Popper's Third World, Moral Habits and Moral Habitat

J. T. Ozolins

Abstract

Karl Popper described the human habitat in terms of three worlds, the physical world of rocks and trees, the second world of human psychology, feelings, hopes and subjective experiences and the third world of works of art, morality and social institutions. This third world is just as real as the first and second worlds. If we accept Popper's notion of the three worlds, and that there are overlaps between these three worlds, our moral actions and values will also be subject to the same kinds of consideration of a repertoire of behaviours exhibited in particular environments. Thus, if we accept that human relationships form one of the elements of the third world and given naturalistic connections between the three spheres then just as habits are developed in relation to the second world, it can be concluded that we will develop a set of behaviours which we employ in our relationships with others. That is to say that we will develop moral habits. Moreover, it is also apparent that our behaviours will also be dependent on the kind of moral habitat in which we find ourselves.

There are three main problems to which this analysis leads and on which we will focus in this paper. Firstly, there is the problem of the kind of moral environment - habitat – that we need to provide for human beings if they are to develop the kinds of moral values that we hold to be important. Secondly, there is the question of how we are to develop the kinds of moral habits themselves and thirdly, there is the question of how these moral habits and habitat are to be maintained. If we take Popper seriously then human beings have a crucial responsibility in the creation of a moral third world – that is, a habitat in which human beings can flourish. I conclude that though there is no consensus about the kind of moral habitat human beings flourish best in, it is nevertheless vital to continue dialogue.

I Introduction

It is no novel observation that human beings are creatures of habit nor that human beings are heavily influenced by their environments – their habitats. William James suggests that habit is the enormous flywheel of society, a conservative influence which keeps the labourer hard at work, the farmer farming and the miner in his coalmine. Moreover, he adds, habit ensures that those in particular walks of life develop the language and style of that vocation or occupation. The young lawyer, for example, is easily distinguishable from the young plumber and, as the years go on, they become more and more set in their ways of acting. (James, 1891, 121) Although James wrote over a century ago and, arguably, there is much more social mobility than was the case in James's day, nevertheless, it strikes me that he is essentially correct in his observation that human beings are quick to develop habits and for these to be remarkably resistant to change. This paper is concerned with the development of moral habits, their maintenance and the role of what I have called the moral habitat in relation to moral habits. Popper's (1972) tripartite division of the domain of human experience into three realms provides a useful model, it is argued, for understanding the interconnections between moral habits, their inculcation, the links between different conceptions of what is moral, different moral habitats and the possibility of an objective morality. In short, Popper's idea of the third world provides a heuristic device for understanding the process of moral education and the development and maintenance of moral commitment. It also enables us to understand why it is that despite a thorough moral education, persons may remain uncommitted to any form of moral life, or perhaps more damningly, they are committed to a way of life in stark contrast to the moral virtues and values to which they have been exposed in their moral upbringing.[1] Moreover, the Popperian heuristic may be helpful in understanding how in a global context, different moral habitats can be taken to represent different communities, both east and west, and how the possibility of an objective morality leads us to common values and alerts us to the importance of continued dialogue.

Popper's description of the human habitat in terms of three worlds, the physical world of rocks and trees, the mental world of human feelings, hopes and subjective experiences and the world of objective, but synthetic, artefacts such as works of art, science and mathematics, morality and social institutions, allows us to understand the complexities of human behaviour and the various forces which operate to push and pull our behaviour in certain directions. At the risk of sounding behaviourist[2], it is evident that our physical environment will affect the way we act and it is just as obvious that our moral environment will also affect the way we act. It goes without saying that our psychological states, how we feel and what we desire, will affect our decisions about what courses of action we will take. The interrelationships between these three worlds provide us with a complex account of the human environment in which we live.

