

Meta Ethics for the Metaverse: The Ethics of Virtual Worlds

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Abstract

After a brief introduction that sets out the overall argument of the paper in summary, the first part of paper will offer a meta-ethical framework based on the moral theory of Alan Gewirth, necessary for determining what, if any, ought to be the ethics that guide the conduct of people participating in virtual worlds in their roles as designers, administrators and players or avatars. As virtual worlds and the World Wide Web generally, is global in its scope, reach and use, Gewirth's theory which offers a supreme principle of morality, the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) that establishes universal rights for all persons always and everywhere, is particularly suitable for this task. The paper will show that persons both in the real world and in virtual worlds have rights to freedom and wellbeing. Strictly with regard to *agency* those rights are merely prima facie but with regard to *personhood* framed around the notion of *self-respect* those rights are absolute.

The second part of the paper, which is prescriptive and evaluative, will examine in more practical detail why and how designers, administrators and avatars of virtual worlds are rationally committed on the basis of their own intrinsic purposive agency to ethical norms of conduct that require the universal respect of the rights of freedom and well-being of all agents, including their own. Using Alan Gewirth's argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency (*Reason and Morality*, 1978) and my expanded argument for the PGC in my *Ethics Within Reason: A Neo-Gewirthian Approach* (2006), the paper will specifically seek to demonstrate that insofar as avatars are extensions of real people and thus can and must be perceived as virtual purposive agents, then they have moral rights and obligations similar to those of their real counterparts. Specifically, they are rationally committed to respecting the generic rights of freedom and wellbeing of all other virtual avatars, as their own must be respected. The paper will also show how conflicts that may arise between the rights of different avatars as well as conflicts that may arise between the rights of avatars on the one hand and those of administrators and designers on the other can in principle be resolved. Finally, the paper will show how the rules of virtual worlds as instantiated by the designers' code and the administrators' end-user license agreement (EULA), must always be consistent with and comply with the requirements of universal morality as established on the basis of the PGC. When the two come into conflict, the PGC, as the supreme principle of morality, is always overriding.

1. Introduction: the Overall Argument of the Paper in Summary

For the purpose of this paper I shall define virtual worlds as "persistent, computer-mediated environments in which a plurality of players can interact with the world and each other" (Bartle 2006: 31). *Second Life*, *EverQuest*, *Dark Age of Camelot*, *The Sims Online*, *Ultima Online*, *Star War Galaxies*, *Lineage* and the *World of WarCraft*, among many others, are such virtual worlds. Do players of virtual worlds and their avatar representatives in those worlds have rights? In this paper I shall argue that they do. Taking my cue from Ralph Koster's "declaration of the rights of avatars" (Koster 2006: 55-56) I shall base my claim on Alan Gewirth's argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) which demonstrates that all purposive agents have *generic rights* to freedom and wellbeing (Gewirth, 1978). I shall

adopt that argument to demonstrate that insofar as avatars can be viewed as the virtual representations of the persons that instantiate them in the real world, and these persons have goals or purposes which they seek to fulfill within the environments of virtual worlds through their avatars, then they and by extension their avatars are acting purposively and as such have rights to freedom and wellbeing. These rights, being only prima facie implies that they cannot be used by agents or their avatars to violate the legitimate rights of other purposive agents or their avatars. When conflicts arise between the rights of one agent (henceforth, unless otherwise stated, I shall use the inclusive term “agent” to refer to both the real person and their virtual representation, their avatar) and those of another, I shall argue that these conflicts can be resolved, at least in principle, on the basis of Gewirth’s supporting argument for the Degree of the Necessity for Action Principle (DNA principle) that states that agent A’s rights should take priority over those of agent B’s when the objects of those rights, namely, freedom and wellbeing, are more necessary for purposive action and successful action in particular than they are with regard to those of agent B’s.

I shall argue, moreover, that although only prima facie with regard to agency, rights to freedom and wellbeing become absolute and inalienable when they refer to the dignity of persons. Thus although an agent’s avatar could be justified in violating (I shall refer to a justified violation of rights as an *infringement*) the generic rights of another agent’s avatar by killing them in a duel or combat let us say, especially when the code of the virtual world and EULA allows for that to happen or at least does not disallow it, no agent is ever justified in violating the rights of another agent by undermining their dignity or self-respect by some widely recognized act of degradation or denigration, such as racial vilification or rape, for example. Although rape undoubtedly violates the rights to freedom and wellbeing of its victim and is therefore unethical on that score alone, it may not always cause any significant physical harm to that agent, as it would, for example, if the agent suffered a physical assault that resulted in the bashing or stabbing of the agent. However, insofar as rape can (in some specified sense) take place in a virtual world, the victim of such virtual rape may be psychologically and emotionally harmed to such an extent that they are made to feel degraded. In such a case, the raped agent’s sense of dignity and self-worth as a person may be seriously impaired. Insofar as rape whether real or virtual degrades a person’s dignity as a person, rape violates not only the prima facie generic rights of a person qua agent but also their absolute rights to their self-respect qua person worthy of inherent respect. This is the greater harm to the victims of rape and one of the most serious moral wrongs that one person can inflict on another.

I shall argue that in general, the code of a virtual world (VW) together with its EULA may allow or at least not disallow virtual “crimes” such as theft or killing that infringe an avatars’ rights, provided those virtual crimes are in keeping with the accepted rules of the game played in that virtual world in accordance with the VW’s code and EULA. However, a code or EULA should never allow and must always disallow virtual crimes in a virtual world or other acts that degrade or can potentially degrade the dignity of an avatar’s person, such as virtual rape for example, even if this is intended as merely part of a game within a virtual world. With regard to absolute rights that a person has to one’s dignity, morality between the real world and a virtual world is always permeable and porous, although it may be less so in the case of crimes that although may infringe an avatar’s generic rights in a virtual world, such as theft and killing, do not violate but maintain respect for the avatar’s absolute rights to their dignity as a person, which by extension refers to the dignity of the person that instantiates the avatar in the real world. Thus contrary to Edward Castronova (Castranova 2006: 79) I wish to argue that morally speaking virtual worlds can never be “closed” with regard to what affects

or could potentially affect the personal dignity of avatars and their persons (the persons who instantiate them in the real world). There is, in another words, no moral *magic circle* as per Castranova (Castranova 2006: 68) separating virtual worlds from the real world, specifically with regard to the absolute rights that agents have to their dignity as persons, both within and without the boundaries of virtual worlds. With regard to morality but not always with regard to the law, there is an ethical continuum that runs between virtual worlds and the real world. An insult that causes offence can be just as hurtful within a virtual world as it can in a real world. An insult can potentially be morally *real* in both worlds.

I am in agreement with Jack Balkin that “the boundaries between the game space and real space are permeable” (Balkin 2006: 91). However, adopting a middle position between Edward Casranova and Jack Balkin, I claim that virtual worlds can under appropriate *interration laws* (Castranova 2006) as instantiated by the virtual world’s code and EULA allow for some closure that renders avatars that steal from or kill other avatars, immune from both moral culpability and legal sanction, especially if such actions are accepted by the avatars themselves as being part of the game space and game plan of the VW. In exercising their right to free association and the right to freedom to play in virtual worlds that in their view enhances both their sense of freedom and wellbeing, avatars may choose to waive their prima facie rights to freedom and wellbeing that in the real world would preclude others from stealing from them and even killing them. Within a virtual world such actions may be permitted as being part of the “game” and thus morally acceptable within the *role morality* of the VW. However, nothing within a virtual world that in some way degrades the personal dignity of an avatar, such as rape, for example, may be permitted, even when it is in accordance with the role morality of the VW as instantiated by the VW’s code and EULA, as this would allow the violation of the absolute rights of avatars, which is never acceptable. Thus a VW whose code and EULA allows rape as part of its game structure is never morally acceptable as this constitutes a violation of absolute rights to freedom and wellbeing with regard to personal dignity that the avatars themselves cannot abrogate or waive, either actually or symbolically. Personal dignity as instantiated by absolute rights to freedom and wellbeing, either in the real world or in virtual worlds, is always and everywhere non-negotiable, at least in principle.

What would determine generally whether a virtual crime is morally acceptable or not is whether the crime is a *feature* of the virtual world (VW) which is allowed or at least not disallowed by the code and EULA of the VW or an *exploit*, a virtual crime which is not allowed or even intended to be allowed by either the code and the EULA of the VW (Bartle 2006: 42). When exploits come to light, they would have to be stopped through an adjustment to the code of the VW thus allowing the VW to maintain its relative closure against external moral and legal sanctions as suggested by Castranova.

However, an additional and overriding proviso that needs to be emphasized is that the code and EULA of a virtual world must always be consistent with and not contravene the requirements of the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC), especially as they apply to respect for the absolute rights to freedom and wellbeing that all avatars have with respect to their dignity as persons. Thus a virtual world’s code or EULA is never justified in creating a *role morality* for itself that contravenes the universal morality supported by the PGC. The latter, because universal and foundational, being based on the PGC as the supreme principle of morality, will always take moral priority and override the *role morality* of any virtual world that allows for example, virtual rape, even though this is allowed by its interrations laws as

instantiated by its code and EULA. In other words, the interrelation laws of a virtual world must themselves be consistent with and not contravene the PGC.

2. The Rights of Agents: Alan Gewirth's Argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency¹

2.1 The Normative Structure of Action (Gewirth, 1978, 48–128)

Gewirth's main thesis is that every rational agent, in virtue of engaging in action, is logically committed to accept a supreme moral principle, the Principle of Generic Consistency. The basis of his thesis is found in his doctrine that action has a normative structure, and because of this structure every rational agent, just in virtue of being an agent, is committed to certain necessary prudential and moral constraints.

