] own.' (Coplan, 2011a, p. 15) In this case, we may be able to successfully adopt the other's perspective, but we experience that perspective not as being the other's, but as our own. As Coplan writes, we end up 'lose[ing] our sense of self and becom[ing] enmeshed' (p. 16).

When there is no clear self-other differentiation, it is not possible to properly engage in other-oriented perspective-taking since we become part of the experiment of perspective-taking, losing, therefore, our capacity to

analyse it: that is, there is a risk of bias. We no longer experience and take participation in the other's experience; we experience it as being our own experience. This eventuality will lead to our contamination of the process and to our failure to have a clear understanding of the other's position as being the other's position. In other words, an imaginative process without self-other differentiation gives rise to a process where we can no longer distinguish that the experiences are not our own, when they are, in fact, the other person's. Self-other differentiation is, thus, a way to avoid the contamination of a clear understanding of other's perspectives, without a biased influence in our judgments and decisions. As we have also seen in the discussion in Chapter III, this is an important worry when we are trying to guarantee the objectivity of our assessments of reasons and claims of justice.

The second feature that is supposed to set other-oriented perspective-taking apart from its self-oriented counterpart is that it does not involve one's projection/inferences into the other's position, by definition, as Coplan claims. This being true would be another reason to favour this form of perspective-taking over the other. However, I do not think this claim holds: the projection/inference problem may not be completely avoided by other-oriented perspective-taking as its definition initially may suggest — as it happens with Gordon's simulation theory (1995), which features a simulation process that is other-oriented. That much can be seen in the following argument that Currie and Ravenscroft (2002) provide (contra Gordon):

> Suppose I imagine being in Smith's shoes, and form, on the basis of this, a belief about what Smith will do. According to Gordon, this is an inferentially based belief. Suppose now that I change my imaginative project in just this way: that instead of merely imagining being in Smith's shoes, I imagine being Smith. According to Gordon, I am now entitled to believe, without inference, that Smith will do such and such. But how could this change in the nature of my imaginative project have produced any epistemically relevant change to the relation between the imagining and my belief? Changing the imaginative project in this way does not make the imagining a more reliable guide to what Smith will do; the reliability of the project depends on whether, in imagination, I am getting my mind to work like Smith's. Adding the stipulation 'I am Smith' does nothing to ensure that my mental processes are more like Smith's than they were before the stipulation […]. (pp. 56-57)

So, the upper-hand that other-oriented perspective-taking is claimed to have over self-oriented perspective-taking is not necessarily due to the use

of inferences by the latter, for both forms of perspective-taking may fail to deal with that problem. In fact, the reliability on inferences increases the less information we have about the other. To put it another way, we will need to rely more on inferences the more we have to assume about the other (I will return to this shortly).

On my view, then, the distinction between other-oriented and self-oriented perspective-taking — and the grounds to argue for one rather than the other — should not focus on the use of inferences by the latter and its avoidance by the former. The criteria to favour one form of perspective-taking over the other, instead, following Currie and Ravenscroft, seems to be related with knowing which form of perspective-taking will enable us to more closely match the target's thinking. Indeed, Coplan seems to hint at this when providing an example on the difference between other and self-oriented perspective-taking — and also when discussing the importance of self-other differentiation. Says Coplan,

> [s]uppose that I'm an introvert and my sister Bettie is an extrovert. If Bettie tells me that she's been spending lots of time alone lately and I attempt to imagine what this has been like *for her* by imagining what it would be like *for me*, I'll imagine feeling relaxed and calm. But Bettie won't have been feeling these things. She will have been anxious, upset, and longing for company. (2011a, p. 12)

What this passage suggests, as did Currie and Ravenscroft before, is that other-oriented perspective-taking, when successful, may present a more faithful representation of the other's perspective than self-oriented perspective-taking; but, this time, what is required for successfully engaging in other-oriented perspective-taking is the need to ensure that we are able to think and experience[97] in a similar way as the target of our perspective-taking does — and not that we merely need to imagine ourselves as being the other, as if performing a magic trick. Then, when we engage in forms of other-oriented perspective-taking, we should aim at avoiding making inferences from self to other, and we should do that by making sure that we can match the target's way of thinking.

[97] I will return to this point about experiencing what others do in IV.2.2.

This, however, comes with its own set of problems: once again, we face the problem of positional asymmetry (see III.2.1): the more different the positions agents occupy, the harder it will be to engage in perspective-taking. This much is also emphasised within the literature on perspective-taking. For example, Coplan points out that differences between individuals can make the reconstruction of each other's subjective experiences harder, or even impossible; Stueber (2006, p. 196) writes that the more culturally different two people are the harder it will be to empathically understand each other.

The solution and, thus, my case for the need to engage in other-oriented perspective-taking continues by pointing out that other-oriented perspective-taking requires that we already possess some knowledge about the target: we need to improve our imaginative processes with the complementary use of different sources of information about the other.[98] Just like I argued in Chapter III, seeking and gathering information about other positions is necessary in order to start bridging the gap between positions. In other words, the more distant another position will be from ours, the harder it will be to engage in successful perspective-taking; however, more information can make these differences less palpable: knowing more about the other will improve our capacity for other-oriented perspective-taking. Otherwise, perspective-taking on its own will not get us very far.

Specifically, the information we need to gather via democratic engagement (III.2.1) can be summarised, following Goldie (1999, 2002; see also Coplan, 2011a), as both the elements that constitute a target's *substantial characterisation* and also the identification of a specific *life's narrative* to simulate. In other words, in order to engage in perspective-taking — Goldie writes about empathy specifically, but we can adapt to a more generalised form of perspective-taking — we are required to have a substantial characterisation and a narrative of the target's positions.[99] This is information about the other that we cannot acquire by perspective-taking.

[98] See also Coplan, 2011a; Goldie, 1999, 2002; Spaulding, 2016a; Stueber, 2006.

[99] Goldie writes specifically about the need to have a substantial characterisation and narrative of the target's life. I will, however, focus more broadly on positions. Of course there will be an overlap between one's life and one's positions, but it is one's positions that may be sharable, and not necessarily one's life.

Characterisation, for Goldie (1999, p. 411), means facts related to the target whose perspective we want to imaginatively take. These are facts about personality/character, emotions, moods, upbringing, historical and cultural situation, 'other dispositional psychological facts […] (being irritable; loving his wife; having a phobia about dogs; being depressed), […] other not *obviously* psychological facts […] (being short; being brought up in 1960s Alabama)', life experiences, 'and other things which make our minds different'. It should be noted that, although I am following Goldie's definition, I am not arguing or suggesting that everything that constitutes one's characterisation is relevant and constitutes one's positional parameters; but these can be, potentially, positional parameters relevant for one's claims of justice. As such, these cannot simply be dismissed, since we can only ascertain their relevance after engaging with them.

A *narrative*, in turn, corresponds to a representation of the target's life events, from their perspective. This representation has a narrative structure in the sense that it provides coherence, meaningfulness, and evaluative and emotional import, to the events being considered. In Goldie's words, a narrative constitutes 'a sequence of events which is the content of the imaginative process' (2002, p. 98), for 'it is necessary that I have a *narrative* which I can imaginatively enact, with the other as *narrator*.'

The connection between these two elements is that a characterisation of the target individual is necessary as 'background' in order to imaginatively simulate that target's narrative. So, we can only engage in the simulation of someone's narrative if we understand the origins of the target's characterisation: without a characterisation it is not possible to simulate being another person, and without a narrative there is no content to simulate (1999, p. 403).

Related to this point of the importance of having characterisation and a narrative to engage with, we saw in Chapter III (see III.2.1) Sanders' (1997) and Young's (2000) arguments for why this type of information about others is morally and politically relevant. Through the inclusion of different forms of communication, such as testimony and narrative, these authors argue that a person's positions can be made accessible to others. When others do this,

they convey their stories and their different experiences. This, in turn, opens up the possibility of a better understanding of their positions and perspectives.

We can thus frame these insights into the context of this chapter: we need to tap into different forms of communication — more specifically, what I have called in Chapter III *democratic engagement* — in order to have access to other persons' characterisations and narratives. These are relevant items of information for others to know in order to improve, or try to improve, the understanding of other differently situated positions. The argument I am developing in this chapter is that, when in possession of this information, we can further improve our knowledge and understanding of others via perspective-taking.

However, the fact that we may now be closing the gap between differently situated positions (by means of communication), in order to be able to engage in perspective-taking, may lead to the conclusion that I am, once again, getting further away from showing that there is a need for perspective-taking. That is, if we already possess propositional knowledge like the one above, why would it be necessary to engage in imaginative perspective-taking — what is it that perspective-taking adds that propositional knowledge of other positions does not already do?