Although the physical world is highly influential in the kind of human environment in which human beings live, work and interrelate with one another, our focus will be on an account of the interrelationship between moral habits and the moral habitats which human beings inhabit and which help reinforce their patterns of moral behaviour. A key element in the discussion is an account of Popper's three worlds. It is argued that in order for human beings to develop and maintain good moral habits and to possess moral virtue, a moral habitat that supports such habits and virtue is needed. Popper's account of the second and third worlds provides a way of explaining why there can be a diversity of moral habitat as well as a belief that there is an objective moral world of moral laws. In a pluralist society, it would seem that while much of the kind of moral habitat formed is due to interactions of beliefs and feelings stemming from the second world, there are sufficient commonalities in our moral commitments to suggest that there is a morally objective world, a world in which intersubjective agreement is possible. This morally objective world resides in Popper's third world, but is one of two possible interpretations of what is meant by an objective moral world or habitat. The Kantian "kingdom of ends" which also resides in Popper's third world, does not rely on intersubjective agreement, but on the existence of a moral law which transcends the human world. It is an objective moral world, independent of human beings and contains knowledge without a knower, as Popper puts it. We therefore operate with two notions of objectivity. Popper is never really clear on this distinction, frequently running the two notions together, but he does provide a means of seeing how we can account for conventional moral principles, but at the same time, hold that there are absolute moral principles. This means that in realising that, though human beings live in the first and second worlds and in a variety of moral habitats in the third world, that there is some ambiguity about the independently objective moral yardstick in the third world which can serve as a public means of measuring the extent of moral virtue in a particular moral habitat. The nature of the moral yardstick itself is subject to critique and challenge for there are those who would deny objectivity of any kind. The difficulty is exacerbated because there is no independent means of establishing the absolute objectivity of the yardstick.[3] Nevertheless, we can proceed as Peirce (1955) urges us to do, to continue our quest after truth in the hope that we will ultimately come to know it.

II Popper's Three Worlds

Popper says that Plato, the Stoics, Leibniz, Frege, Bolzano all believed in the existence of a third world. Plato's world of forms or Ideas, he says, was a religious world, a world of higher realities. (1972:153) Plato's Forms or Ideas, claims Popper, constitute a third world *sui generis*. It exists in addition to the physical world and the world of the mind. Popper takes this tripartite idea of the world as his starting point and says that there are three distinct worlds (or sub-worlds): the first is a physical world, the second the mental world and the third the world of ideas or intelligibles – ideas in the objective sense. He explains that this third world is a world of possible objects of thought: the world of theories in themselves, and their logical relations; of arguments themselves, and of problem situations themselves. (154)

The first two worlds, it is claimed, interact with each other and so do the last two, which means that the second world acts as a mediator between the first and the third world. As an intermediary between the first and the third world, the human mind can literally see a physical body and can also see or grasp an arithmetic or geometric object. Scientific and mathematical theories, it is asserted, which exist in the third world are able to exert an influence on the first world through the application of theory – that is, through the creation of technology which exploits theory. (155) The third world, Popper adds, contains universal concepts or notions such as the number 7 or even the proposition 7 times 11 equals 77 and even false propositions and all kinds of non-mathematical propositions. (156) The natural numbers, it is contended, are the product of human language and human thought, but this does not lead to the denial that mathematical objects such as numbers are not objective. (161) Popper uses "objective" in two senses, objective_1 means transcending an individual's whim and objective_2 is defined as the independent existence of the content of thought. (Popper, 1959, 44; Carr, 1977, 217) Applied to scientific knowledge, objective_1 implies intersubjective standards of testability of the truth or falsity of scientific propositions, while objective_2 refers to the correspondence of propositions or statements with facts, where Popper takes this to mean correspondence with the real world. The difficulty is that he conflates these two notions of objective so that though numbers are artificial or human artefacts it is not entirely clear whether he regards them as wholly humanly created objects in the natural world. Thus, though invented by human beings, they also seem to have properties which are discoverable by human beings and so seem to be independent of their putative creators. (Popper, 1974, 223; 1959, 274) They are nevertheless not physical, belonging instead to a third world of ideas.[4]

The fundamental distinction between the second and third worlds Popper understands as being similar to Frege's distinction between the way in which the mind grasps a particular idea (the thought itself) and the objective contents of that thought. In *Uber Sinn und Bedeutung*, Frege says, "I understand by thought not the subjective act of thinking but its objective content."[5] (Frege, 1997) Popper distinguishes second world knowledge and third world knowledge by stating that "Knowledge or thought in the subjective sense, consisting of a state of mind or of consciousness or a disposition to behave or react" is second world knowledge and "knowledge in [this] objective sense is totally independent of anyone's claim to know…it is knowledge without a knower." (108-9) Though Popper holds that the third world is the product of human beings, it is objective in the sense that it is independent of any particular knower and this knowledge itself gives rise to unexpected new problems and insights, as Goldbach's conjecture[6] illustrates. The third world is described as an unintended by-product of actions which were directed at other aims, and the product of human language and thought. (117, 161)