Gewirth undertakes to prove his claim that every agent,² *qua* agent, is committed to certain prudential and moral constraints in virtue of the normative structure of action in three main stages. First, he undertakes to show that by virtue of engaging in voluntary and purposive action, every agent makes certain implicitly evaluative judgments about the goodness of his purposes, and hence about the necessary goodness of his freedom and wellbeing, which are the necessary conditions for the fulfillment of his purposes. Secondly, he undertakes to show that by virtue of the necessary goodness which an agent attaches to his freedom and wellbeing, the agent implicitly claims that he has rights to these. Thirdly, Gewirth undertakes to show that every agent must claim these rights in virtue of the sufficient reason that he is a *prospective purposive agent* (PPA) who has purposes he wants to fulfill. Furthermore, every agent must accept that, since he has rights to his freedom and wellbeing for the sufficient reason that he is a PPA, he is logically committed to also accept the rational generalization that all PPAs have rights to freedom and wellbeing (1978, 48).

2.2 Stage I

In stage I of the argument, Gewirth argues that since purposive action is conative, in that the agent aims by his action to bring about certain purposes which he wants to attain, it follows, from the agent's own conativeness, that the purposes for which he acts *seem* to him to be good. Therefore, the agent implicitly makes a value judgment about the goodness of his purposes. Thus an agent's statement:

1. I do X for purpose E

entails dialectically from the agent's own standpoint:

2. E is good (1978, 49).

In what sense does an agent consider his purposes to be "good"? He considers them to be good in the sense of wanting to bring them about; he regards his purposes as worth aiming at or pursuing. To the extent that an agent is not indifferent to his purposes, and that he has some volition or desire for bringing them about (otherwise why would he even attempt to attain those purposes?),³ the agent exhibits either dispositionally, as when he reflects on certain purposes which he wishes to attain, or actually, when he acts to bring them about, a certain favorable interest or pro-attitude towards those purposes. And in having this favorable interest

or pro-attitude, in the minimal sense of merely wanting to bring them about, the agent values those purposes. His valuing those purposes need not be moral or in any other way deontic. His valuing need only be instrumental, since it is only this minimal instrumental sense of valuing—wanting to attain certain purposes—which is directly relevant to the agent as agent *simpliciter*. In wanting to bring about certain purposes, the agent attaches a positive value to those purposes, irrespective of whether they are moral or immoral; the agent’s valuing of his purposes, in this minimally instrumental sense, is independent of the further consideration whether the purposes which he values, on the basis of his wanting or wishing to attain them, are moral or immoral, or deontic in some other sense. Thus the agent’s valuing of his purposes is constituted by the agent’s wanting to attain them, and his wanting to attain those purposes suffices to attach value to them. And it is because the agent values his purposes that he considers them good—“good”, that is, in the morally neutral and instrumental or inclinational sense of the term. As Gewirth puts it:

the primary, although by no means the only, basis of judging something to be good is precisely its connection with one’s pro-attitude or positive interest or desire whereby one regards the object as worthy of pursuit. And since it is admittedly some desire, at least in the intentional sense of wanting, that provides one’s purpose in acting, it follows that an agent acts for a purpose that constitutes his reason for acting and that seems to him to be good on some criterion he implicitly accepts insofar as he has that purpose. (1978, 50)

Note that an agent who regards his purposes as good *qua* agent (that is, values his purposes merely in his capacity as agent who has certain purposes that he wants to fulfill) might hold those purposes to be morally bad. This, however, would not involve the agent in any logical inconsistency. For the agent might, in choosing to act for certain purposes which he wants to bring about, and to which he attaches a positive value on certain non-moral grounds, act to bring them about in accordance with those morally neutral grounds, notwithstanding that the agent’s moral evaluation of his own purposes was counter to his wanting to bring about those purposes. In short, any rationalizing reflection by the agent on his purposes might be separate and independent to what motivates him to carry out those purposes, at least instrumentally, and his reflective rationalizing reasons might not always coincide with his motivating reasons. But it is the proximate motivating reasons in accordance with which the agent acts which, from his own standpoint, render the purposes for which he acts good. To the extent that those motivating reasons are morally neutral, the purposes for which the agent acts might turn out to be immoral—and even evaluated as such by the agent himself. In sum, it is in virtue of being a prospective agent *simpliciter*, who wants to bring about certain purposes and acts to bring them about, that the agent values his purposes and considers them good. And this is compatible with any *specific* viewpoint that the agent might have. That viewpoint could be moral, immoral, amoral, or any other sort whatsoever. The crucial point is that what renders the agent’s purposes good *for him* is his *wanting* to fulfill them, irrespective of what the specific viewpoint and psychological states that motivate him to have and pursue those purposes are. Insofar as the agent acts purposively, the agent’s actions will seem good to him (in Gewirth’s minimal instrumental sense of “good”), whether the agent’s specific viewpoint is that of a criminal or a saint.

Gewirth’s notion of value, which is relative to the prospective agent’s individual standpoint, is similar to the notion of subjective value which David Gauthier employs in his *Morals by Agreement* (1986). However, the results for morality that the two philosophers draw from their respective subjective notions are very different. Gauthier bases his theory of morality on

instrumental rationality, which allows for a wide scope for variation in moral conduct between agents, and can only be provided with a common moral denominator through some mutually acceptable contractarian agreement which sets constraints on the moral variation allowable. Gewirth, by contrast, bases his theory of morality primarily on deductive reason, which provides determinate and independent constraints on moral conduct which preclude, in principle, the subjective variability present in Gauthier's and other moral theories that do not provide conclusive and independent criteria of moral rightness. This is one of the major strengths of Gewirth's theory. In making value relative to the individual agent's standpoint, he establishes the motivational foundation for his moral theory. By basing morality on deductive reason, he provides determinate and independent rational criteria sufficient for establishing a common moral denominator that applies to every agent, irrespective of the contingent variabilities in the individual agents' subjective viewpoints. Thus although the rational justification for the common moral denominator of Gewirth's moral theory issues from within the subjective viewpoint of each individual agent, that rational justification applies universally to all agents.

The next and final part in stage I of Gewirth's argument is to show that the agent's positive evaluation of his purposes as good encompasses not only the agent's particular purposes but also the generic features that characterize all his actions. Since voluntariness or freedom, one of the two generic features of action, is essential in acting for any purpose which an agent considers good, he must regard the freedom, which allows him to act on his intended purposes, as also good. For without voluntariness or freedom he would not be able to carry out any of his purposes. According to Gewirth, the freedom which every agent needs in virtue of being an agent—that is, in virtue of having purposes which he wants to fulfill—is both *occurrent* and *dispositional*. It is *occurrent* in that it consists in the agent's control of each of his particular behaviors by his unforced choice, and it is *dispositional* in that it consists in his long-term ability to exercise such control. Thus, in virtue of being an agent, an agent attaches an instrumental value to his freedom as being an essential feature of his agency.

The other essential generic feature of action is purposiveness. Since an agent values each of the particular purposes which he pursues, in the minimal sense of intending to bring them about, he must also value the general purposiveness which, as a generic feature of all action, is essential to the pursuit and accomplishment of all his particular purposes. In turn, the agent must also value certain essential abilities and conditions which enable him to act on this general purposiveness. These essential abilities and conditions consist in the agent's wellbeing. Thus the agent's positive evaluation of his particular purposes and his general purposiveness as such extends to his own wellbeing, which is an essential condition for acting on any of his purposes. For without wellbeing, an agent cannot pursue any of those purposes.

Gewirth identifies wellbeing primarily with the general abilities and conditions required by an agent for attaining any of his purposes. These are the general necessary preconditions of action, and comprise certain physical and psychological dispositions which include life, physical integrity, and mental equilibrium. Gewirth refers to these as the *basic goods*. They are necessary for all purposive action, notwithstanding what other particular and variable components individual agents might consider as part of their wellbeing. According to Gewirth, wellbeing can be viewed in two ways: *particularly-occurrently* or *generically-dispositionally*. Viewed in the former way, wellbeing relates to particular purposes that any agent wants to attain through his actions by maintaining his basic goods (*basic goods*), retaining the particular goods he already has (*non-subtractive goods*), and obtaining further goods (*additive goods*). On the other hand, viewed in the latter way, the three different kinds

of good consist in the general conditions and abilities required for fulfilling any particular purposes whatsoever. It is in this latter sense of wellbeing—that is, wellbeing viewed generically-dispositionally—that an agent values it as agent *simpliciter*. For it is his wellbeing, which consists in certain general necessary abilities and conditions, which enable him, as agent, to pursue any purposes which he wants to fulfill. As generically-dispositional, wellbeing refers not to certain particular goods essential for particular purposes for which individual agents occurrently act, but to the abilities and conditions which enable an agent to act for any purposes which he might wish to attain now and in the future.

In sum, the wellbeing necessary for agency as such, irrespective of the diverse particular purposes which different agents wish to attain, consists of: the basic goods (life, health, and so on) which are necessary preconditions of an action; certain necessary general abilities and conditions required for maintaining and retaining the agent's non-subtractive goods and their associated capabilities of action; and advancing, improving, and increasing the agent's additive goods and their associated capabilities of action.

Because every agent needs these general capabilities of action (the basic, the non-subtractive, and the additive) viewed generically-dispositionally, in order to pursue particular purposes which he wishes to attain, it follows that since the agent considers his particular purposes good merely in virtue of intending to carry them out, he must consider the general capabilities which enable him to carry out those purposes as also good. Thus the agent, in his basic capacity as agent, must positively value his wellbeing, which is primarily constituted by those general capabilities of action. Furthermore, because his wellbeing, as constituted by these general capabilities of action, is required for all purposive action, the agent must regard his wellbeing not merely as a good but also as a necessary good, since without it he cannot act as an agent.