Sartre (2010, originally 1940), who has raised a similar objection, argues that the experience of imagination does not yield knowledge of an object since, with imagination, knowledge is prior to experience (contrary to what happens with perception). As an illustration, Sartre puts side by side *the experience of imagining* and *the experience of perceiving* the *Panthéon* in Paris (pp. 87-88). Whereas with perception we can come out of the experience knowing how many columns the *Panthéon* has, we cannot acquire that knowledge by imagining it — in order to accurately imagine, we need to already have that knowledge, Sartre argues. Adapting Sartre's point to my discussion, we could answer the question I started the paragraph with by saying that we should not engage in imaginative perspective-taking, since it will not add anything to the propositional knowledge we already have.

In order to answer this possible objection, and also Young's from before, I need to draw another distinction between forms of perspective-taking, as I will do next. My answer to these objections will rely specifically

on my argument for empathic perspective-taking, which will rest on the fact that perspective-taking can give us a type of knowledge — that is, phenomenal knowledge — that we could not have otherwise, and that is necessary to better understand other positions.

So far, I have explored the necessary conditions for other-oriented perspective-taking to be successful. These, as we have seen throughout, are not sufficient to validate the argument that we should indeed engage in other-oriented perspective-taking with the aim of better understanding other positions. The arguments I will develop next, in combination with the conditions discussed before, will provide that answer.

IV.2.2 — Empathic perspective-taking and non-empathic perspective-taking

I have been developing the argument that other-oriented perspective-taking is a form of engagement that is required of us in order to better know and understand other positions. So far, I have explained how other-oriented perspective-taking should be understood, and what it aims to achieve. However, as we have also seen, in order for other-oriented perspective-taking to get off the ground, it requires information regarding an agent's characterisation and life narrative that we cannot access via perspective-taking, and that has to be acquired through other means (namely, I argued in Chapter III, via democratic engagement). Given this possible shortcoming, I have yet to argue what is it that is added specifically to our knowledge and understanding of other positions, that we could not have otherwise, when we engage in other-oriented perspective-taking. In other words, I still have to provide an explanation as to why other-oriented perspective-taking should be taken complementarily to democratic engagement in my account of the engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny.

In order to make this argument, I need to draw a further distinction: that is, between forms of other-oriented perspective-taking that aim at affective/emotional and cognitive perspective-taking, and those that do not

aim at affective/emotional perspective-taking. The former corresponds to what is commonly called empathy (Coplan, 2011a) — I will refer to it as *empathic perspective-taking* (IV.2.2.1); the latter I will label *non-empathic* perspective-taking (IV.2.2.2).

IV.2.2.1 — Empathic perspective-taking

The argument for empathic perspective-taking rests on one main characteristic of other-oriented perspective-taking that I have only merely flagged until now: that is, the need to simulate emotional states — or the need for *affective matching*.

Following Coplan (2011a), affective matching corresponds to a qualitatively identical affective state between observer and target. In other words, the observer is to reproduce and experience the same kind of emotion (or affect) that the target is going through. Although needing to be a qualitatively identical state (if the target is angry, the observer should also reproduce and experience anger), it may vary in terms of degree. That is, if the observer does not reproduce the exact same degree of anger, the observer's reproduction and experience does not necessarily misrepresent the target's emotional experience. So, in order to understand the other, we need to accurately mentally represent their psychological states. This is a necessary element for fully understanding someone's situation, it is claimed.

However, this claim raises immediately a few questions: why do we need to match another's affective states to understand them and their perspectives? And is it not enough that we know propositionally what the other's affective state is? As a response to these questions, I will present two main arguments, thus justifying the need for empathic perspective-taking. The first argument will be that emotions play a decisive role in how we think, perceive and understand the world, and how we exercise practical reasoning; the second argument will be that there is a particular form of knowledge that is dependent on us experiencing something.

Starting with the first argument. As I just stated, emotions are an essential element of how we reason, in that they affect our reasoning abilities on what goes beyond pure logic. Several neuroscientific proposals — of

which I highlight António Damásio's (2004, 2006) — seem to suggest that much. Based on his own research and the existing research by other neuroscientists, Damásio explores cases of patients that have neurological impairments. These neurological damages have a visible impact on the reasoning capacities of the patients. However, the patients show no cognitive failures: they are able to engage in mathematical problem solving, for example. And yet, they do systematically fail to be able to deal with problems with social dimensions. Damásio's explanation to this conundrum is that, although having no cognitive failures, these patients' reasoning defects could only be due to a defect in emotion and feeling.

Damásio writes that

> [i]t is quite disconcerting to hear one of those patients reason intelligently and solve successfully a specific social problem when the problem is presented in the laboratory, as a test, in the form of a hypothetical situation. The problem may be precisely the same kind the patient has just failed to solve in real life and real time. These patients exhibit extensive knowledge about the social situations that they so egregiously mismanaged in reality. They know the premises of the problem, the options of the action, the likely consequences of those actions immediately and in the long-term, and how to navigate such knowledge logically. But all of this is to no avail when they need it most in the real life. (2004, pp. 143-144)

Faced with these scenarios, Damásio suggests that every experience we have 'is accompanied by some degree of emotion', regardless of it being a response to an evolutionarily set stimulus or a learned stimulus — positive or negative emotions are 'obligate components of our social experiences' (2004, p. 146), Damásio writes. So, accompanied by these social emotions, we start to categorise the experiences we have — 'the structure of the scenarios, their components, their significance in terms of our personal narrative'. We then 'connect the conceptual categories we form […] with the brain apparatus used for the triggering of emotions. For example, different options for action and different future outcomes become associated with different emotions/feelings.' As such, whenever we again experience a situation that fits into one of the categories from our previous experiences, 'we rapidly and automatically deploy the appropriate emotions.' (pp. 146-147) Under this proposal, emotions and feelings are part of our reasoning

abilities. Emotions are an intrinsic part of what we call reason and of how we reason.

Helm (2001, 2002), in a theory that seems to respect, for the most part, Damásio's advances, calls emotions *felt evaluations*, *i.e.*, evaluative feelings — in that they are 'evaluative responses to one's situation […].' (2002, p. 15) These are feelings of things going well or poorly, that are pleasant or painful, in response to an object; they are evaluative feelings insofar as an emotion is felt due to the import, and represents the import, of the situation one is in. In other words, 'their formal object involves import' that is construed by emotion. So, emotions both constitute and are responsive to import, they involve evaluative content.[100]

From these two insights we can start appreciating the fact that emotions are not only part of our reasoning processes (see also Morrell, 2010, p. 173), but also important for our practical reasoning specifically, in the sense that they condition our reasoning about how to act and what we take to be valuable.

More recently, Bagnoli (2016b) has argued that *emotional engagement* — understood as the actions and reflections that are prompted on an agent by their emotions — is a crucial component of deliberation and practical reasoning since it can contribute to one changing one's views and revise one's judgments and decisions. Bagnoli's argument is that emotions bring some facts to the attention of a subject, which, when triggering deliberation on the interaction of those emotions and facts, can lead to a change in the subject's views and lead to action. As an example of the connection between emotional engagement and practical reasoning, Bagnoli brings up Anna Karenina and her feeling of disgust towards the appearance of her husband: as Anna Karenina becomes aware of her feelings, she starts reflecting on them, which, in turn, leads to a change in view and action.

In short, Bagnoli proposes that emotions are normatively significant by making agents become sensitive to certain facts and leading to reflective engagement. This reflection can lead to a change in view and subsequent

[100] This view seems to correspond to the majority view in Emotion Theory. See, for example, Deonna and Teroni, 2012.

action. It is through *emotional engagement* that emotions are normatively relevant for practical reasoning and in the possible determination of one's normative practical reasons.

Also relevant for my argument is Bagnoli's distinction for practical reasoning between *emotional engagement* and *emotional involvement*. The difference is that, in the latter case, emotions do not lead the agent to learn anything new (or true); because of an agent's emotional involvement — and how emotions can cloud one's judgments —, facts that may be relevant are not considered.

Bagnoli's argument helps connect the insights from Damásio and Helm about reason being emotional reason and the importance of emotions and reasons for practical reasoning and for the definition of one's reasons.[101] Given the possible importance of emotions for reason and for practical reasoning, if we want to understand the positions, evaluative perspectives and reasons other agents occupy and have, we need to understand the affective states of those agents. Failing to understand those affective states decreases our possibilities of actually understanding their positions, evaluative perspectives and reasons — which, again, we need to do in order to engage in trans-positional scrutiny.

Even the above distinction between *emotional engagement* and *emotional involvement* provides further reason for the need to know the affective states of other agents, since, in order to exercise trans-positional assessments, we need to be able to determine which emotions are relevant for practical reasoning and which have a negative contribution in one's deliberation.