III Moral Propositions and the Third World

Moral propositions, Popper suggests, also exist in an objective world three, though as already indicated, this objective world is artificial.[7] Popper says that the Stoics extended the theory of the third world not merely from Platonic Ideas to theories and propositions, but also to declarative statements, problems, arguments, commands, admonitions, prayers, and poetry and narration. They also distinguished between a personal state of truthfulness, and the truth of a theory or proposition. (158) In an earlier work, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1962), Popper distinguishes between physical laws and the normative laws which operate in the moral realm. These latter are norms, prohibitions and commandments. Laws of the normative kind differ from the former by being alterable. He thinks these can only be called 'true' or 'false' in a metaphorical sense. Nevertheless, he admits that there are those who hold that laws of the normative kind are natural in the same sense as physical laws, since they depend on human nature itself. He notes that because such norms are human artefacts does not mean that they are arbitrary. It is human beings who impose their standards on the world and this is how morals are introduced into the world. (57-61)

Although norms are human constructions, it does not mean that any system is as good as any other. Popper argues that in mathematical calculi, language, music, poetry, it does not follow that one symphony is as good as another, nor one poem as good as another. Human beings have created the world of moral demands, for equality, for justice, for freedom and these are very important and not to be considered entirely arbitrary. Decisions against slavery and so on, are decisions of considerable importance and not just matters of taste. (65) Popper accepts the fact/value distinction and holds that it is impossible to derive a moral norm from a fact.[8]

Popper does not believe there is any contradiction in supposing that though moral laws are human constructions they may not nevertheless be thought of as given to us by God. Popper thinks that whether or not moral laws have been given by God or not, it is human beings who have to make the decision and carry the responsibility for how the law is to be interpreted and implemented. As a critical dualist[9], Popper says that we do not accept norms just on the basis of a claim that they may be God-given, but rather on the basis that we are convinced on grounds other than faith that we have made the right choice. Though ethics is independent of religion, it does not mean that it does not assist in making our choices about norms, which, after all, are not entirely arbitrary. (65-66)

We may have reason to elaborate this point of Popper's for it provides us with a starting point for a consideration of how a moral habitat might be created – it is not determined absolutely, but exists partly in world two and partly in world three, at least insofar as these interact with one another and produce another third world habitat. Insofar as there are conventions or religious beliefs which shape our moral norms, there are also human experiences of the operation of these norms which provide us with the interpretations of these norms. We may or may not share these across a society or across a community, however. In one sense, the moral decisions we make will depend very crucially on the world around us – both the physical and the social worlds. The norms may, as Popper himself suggests, have been the gift of God, for example, but the understanding of the nature of justice, of human rights, obligations, etc., will be determined by human beings who interpret these norms in the light of their own experience. A moral habitat will consist of a combination of third world moral norms and second world human interpretations of these. It is against this background that our moral decision-making takes place. That is to say, our moral background, which consists of the particular human community to which we belong, as well as the moral norms accepted by that community, will be a powerful influence on our moral decisions.

Although this argument is a development of Popper, it is supported by his extension of the reach of the third world to social laws and to economics. Popper argues that there are sociological laws, such as economic laws which govern trade and economic life. What Popper seems to have in mind are something like Adam Smith's notion of the 'invisible hand' which regulates supply and demand of goods. Popper asserts that there are many interconnections between natural laws and the observation of norms. For example, the transformation of physical things follows not only physical laws, but also design principles which are human artefacts. (67-68)

What the Popperian approach provides is the understanding that there is a third world that is essentially a human artefact, though the idea that there are God-given moral laws is not excluded, and human beings interact with this world. In the case of mathematics, the interaction is clear enough: human beings postulate certain mathematical principles and describe the world according to these principles. At the same time, these principles reveal novel facts about the world that human beings are able to discover. That is, having postulated certain principles, novel problems and discoveries about the world are revealed. Thus, although mathematics is a human creation, it is not entirely so, because in interacting with this human creation, novel problems and new insights into the human understanding of the world are discovered.[10]