Because freedom and wellbeing are the necessary generic features of agency, every agent must hold dialectically, from within his own internal standpoint, that his freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods of his agency. Thus every agent must accept, dialectically:

3. My freedom and wellbeing are generically necessary conditions of my agency

which entails:

4. My freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods.

The whole argument for stage I can now be stated dialectically from within the standpoint of every putative prospective agent:

1. I do X for purpose E

entails:

2. E is good

—where “good”, as we saw above, refers to the minimal subjective instrumental goodness which an agent attaches to all his particular purposes by virtue of merely being positively inclined to carry them out. That is, “good” refers to the minimal subjective instrumental

evaluation inherent in the dispositional purposiveness which an agent exhibits with regard to all his chosen actions.

3. My freedom and wellbeing are generically necessary conditions of my agency

and (2) and (3) entail:

4. My freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods (1978, 61).

2.3 Stage II

In stage II, Gewirth sets out to demonstrate that if it is dialectically necessary from within my internal viewpoint as a purposive agent to hold that my freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods (entailment 4 above), I am also logically required, again from within my own internal viewpoint, to hold that I have rights to my freedom and wellbeing (1978, 63). This is the most important and controversial stage in Gewirth's argument, and thus requires a careful examination of the various steps involved. First I will present Gewirth's argument for stage II, and then offer a brief summary of his explanation and elucidation of some of the key terms and components in that argument.

Gewirth offers two main versions for his argument for stage II, a general argument which he refers to as his "direct argument" (1978, 78) and a variation of that argument, based on the logical principle of noncontradiction (1978, 80). I shall refer to this second argument, and variations of it which Gewirth sometimes presents in *Reason and Morality* and some of his other writings,⁴ as the *argument from self-contradiction*. Both arguments are important in understanding Gewirth's claim in stage II that every agent, *qua* agent, must hold that he has rights to freedom and wellbeing.

The Direct Argument

From stage I of Gewirth's argument for the PGC, we saw that every agent in virtue of being an agent—that is, agent *simpliciter*—must rationally hold dialectically from within his own internal standpoint:

4. My freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods.

Because freedom and wellbeing are the necessary conditions of agency, every agent needs, as agent, freedom and wellbeing to carry out any action whatsoever, so (4) entails:

5. All other persons ought, at least, to refrain from interfering with my having freedom and wellbeing.

Because of the logical correlativity between strict "oughts" and right-claims (specifically, the "generic rights" pertaining to freedom and wellbeing), (5) entails:

6. I have rights to freedom and wellbeing (1978, 78–80).

The Argument from Self-Contradiction

Suppose some agent denied or refused to accept, from his own internal standpoint, judgment (6) "I have rights to freedom and wellbeing." Because of the equivalence between right-claims (specifically, the generic rights of freedom and wellbeing) and strict "oughts", the

denial of (6) would entail the agent's denial of (5) "All other persons ought at least to refrain from interfering with my freedom and wellbeing." By denying (5), the agent would have to deny (4) "My freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods." But this he cannot deny, for as we saw above, the agent, in virtue of being an agent who has purposes he wants to fulfill, must regard his freedom and wellbeing as necessary goods for achieving any of his purposes, since freedom and wellbeing are the necessary conditions of agency (stage I above). Hence by having to accept (4), the agent must accept (5). Since (5) is logically equivalent to (6), the agent contradicts himself if he denies (6). The agent must therefore accept, on pain of self-contradiction, that he has the generic rights, namely to freedom and wellbeing (1978, 80).

In order to make more explicit the agent's logical self-contradiction involved in his non-acceptance that he has the generic rights, Gewirth presents a further variation which combines some of the essential features from both the direct argument and the argument from self-contradiction. Because this version of Gewirth's argument provides further elucidation of the previous two versions, I shall include it here for additional clarification of the key moves in those arguments. For referential convenience, I shall label this third argument the *argument from generic consistency*, although this is not how Gewirth himself refers to it.

The Argument from Generic Consistency

Since freedom and wellbeing are the necessary conditions of action (the conclusion of the argument in stage I), no agent can act to fulfill any of his purposes without having these conditions. It follows, therefore, that every agent has to accept, from within his own internal standpoint, (1) "I must have freedom and wellbeing", where the "must" used here is what Gewirth refers to as a practical-prescriptive "must", for it signifies the agent's implied *advocacy* of having what he needs in order to act. By accepting (1) he also has to accept (2) "I have rights to freedom and wellbeing." For if he denies (2) because of the logical correlativity of right-claims (specifically, the generic rights) and strict "oughts", he also has to deny (3) "All other persons ought at least to refrain from interfering with my freedom and wellbeing", and by denying (3) he has to accept (4) "Other persons may (It is permissible that other persons) interfere with my freedom and wellbeing." By accepting (4), he has also to accept (5) "I may not (It is permissible that I not) have freedom and wellbeing." But (5) contradicts (1). Since, however, every agent, in virtue of being an agent who has purposes he wants to achieve, must accept (1), he must deny (5). And since (5) follows from the denial of (2), the agent must reject that denial and so he must accept (2) "I have rights to freedom and wellbeing."

In sum, the above three versions of Gewirth's defense for stage II of the argument for the PGC purport to show that from any agent's standpoint, the necessity of having freedom and wellbeing entails the necessity of noninterference by other persons of his having those conditions. This necessity in turn entails at least a strict *instrumental* "ought" addressed implicitly by the agent to other agents, which in turn entails, by the logical correlativity of strict "oughts" and right-claims, a claim by the agent that he has rights to the necessary conditions of freedom and wellbeing. Furthermore, any agent who does not accept that he has these rights involves himself in self-contradiction, since he holds that he need not have what as an agent he necessarily needs, namely, freedom and wellbeing (1978, 81).

This completes the exposition of stage II of Gewirth's argument for the PGC. However before we proceed to look at his argument for stage III, we need to first examine Gewirth's explanations and elucidations of some of the key terms and components in his argument for stage II.

Rights and Obligations

According to Gewirth, there is a conceptual connection between rights and the necessary conditions of action, namely, freedom and wellbeing. Because the agent, *qua* agent, necessarily requires freedom and wellbeing in order to fulfill any of his chosen purposes, the agent has, from within his own subjective viewpoint, a justifying reason for requiring other persons not to interfere with his freedom and wellbeing. In other words, the necessity with which he must regard his freedom and wellbeing creates for each agent, from within his own internal viewpoint, an entitlement⁵ to those conditions. Furthermore, in virtue of this necessity, every agent feels entitled to require other persons not to interfere with his freedom and wellbeing. This requirement, which is implicitly advocated by every agent in the form of an “ought”-judgment—that is, “All other persons ought at least not to interfere with my freedom and wellbeing”—is logically correlated to the right-claims pertaining to freedom and wellbeing which every agent, in virtue of being an agent, feels entitled to make. Gewirth refers to these rights, which every agent needs in his capacity as agent, as *generic rights*, since these are rights that essentially issue from the generic features of action.

The claim which every agent makes to his rights for freedom and wellbeing might only be implicit or dispositional; a matter of attitude of how the agent regards himself in relation to other persons. What is, however, essential is that every agent, by being a rational agent who values his purposes, recognizes that, as an agent, he is entitled to the necessary conditions of freedom and wellbeing, and that others ought not to interfere with his having those conditions. For without freedom and wellbeing he will be unable to achieve any of his chosen purposes. Thus, according to Gewirth, it is this recognized and implicitly advocated entitlement by each agent which directly constitutes the nature of the rights that each agent claims for himself *qua* agent. This entitlement is due to each agent not on the basis of any specific or implied prior contractarian agreement between him and other agents, but on the basis of his own rational recognition that as an agent he must have freedom and wellbeing.

It is important to recognize the difference between Gewirth’s rationalist thesis and the rationalist thesis of contractarianism in its various forms. Whereas for contractarian theories principles of justice or morality are based on some prior implied or tacit agreement between consenting agents for their mutual benefit, Gewirth’s Principle of Generic Consistency is based on the generic rights which issue from the necessary conditions of action. Since every agent of necessity needs freedom and wellbeing to function as an agent, the generic rights, which every agent must lay claim to in virtue of being a rational agent, provide an independent and objective basis for morality. Such an independent basis is absent from contractarian moral theories, whose own basis for the moral principles they support is dependent on the prior agreement of the contracting agents, an agreement which might vary between different contracting groups that have different contingent interests. A crucial factor which renders Gewirth’s theory of moral rightness superior to contractarian theories of morality is that although Gewirth’s supreme moral principle is addressed to individual rational agents, the agreement or assent of those agents is not required for the rational justification of that principle. That is, the rational justification of Gewirth’s moral principle, the Principle of Generic Consistency, issues not from the collective notional agreement of the agents to whom it is addressed, but from certain logical constraints which the necessary contents of action, namely, freedom and wellbeing, impose on every rational agent. Every agent needs to have freedom and wellbeing, and every agent is entitled to have them, in virtue of being an agent, irrespective of whether or not others agree to his having them. In other words, the generic rights which every agent is entitled to in virtue of being an agent are based on objective criteria. These are logically derivable from the essential features of action in

which morality is located, and whose justification is provided independently of any prior contractarian-type agreement. All that is required for the rational justification of Gewirth's moral principle is the individual agent's rational understanding of the logical implications which issue from his recognition that action has certain necessary generic features that generate both values and entitlements for any individual agent engaging actually or dispositionally in action. At the conclusion of stage II, these entitlements, because primarily self-regarding, are merely prudential. At the conclusion of stage III, as we shall see, these entitlements, being also other-regarding, are shown to be moral.