So far, I have argued for the need to know the affective states of other agents whose reasons and claims of justice we want to assess by arguing that an agent's affective states impact that agent's engagement in practical reasoning. But the need to know other agents' affective states does not imply the need for *affective matching*: in other words, why would others need to match another agent's affective states if they already know of them?

[101] See also Bagnoli, 2018, 2020.

The short answer is that observers are as dependent on their own affective states as targets are. The above argument about emotional reason and practical reasoning impacts both targets and observers. The way we, as observers, gather information about targets and interpret that information is also dependent on the same emotional conditions. Our thoughts, perceptions and understanding of a target are dependent on our emotional states and our emotional markers. As such, unless we can somehow guarantee sharing a similar affective state, it will become much harder to be correct about our understanding of the target. Therefore, trying to affective match the target with the goal of understanding their positions may be helpful, even if not necessary.

However, we can argue more strongly for why we need to *imaginatively* affective match others. The answer to this question, I believe, can be found in the idea that there is a form of knowledge that can only be acquired by consciously experiencing (see also Gaut, 2007, pp. 134-164). That form of knowledge is called *phenomenal knowledge*. In other words, when we experience something, we can acquire information that otherwise we could not and we can acquire a better understanding of what something is — perhaps, in some cases, the only adequate understanding of what something is.

An example that seems to express this idea is that of Mary in the famous Frank Jackson (1982, 1986) example. According to the example, Mary is a scientist who has always lived in a black and white room. Although knowing all the facts that there are about colours, she has never experienced any of them; Mary has only experienced the world in black and white. Jackson questions whether Mary will learn anything knew when she first experiences the colour red once she leaves the black and white room she has always lived in.

For the purposes of my argument, I will not engage in the debates in which this example is normally used — that of the existence of *qualia*, of physicalism, and of the properties of the colour red. I am taking this example to show what it intends to show: that Mary does not know what it is to experience the colour red, even if she knows all the physical facts about red,

and that, therefore, she cannot really know the colour red until she experiences it.

Now, for the purposes of this work, the form of experiencing that I am interested in is experience by imagination. Following Alter (2008),

> [t]o *access* phenomenal knowledge is to exercise closely related abilities, such as the ability to imagine, recognize, or remember relevant experiences. I access my phenomenal knowledge when I visualize a ripe tomato, stop at a traffic light, or have an episodic memory of seeing oxygenated blood. (p. 254)

Imagination being one way to acquire phenomenal knowledge, it seems plausible to argue that experiencing the position of the other through imagination, as with empathic perspective-taking, can constitute a form of acquiring phenomenal knowledge. This seems to be better demonstrated by way of another example: I can both imagine *that* I am in dangerous waters — propositional imagining — and imagine that I *am* in dangerous waters — imaginatively enacting a narrative. The results of these two forms of imagination do not seem to provide the same informational outcomes. The difference, as Goldie points out, is that the content of the imagination

> includes not, for example, 'I imagine that I could be in dangerous waters' but rather items like 'Jelly-fish have been seen in these waters recently' or 'My strength is going', with such parts of the narrative representing the contents of the thought, feelings and emotions which I centrally imagine myself having. (1999, p. 409)

Goldie, in this passage, is explaining what is distinctive about imaginatively enacting a narrative. But from this explanation we can say more: when imaginatively enacting a narrative — being it one that we originally construe, or some other concrete narrative we want to imaginatively enact — we start to access phenomenal knowledge. The more we are able to experience what we are trying to imagine, the more we will be putting ourselves in position to understand. For us to vividly imagine, from the inside, that we *are* in dangerous waters may get us closer to understanding what is significant when one actually is in dangerous waters. From that imaginative experience we can, for example, get to know that we would feel lost, that we would feel panic while experiencing heavy breathing; that we, subsequently, would start moving our legs a lot to stay afloat — more than probably necessary, which would startle us even more; or that we would try to understand the direction

of the water, what our surroundings would be, and what best strategy we could come up with given the circumstances. All this, of course, would depend on one's own experiences in dealing with situations of crisis in the past and the knowledge that one already has of one's behaviours. But, in any case, this would still possibly be the closest thing one could get to know about what it would be to be in dangerous waters, short of the experience of actually being in dangerous waters. So there is, potentially, something to be gained by engaging in imagination: the knowledge of experiencing.

This however does not say anything regarding imaginative *perspective-taking*. Following the argument that there is knowledge to be gained by engaging in imagination, my argument for the relevance of affective matching for empathic perspective-taking is a mere extension of the former argument to the latter case. That is, given that there is phenomenal knowledge to be gained, when we want to understand other's affective states, which involves understanding other positions that other agents occupy, phenomenal knowledge via imagination seems to be a good possibility we have in order to be able to experience those positions. In terms of the information we can get, and the understanding we can have, of another person's situation, there seems to be a difference between believing that person *X* is anxious and feeling *X*'s anxiety, in terms of understanding what *X* will do next (Matravers, 2011, p. 30). We may know facts about the other; however, the imaginative exercise allows for us to potentially know what is like to be the other, which gives us a deeper — and hopefully a more precise — understanding of other positions.

In order to further understand my argument that engaging in empathic perspective-taking can add something different to our propositional knowledge of another person's position, consider the following example and point by Morrell (2010, p. 142):

> [M]any white people tend to have few experiences analogous to living as a black person in a racist society, and in this respect, the experience of blacks is not generalizable. The way white people may come to understand this experience is through a combination of hearing the personal narratives of blacks and reflecting on their own emotional experiences. They may have never felt humiliation because of the color of their skin, but they have certainly felt the pain of humiliation in other contexts. The generalizable aspect that is

> important is not the experience itself but the underlying emotions that allow empathy to occur.[102]

With this passage, Morrell provides an excellent example of how trying to understand other positions via perspective-taking while engaging in affective matching can help improve our understanding of those positions. By affectively matching others we can start to imaginatively experience different positions, and we can start to have an idea of what it might be to inhabit them.

To put this in the context of this dissertation then: in what regards social justice, there are claims that we can only say that we properly know, and actually have understanding of, if we have some phenomenal knowledge of the contexts that give rise to those claims. In Morrell's example above, it is true that we can gain propositional understanding of what racist discrimination and related disadvantages may be. But can we say that we truly understand what discrimination and the disadvantages that follow are? We are much better equipped to identify the dimension of these wrongs if we understand them from within, since a part of that understanding comes from the central experiential component that it has.

That much can be said about the Black Lives Matter example I have been using: we cannot properly assess reasons and claims of justice that follow from a lived experience we know very little about. Propositionally knowing about police violence and racial targeting is not the same as experiencing it. We can say the same about Marcus Rashford's example from before, as well. To know about hunger and to experience hunger as a child is very different. From having these two disparate forms of knowledge and experiences results in the formation of different evaluative perspectives and different forms of practical reasoning

In these cases, apart from the experience itself, everything else falls short at providing us with knowledge and understanding of how bad or wrong a situation is. Its badness/wrongness cannot be separated from the experience. Propositional knowledge is insufficient for this purpose because it takes for granted the experience. Just like in the case of Mary with the colour red, we

[102] Morrell raises this example and makes this point while discussing Dryzek, perspective-taking, narrative, and moving from the particular to the general. I will not engage in this particular debate.

can have and gain propositional understanding of reasons and claims of justice, but we still do not fully know and understand the normative force of the contexts that give rise to them.

Consider now a more detailed example that combines all that I have been writing and that can be found in the reporting of what has been called the 'Bronx Slave Market', in 1949 (see account of this story in Wallace, 2019, pp. 64-66). According to Wallace, in 1949, a black journalist called Marvel Cooke decided to write a story about 'a block where unemployed Black women would go and stand out and wait to be hired by white women for day labor in their homes' (p. 65). Cooke decided to go undercover and experience first-hand what was happening in the Bronx and report on it, on the situation of these workers that did not have any job security nor guarantee that they would be property paid (or paid at all), and that, furthermore, were not protected from violence and other forms of abuse. As Wallace quotes her:

> After a few days, she wrote, "Woolworth's on 170th St. was beginning to feel like home to me. It seemed natural to be standing there with my sister slaves, all of us with paper bags, containing our work clothes, under our arms. I recognized many of the people who passed. I no longer felt 'new.' But I was not at peace. Hundreds of years of history weighed upon me. I was the slave traded for two truck horses on a Memphis street corner in 1849. I was the slave trading my brawn for a pittance on a Bronx street corner in 1949. As I stood there waiting to be bought, I lived through a century of indignity." (p. 65)

According to Wallace's reporting, Cooke's writing, by taking 'readers inside an experience that only a Black woman could have' (p. 65) had an emotional impact on them — especially, it seems to have had an impact on New York City's mayor at the time, who, as a result, decided to implement some of the reforms Cooke suggested at the end of her piece.