Popper does not believe that the notion of a third world is only useful for an understanding of mathematics, but thinks that other human endeavours such as art and morality can be understood as belonging to it also. If morality is a third world object, then it is clear that human beings will interact with it in a similar vein to their ways of operating in the world of mathematics. If this is so, then it would be consistent with the claim that there are moral facts discoverable from our experiences in the world. Moral facts, however, since they lie in the realm of values, are not facts in the same way that facts about the physical world are facts, but would be legitimate objects in the second half of the fact/value dichotomy. Treated in the same vein as mathematical objects, moral values also lead to new problems and new ways of understanding of the human condition. Acceptance of particular tenets, such as the Ten Commandments, lead to further discoveries about what more these Commandments entail about our behaviours and attitudes to one another. It should not be supposed that the Decalogue is immune to criticism or interpretation and it is through reflection and rational thought that new understanding - or discovery - about moral objects is brought about.

Whatever the objects of understanding are, the process of understanding is the same. That is, whether we are talking about mathematics or art or morality, our understanding acts on third world objects. Popper asserts the following three theses about the subjective act of understanding: (1) That every subjective act of understanding is largely anchored in the third world; (2) that almost all important remarks which can be made about such an act consist in pointing out its relations to third world objects, and (3) that such an act consists in the main of operations with third-world objects: we operate with these objects almost as if they were physical objects. This, he says, can be generalised and holds for every subjective act of knowledge. (1972, 163) It is clear that the moral objects are third world objects which are the subjects of our understanding.

Popper claims his analysis provides a possible explanatory theory of human action and may even be applicable, he proposes, to works of art, though he does not provide elaborate. (179-180) It is possible to apply some parts of his analysis to moral matters, but in general it does not adapt well to moral actions. Though it is true that human beings want to determine what the right action is in particular circumstances, it is not the same as a question about the general applicability of a theory to a particular set of observations. Moral reasoning takes place in order to decide how to act, not to test a theory. In moral situations, a very particular answer is sought for a very particular problem. It is not just a matter of adequately explaining why a particular decision was made, even though this might be important.

Popper says that learning to understand a problem is a matter of handling third-world structural units, and to get an intuitive grasp of the problem is to get familiar with these units and their logical interrelations. All this, he adds, is similar to getting an intuitive grasp of a theory and this suggests that his schema of situational analysis is applicable to art, music and poetry. Though this may be so on one level, it seems to miss the point of art, music and poetry, which speaks to our innermost being in an intensely personal way. The same may be said for the point of moral reasoning.

Popper is not entirely unaware of the criticism that the object of moral reasoning is different from that of science. In considering understanding in the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), he says that we understand human beings somewhat differently to the way in which we might understand nature. Part of understanding here depends on our common humanity. Nevertheless, Popper thinks that the differences between the sciences and the humanities have been overdrawn. Both science and humanities practise the method of conjecture and refutation, but this does not mean that scientific methods apply equally well in humanities. (184-186) Popper, however, does not provide us with a convincing argument for accepting that scientific methods will apply equally well everywhere and especially in the moral dimension. He only applies his reasoning to an analysis of history, leaving us to try to account for understanding in the moral field.

Though there are clearly some limitations in the applicability of the notion of the third world, as expounded by Popper, it nevertheless, provides with an explanatory model that explains the differences that we observe in our pluralist and multicultural world. It is evident that human beings are initiated into particular languages and cultures which provide a way of being in the world. That is, human beings are initiated into a particular third world and this world will be populated with values, beliefs and, of course, moral values. This world is an objective$_1$ world rather than an objective$_2$ world and it is this particular third world which constitutes the moral habitat in which human moral actors are active. In deciding how to act, human beings have artefacts, relics and moral theories, that is, moral norms against which they can measure their progress towards truth, justice and the common good.

IV Moral habitat

We can make use of the distinction between objective$_1$ and objective$_2$ to provide an account of the way in which human beings make moral judgements and decide to act in moral situations. It is within the third world that we can locate an objective$_2$ moral order, and so an objective$_2$ moral world. This is a moral world which is independent from human beings. That is, it is a world of universal moral principles which, if it is independent from human beings is not created by them, but may possibly be discoverable by them. Just as it is controversial to argue that Plato's realm of the Forms exist, it is equally controversial whether it makes sense to talk of such objective$_2$ world. This moral world, however, differs substantially from the moral habitat into which human beings are initiated and which forms the environment for the exercise of moral decision-making. This is because human beings exist in a personal moral space and this is part of the second world. Moral situations are generally seen through the lens of human emotion and immersion in those situations and so belong to the psychological or mental world – which is the second world. The second world interacts with the third world, providing through reflective rational thought, the third world moral theories created by human beings. Thus, moral theories, such as Natural Law, Utilitarianism, etc. are based on particular conceptions of how the world is and they are theories in an objective$_1$ third world. The third world, therefore, contains an objective$_1$ moral order and forms the basis of the moral principles that a person adopts in order to negotiate the moral problems and dilemmas. It is the objective$_1$ moral world which forms the moral habitat.