Another important feature of Gewirth's notion of rights is that, in the first instance at least, they need only be prudential, with no moral or legal implications. Thus, according to Gewirth, the generic rights which an agent claims for himself at the conclusion of stage II are primarily prudential rights because they issue from the prudential necessary need that each agent has for his freedom and wellbeing. According to Gewirth, since morality by definition encompasses not only one's own interests but also the interests of others, the generic rights referred to at the end of stage II of the argument for the PGC are essentially prudential. They are prudential because they merely refer to the self-regarding agency interests of the individual agent as viewed by the agent himself from within his own internal standpoint, but do not, at least not at this stage of the argument, refer to the interests of other agents. In other words, by being self-regarding and not other-regarding, the rights referred to in stage II of Gewirth's argument are merely prudential and not moral. It is only in stage III of the argument that those rights become other-regarding and thus moral.

Another feature of the generic rights which every agent must lay claim to in virtue of being an agent is that their correlative "oughts" or obligations, addressed by every agent to other agents from within his own internal standpoint, are *strict* "oughts." They are strict because they issue from the necessary conditions of action which every agent needs in order to function in his capacity as agent. Their strictness or mandatoriness is a logical consequence of the fact that the objects of the generic rights are not merely optional goods which one can do without, but are the necessary goods of freedom and wellbeing which every agent, irrespective of his own particular purposes, must have in order to function as an agent. Since freedom and wellbeing are constitutive of his agency, they provide the agent with a conclusive rational justification for claiming a right to them, and directing a correlative strict "ought"-judgment to other agents not to interfere with his possession of those necessary goods.

One very interesting aspect of Gewirth's moral theory is that by basing morality on the necessary conditions of action, he manages to combine rights with values and a subjective notion of the good. Gewirth shows the connection between rights, values, and the good by first demonstrating that action is evaluative, by virtue of every agent acting in order to achieve purposes which he considers from within his own internal viewpoint to be good. This, as we saw, was stage I of Gewirth's argument. The connection between values, the good, and rights is demonstrated by Gewirth in stage II of his argument by showing that in having purposes which he values and regards as good, the agent needs his freedom and wellbeing not to be interfered with by others, since he would be unable to achieve any of his purposes which he values and considers good unless he has the necessary conditions of action. It is the recognition of the necessity of the generic conditions of action which entitles the agent, from within his own internal standpoint, to claim rights to those generic conditions and direct a correlative obligation to others, by way of an implied strict "ought"-judgment, not to interfere with his generic rights to freedom and wellbeing. Thus, in demonstrating that action has an evaluative as well as a deontic structure, Gewirth manages to connect the notion of right to the

notions of value and the good as viewed subjectively from within the internal standpoint of every prospective purposive agent (PPA). This is of crucial importance, because by locating the good and the right inside the standpoint of each rational agent, it becomes easier for Gewirth to explain how a theory of morality based primarily on deductive and inductive reason can motivate an agent to behave morally.

In sum, stage II of the argument for the PGC purports to show that the concept of a right is essentially connected with action. From the internal standpoint of an agent, his statement “I do X for purpose E” entails the further statements “E is good”, “My freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods”, and “I have rights to freedom and wellbeing.” Thus by his conceptual analysis of the necessary generic features of action, Gewirth has demonstrated how evaluative and deontic judgments can be logically derived from a set of factual observations regarding the essential characteristics of action (1978, 102).

2.4 Stage III

The aim of stage III of Gewirth’s argument is to establish, through the employment of the principle of universalizability, that every agent is logically committed to extend the generic rights he claims for himself to all other PPAs, and thus prove the truth of his supreme principle of morality, the Principle of Generic Consistency: “Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself” (1978, 135). Gewirth’s argument for stage III comprises three components: a *criterion of relevant similarity*; the formal *principle of universalizability*; and the *argument from the sufficiency of agency*.

We saw that the conclusion of stage II of Gewirth’s argument, premise (6) “I have rights to freedom and wellbeing”, is a statement that every agent must accept from within his own internal standpoint. Now the agent’s understanding of himself as a PPA, who needs to have freedom and wellbeing in order to act for his purposes, is both a necessary and a sufficient condition of the justifying reason he must provide as ground for his claim to have the generic rights (1978, 109). It is a necessary condition because every agent performs his actions in virtue of having purposes whose achievement he subjectively regards as good. For if agents had no purposes which they valued, they would not claim any rights, including the generic rights to freedom and wellbeing. It is a sufficient condition because it is strictly in virtue of being a PPA who needs freedom and wellbeing that an agent claims to have the generic rights. By not claiming the generic rights he contradicts himself. For he claims at once that he is an agent and that he does not require the very conditions essential to his agency. Hence it is the agent’s understanding of himself as a PPA which constitutes, from his own internal viewpoint, the necessary and sufficient justifying reason for his claim to the generic rights. As a result, every agent must accept (7) “I have rights to freedom and wellbeing because I am a PPA.” It is this description of himself by the agent which constitutes the *criterion of relevant similarity*. For it is this description which logically entails, through the principle of universalizability, that the generic rights the agent claims for himself, as a PPA, are rights which he must also extend to all other persons who are relevantly similar to himself—that is, to other persons who are prospective purposive agents (1978, 109).

Now suppose, however, that some agent were to hold instead that he has the generic rights only because of a certain more restrictive characteristic R. Examples abound, but let us say R stood for being an Australian, or a Catholic, or a millionaire, or Rupert Murdoch, or what not. In that case, the agent would be claiming (7a) “I have rights to freedom and wellbeing *only*

because I am R.” Such an agent, however, would contradict himself, for he would in effect be claiming that if he were not R then he would not have the generic rights. But since by being a PPA he must hold that he has those rights, simply in virtue of being such an agent, he cannot also hold the view that R alone is the sufficient justifying reason of his having the generic rights. So to avoid contradicting himself, the agent must accept that simply being a PPA is a sufficient as well as a necessary justifying condition of his having rights to freedom and wellbeing, and that he would have those rights even if he did not have the more restrictive characteristic R. This is Gewirth’s “argument from the sufficiency of agency”, so called because it states that the fact of being a PPA who has purposes whose fulfillment he regards as good provides, for any agent, a sufficient as well as a necessary justifying reason for his implicit claim to have the generic rights (1978, 110).

Given the sufficiency of agency as the justifying reason for claiming to have the generic rights, and applying the principle of universalizability, the agent must accept (8) “All PPAs have rights to freedom and wellbeing.” It is by the application of the principle of universalizability that (8) follows from (7). The principle states that if some predicate P belongs to some subject S *because* that subject has some quality Q (where this “because” stands for a sufficient condition), then that predicate must belong to every other subject that has Q. Therefore, since the original agent has claimed that the predicate of having the generic rights belongs to him *because* he is a PPA, he is rationally committed to admitting that every PPA has the generic rights. If the agent were to deny this generalization, he would contradict himself, for he would at once affirm and deny that being a PPA is a sufficient condition of having rights to freedom and wellbeing.

As we saw from the argument for stage II, the claiming of generic rights entails correlative duties or obligations addressed by the agent claiming the rights to other agents that they ought at least to refrain from interfering with those rights. Since the agent must accept the generalized rights-statement “All PPAs have rights to freedom and wellbeing”, he must, if he is not to contradict himself, also accept (9) “I ought at least to refrain from interfering with the freedom and wellbeing of any PPA”, where the transition from “all” to “any” is secured by the fact that the “all” in the generalization is distributive and not collective. That is, it refers to each and every agent, and therefore to any prospective purposive agent (1978, 133).

Now since all other PPAs are actual or potential recipients of an agent’s actions, every agent is rationally committed to accepting the general moral principle (10) “Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself.” Gewirth refers to this statement as the Principle of Generic Consistency, for it combines the *formal* consideration of consistency and the *material* consideration of rights with the generic features or goods of action. Gewirth calls these two components of the PGC, the formal and the material, the *generic* rules (1978, 135).

In a nutshell, the PGC states that since the generic features of action constitute the necessary structure of action, a structure that not only generates descriptive but also prescriptive statements, and since the agent must hold from within his own internal standpoint that he has rights to these necessary features of action simply by virtue of being a PPA, the agent is rationally committed to accepting that his recipients, insofar as they too are actual or potential PPAs, also have those rights (1978, 135).

2.5 A Summarized Outline of Gewirth's Argument for the PGC

We are now in a position to present a summarized outline of Gewirth's argument for the PGC. Every PPA has to rationally accept from within his own internal standpoint the following statements and their consequent logical entailments:

Stage I

1. I do X for purpose E.

(1) entails:

2. E is good

3. My freedom and wellbeing are generically necessary conditions of my agency.

(2) and (3) entail:

4. My freedom and wellbeing are necessary goods.

Stage II

(4) entails:

5. All other persons ought, at least, to refrain from interfering with my having freedom and wellbeing

and (5) entails:

6. I have rights to freedom and wellbeing.

Stage III

Applying the argument from the sufficiency of agency to (6) entails:

7. I have rights to freedom and wellbeing because I am a PPA

and applying the principle of universalizability to (7) entails:

8. All PPAs have rights to freedom and wellbeing.

(8) entails:

9. I ought at least to refrain from interfering with the freedom and wellbeing of any and every PPA

from which it follows that every agent is rationally committed to accepting the general moral principle, the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC):

10. Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself.

The above summary of Gewirth's presentation of his argument for the PGC concludes this section.

3. The Absolute Right to Personal Dignity

3.1 The Concept of Self-Respect

A Case Study

Consider a person, call him Arthur, who has, after due consideration, chosen to commit suicide. He is experiencing great suffering caused by some debilitating disease and decides that he no longer wishes to live under those conditions. There have been real cases where persons have, after due consideration, chosen to take their own lives for the kind of reasons I mention here, so that my example is realistic and not merely fanciful. It is unfortunately *too* realistic.