To the extent that we can take this example as being significant, it seems that we can once more conclude that the experience that follows from empathic perspective-taking adds something to certain beliefs we have, since by engaging in empathic perspective-taking we may be able to experience things as they are (or, at least, as closely as we can get). It is by experiencing and matching the affect of others that certain features become salient. This, to finish my argument, is what empathic perspective-taking can add that mere

propositional knowledge cannot: it provides a way, even if only an approximation, of knowing what it is like to be in another position.

So, to return to Young's and to Sartre's objections that I flagged previously, I can now provide an answer to both: to know phenomenally can add more information that we did not have before. There is always more information about other positions that may be acquired for a better understanding, and this can be done by experiencing the other through the process of empathic perspective-taking. Furthermore, the fact that empathic perspective-taking may yield new relevant information is enough reason to engage in it, since we can only know if there is further information to be acquired by doing it — we cannot know in advance. In other words, the mere possibility that empathic perspective-taking may indeed provide new information seems to be enough of a reason to engage in this kind of imaginative project.

In summary, I provided two arguments that, taken together, justify the need for empathic perspective-taking. The first argument was that emotions play a decisive role in how we think, perceive, understand the world, and exercise practical reasoning. As such, it followed that: (1) to fully understand the other person we need to also understand their affective states, otherwise we can only have a partial representation of what it is to be in that position; (2) we, as interpreters, are also influenced by emotions and feelings in how we think, perceive and understand the target. This, I argued, meant that the only way we can start to guarantee a successful comprehension of what it is to be the target is by knowing their affective states. The second argument was that there is a form of knowledge — phenomenal knowledge — that gives us a different understanding than just knowing facts about the target. Taken together these two arguments signify that: in order to understand others' positions, we need to experience them. Therefore, we need to engage in affective matching. In this way, empathic perspective-taking — perspective-taking that features the matching of affective states — is an essential form of other-oriented perspective-taking for us to engage in.

There is, however, one specific caveat with affective matching that deserves to be pointed out: affective matching seems to produce a proximity between observer and target that may, in fact, be illusory. Even if we assume

that there is successful correspondence of affective states between observer and target, the way the observer and the target experience that same affect is not the same, as I have been hinting at throughout. As Husserl famously points out, the experience is only truly experienced by the agent, and not by the one who empathises with the experience. This produces a distance between observer and target that may lead to a smaller degree of understanding of the target, and could even lead to a false sense of understanding of the other. As such, we need to be particularly attentive to the conclusions we make when engaging in empathic understanding.

I have now argued for the need to engage in imaginative other-oriented perspective-taking that focuses on both affective states and cognitive states — that is, empathic perspective-taking. Next, I will argue that we should also engage in forms of what I have called non-empathic perspective-taking.

IV.2.2.2 — Non-empathic perspective-taking

On par with empathic perspective-taking, we can also conceive of another form of other-oriented perspective-taking that does not aim at affective matching — what I have called non-empathic perspective-taking. Here, I will briefly argue[103] that we should also engage in non-empathic perspective-taking, when empathic perspective-taking may not be relevant.

There are circumstances in which engaging in imaginative perspective-taking may not require, or in which it may not be possible, to affective match others. Such circumstances can include, for example, when what we aim to simulate is not so much an agent's specific position, but a more general position that may be occupied by several agents — that is, a situation where we aim to know and understand a position as a whole. These circumstances may be quite frequent in what concerns issues of social justice.

One possible case of what I have just described can be related to the example I have raised several times regarding women's wrongly developed beliefs about their own health in India. As described before, the example

[103] Most of the argument has been laid out in IV.2.2.1.

focuses on a group of women, from a low class, with very low or no levels of instruction, within a specific Indian culture with its own established patriarchal patterns and practices. Say we want to try to improve our knowledge and understanding of their position — although this may manifestly not be enough information in order to proceed, let us assume it is. On this example, to engage in empathetic perspective-taking may make little sense: emotions do not seem to be a crucial positional parameter,[104] and we would not be simulating one person's position, but these women's position as a whole, as a group. If what I have just described holds, then, rather than empathic perspective-taking, we could instead engage in non-empathic perspective-taking.

In this case, and following the argument regarding phenomenal knowledge from before, what imaginative perspective-taking would add would be the experience of a previously unknown position to us, in the position of a general other: that is, we would imagine ourselves as those women in their position. We would perhaps — and now I am exercising my own imagination in order to come up with appropriate suggestions — start to imagine and experience what it is to live in a home that is not fully finished, poorly insulated — where we are constantly extremely hot during the day, and too cold during the night —, overcrowded, and where everyone depends on our doings of several domestic tasks at all moments. We may further experience what it might be to always put the rest of our family's needs in first place, being it on health, food, or clothes, to the point that we become an afterthought to ourselves. And, perhaps, if we continue to properly imagine, we may start to understand exactly how these women both developed a false belief about their own health and started to devalue it.

It would be in situations such as these, where we may be interested in exploring group positions, that non-empathic perspective-taking should also be seen as a way to improve our knowledge and understanding of those positions. I am not suggesting that in these cases affective states are absent; I am simply pointing out that an exercise of perspective-taking would not aim at affective matching. Nonetheless, although we may not aim at matching any

[104] In that emotions do not seem to be playing a role in describing the position.

affective state of other agents, emotions may still manifest themselves in our exercise of perspective-taking by helping explain and making more salient the relevance of some features rather than others. That is, with non-empathic perspective-taking we may still develop affective reactions as we start to experience certain positions, we just are not attempting to match the affective states of those positions.

As with the example I just gave, and many others I have been raising throughout the thesis, claims of social justice arise from entire groups of people. The reasons for those claims also need to be assessed in the same objective manner. We thus also need to guarantee the objectivity of those assessments. It is in that way that non-empathic perspective-taking is a relevant form of other-oriented perspective-taking for an engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny.

IV.2.3 — Other-oriented perspective-taking and trans-positional scrutiny

In this section, I argued that we should engage in other-oriented perspective-taking in order to improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions. I started by explaining other-oriented perspective-taking and the conditions for simulation that is other-oriented to be more successful (IV.2.1). Following that, in IV.2.2, I suggested that there are two different forms of perspective-taking that are worth engaging in that can improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions in different ways: that is, empathic perspective-taking (IV.2.2.1), which aims at simulating both affective and cognitive states, and non-empathic perspective-taking (IV.2.2.2), in which we should engage when we want to simulate group positions as a whole. In the end, my main argument for other-oriented perspective-taking rests on the possibility of accessing phenomenal knowledge — that is, on the possibility of imaginatively acquiring knowledge of what it is to experience certain positions, which we would not be able to experience otherwise. Even if we do not always get a deeper understanding of other positions, it is still worth pursuing other-oriented perspective-taking,

since unless we try, we cannot be sure that it will not provide further information.

What this means for my overall proposal in this work is the following: my argument in Chapters III and IV is that in order to be in position to more appropriately trans-positionally assess reasons and claims of justice, we need to understand the positions and perspectives that gave rise to them. And we do that by engaging with others, rather than detaching from them.

Specifically, in Chapter III, I argued that trans-positional scrutiny requires a form of democratic engagement. Complementary to that, in this chapter, I am arguing that we should also engage in different forms of imaginative perspective-taking, that imaginative perspective-taking is a relevant form of engagement with other positions. In this second section of the chapter, I have just argued that other-oriented perspective-taking can improve our knowledge and understanding of others. My proposal, then, is that, in order to successfully engage in trans-positional scrutiny, we need to also engage in forms of other-oriented perspective-taking. That is, together with democratic engagement, engaging in other-oriented perspective-taking helps creating the conditions to appropriately scrutinise different positions, reasons, and claims.

In the next section, I will continue my argument by exploring and defending another form of imaginative perspective-taking, *i.e.*, self-oriented perspective-taking, with the aim of improving our conditions to objectively exercise trans-positional assessments.

IV.3 — Self-oriented perspective-taking

As I have introduced, the process of imaginative perspective-taking can be understood in one of two ways: as self-oriented, or as other-oriented. *Self-oriented perspective-taking* corresponds to one of the main ways of understanding imaginative perspective-taking that we can find in the literature. This is the view that most closely conveys the idea of *in-their-shoes imagining* and that has Simulation Theory as its main conceptual framework. Although this is what a lot of authors seem to mean when they use the term

empathy, and since I am taking empathic perspective-taking to be a form of other-oriented perspective-taking (see IV.2), I will simply refer to it as self-oriented perspective-taking.

In the present section, I will argue that self-oriented perspective-taking can provide a contribution, even if a small one, to better inform us about other positions. I will start, in IV.3.1, by exploring the core ideas of Simulation Theory, and its main differences with other-oriented perspective-taking. Following that, I will look into some of the objections made against Simulation Theory: namely, that it operates with insufficient information (IV.3.2), and that it relies on projections/inferences (IV.3.3). This will lead me to conclude that self-oriented perspective-taking thought experiments do not seem to reasonably provide knowledge of other positions. In Section IV.3.4, I will argue that, although self-oriented perspective-taking may not yield accurate knowledge of other positions, it is still a worthy thought experiment to undergo with the purpose of understanding them.