We have already briefly indicated the distinction between objective$_1$ and objective$_2$, as being a difference between objectivity understood as intersubjectivity and objectivity understood as referring to the world which exists independently of human beings. In reference to the moral realm, an objective$_2$ world would be one where moral principles and laws existed independently of human beings, thus, like Plato's Forms, these would exist in an absolute, eternal realm. It is important to clarify this distinction.

Moral habitat can be understood in the Popperian objective$_1$ sense. It is objectively real in the sense that moral actions are judged intersubjectively as either good or bad, right or wrong, on the basis of what a human community agrees to. This need not be simply on the basis of a majority vote, but be the result of discussion and debate within a community. For example, a better understanding of the dignity of human persons leads to the conclusion that slavery is morally wrong. A concern for the importance of human autonomy and freedom is understood as requiring tolerance. These, however, do not lead us to assume thereby that there is an absolute moral order which captures absolutely the notion of tolerance or of freedom. Intersubjective agreement means that the general outlines of how we should conduct ourselves are determined on, perhaps, the basis of tradition or of practice within a particular culture – within a particular habitat. Within such a habitat, certain practices may well be seen as morally permissible and even good. For example, female circumcision, seen as part of a culture and an expression of a certain moral understanding of what it is to be a woman in that culture, may be regarded as morally good, however, outside that moral habitat it may be incomprehensible how it could possibly be regarded as morally good. We may be tempted at this point to say that some moral habitats may be incommensurable, especially if we consider the analogous environmental habitat, in which it is impossible for one species to occupy the space of another without displacement. Nonetheless, even in nature, environmental habitat can come to be shared. So, while it may be concluded, in a moral habitat it is impossible for one culture to occupy the moral habitat of another, there may still be significant commonalities. Moral habitats are porous and human beings adaptable, so that exposure to new ways of thinking about moral problems can bring about the creation of a new moral habitat, one reflecting new moral principles and ideals.

Contrasted with this approach is the view that there are objective$_2$ moral theories which assume an objective moral order and the possibility that we can know in some absolute sense, what is morally right and good. Plato holds that there is an objective moral order – for, as Socrates says, it is better to suffer evil than to do it. There would be no point in asserting such a statement if it was not thought that this held absolutely – Socrates' equanimity in the face of his imminent death would be devalued if the principles which he thought to be worth dying for turned out not be absolute, but a matter of taste or of negotiation. The moral environment might be considered in the same way as an interpretation of the moral world and this will depend on the moral community into which one is initiated and in which one lives. The objective moral world is revealed (if it is revealed at all) only partially to us and so there is room for different perspectives on what constitutes what is moral, good and right. That we are prepared to debate the nature of morality points to an impulse towards the establishment of moral truth, or more precisely, an intuition that there is a moral truth.

Aristotle can be taken to understand the moral world in terms of an objective$_1$ world, explicitly rejecting a world of Platonic Forms. This follows from his discussion of distinctions between the intellect and the intelligible object. Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics* (1072b18-30), that the intellect understands itself insofar as it takes on its intelligible object; for it becomes intelligible by attaining and understanding its object, so that an intellect and its intelligible object are the same. Aquinas, commenting on Aristotle, explains that since it is characteristic of an intellect to understand itself inasmuch as it takes on or conceives within itself some intelligible object, an intellect becomes intelligible by reason of the fact that it apprehends something intelligible. Hence, since the intellect becomes intelligible by conceiving some intelligible object it follows that the intellect and its intelligible object are the same.[11] An intellect is related to an intelligible object as potentiality is to actuality, and as something perfectible to its perfection. The argument, as Aquinas elaborates it, is based on an understanding of substance, which is the proper intelligible object of the intellect, since this is the actualisation of the intellect. That is, the intellect is properly understood in terms of its activity and this is the intelligible object. Aquinas says, "And since each thing is active to the extent that it is actual, it follows that the intellect becomes active or operative , that is, understanding, to the extent that it attains its intelligible object." (Aquinas, 1995, Par 2540, 807-808) Aquinas, following Aristotle here, explicitly rejects Plato's claim that the intelligible forms of material things are self-subsistent entities. (1995, par.2541, 808) It would follow that intelligible forms of non-material things such as moral principles would also fail to be self subsistent entities. Consequently, that the idea of an objective$_2$ world of moral principles is also rejected, since such a world is removed from connection with human beings.[12]