Having decided to take his own life, Arthur reasons as follows: "I am in great pain; my quality of life has deteriorated to the point where I can no longer do the things I used to enjoy doing; I feel I have become a burden on others; I have always been self-reliant and now I have to rely on others even for the most rudimentary tasks; I feel I can no longer maintain my dignity⁶ under the present circumstances; I have been informed by the doctors that my present condition will not get better, in fact the most reliable prognosis is that it will deteriorate further. I wish to determine my own course of action whilst I am still able to do so, rationally and calmly. I shall, therefore, exit this life in a rational and dignified manner. No one must try to stop me. I know it's against the law but it's my life and I must be free to end it since it's no longer possible to live well under the present circumstances. I know that death is bad but in my case it would be a relief. No one ought to interfere with my plans to take my own life. My freedom and my mental wellbeing are all I have left. I must be allowed to at least retain my dignity. I know, however, that the law being what it is, others will try and stop me if they can. But they mustn't. I must be allowed at least this last freedom."

Arthur's internal monologue above reveals to us the type of logical moves in stages I and II of Gewirth's argument. It is, I believe, one of the strengths of the argument that, because of its generality, simplicity, and realism, it can be used to directly attribute the judgments contained in its premises to any putative rational agent. In the case under consideration, the judgments in Gewirth's argument can be directly attributed to Arthur without any loss of natural and psychological realism.

In choosing to take his own life in order to release himself from his suffering and retain his dignity, Arthur exhibits a positive value for what he has decided to do. Although Arthur considers suicide to be generally a bad thing, he considers suicide in his present circumstances as a good thing because it will release him from his suffering. We could say that at the very least, Arthur considers death in his present circumstances as instrumentally good. In showing a preference for death over life by his reasoned and considered decision to take his own life, we could say that Arthur positively values death in accordance with his criterion that life is only worth living if it can be lived well and with dignity, notwithstanding that Arthur also considers death and suicide to be generally bad, in accordance with some other criterion that might encompass his general metaphysical, moral, and religious beliefs about life and death.

Thus, from the fact that Arthur considers the purposive action of taking his own life to be good from his own perspective, he must also consider that his freedom, as a necessary condition of carrying out any of his chosen purposes, including his purpose for ending his life, is a necessary good for him. By taking his own life, Arthur is not only exercising his freedom one last time, he is also protecting his wellbeing. He will of course, in a sense, harm himself by taking his own life. But he considers the harm of his continuous suffering, if he goes on living, as greater. This harm is not only physical, but psychological as well. Thus by taking his own life, Arthur is, from his own point of view, also protecting his wellbeing, which under the present circumstances he identifies solely with his dignity.

3.2 Self-respect as a Primary Good: A Question of Life and Death

Rawls states that “self-respect and a sure confidence in the sense of one’s own worth is perhaps the most important primary good” (1972, 396). He also states that “it is clearly rational for men to secure their self-respect” (Rawls 1972, 178). Gewirth’s argument for the PGC demonstrates the truth of both these statements by showing how one’s self-respect emanates from one’s own rationality. In the case of Arthur, the source of his self-respect is his own sense of freedom and wellbeing. It is primarily because his wellbeing is diminished to such an extent that Arthur can no longer live his life with dignity. He also recognizes that because he is free to act he ought to safeguard his dignity by ending his life. And he recognizes that if he were impeded from carrying out his plan to end his life, he would face a worse indignity than the one he is currently facing. He would be at the mercy of other people’s choices, but would have no mercy from his suffering. Thus we can see that Arthur’s freedom and wellbeing are essential to his self-respect; his wellbeing because the continuous harm to it caused by his debilitating illness diminishes day-by-day his dignity and self-respect, his freedom because without it he cannot act to safeguard and retain his self-respect. Thus in order to preserve his self-respect, Arthur must have both his freedom and wellbeing. His freedom and wellbeing are not just necessary for his accomplishing any of his chosen purposes, they are also necessary for the preservation and maintenance of his self-respect and his sense of worth as a human being. In this extreme case, we can see that freedom and wellbeing are not only necessary for accomplishing any of one’s chosen purposes, they are also, and perhaps more importantly, necessary for preserving and maintaining one’s self-respect.

In sum, Gewirth’s argument demonstrates the importance of self-respect for morality by first showing how freedom and wellbeing, as the necessary conditions of action, are essential for one’s self-respect. Not only is one unable to act without one’s freedom and wellbeing, but one is unable to live one’s life without a certain minimal degree of dignity and self-respect. Arthur’s decision to exercise his freedom and end his life because he no longer wishes to live without dignity is a case in point. In Arthur’s case, his freedom has a poignant significance which echoes Socrates’ question “How should one live one’s life?” and Hamlet’s similar question “To be or not to be?” In choosing to end his life, Arthur must of necessity be free to do so. By exercising his freedom for the last time, Arthur chooses to escape the very constraints of physical necessity which render his freedom necessary. In choosing to end his life, Arthur exercises his freedom *to end* his freedom. Thus, by choosing to escape through death the physical necessities which render, in his circumstances, his life unbearable and not worth living, Arthur exercises the most radical freedom of all—the freedom of choosing to cease to exist.⁷ Perhaps this is one way of understanding Kant’s notion of transcendental freedom, although I do not wish to press this point too far, for I want to avoid engaging in any kind of metaphysical speculation. Nevertheless, it does seem that in choosing to end his life

and escape the physical necessities which render his life, in his present circumstances, unlivable, Arthur is in a sense exercising a transcendental kind of freedom—transcendental because at least in its intention, it carries with it the power to release him from the physical necessities that render his life, from his point of view, not worth living. It is “freedom” understood in this radical sense that illustrates why one’s freedom, at least in the extreme case we have been examining so far, carries with it a necessity which renders it, for oneself as a purposive agent, simply more than just desirable. It is, I contend, this radical necessity, as understood by an agent in the limiting case when faced with Hamlet’s question of whether or not one’s life is worth living, that renders one’s freedom and wellbeing not just desirable, as a holiday or a new car, but as things whose possession is, because they are essential to one’s self-respect, one’s right.

Following on from our discussion above, I want to suggest that Gewirth’s agent values his freedom and wellbeing not merely instrumentally and conatively, as necessary means for accomplishing all his chosen purposes, but as the essential components of his own sense of integrity and self-respect. Williams states in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* that “‘good for me’ . . . introduces some reference to my interests or well-being that goes beyond my immediate purposes, and my freedom is one of my fundamental interests” (1985, 59). I wish to claim that for Gewirth’s agent his freedom and wellbeing are two of his fundamental interests because they contribute directly and essentially to his own sense of self-respect, which is an essential feature of what it is to be a person. In recognizing that my freedom and wellbeing are essential components or characteristics of my self-respect, and not merely necessary instrumental means of carrying out any of my purposive actions, I am, as Williams nicely puts it, beginning “to touch on some deeper questions about my conception of my own existence” (1985, 59).

3.3 A Reconstruction of Gewirth’s Argument for the PGC

Gewirth’s argument for the PGC reveals that a person has rights to his freedom and wellbeing in virtue of being a PPA, a prospective purposive agent (stating this assertorically with the understanding that the PGC is derived dialectically from within the internal standpoint of *every* agent, and thus encompassing and applying to *all* agents). My analysis of the concept of “self-respect” reveals that a person needs to have the property or quality of self-respect in order to function fully as a person. But to have the property or quality of self-respect, which is essential and fundamental to being a person, an agent must have freedom and wellbeing, since, according to my analysis, freedom and wellbeing are the essential and fundamental constituents of a person’s self-respect. Thus an agent must not only claim rights to his freedom and wellbeing on the basis that these are the necessary conditions for all his purposive actions, but he must also claim rights to his freedom and wellbeing because these are the essential and fundamental constituents of his self-respect. In sum, an agent must consider that he has rights to his freedom and wellbeing not only because he is the sort of being who engages in voluntary and purposive action—that is to say, a being who is a *PPA*—but also because he is the sort of being who needs self-respect—that is to say, a being who is a *person*. To be sure, by being a person an agent is also a PPA. However, my analysis is meant to highlight what I consider to be another important and fundamental aspect of being a person, apart from merely being a PPA who engages in voluntary and purposive action. Although Gewirth’s argument for the PGC does not explicitly refer to or focus on an agent’s sense of self-respect, the notion of self-respect is implicit in Gewirth’s argument because it is a notion which is implied by Gewirth’s notions of both freedom and wellbeing, especially the latter. Gewirth himself refers to the concept of “self-esteem” as an example of one of the

goods belonging to his notion of “additive wellbeing”, which is, as we saw, one of three components which comprise an agent’s total wellbeing.

Gewirth’s argument, starting from what any person *does* (that is, engage in voluntary and purposive action), reveals that any PPA must accept that he and all other PPAs have rights to freedom and wellbeing. By making explicit what is already implicit in Gewirth’s argument, my reconstruction of it around the concept of self-respect reveals that every agent must accept that he has rights to his freedom and wellbeing because of what he *is*, namely, a being who needs self-respect—in other words, a person. Gewirth’s explicit argument reveals what rights an agent has by virtue of the necessary conditions attaching to his purposive *actions* as an agent. My analysis of what is only implicit in Gewirth’s argument, that is, the concept of self-esteem, reveals what rights an agent has by virtue of those conditions being constitutive of his self-respect as a person.