One last introductory note to the section: as I mentioned, I will be looking especially to Simulation Theory in this section. However, it is not my aim to contribute to the Simulation Theory versus Theory-Theory[105] (versus some other hybrid theories) debate. I am merely interested in the role imaginative perspective-taking may have to improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions.

IV.3.1 — Simulation Theory

Simulation Theory (ST), as it is known, provides a theoretical framework to imaginative perspective-taking with the aim of understanding other minds. What ST advocates is that, in order to know another persons' mental states,

[105] As Shannon Spaulding (2016a) explains best, '[t]heory theorists argue that we understand others by employing a folk psychological theory about how mental states inform behavior. With our folk psychological theories, we infer from a target's behavior what his or her mental states probably are. And from these inferences, plus the psychological laws in the theory connecting mental states to behavior, we predict the next behavior of the target […]. The capacity that underlies the theorizing of TT is supposition, which is distinct from imagination.' (p. 211)
Very shortly, it is exactly because Theory-Theory does not make use of imagination that I will not be focusing on it in this work. It should not be concluded from this, however, that TT is not important for trying to understand others, as it will become clear during this section.

we need to imaginatively project ourselves into the position of others. In doing this, we will imagine having specific mental states, and form beliefs about how we would behave in that situation. We, then, ascribe to the person we are imaginatively projecting ourselves into the beliefs and desires imagined while in their position. In other words, we understand the other by imaginatively being in their position, and then attributing the generated mental states to them. Simulation, then, has the purpose of yielding information about the other by using pretend beliefs, desires, feelings, and other psychological properties.

There are several versions of simulation theory. Here I will start with Goldman's. According to Goldman (1992, 2005), there are three phases in a process of simulation: the *matching phase*; the *simulation phase*; and the *projection phase*. The first phase involves imagining being in the other person's position (being in their shoes). The purpose of this first phase is to create pretend mental states — such as perceptions, desires, beliefs, hopes, plans, sensations, emotions, etc. — that match those of the target of our perspective-taking. In order to do that, we are to imagine, based on the background information that we have about the target, that we have the same initial desires, beliefs, or other mental states that the target does. The second phase entails feeding the created pretend mental states 'into some inferential mechanism, or other cognitive mechanism,' in order for it to 'generate further mental states as outputs by its normal operating procedures.' (1992, p. 21) In other words, given the matching phase, we try to mirror the target's 'internal processing' through our cognitive system — we simulate the target's cognitive process. The third, and last, phase is the one of projection. In this phase we ascribe our pretend mental states (the output states) resulting from the simulation phase to the target as being the mental states that the target had or will have. Thus, letting our 'own psychological mechanism [to] serve as a 'model' of his.' (1992, p. 21) In other words, the projection phase involves making inferences from ourselves to others. From this imaginative process we are supposed to be able to conclude what is the situation the other is in.

Goldman (2005) summarises ST and the three-phase process just described in the following manner: '[…] the distinctive idea of ST is that mind reading is subserved by pretense and attempted replication. A mind

reader adopts the mental "position" of the target and replicates (or attempts to replicate) mental activity appropriate to that position'. (p. 81) In practice, this simulation process is often used to describe/explain the mental exercises chess players have to do when choosing their best move. That is, players imagine themselves in the position of the opponent by imagining what they would play if faced with a specific move. In doing this, they reach a conclusion about what they believe the opponent will do and play accordingly.

So far, *simulation* has been used to represent an entire thought experiment with several phases. However, what the literature calls simulation, in order to simplify, should be called *simulation-plus-projection*, as Goldman admits (2006, p. 40). What this means is that simulation represents only the second stage of the process of understanding other persons' mental states, being projection the final stage. This distinction seems to be quite important, for we can have simulation with projection, or simulation without projection, or projection without simulation — in fact, Robert Gordon (1995) argues that simulation (in the wide sense) does not include a projection/inferential phase.[106]

Another reason why it is important to raise this issue is to emphasise its difference to other-oriented perspective-taking: we can now more easily conceptualise the difference between the two forms of perspective-taking in which the big contrast between them regards who does the thinking in the imaginative process of perspective-taking (Goldie, 2011, p. 305).

This difference in the direction of fit between the two forms of perspective-taking also has implications regarding the amount of characterisation of the target (see IV.2.1) that is necessary to know in order to engage in perspective-taking. With self-oriented perspective-taking, since the direction of fit is towards the self, the exercise of perspective-taking requires a much lesser characterisation of the other: we use ourselves as a model, and we may not use as much of the target as the model.

[106] On why this may not be so, see Currie, Ravenscroft, 2002, p. 56-57; Goldman, 2006, Chapter 2.

More specifically, simulation-plus-projection processes, such as the ones described above, engage in a mixture of characterisations, as Goldie (1999) suggests: '[f]or I can imagine myself in another's shoes with an overall characterization which retains certain aspects of my characterization as well as bringing in certain aspects of the other's characterization.' (p. 412) Goldman's proposal is that we serve as a model, and then make adjustments to accommodate the differences between us and the target. As I have mentioned, and will critically assess next, this form of perspective-taking involves a very controversial assumption: that, as Goldman himself puts it, '[…] my psychology works the same as the target's psychology' (2002, p. 16, n. 10).

So far, I have explained what ST proposes. Next, I will look into the two objections with a bigger potential to undermine ST's capacity to understand other positions: insufficiency of information (IV.3.2), and projection as not being a good way to provide knowledge of the other (IV.3.3).

IV.3.2 — First objection: insufficient information

When describing the three-stage simulation-plus-projection process, Currie and Ravenscroft (2002, p. 54) do it in a slightly different manner than Goldman: the first stage is characterised by the need to acquire knowledge, or at least some beliefs about the other person's situation. The second stage of this process is the simulation exercise itself, along the lines of what has been explained. That is, imaginatively putting ourselves in the other person's position, and understanding what mental states we are imaginatively going through and how we would deal with them. The third and last stage is the projection/inferential stage, where we draw a conclusion from the last exercise about what the target will do, or why they did it, and ascribe it to them.

There seems to be one main difference between Currie and Ravenscroft's, and Goldman's description: Currie and Ravenscroft think that it is necessary to include in this process the need to have some knowledge

about the other. Goldman does not deny this being a necessity but seems to assume that the attributor already possesses some knowledge about the target or that it may be added later in order to lead to an adjustment. Thus, it seems we can say, for Goldman, knowledge about the other is not part of the process — which may also be due to the assumption that observer and target share a similar psychology. Nonetheless, and most relevant for the point I am trying to make, Goldman does say that a simulation may not be accurate when there is an absence of information (2006, pp. 174-175). As such, we need to have, at least, knowledge of the differences between the observer and the target, in order for the simulation process to be successful (Goldman, 2006, p. 184).

Some authors[107] see this need of knowledge as being evidence that ST can only work if it is backed up by a psychological theory of other humans, as the proponents of Theory-Theory (TT) defend. In other words, this sceptical challenge to ST — called, precisely, the threat of collapse — posits that it is unclear how, just by using imagination, we can acquire new knowledge of the mental states of other persons, *i.e.*, we cannot know if the imagined mental states are correct. In order to know that our pretend mental states are correct, ST needs TT's theoretical knowledge, they argue. In this way, there is the threat of ST collapsing into TT.

I will not address here if there is indeed a threat of ST collapsing into TT. The point I want to make clear by raising the 'threat of collapse' objection is that both the opponents of ST and different proponents of ST (such as Currie and Ravenscroft, explicitly, and Goldman, less explicitly, as we saw) agree about the need of introducing more information into the process of trying to understand others via simulation.

To see why, consider the following example Spaulding (2016a) provides to 'illustrate the simulation heuristic' of deliberate imagination and high-level simulation:

> Suppose I see John making fun of Mary. I wonder why he is doing that, so I imagine myself engaged in his behavior. I imagine that I dislike Mary and want to humiliate her. I imagine that I like Mary and want to get her attention. I imagine that I am indifferent about Mary and simply want to entertain myself. I evaluate the plausibility of these imagined mental states given the observed behavior and conclude that

[107] See, for example, Dennett, 1987; Jackson, 1999; Spaulding, 2016a.