It is possible to attempt to reconcile these two different understandings of mental objects, as either objective$_1$ or objective$_2$, but it is not required for our argument. We don't have to accept Popper's analyses in their entirety – what is salient, it seems to me is that we can accept the idea of the reality of a moral world since it is brought to actuality by our moral actions. So the moral environment is created by moral actions and the moral principles that are adopted will be determined by the moral environment in which we exist. Thus, a moral environment of corruption, that is, where people do not act morally, will lead to the adoption of an attitude which reinforces the values lived – that is, of corruption. Commitment to good moral values involves not just an objective moral world of forms, but the concrete actualisation of that commitment. The objective moral world does not exist in potential.

Moral habitats – or moral environments – can take many different forms and the moral habits which we form will be ones which enable us to engage in moral decision-making based on the objective$_1$ moral rules that exist in our objective$_1$ moral world. Being in a particular moral habitat which adheres to a strict code of behaviour may encourage us to form good moral habits; on the other hand, the absence of a moral habitat which upholds, say, a Christian view of morality, will certainly lead to a very different set of moral habits and hence, the kind of moral virtue which can be practised. For example, a moral habitat which encourages theft or fraud is less likely to produce good moral behaviour. For that reason, poor moral habitats undermine good moral habits and lead to the kinds of apparent contradictions where a corporation can trumpet honesty and solid moral values, but in its culture – its moral habitat – encourage the practice of the habits of vice rather than virtue.

V Moral Habits

James (1891) observes that human beings habitually fashion their characters in the wrong way and, regrettably, fail to see that through their conduct they soon become mere walking bundles of habits. Each action, whether virtuous or vicious, leaves its mark, he says, in the nerve cells of the body, so that little by little we acquire virtue or vice. Moral education in the light of this becomes crucial, for if young people spend each day in its acquisition, eventually they will have habituated themselves to moral virtue and understanding and so be confident that the moral choices they make will be oriented towards the good and the just. This is not to say that provided that persons have been habituated to the right kinds of moral virtues it would be best if human beings made moral decisions without deliberation and thought, but rather that an orientation to moral virtue makes it easier for human beings to act freely. Those who are in the grip of vice are not in a position to make free choices, for they have become slaves to their passions. The habitual drunk, for example, always has the intention to stop drinking, but it is always the next time after he or she has succumbed once more that will be the time when he or she stops. Thus, though we have the expectation that our choices will be freely made and not coerced, nevertheless, the power of routine and habit to determine our actions must be recognised.

The inculcation of good moral habits is recommended by Milton (1897) as the first step in ensuring that young persons are in a state receptive to instruction in the knowledge of virtue and the hatred of vice. The instilling of good moral habits is important not just for their own sakes, but because this will ensure that they will possess those traits of character which will enable them to take their places as good citizens of their nations. Thus, Milton, unlike Rawls (1996) does not see a distinction between the comprehensive private moral system adopted by an individual and a public value system. He sees the comprehensive private moral system as co-extensive with the public value system, perhaps because of the entrenched view of the time that young men were to be prepared for a role in the public sphere. The moral system to be adopted, he suggests, is one steeped in the Western moral tradition handed down from the Greeks and Romans, arguing that a love of virtue is to be acquired through the study of the moral works of Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, Plutarch and Laertius, among others. In this way, young people will come to know what is good and acquire the habits of virtue that will enable them to become good persons and citizens.