3.4 The Concept of Absolute Rights

Gewirth’s Notion of Absolute Rights

We can now see that to some degree at least, a person has the generic rights in virtue of being a person irrespective of what he does or omits to do as an agent. For every person, no matter what he does or fails to do, needs his self-respect. Because all persons need their self-respect equally in virtue of being persons, each person will need a certain degree of freedom and wellbeing, especially the latter, in order to preserve and maintain a minimal degree of self-respect so as to preserve and maintain his personhood. Thus, a criminal needs his self-respect as much as a law-abiding citizen. In this sense, they must both have sufficient freedom and wellbeing to allow them to preserve and maintain their self-respect. To the extent that a person has a right to have enough freedom and wellbeing in order to maintain his self-respect, that right is absolute. The right to minimal freedom and wellbeing, sufficient for a person to preserve and maintain his self-respect, cannot be removed without at the same time removing the very conditions necessary for an agent’s personhood.

Gewirth himself argues for absolute rights. According to Gewirth:

a right is absolute when it cannot be overridden in any circumstances, so that it can never be justifiably infringed and it must be fulfilled without any exceptions.

The idea of an absolute right is thus double normative [emphasis added]; it includes not only the idea, common to all claim-rights, of a justified claim or entitlement to the performance or non-performance of certain actions, but also the idea of the exceptionless justifiability [emphasis added] of performing or not performing those actions as required. (Gewirth 1982, 219)⁸

Due to constraints of space, I shall not discuss Gewirth’s detailed arguments for absolute rights. Crucially, however, Gewirth’s defense of absolute rights rests, like that of mine, on the concept of self-respect.

3.5. The Agent’s Double Standpoint

My Reconstruction of Gewirth’s Argument is Kantian in Spirit

My reconstruction of Gewirth's argument, with regard to the role that self-respect plays in the argument, is Kantian in spirit, and accords with what Kant himself says about personhood in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*:

rational beings are called *persons* inasmuch as their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves, i.e., as something which is not to be used merely as means and hence there is imposed thereby *a limit* on all arbitrary use of such beings, which are thus *objects of respect*. Persons are, therefore, not merely subjective ends, whose existence as an effect of our actions has a value for us; but such beings are *objective ends*, i.e., *exist as ends in themselves* [emphases added]. (Kant 1981, 36)

Gewirth himself, as we saw above, sees that treating persons as ends in themselves emanates directly from the PGC. More importantly, Gewirth's own statements regarding treating persons as ends in themselves lend textual support to my Kantian reconstruction of his argument. In the following illuminating passage, Gewirth claims that treating persons as ends by respecting their rights to freedom and wellbeing provides a Kantian answer to the *substantive* question of moral philosophy: "Of which interests of other persons ought one to take favorable account?" Gewirth's Kantian answer to this substantive question is "that the fundamental interests in question, deriving from the necessary content of action . . . are freedom and well-being, which are, respectively, the procedural and the substantive necessary conditions and generic features of action." Gewirth goes on to say that "to treat persons as ends in themselves is to respect their needs for these necessary conditions of action, by not interfering with them and, in certain circumstances, by helping persons to have or maintain them" (Gewirth 1991, 92).

What Gewirth omits to *also* say in the above passage, and it is what I have been attributing to him in my reconstruction of his argument for the PGC, is "to treat persons as ends in themselves is to respect their needs for these necessary conditions of action, *and of their self-respect*, by not interfering with them and, in certain circumstances, by helping persons to have or maintain them." My added words in italics in the passage, "and of their self-respect", are meant to re-emphasize the double standpoint from which an agent regards himself. On the one hand, an agent regards his freedom and wellbeing as necessary *means* to achieving any of his chosen purposes through his actions—this is the agent's instrumental and purposive standpoint. On the other hand, an agent regards his freedom and wellbeing as necessary *ends* for preserving and maintaining his self-respect since, as I have been arguing, freedom and wellbeing are the essential and fundamental constituents of a person's self-respect. This is the agent's personal and expressive standpoint. With regard to his purposive standpoint, an agent only has *prima facie* rights to his freedom and wellbeing. With regard to his personal standpoint, however, an agent's rights to his freedom and wellbeing are absolute. They are absolute in that they indicate and prescribe that agents, *as persons* who have self-respect, either occurrently or dispositionally, should always be treated as ends, never merely as means.

It is to emphasize this very crucial point, namely, that agents as persons should be treated as ends in themselves, that I believe the *personal* and *expressive* standpoint of an agent should be added to the agent's *instrumental* and *purposive* standpoint in Gewirth's argument. My reconstruction of Gewirth's argument with regard to adding the *personal-expressive* standpoint of an agent to the agent's *instrumental-purposive* standpoint is intended to demonstrate that agents not only have a necessary *instrumental* and *agentive* interest in claiming rights to their freedom and wellbeing, but also, and more importantly, have a necessary *constitutive* or intrinsic and *personal* interest for claiming those rights. Interference

with their freedom and wellbeing with regard to the former will frustrate their purposive actions and thus directly harm them as agents; in addition, interference with their freedom and wellbeing with regard to the latter will harm the agents as persons by removing or diminishing the necessary conditions sufficient for preserving and maintaining their self-respect. In the first instance, they will be harmed as *agents*; in the second instance, they will be harmed as *persons*.

This way of understanding Gewirth's argument, as one that requires an agent to regard and value his freedom and wellbeing both instrumentally and constitutively or intrinsically (that is, both as necessary means for achieving any of his chosen purposes, and as necessary goods which an agent values as ends in themselves in virtue of those necessary goods being constitutive of the agent's self-respect), accords well with Kant's claim that an agent or a person:

has *two standpoints* [emphasis added] from which he can regard himself and know laws of the use of his powers and hence of all his actions: first, insofar as he belongs to the world of sense subject to laws of nature (heteronomy); secondly, insofar as he belongs to the intelligible world subject to laws which, independent of nature, are not empirical but are founded only on reason. (Kant 1981, 53)

However, unlike Kant's "two standpoints", which are in two separate worlds, the empirical spatio-temporal world and the intelligible or noumenal world, the two standpoints I have been attributing to an agent above, in accordance with my reconstruction of Gewirth's argument, belong to the same natural world. It is, I believe, one of the great advantages of Gewirth's argument, given my reconstruction of it, that it can account for and explain both these two different standpoints from within the natural world without having to resort to Kant's problematic metaphysics involving two distinct and ontologically independent worlds.

3.6 The Dignity-Conferring Value of Rights

The distinction between being an agent and being a person can be clearly demonstrated in terms of the harm that a person may suffer as an *agent* and the harm he may suffer as a *person*. We can clearly conceive of a person suffering a certain harm as a result of his freedom and wellbeing being interfered with by others, with regard to the agent's purposive actions, with no loss of self-respect, and we can also clearly conceive of a person suffering a loss of self-respect as a result of being degraded by others in some way, without any hindrance to the performance of any of the agent's purposive actions. In the first instance, the agent would suffer, as an agent, an *instrumental* harm by virtue of not being able to perform some of his purposive actions. In the second instance, the agent would suffer, as a person, a *personal* harm by virtue of suffering a loss of self-respect. Of course, there are cases where an agent could also suffer a loss of self-respect if the planned performance of some of his purposive actions was frustrated by the interference of others. However, even in these mixed cases, where an agent suffers a personal harm as a result of, or in addition to, an instrumental harm, we can still make the conceptual distinction between the two harms. In fact these mixed cases, where an agent suffers a personal harm as a result of, or in addition to, an instrumental harm, are nicely captured by the commonplace colloquial saying "add insult to injury", where the "insult" is a personal harm and the "injury" an instrumental harm.

The distinction I have been making between, on the one hand, being an agent and being a person, and on the other, suffering an instrumental harm as an agent and suffering a personal

harm as a person, is given strong textual support by what Gewirth himself says in his paper “Why Rights are Indispensable”:

When A has a right to X, the protection of his interest in X is justified because he has a personal title to have X so that X is personally owed to A as his due and for his own sake, not because it adds to overall utility. If X is withheld from A, then not only is he harmed—some important interest of his is adversely affected—but he is also *personally wronged* [emphasis added], in that he is prevented from having something that belongs directly to him. (Gewirth 1986a, 335)

According to Gewirth, a crucial aspect of rights, and in particular generic rights, is that they have a “*personal orientation* which derives both from the justifying ground and from the right-holder’s relation to the duty-bearer” (1986a, 334–35). According to my reconstruction of Gewirth’s argument, the generic rights to freedom and wellbeing have “a personal orientation” precisely because they relate to an agent *personally* and *constitutively or intrinsically*, by virtue of freedom and wellbeing being constitutive of his self-respect, and not merely *instrumentally*, by virtue of freedom and wellbeing being the necessary means for the accomplishment of any of the agent’s purposive actions. It is because of this personal orientation, which the generic rights have with regard to a person’s self-respect, that an agent can be “personally wronged” in addition to being instrumentally wronged. And being personally wronged, the agent is “prevented from having something that belongs directly to him”—according to my reconstruction of Gewirth’s argument, his *self-respect* as a person.

In “Why Rights are Indispensable”, Gewirth talks of the “dignity-conferring value of rights.” Gewirth identifies the source of the dignity-conferring value of rights in “the position of being a claimant, which pertains to every right-holder of suitable age and mental capacity” (1986a, 335–36). According to my reconstruction of Gewirth’s argument, having rights, specifically generic rights, confers dignity on persons precisely because dignity is essentially and fundamentally constituted by the objects of those rights, namely, freedom and wellbeing. As I have argued above, if a person’s freedom and wellbeing are diminished beyond a certain minimal level (and that level will, of course, vary between persons), then a person could suffer the ultimate harm of losing his self-respect. If an agent lost all his self-respect he would, effectively, cease to be a normal person: the flame of humanity would be extinguished from his soul and he would become an alien not only to others but also to himself. That is why this total loss of dignity can sometimes result in a form of madness. It is a form of madness because an agent who loses all his dignity can no longer make sense of himself or of others—all meaning, which is to a large extent generated and communicated through human fellowship, is lost to him.