> I would behave as John is behaving if I liked Mary. I attribute this motivation to John, and from this attribution, I predict his future behavior. […] (p. 214)

For Spaulding, however, this example can also be used to more strongly demonstrate ST's shortfalls regarding lack of information. Spaulding argues that it is possible the presented explanations for John's behaviour are not exhaustive, that we can come up with many other explanations, each one with different consequences (p. 216): it can be the case that, Spaulding suggests, '[p]erhaps John is trying to distract Mary to steal her wallet [or that] John may be trying to hide his homosexuality by flirting with a woman.' More precisely, Spaulding argues that 'a particular behavior is compatible with indefinitely many mental states' (p. 216), a view also shared before by Gallagher (2007, p. 355). It is, therefore, hard to claim that we can have knowledge of John's mental states through simulation alone, since we cannot be sure why John is behaving in the way we are observing. It is in this way that Spaulding not only says that ST is an '*information-poor* mindreading process […]', but that '[…] the problem is that it is *too* information-poor.' (2016a, p. 218) Imagination is not capable of assigning one hypothesis to be more probable than the rest, she concludes.

Furthermore, with the above example we can see that, not only do we have a problem of lack of information (which may also be due to the poor characterisation that we have about John), deeming the simulation process difficult to succeed, but we as observers also may suffer from a lack of imaginative acuity (Maibom, 2016, p. 193). That is, when we engage in imaginative processes, we do not imagine with enough detail. Maibom provides the example that if we are told by our mother to imagine 'how we would feel if someone were to hit us over the head with a stick and take our toy, this is exactly what we will imagine: being hit over the head and deprived of our toy.' It is unlikely, however, that we would imagine anything else — for example, our surroundings, where we got hit, who the person hitting us is and their reasons for doing it. There is, as Maibom powerfully suggests, a discrepancy between our imagination and how the events in our lives occur.

In order to be a bit closer to know the real mental states of someone, further information is needed, since it can help closing the gap between one's

actual mental states and the range of possibilities of mental states that we imagine the target can have. The problem of lack of information that seems to be a feature of self-oriented perspective-taking is not too different from the one we saw before with other-oriented perspective-taking (see IV.2.1). What seems to exacerbate the problem in the present case is its reliance on the observer to serve as the model for perspective-taking: by focusing on ourselves rather than on the target, we rely too heavily on the assumption that the other is like us, creating a bigger gap between what we *actually* need to know in order to simulate and what we *take* to be what we need to know. If the goal is to try to know and understand other positions, to engage in self-oriented perspective-taking seems to lead to not taking all the necessary steps to make that effort.

In any case, the information that is needed, just like we saw before with other-oriented perspective-taking is what Goldie calls a characterisation of the target (see IV.2.1).[108] However, within this particular debate on ST, different forms of acquiring the necessary information are proposed, but most authors argue for the need of a theory, as the proponents of TT (or hybrid theories) do.

TT's proposal, however, relies too heavily on supposition and on psychological theories: TT proposes that, from folk psychological theories, we engage in inferences of what the target's mental states may be based on the target's behaviour. It is questionable to what extent the information regarding a target's characterisation and narrative can be found on psychological theories. The goal, in the context of this dissertation, is not to find processes that allow us to predict another person's behaviour, but processes that can make us more competent in our exercises of trans-positionality. In this way, rather than a theory, we should take democratic engagement as a better way of acquiring that information. Indeed, through it we can know about the target's positions in the most reliable way: from the source itself — as I argued in Chapter III. That is, rather than using the detached method of a third-person understanding of others, as with TT, or a first-person, as with ST — since it is very much an egocentric exercise to use

[108] See also Spaulding, 2016a, p. 218.

ourselves as model to know others —, we should focus on a second-person method of understanding in combination with first-person other-oriented perspective-taking.

My goal so far has been twofold: to show that simulation, as understood by Simulation Theory, is not enough as sole method of understanding;[109] and to stress the need to have more information. In the next part of the present section, I look in more detail into the problems that may arise with projections/inferences being part of a simulation process.

IV.3.3 — Second objection: projections/inferences

Another problem that can be found in ST is related with the third stage of the simulation-plus-projection process. That is, the projection/inference of our pretend mental states to others. In a 1992 paper, Goldman makes reference to an experiment, made by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, where the subjects of the experiment were asked about who they believed to be the most upset person from the two in following scenario:

> Mr. Crane and Mr. Tees were schedule to leave the airport on different flights, at the same time. They travelled from town in the same limousine, were caught in a traffic jam, and arrived at the airport 30 minutes after the scheduled departure of their flights. Mr. Crane is told that his flight left on time. Mr. Tees is told that his was delayed and just left five minutes ago. (p. 19)

The result of the experiment was that 96 percent of those inquired responded that Mr. Tees would be the more upset of the two. In trying to answer how the subjects of the experiment reached said conclusion, Goldman argues that the method was the one of simulation, rather than the use of some theory about folk psychology (*i.e.*, TT). The explanation would then be, Goldman suggests, that 96 percent of the subjects had 'projected themselves into the shoes of the two protagonists and all decided that *they themselves* would be more upset in Tee's situation than in Crane's. They therefore concluded that Tees would be more upset than Crane.' (p. 20)

[109] This is the view that the majority of ST supporters currently embrace, ending up making a case for a hybrid account.

As stated before, it is not my goal to debate which of the mindreading theories is more plausible. My focus is on the role imagination can have for a better understanding of others, and the possible problems that may arise with it. And although Goldman's use of this example was to try to provide a better explanation to its results given the other available options, I will use it as a paradigmatic case of what we can find problematic with simulation-plus-projection processes — or, as I have been more consistently calling it, self-oriented perspective-taking.

In the cited example, there seem to exist a clear problem which results from the last stage of the simulation process. The problem resides in the projection phase. Namely, in order to claim that we can have knowledge of others' mental states via simulations we need to assume that Tees and Crane apprehend, understand and react to reality in the same way, and that, thus, they share the same mental states. Which is more, we have to assume that the subjects of the experiment also have the same dispositions that Tees and Crane have, and that those subjects would also have the same mental states. However, since Tees and Crane are two different individuals, we cannot conclude, for sure, that Tees would be more upset than Crane. In fact, we have to make all these assumptions because we are missing one essential feature: a characterisation of the individuals we want to simulate — which, once again, leads us to the problem addressed before of lack of information and of how ST seems to constantly lead to a loose approach to perspective-taking.

As such, the only conclusion we can make is that *we* would prefer to be in Crane's situation, given the choice between the two. We could also possibly conclude, with the right information about both Tees and Crane, that Crane would prefer to be in his situation rather than Tees' (and the same for Tees). Imaginative perspective-taking, in this case, may be opening some hypothesis that may be worth exploring in order to know the other, but it seems manifestly insufficient to conclude anything about the other, especially if we limit ourselves to attributing our simulated mental states to them.

The more we get to know the characterisation of our targets, the probability of success of simulations (that include a projection phase) will be increasingly worse, since there will be more differences between the

attributors and the targets. As we have seen before, argued by Coplan, Stueber, and Young, these differences between parties can have nefarious effects for our ability to perspective-taking, which Goldman also acknowledges when he writes that

> there is no guarantee of *faithful* imagination of the agent's initial states. […] it seems to be a general fact, congruent with the simulation theory, that when an agent's life experience is very different from our own, we have a harder time predicting or explaining their behavior. (1992, pp. 21-22)

There seems to be, in fact, a broad agreement on this issue, especially when applied to self-oriented perspective-taking. In other words, as I have been suggesting, the other main problem that affects ST is its strong reliance on projections/inferences, which we can see reflected in the 'Mr. Tees and Mr. Crane' example.

Specifically on this point of ST's reliance on projections/inferences, Coplan (2011a) argues critically that, since it is rarely the case that the conditions for self-oriented perspective-taking experiences lead to a good simulation, one individual and his responses can rarely serve as a good model for other individuals. The problem, Coplan further adds is that we have a 'natural tendency to assume greater similarity between self and other than typically exits, especially when we attempt to imagine how the other is feeling or what she is thinking; we are naturally subject to egocentric bias'. (p. 10) As a consequence, we fail to properly understand the other because we let our own beliefs and values influence the simulation process — this, paired with the problem of lack of information, leads me to disregard self-oriented perspective-taking as a good way of understanding the positions of specific agents.

Even if we could argue that there is a similarity between self and other, self-oriented perspective-taking could still fail to provide us with knowledge about others due to a problem of self-knowledge. Maibom (2016) argues, with the help empirical evidence, that

> [t]oo often we cannot figure out what *we* would think, feel, want, or intend under situations only slightly different from those we find ourselves in. The problem is that our ability to project ourselves into situations different from the ones that we are in is limited. […] Since a certain degree of self-knowledge is required to gain other-

> knowledge, failure to gain the former is reflected in failure to have the latter. Not knowing me, I don't know you. (p. 187)

From all that I have been saying, we can thus conclude that the inferential/projection problem has a twofold manifestation: it may only provide knowledge about the self and not the other; and the content of those inferences/projections is not reliable. As a consequence, self-oriented perspective-taking can lead to wrongly believing that we understand the other, when we actually fail to do it on two accounts.