There are several different ways in which we can think about habits and the manner in which they enable us to act. On the one hand, we can think of a habit as something so ingrained in us that we do it without thinking, on the other, we can see habit as something which facilitates the occurrence of certain complex actions. By this we mean that there are some actions which require practice in order for us to be able to do them well. In the case of moral actions, moral habits can facilitate virtuous behaviour so that it becomes second nature. As Aristotle tells us, we come to virtue through practice and, we might add, through reinforcement by habituation. Locke observes that children are not taught by rules which are always slipping in and out of their memories, but by practice which begets habits. (1892)

Locke also thinks that the virtues of civility and good manners are best learnt through the example of others and argues that young persons should be kept away from bad company, that is, a bad moral habitat. If they are not, he warns, all the instruction in the world will not enable them to acquire the habits of virtue for what influences the most is the company they keep. Human beings are like chameleons, adapting their behaviour to the environment in which they find themselves and so it is important to keep children especially away from those who would lead them astray into vice and debauchery. Schools, he notes, have an important role to play in the provision of an appropriate environment in which virtues can be acquired. Vice, he says, is much more easily learnt and so the learning of virtue cannot be left to chance. (Locke, 1892)

Schools and educational institutions have an important role to play in the formation of moral habits for they form a particular habitat in which the values and beliefs of the community can be passed on. Dewey regards the community – which forms a particular habitat – as crucial in the formation of good moral habits, for by withholding or extending approbation for our actions, it begins to form our consciences and develop in us the moral habits which guide in our behaviour. For Dewey, morality is entirely social and so conventional. We need not accept this, however, especially if we accept the moral world to be an objective$_2$ moral world, that is, one which contains a reality beyond human experience in which independent moral principles exist in a third world of their own. Nevertheless, the kinds of moral habits we develop will be the product of the kind of moral habitat or environment in which we find ourselves. (Dewey, 1981) Given that the school community forms a particular kind of community, it too will provide the opportunity for the inculcation of moral habits. Dewey says that the school or educational community has to be a real community, exercising a real life and so a real habitat in which moral habits can be formed. There cannot be one set of moral principles which are practised within a school community and another which are practised without. (Dewey, 1910)

Although Dewey is right to argue that the school community and the educational community have to be real communities, he is wrong to argue that the moral habits that are formed there are necessarily the same as those in the outside community. Dewey's assumption is that there is a monocultural community of which the school community is a microcosm. Recent debates in the Australian community about what count as specifically Australian values have shown that there is little consensus about what these are and instead, what is reflected is diversity.[13] In a pluralist society it is hardly ever likely that there will be consensus about moral values and so each community will form its own moral habitat which will nurture the moral virtues and values of that community. This is not to suggest that there may not be large similarities among communities and so among the moral habitats inhabited by individuals. Just as individuals group together to form a community (and hence a moral habitat), so too, communities group together to form a larger community or society. In the larger community, a lack of commonalities, which are rooted in the smaller, more specific communities, leads to conflict, sometimes with tragic consequences. It is true that all the actions of an individual will bear the marks of community in which he or she grew up in, but it is also true that the our society consists of many communities and all of these, one way or another are real. The upshot of this is that common values do not emerge by an identification of abstract values that capture the essence of a nation that may be imposed on communities in order to ensure a commonality of belief and value, but rather from the deeply held common values that are experienced through exposure to different moral habitats.

There are several ways in which we can understand what is meant by a habit and we can only supply the briefest of sketches. To say that someone does something out of habit is to imply: 1) there is no further reason to perform the action other than the obvious one – eg X raises his arm – X simply does this regularly in certain circumstances. He might do this when excited, or automatically when meeting strangers for the first time – it just happens that the arm gets raised without X deliberating about it, though X may be aware that it is happening. 2) Things done out of habit are not done spontaneously. Someone who follows a routine, for example, cleaning her teeth before going to bed can be said to be doing things out of habit. Habits, says R.S. Peters (1981), are the kinds of things which are stereotyped and narrowly conceived things which are usually fired off by familiar stimuli. Peters says that there is no further extrinsic end for something done out of habit. Doing things out of habit, however, can also free up the mind to attend to other things. (58-59) Aristotle says, "But the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts." (Aristotle, 1976, [1103a14-b1])

The importance of the right habitat to bring about the right sort of moral habits is brought out by R.M. Hare, who asks, "How should I bring up my children?"[14] Moral education, which is conducted in a moral habitat, should promote good activities, as much as it does the maintenance of rules for social conduct. R.M. Hare (1972, 74) in discussing the connections between moral habitat and moral habit, says the following:

> "A child's moral upbringing has an effect upon him which will remain largely untouched by anything that happens thereafter. If he has had a stable upbringing, whether on good principles or bad ones, it will be extremely difficult for him to abandon those principles in later life – difficult but not impossible. They will have for him the force of objective moral law; and his behaviour will seem to give much evidence in support of intuitionist ethical theories, provided that it is not compared with the behaviour of those who stick just as firmly to quite different principles."