“The position of being a claimant” is “an important source of the dignity that having rights confers on persons” (Gewirth 1986a, 335) precisely because, according to my reconstruction of Gewirth’s argument, freedom and wellbeing, as the generic features of agenthood and personhood, are both the objects of the generic rights which an agent claims for himself and the essential and fundamental constituents of the property of personal dignity which the agent possesses by virtue of being a person. It is because of this *intrinsic* relation between, on the one hand, freedom and wellbeing as the objects of the generic rights, and on the other, freedom and wellbeing as the essential and fundamental constituents of the personal property of dignity, that the claiming of the generic rights by an agent has a “dignity-conferring value.” That is, they have a dignity-conferring value precisely because the objects of those rights are simultaneously the essential and fundamental constituents of the property of dignity. If

freedom and wellbeing were merely valued as the necessary instrumental *means* for action, and were not also valued for themselves as the essential and fundamental constituents of an agent's dignity, then the claiming of the generic rights by an agent would not have the dignity-conferring value that Gewirth refers to. Of course, as merely the necessary means for action, freedom and wellbeing will have a prudential value for the agent. But if the agent was not also a person, who valued his freedom and wellbeing as ends in themselves because he considered them essential for the preservation and maintenance of his dignity, the agent's rights to his freedom and wellbeing will lack the dignity-conferring value which his generic rights have by virtue of his being a person for whom personal dignity matters.

The intrinsic relation that holds between, on the one hand, freedom and wellbeing as objects of the generic rights, and on the other, freedom and wellbeing as the essential constituents of the property of dignity, illustrates two crucially important aspects of the claiming of the generic rights. First, it demonstrates quite clearly why an external acceptance of a claimant's rights to his freedom and wellbeing by others is not required for the justified validity of those rights. Since the objects of the generic rights are also the essential and fundamental constituents of an agent's dignity as a person, his claim to the generic rights is not only a claim to the right to have the necessary means for pursuing any of his purposive actions—which being the particular and idiosyncratic actions of the agent himself others may or may not value or approve—but also, and more importantly, it is a claim by the agent to the right to preserve and maintain his dignity. Without undue exaggeration, it is the agent's right *to be a person*. For as I tried to show above, it is difficult to see how an agent, who has lost all his dignity by virtue of losing his freedom and wellbeing, to the extent of no longer being able to preserve and maintain his dignity, can continue to function normally as a person. To be a person it is necessary to have adequate freedom and wellbeing sufficient for preserving and maintaining one's dignity. Thus, because freedom and wellbeing are the essential and fundamental constituents of an agent's dignity and, in effect, those of his personhood, an external acceptance of an agent's claiming of rights to his freedom and wellbeing is not required for the justification and validity of those rights because those rights are internally justified by the agent's own recognition that freedom and wellbeing, as the objects of those rights, are essential and fundamental to him not merely as an agent but also as a person. And because being a person requires no external justification, the property of being a person by itself justifies the having of rights to freedom and wellbeing.

I have been trying to emphasize through my reconstruction of Gewirth's argument that a PPA must recognize and accept that he has rights to his freedom and wellbeing as the necessary means of all his purposive actions, as well as recognizing and accepting that he has rights to his freedom and wellbeing as the essential and fundamental constituents of his self-respect and personhood. The former rights are only *prima facie* and conditional on the kind of purposive actions that the agent engages in. The latter are absolute and unconditional because they are rights the agent has to his dignity, which he has not only as an agent engaging in purposive action, but also as a person who is capable of reflecting upon himself as a person worthy of respect. The agent owes the same two-fold conditional and unconditional respect to all other agents in their double capacity as agents and persons. As Gewirth correctly states, freedom and wellbeing are very important for the "personal dignity" of an agent because "without rights to these objects, the individual's personal dignity as an agent who can justifiably claim these goods on his own behalf is seriously threatened" (1986, 343). It is because of this "serious threat" to an agent's personal dignity that the violation of an agent's rights to his freedom and wellbeing might not only result in the interference and frustration of the agent's purposive actions; also and more importantly, such a violation might result in a

terrible harm to his dignity and personhood. Consider, for example, a rape victim. The violation of her generic rights, in particular the violation of her substantive right to her wellbeing, is not merely an interference with and frustration of her purposive actions, but more seriously a violation of her dignity as a person. That is to say, the violation of her generic rights does not merely result in a loss with regard to her agency—a loss, that is, with regard to her not being able to perform certain actions and achieve certain goals—but far more seriously, the violation of her generic rights constitutes a loss to her dignity as a person. It is, in other words, not merely an *instrumental purposive loss*, an interference with the instrumental conditions necessary for the performance of certain purposive actions, but an *intrinsic personal loss*, a loss of dignity which harms her not only instrumentally as an agent but personally as a self-respecting person.

It is also possible, of course, that a woman who has been raped might not suffer any instrumental loss as a result, at least not a loss that can be directly attributed to her rape. That is to say, the violation of her generic rights as a result of being raped might not interfere with any of her purposive actions or the accomplishment of any of her goals. Nevertheless, the woman would undoubtedly suffer a loss to her dignity, assuming, of course, that she sees her rape as a violation of her generic rights; especially, a violation of her wellbeing. This example serves to illustrate, once again, the conceptual distinction between agenthood and personhood that I mentioned above.

By revealing the centrality of dignity in morality, Gewirth's argument is able to explain the pervasiveness and resonance of morality. It explains it by revealing that indignities suffered by one person as a result of the actions of others affect and harm not only that person and his community, but also the human race as a whole. Extreme degradations suffered by persons at the hands of others harm and degrade both the agents and the recipients, as well as harming and degrading all of us as persons, at least symbolically, by degrading the universal minimal worth that all of us are due by right; that is, by virtue of our common humanity—by being persons worthy of respect.

4. Role Morality and Universal Public Morality

Every practice, profession or institution has its own internal *role morality*; a morality determined by the specific overarching role of a particular practice, profession, or institution. Thus, the role of a police officer is to uphold law and order and to provide assistance in the criminal and judicial process; the role of a journalist is to inform the public truthfully and fairly on matters of public interest; the role of a doctor or a nurse is to provide medical care to her patients for the benefit of their health; the role of a priest or a minister is to provide pastoral care to members of his congregation; the role of a politician is to provide good and just government to her electorate.

The role morality of a particular practice, profession or institution sets in turn its own internal rules and codes of conduct for the ethical regulation of that practice, profession, or institution. Thus, typically, the code of ethics for a particular profession, industry or institution, would reflect and be constitutive of the role morality of that profession, industry or institution. To the extent that a profession's code of ethics does not reflect or is constitutive of that profession's role morality, that code of ethics is inadequate. It is therefore of paramount importance that before establishing a profession's, industry's or institution's code of ethics, the role, determined by the ultimate goals and ends of that profession, industry or institution, are well understood and accurately ascertained.

I shall refer collectively to the moral requirement of equal respect of the rights to freedom and wellbeing of all purposive agents, in their dual capacity as agents and persons, established on the basis of the argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency, as *universal public morality*.

Sometimes the role morality of a particular institution or profession may come into conflict with universal public morality. When that happens, universal public morality will always take precedence over role morality for the simple reason that universal public morality as foundational, is more fundamental and applies equally to everyone irrespective of the particular personal or professional interests or commitments including those required by the role morality of a particular institution or profession.

Role morality acquires its moral authority derivatively from universal public morality so it stands to reason that when the two come into conflict universal public morality should take precedence, as the role of a particular institution or profession which generates that institution's or profession's role morality must first be morally justified and thus morally acceptable on the basis of the principles of universal public morality. For universal public morality is universal and public and applies equally to every member of the public (thus it is public) at all times and in all places without exception (thus it is universal).

The fundamental rights to freedom and wellbeing justified by the Principle of Generic Consistency, which as we saw above apply to every individual person just by virtue of being a purposive agent, must be respected and protected against practices that may be allowed by the role morality of a particular institution or profession but not allowed by universal public morality because they may involve violations of the rights of freedom and wellbeing of particular individuals or groups of individuals; violations, which are morally not permitted by universal public morality. For example, under no circumstances would deceptive advertising be morally acceptable even if it were allowed by the role morality of advertising simply because deceptive advertising would involve the violation of the individual as well as the collective rights of freedom and well being of members of the public. Similarly, some forms of stereotyping would be morally objectionable and unacceptable if they involved the violation of the individual as well as the collective rights of freedom and wellbeing of a particular gender, ethnic or racial group that was being stereotyped. Advertising that targets children and encourages them to develop undesirable habits such as eating junk food, for example, may also fail the requirements of not violating the children's rights to freedom and wellbeing even if such a practice was considered acceptable by the role morality of advertising.

Ultimately, the role morality of every institution and profession is answerable to the principles and hence the requirements of universal public morality because it is universal public morality that provides the foundational justification of any particular role morality. For it would be self-defeating to allow role morality to overrule the very principles of universal public morality that provide the initial and foundational moral justification of institutional or professional role morality. Hence, role morality will always be trumped by the requirements of universal public morality where the two moralities come into conflict as they can do from time to time.

To be sure, quite often institutional and professional ethical transgressions will also violate the moral requirements of institutional or professional role morality as when a police officer

falsifies evidence in an effort to secure the conviction of a suspect. Such falsification of evidence is a violation of both the requirements of police role morality, which demands that police officers uphold the law and the criminal justice system, as well the requirements of universal public morality which demands that the citizens' rights to a fair trial are not violated by the police through the fabrication and falsification of evidence in an investigation. Deceptive advertising would be an example of an advertising practice that would be precluded by both the role morality of advertising which requires that advertising information communicated to consumers is not misleading or deceptive as well as precluded by universal public morality because such deception would constitute a violation of the consumers' rights to freedom and wellbeing.