To put this problem in another way, we can revisit Gallagher's (2007, p. 355) and Zahavi (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2012)'s point that I mentioned in Chapter III regarding Nagel (III.1.2), and Sen (III.1.3): by projecting the mental states resulting from simulation onto the other, we may end up only understanding ourselves in the other's situation and not the other, since we are the ones constructing the other's perspective. Even if we take into consideration the necessary adjustments that need to be done, projection seems to derail the simulation process.

This much seems to be clear when we return to the chess example given at the beginning of this section as a practical representation of ST. It is not because I imagine being in my opponent's position that I am able to know what my best next move is. That assumes that there is only one right and best move, that there are not different ways to play a given position, and that that the next best move is the same that I would make. So, to reinforce Gallagher's and Zahavi's point in their own words, '[t]he question, then, is whether a process of simulation will ever allow for a true understanding of the other, or merely let me attain an understanding of myself in a different situation […]. (2012, p. 197) I will return to this statement in IV.3.4.

In this subsection, I have tried to show the implausibility of simulation-plus-projection giving us knowledge of other persons' mental states. Next, I will try to explain why simulation as self-oriented perspective-taking may still be a worthy thought experiment to undergo in order to understand other positions — albeit not the specific positions we may want to know and understand.

IV.3.4 — Self-oriented perspective-taking and trans positional scrutiny

Despite its many problems — simulation-plus-projection does not seem to be able to overcome most of the objections that were raised —, the use of imaginative perspective-taking for simulation (without projection) may still provide a small contribution for our understanding of other positions, I will argue now.

In order to make my case of why we should engage in self-oriented perspective-taking, we should look more closely into what it can do. And that starts with imagination itself, and the possibilities it opens. Spaulding, for example, argues that we can deliberately imagine many ideas, scenarios, and strategies when presented with a problem. However, she argues, in the end imagination cannot give a solution to a problem, in the same way that a simulation process is not able to guarantee a correct attribution of mental states. Given her argument, Spaulding concludes that deliberate imagination can only generate 'ideas that may not be available through perception, memory, or other cognitive capacities. We may go on to consider these ideas, and this may lead to new knowledge of contingent facts' (2016a, p. 224), but only with the help of other sources of knowledge.

This is exactly the possibility I want to explore when applied to self-oriented perspective-taking: given the possibility of imagination to generate ideas, the exercise of simulation can be seen as an exercise where we generate scenarios of what it is to be in another position — and that, when modulated by the other necessary sources of information, may provide some understandings of other positions, or an approximation.

Consider again the 'Victor Hugo death row example' provided at the beginning of this chapter. At the time, I used that example to help demonstrate that a process of imaginative perspective-taking does not require being initiated by perception. But let us assume now that we engage with Victor Hugo's writing by exercising self-oriented perspective-taking specifically. Does simulating the convict's perspective not somehow improve what we think about being a person on death row? As already expressed, we may not understand exactly what that person's position is specifically. But we can

come to understand what it is like to be on death row, and the more information we have, the closer our understanding will be to the one of experiencing that position. We may not reach an ideal (or even precise) level of understanding of that convict's perspective, but we are closer to his perspective than by not engaging in simulation at all. By engaging in self-oriented perspective-taking we do start to understand what it might be to be in the position of someone on death row — this of course is because of the phenomenal knowledge we may access by experiencing that position ourselves, as advanced in IV.2.2.1.

Thus far, I have been suggesting that simulation in conjunction with other sources of knowledge may still be worthy engaging in for reasons mostly presented in section IV.2.2.1 regarding phenomenal knowledge. But this is not all I want to suggest: in what follows, I will also suggest that, even when we lack information, self-oriented perspective-taking may be particularly useful to improve our understanding of other positions.

When defending empathy as a form of other-oriented perspective-taking, Coplan (2011b) writes the following against self-oriented perspective-taking:

> What about cases where we lack the knowledge necessary to be able to engage in other-oriented perspective taking? Would it be better in such cases to engage in self-oriented perspective taking? My answer is "no." We are better off recognizing that we are sometimes incapable of genuine empathy, rather than making the assumption that we know what the other is going through in some similar situation. (p. 56)

This position, however, does not acknowledge what else self-oriented perspective-taking can provide us. Indeed, it is doubtful that, given all the constraints in this scenario, simulation can provide accurate knowledge of other minds — as has been already established. But what Coplan's position does not acknowledge is that self-oriented perspective-taking can induce reflection, which can help us understand other positions — positions that would be, otherwise, inaccessible. And that this may be so even if it does not provide knowledge and understanding of the position of the specific person we would want to know and understand.

When *A* tries to put herself as herself in *B*'s position, *A* will probably not be able to reason as if in *B*'s position, for all the reasons already presented. But in trying to do that, *A* may consider perspectives that differ from *A*'s already established views. And these perspectives may introduce new interpretations about *B*' position. To put it less abstractly: if we look again to 'John and Mary' example provided before, given the lack of characterisation to engage in other-oriented perspective-taking, we can use simulation to explore different possibilities of comprehending the situation. It is because we make the effort to simulate ourselves into John's position that we can come up with so many justifications for John's behaviour towards Mary. Simulation, thus, can be seen as contributing for us not to be confined to our own positions. Or even, not to be confined to our own perspectives of others.

What I mean by this is that, through self-oriented perspective-taking, we explore possibilities by engaging in reflection. And we do this just like we do when engaging in any other form of philosophical thought experiment. In the case of the use of simulation, however, due to imagination, we experience something that adds to our comprehension of the position, in that we become aware of some of the possibilities of what it is/would be like to be in that position. In the case of Victor Hugo, for example, to engage in simulation would be to make the badness of being on death row something much more present for us, even if the experience happens on our own imaginative terms. In the case of John, by failing to actually inhabit John's position, we experience and inhabit many more — all the other positions, in fact. When in the context of trans-positional assessments, this can add to our capacity to exercise scrutiny: more positions are being brought in for scrutiny, and so we become better scrutinisers.

To go back to Gallagher's and Zahavi's question about 'whether a process of simulation will ever allow for a true understanding of the other, or merely let me attain an understanding of myself in a different situation […]', the answer may be: neither. Simulation (as self-oriented) may, merely, provide the means to understand a problem through more than one viewpoint, and therefore to expose us to more information — or to realise information that we had but had not yet accessed if we were not to explore other positions imaginatively. In the end, this will, possibly, improve the quality of trans-

positional assessments, as the engagement view trans-positional scrutiny aims to do.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have suggested that the engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny should also involve engaging in different forms of imaginative perspective-taking. By engaging in different forms of imaginative perspective-taking, I argued, we can improve our knowledge and understanding of other positions, thus making putting us in a better position to exercise trans-positional scrutiny.

I started the chapter, in IV.1, by setting up and explaining the necessary terminology: how we should understand and frame the concepts of perspective-taking and imagination. I proposed that we should differentiate perspective-taking in other-oriented and self-oriented, that we should focus only on high-level simulations, and that imagination should be understood as deliberative imagination.

In section IV.2, I argued that we should engage in two different forms of other-oriented perspective-taking: according to the different types of positions we may want to know and understand better, we should engage either on empathic perspective-taking or on non-empathic perspective-taking.

Lastly, in IV.3, I argued that, although self-oriented perspective-taking can hardly be said to be a good form of perspective-taking to improve our knowledge and understanding of other specific positions, we should still engage in these forms of simulations for they can makes us consider positions that we would not otherwise consider or engage with.

With this chapter, I have provided a complementary way to engage in trans-positional assessments — together with what I developed in Chapter III under the header of democratic engagement. Put together, imaginative perspective-taking provides a first-person complement to the second-person perspective that results from democratic engagement. As a result, the engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny is a much more robust proposal

to guarantee the (trans-positional) objectivity of our assessments of reasons of justice.

Conclusion — Reasons of justice: objectivity as trans-positionality

In this thesis, I argued for a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality as the correct evaluative standard for claims of social justice. On this conception of objectivity, the reasons that justify claims of justice are objective when they withstand scrutiny from every position. Furthermore, the objectivity of our assessments of these reasons implies an active engagement, rather than detachment, with those positions that give raise to each reason and claim of justice.

Across all the chapters of this thesis, I focused on a few common examples. I will return one last time to one of them: that of the social movement Black Lives Matter (BLM). This time, I will refer to this example with the aim of presenting the conception of objectivity as trans-positionality step-by-step, as whole.

The Black Lives Matter movement surged as a direct response to police violence and the racialised targeting of Black people in the cities of Ferguson and Baltimore in the United States. But it immediately became the manifestation of an all-encompassing movement against what Black communities perceived were forms of injustice — mostly structural injustice — perpetrated against them: not only of police violence and racialised targeting in predominantly Black neighbourhoods, but also of forced segregation, and disinvestment in housing and infrastructures, to put it briefly. In the Introduction, I summarised these forms of injustices, as understood from their positions, as forms of oppression by the existence of social inequalities that follow from a structurally racist society.