In sum, universal public morality places restrictions on institutional or professional role morality in at least two ways:

First, there are good instrumental and pragmatic reasons for an institution's or profession's role morality not to be allowed to violate the rights of citizens or consumers that are required and supported by universal public morality for such ethical violations may prove self-defeating through loss of public trust in the role of an institution or profession that is seen to violate citizens' and consumers' universal rights to freedom and wellbeing. Such loss of trust could harm the reputation of the institution or profession whose role is seen by the public to violate the requirements of universal public morality.

Secondly, the violation of the requirements of universal public morality by an institution's role morality goes against the public good if it harms other people by violating their rights to freedom and wellbeing. This is rationally and ethically self-defeating since members of an institution whose role morality is allowed to undermine the public good are by extension also harmed as citizens since they are also committed to the overall public good of the society in which they live by the requirements of universal public morality which apply to everyone, including themselves.

5. The Significance and Consequences of Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency for the Ethics of Virtual Worlds

By providing a reasonably detailed account of the essential features of Gewirth's argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency as the supreme and universal principle of morality, I can now outline the significance and consequences of his argument for the ethics of virtual worlds on the basis of the now demonstrated justification of the argument for the PGC that was missing from my earlier summary of key claims that I had introduced in section 1. With the meta-ethical framework provided by Gewirth's argument for the PGC, I can now demonstrate the justification of those claims.

5.1 The Rights of Virtual Agents

I have demonstrated on the basis of the PGC that insofar as avatars are virtual representations or extensions of purposive agents in the real world it follows that avatars, who just like their counterparts in the real world act and think purposively in virtual worlds rather than in the real world, have rights to freedom and wellbeing. They have these rights on the basis of their virtual purposive agency. Strictly as agents who engage in purposive action they have these rights *prima facie*. However, as persons and specifically with regard to their self-respect or

dignity they have those rights absolutely. These rights of course extend to the designers and administrators of the virtual worlds, since they too are purposive agents and thus entitled to the same generic rights to freedom and wellbeing as the players or avatars themselves.

Insofar as purposive agency is the sufficient condition for having moral rights it makes no difference, in principle at least, whether the purposive agency is that of real persons or that of avatars. Virtual purposive agency is as sufficient for establishing the rights of avatars as it is for establishing the rights of real persons. In a sense, avatars are real persons that just happen to inhabit a virtual environment.

Given that avatars with regard to their personal dignity hold their generic rights absolutely, codes or EULAs of virtual worlds are never morally justified in violating those rights. Any degradation to an avatar that undermines their dignity is therefore always unethical as it violates the avatar's absolute rights to freedom and wellbeing. Insofar as virtual rape can take place in a virtual world (I leave the matter open whether it can or not) that would constitute a violation of an avatar's absolute rights and would thus be morally objectionable even if rape was somehow allowed by the code or EULA of the virtual world in question.

However, with regard to the avatars' prima facie rights to freedom and wellbeing, avatars may choose on the basis of their right to free association and the right to freedom to play for their enjoyment and the enhancement of their wellbeing, rights which are in turn supported by the PGC, to waive their generic rights not to be killed or be stolen from if the code and EULA of a particular virtual world, such as, for example, the World of WarCraft, allow such activities as part of a game.

5.2 The Conflict of Rights

In the event of a conflict of rights within a virtual world the conflict can in principle be resolved on the basis of Gewirth's The Degree for the Necessity of Action Principle (DNA principle). As indicated in section 1, the DNA specifies that in the event of a mutually exclusive conflict between agent A's generic rights and the generic rights of agent B, A's rights should take priority over those of agent B's rights when the objects of those rights, namely, freedom and wellbeing, are more necessary for purposive action for agent A than they are with regard to that of agent B. Let us assume, for example, that the designer or administrator of a virtual world (VW) wants to arbitrarily change the rules of the VW so as to potentially attract more players for financial gain. And he does it in such a way that its consequence is to reduce the legitimately earned status of an avatar that may have taken them years to achieve, thus reducing it the extent that the avatar's ability to engage in purposive action at their reduced status is severely limited or restricted. Further let us assume that the existing financial status of the VW provides sufficient funds and profits to maintain the VW at its present level with no financial loss to the owner/administrator of the VW. Applying the DNA principle and all things being equal, the principle seems to suggest that in such a conflict between the moral rights of the avatar and the moral rights of the administrator, the rights to freedom and wellbeing of the avatar because more necessary for their purposive action within the VW should take priority over the generic rights of the administrator.

5.3 Virtual Role Morality and Universal Public Morality

An important and overriding proviso that I mentioned earlier in section 1, is that the code and EULA of a virtual world must always be consistent with and not contravene the requirements

of the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC), especially as they apply to respect for the absolute rights to freedom and wellbeing that all avatars have with respect to their dignity as persons. Thus a virtual world's code or EULA is never justified in creating a *role morality* for itself that contravenes the universal morality supported by the PGC. The latter, because universal and foundational, being based on the PGC as the supreme principle of morality, will always take moral priority and override the *role morality* of any virtual world that allows for example, virtual rape, even though this might be allowed by its interration laws as instantiated by its code and EULA. In other words, the interration laws of a virtual world must themselves be consistent with and not contravene the PGC.

5.4 Virtual Rights are Universal Rights

In conclusion, the rights of avatars in virtual worlds like the rights of their counterpart persons in the real world are universal rights that apply always and everywhere. Thus an avatar and his counterpart person has the same universal rights to freedom and wellbeing irrespective of whether they reside in China, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Iraq , Europe, America or anywhere else on the planet or in cyberspace. Of course how those rights are used to pursue individual and collective goals may vary from place to place from person to person. However, as Gewirth's argument for the PGC clearly demonstrates, since freedom and wellbeing are the necessary features of all action, they form the basis of universal rights to those goods for all purposive agents, both real and virtual, for without them no purposive action would be possible.

Notes

¹. Readers who do not require the full exposition of Gewirth's argument for the Principle of Generic Consistency may choose to skip sections 2.2 to 2.4 and go straight to section 2.5 which sets out in outline a summary of the argument for the PGC and return to those sections only if they require further elucidation of the logical moves in the argument. I have provided a detailed exposition of the argument for the PGC so as to avoid any misunderstanding of Gewirth's argument, which may result in readers considering the argument unsound due to its misinterpretation. A full and detailed defense of the argument for the PGC against all the major objections raised against it by various philosophers can be found in Spence 2006 (Chapters 1 to 3) and Beyleveld 1991.

². To save space, I will henceforth use "agent" to mean "rational agent" unless otherwise indicated. An agent, as we saw, is one who exhibits voluntariness and purposiveness in his choices and actions and satisfies Gewirth's minimal conditions of rationality.

³. The question within the parentheses can also be asked thus: how can we attribute purposiveness to an agent in the absence of any kind of pro-attitude or intentional or inclinational disposition by the agent towards his actions? The answer is that in order to make sense of any agent's purposive actions, we have to at least attribute to that agent some minimal pro-attitude towards them, in Gewirth's minimal instrumental or inclinational sense, so as to account for the agent's having a reason for acting as he does. For implicit in an agent's purposive actions is his subjective evaluation of those actions, which commits the agent, by virtue of his own purposiveness, to value them in at least some minimal instrumental sense.

⁴. "The Rationality of Reasonableness," *Synthese* 57 (1983): 230–31, and "Can Any Final Ends Be Rational," *Ethics* 102 (1991): 76.

⁵. This entitlement can be viewed as both subjective and objective. It is subjective in the sense that it arises from within the agent's internal subjective standpoint. However, it is objective in the sense that it issues from the necessary conditions of agency, which not only apply to the individual agent but to all agents generally, in virtue of those generic conditions being necessary for action and agency as such.

⁶. I shall use the terms "dignity", "self-respect", and "self-esteem" interchangeably. I am aware that there might be some fine-grained distinction between the three terms, however I am setting those distinctions aside in this book. The crucial point for my purposes is the respect which a person has for himself as a particular, social, and historical individual. The notion of "self-respect", like the notions of "value" and "good" which Gewirth employs in his argument for the PGC, is primarily subjective. A sense of self-respect, self-esteem, or personal dignity is primarily determined by how an individual person perceives himself. Part of that perception will of course be determined by his social and communal environment. Nevertheless, insofar as it forms part of his self-perception, it is part of the individual person's internal and subjective perspective, for there is nothing in Gewirth's argument for the PGC that requires the agent to be socially disembodied and ahistorical. On the contrary, Gewirth's argument addresses actual, socially-embedded historical agents. This, as we shall see later, constitutes one of the main strengths of Gewirth's theory, as compared to certain other rational ethical theories.

⁷. It is the lack of this personal freedom which makes Sisyphus' punishment of rolling a rock up and down the same hill for all eternity seem so terrible to us. For, unlike Arthur, Sisyphus cannot escape from his suffering and indignity; that is, the suffering and indignity at being reduced to perform a meaningless repetitive task for all eternity. Paradoxically, the gods must allow Sisyphus to retain enough of his personal qualities, including his sense of self-respect, so that he should suffer as a direct result of his punishment. For if he were to lose all the personal qualities that make him a normal person, and become either a madman who was not aware of what he was doing, or, through his repetitious task, a mere thoughtless and emotionless automaton who performed his task without reflecting upon it, then Sisyphus would not be aware of his punishment and would thus not consciously suffer from it, as the gods intend him to. The gods were ingenious in devising a punishment that would inflict the most terrible suffering on a rational person—the punishment of performing a meaningless task for all eternity in total isolation, without the fellowship of other persons. Sisyphus's case serves to highlight the importance of freedom to human beings, not merely in their capacity as purposive agents but also as self-respecting persons.

⁸. Gewirth uses the terms "claim-right" and "right-claim" interchangeably throughout his works: I will stick to the usage "right-claim" to avoid confusion.

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