It is then clear how this movement and the people it represents are making claims of social justice to which we, as a society, need to address. But in order to do that, we need to be able to evaluate these claims and the reasons that support them. So, we first need to find an answer to the following question: how can we guarantee that our evaluations of the reasons and claims are objective in the first place, before we consider what is the just thing to do?

My answer, to condense what I have been arguing for in the last four chapters, is the following: it is possible that these claims, that their reasons, are positionally relevant — because of the social, historical, cultural, and biological contingencies that only those who are Black individuals living in certain societies have. Given this possibility, we need to be able to assess two things: to what extent are those reasons and claims objective, and to what extent are our assessments objective. What I proposed in this dissertation is that we need to assess the reasons and claims from a diverse set of other positions, in order to put these reasons and claims in a wider context. And second, we need to do all this by engaging with specific positions that give raise to specific reasons of justice. Only then, I proposed, may we have some pretensions to objectivity.

More systematically, in Chapter I, I argued that there are reasons that are normatively relevant for objectivity that are dependent on agents' positions and their perspectives: namely, that these reasons are normatively significant given one's social, historical, cultural, and biological contingencies. In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, that means that, in order to assess their claims, we first need to establish and consider their reasons from the positions they occupy and the perspectives they have: it is at the positional level that we will find if these are normatively relevant.

In order to make this argument, in Chapter I, I started by rejecting the traditional objective/subjective reasons dichotomy that sets that reasons are objective if they are determined independently of specific agents, that apply to *any* agent according to how the world is taken to be as a matter of fact — for example, that the reasons for those involved in the Black Lives Matter movement to, for example, revolt against those they consider to be their oppressors, would only be objective if *any* agent could and should have those reasons. I argued that this conceptualisation of reasons is mistaken because it puts side by side reasons that have to do with specific agents, with reasons that have to do with the standpoint that agents should occupy according to what the world is taken to be as a matter of fact for anyone. In doing that, I suggested, the dichotomy ends up ignoring some reasons that are normatively relevant that are, in their very nature, position-dependent.

Instead, developing from Sen's conception of positional objectivity, I argued that the positions agents occupy — which, again, are influenced by social, cultural, historical, and biological contingencies — are normatively relevant, and that those reasons can be said to be objective if other agents in the same positions and sharing the same perspectives could also hold those reasons. In other words, I argued that these reasons are objective in virtue of the positions and perspectives from which they follow. These positional reasons, as I called them, are normatively relevant reasons that escape the traditional objective reasons/subjective reasons dichotomy: that is, the status of objectivity of these reasons is not determined by subjectivity nor impersonality, but by the positions one occupies. However, these positional reasons can only be said to be objective at the positional level, and not necessarily across all positions — they are *pro tanto* reasons, in this sense.

In short, reasons are relevant for objectivity across all positions if reasons are first objective at the positional level, *i.e.*, if reasons are positional reasons — they are normatively relevant and objective reasons, but only positionally. In this context, what it means for our evaluations to be just is to start by considering and assessing if, from the position of those who the Black Lives Matter movement represents, their reasons regarding their claims of justice are positionally objective.

In Chapter II I developed, following Sen, a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality: that is, objectivity — across all positions, and not just positionally as in Chapter I — corresponds to the assessment of those positional perspectives and from all other perspectives. When applied to normative reasons, I proposed, the trans-positional objectivity of a reason corresponds not to those reasons that are independent from specific agents' positions — that is, reasons that can be taken as such from the standpoint that matches how the world is taken to be as a matter of fact — but rather to its capacity to sustain scrutiny across positions. In other words, reasons that are person-invariant and position-invariant and that coherently follow from a collective evaluative perspective. These, I called, are trans-positional reasons.

Furthermore, in Chapter II, I developed a conception of objectivity as trans-positionality within a public reason framework where social justice claims should be justified in terms of trans-positional reasons. In other words,

on this account, public justification happens when we engage in trans-positional scrutiny of positional reasons. The outcome of that exercise determines which reasons are trans-positional reasons, and thus publicly justificatory reasons. As such, on this trans-positional account of public reason, it is the process of scrutiny that will allow us to move from what is normative and objective at the positional level to what is normative and objective at the trans-positional level.

Importantly, within the trans-positional account of public reason, public justification should be understood specifically in two complementary ways: the validity view and the correctness view. That is, although positional reasons should be considered for public justification, they need to be assessed for both their validity and correctness. If they withstand scrutiny on both these views, then, these reasons can be called trans-positional reasons. These two views correspond to the following: first, both reasons and perspectives need to be scrutinised for their validity according to other evaluative perspectives; second, reasons need to be scrutinised in the context of, and according to, the evaluative perspectives that generate them. In this way, although trans-positional reasons are those positional reasons that survive trans-positional scrutiny, this scrutiny has to be based on the perspective-understanding view of public reason — rather than the traditional understandings of public reasons as consensus or convergence. On the perspective-understanding view, reasons need to be understood in their own context by those scrutinising.

Returning to the BLM example, what this all means is that their reasons and claims may be objective if they are able to be considered in a wider context and survive trans-positional scrutiny, in which scrutiny means assessing reasons regarding both their validity and correctness. In order to do that, we need to understand these reasons according to the standpoints to which they are associated.

According to my argument from Chapters I and II, objectivity has to do with the positions agents occupy and with that, that after being trans-positionally assessed, is still valid and correct across positions. We thus come to answer one of the questions that I initially posed: we now know what it

means to be objective in our evaluations of justice, which is that we need to trans-positionally assess reasons and perspectives.

However, this is still an incomplete picture. What it is to be objective in this context, however, is not simply to exercise trans-positional scrutiny, but to actively engage with the position we may want to assess, such as those represented by the Black Lives Matter movement. In other words, it is not enough to say that we need to engage in trans-positional assessments; we need to make sure that we create the conditions for the possibility of scrutiny to be properly exercised; for scrutiny itself to be objective.

This was the topic of Chapters III and IV, where I argued that objectivity as trans-positionality requires that we embrace what I have called the engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny, and reject the requirement of detachment. What I proposed was that in order to appropriately exercise scrutiny we need to know and understand as best as possible the positions and perspectives we are scrutinising — in short, that we engage with them, rather than detach. My argument was that we should engage with other positions and perspectives by engaging in forms of democratic deliberation that rely on the use of different forms of communication with others, while including as many perspectives as possible in that exercise — this is what I called democratic engagement.

In Chapter IV, I complemented my account of the engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny by proposing that, not only we should democratically engage with other perspectives, we should also engage in forms of imaginative perspective-taking to better know and understand those positions. I specifically argued that we should engage in different forms of imaginative perspective-taking — either other-oriented (as empathic perspective-taking and non-empathic perspective-taking) or self-oriented — depending on the type of positions we want to understand better. To engage with others in this way is to open the possibility of better knowing and understanding the perspectives of those others.

In the context of the BLM movement example, this means that we cannot simply exercise trans-positional scrutiny of their reasons. Objectivity as trans-positionality further requires that we engage specifically with their positions. We need to create the conditions to judge the normativity and

objectivity of their reasons, which implies needing to know their evaluative perspectives and positionality. According to what I proposed in Chapters III and IV, engagement with other positions means two things. On the one hand, we are to consider their positions by deliberating with them, by listening to their narratives, to their testimonies, and to enquire dialogically about their positions and reasons. This means getting to know and understand their accounts of what it is to be a Black person in the United States (or Europe) and what it is to be forced to live in communities specifically targeted by the police, with high levels of unemployment and poverty, for example. On the other hand, we are to engage in imaginative perspective-taking, where we are to imagine being in their position and, in that way, imaginatively experience that position.

Only by embracing something like the engagement view of trans-positional scrutiny, I argued, can we say that we have created the conditions for the objectivity of our evaluations about justice. In the Introduction, I defined social justice as having to do with any matter that, in a social context, raises issues of how to treat what is similar similarly, and what is different differently. This means that if we want to guarantee that our judgments and decisions are just — that we are in a position to guarantee that certain things are treated similarly or differently as they should, according to some conception of justice to develop — at a minimum, we need to properly consider every reason, claim and perspective from other, different specific perspectives.

Objectivity as trans-positionality, as proposed in this dissertation, may seem like a very demanding conception of objectivity, it may even strike some as implying a naïve understanding of our moral and political lives. My argument was simply that if we have ambitions of objectivity in our judgments and decisions of justice, this is what objectivity requires of us. If we actually fulfil these requirements, or if actually have the inclinations to do so, is only a reflection of our ambitions to be able to claim that our judgments and decisions regarding social justice are objective, but not that they are indeed objective.

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