In relation to how parents ought to bring up their children, Hare observes that the only instrument that parents possess is moral education – the teaching of principles by example and precept, backed up by chastisement and other more up to date psychological methods. In the development of moral habits what is salient is that the inculcation of moral habit takes place within a particular moral environment or habitat – that is, within the family. This is a moral habitat which clearly has enormous influence on the kind of moral values that a person absorbs – to the extent, as Hare, puts it, the individual comes to regard his or her moral values as somehow intuitive. If we are sensible, says Hare, we give persons a solid basis of principles, but at the same time ample opportunity to make decisions and alter the principles if circumstances warrant. Children need principles, but they also need the opportunity to apply them in concrete situations, modifying them in the light of circumstances.

We can agree with Hare to the extent that principles form the grounds on which we justify our decision-making and are modified in the face of circumstances which compel us, in the interests of justice, mercy or some other higher order value, to make the change. It is not the case, however, that the principles are modified without appeal to some other overriding values. Peters says that though it is desirable to develop people who conduct themselves rationally, intelligently and with a fair degree of spontaneity, it is apparent that a child is incapable of such a form of life. For this reason, it is important for them to develop moral habits. Developmental evidence suggests that the giving of reasons is of little value up to a certain age. (1981, 51-52)

Children, observes Aristotle, must enter the palace of Reason through the courtyard of Habit and Tradition.[15] (Aristotle, 1976) The importance of moral habits is clear, but not just for children and a good moral habitat is required to ensure that good moral habits are maintained.

VI Conclusion

We have focused in this paper on three issues, stemming from a consideration of the relationship between moral habits and the moral habitat needed for their genesis and their continuing support. We began by considering whether Popper's tripartite division of the world into a physical world, a human world and a world of humanly created abstract objects would be useful in providing a model for understanding the interplay between moral principles, values and virtues and how human beings come to acquire these, operate with them and why there are differences between interpretations of these. It is evident, though there are numerous controversies and questions still to be examined, that Popper's third world provides a heuristic for explaining how moral theories and particular communities form an objective$_1$ world – a world of intersubjective agreement – which forms the moral habitat in which human beings are immersed. It is in a specific moral habitat that human beings acquire particular moral habits, where habits are understood to mean not only particular acquired patterns of behaviour, but also the values and beliefs on the basis of which decisions on how to act are taken. It is within that moral habitat that the moral habits we have acquired are reinforced and maintained. When human beings are immersed in another moral habitat, just as they adapt to a different physical habitat if transferred from their original one, so too, they will adapt to the changed moral environment. In such cases, it is possible that new moral habits will develop – hence the strictures against allowing impressionable young persons being placed in habitats which may lead them to develop vices.

The division of the third world into an objective$_1$ world and an objective$_2$ world, whilst confused in Popper himself, is useful also in understanding how we can both have a diversity of moral habitats, that is, a diversity of moral theories which are part of the objective$_1$ third world which is socially constructed and an objective$_2$ world which is a rather more Platonic world that nevertheless provides the reason for hoping that there is an ultimate truth. It is the possible existence of the objective$_2$ world which impels people to continue to search for it. Moreover, it provides a response to the charge that there is no means of deciding between moral habitats, since objective$_1$ world habitats are formed through intersubjective agreement. Although not discussed here, except in passing, the existence of the objective$_2$ world provides a yardstick against which moral habitats formed through intersubjective agreement can be judged. The major objection to this is the question of how we can know anything about moral values that are independent of our experience of the good. This is a serious question, but fortunately there are several possible ways in which we can address this objection. One move that is possible is to argue, as Plato does, that the realm of transcendent, objective ideas can be accessed through the use of reason. Another, is to give a theological response which raises the possibility that it is through God's Revelation that we come to know the nature of the good. In any case, there are plausible grounds for accepting the existence of some kind of an objective$_2$ world that does not from human intersubjectivity alone.

In a pluralist society there will be many competing moral habitats, some based on religions, some based on race and ethnicity and others based on neither of these. Moral habits shift when habitats are changed, so the problem that we face is how we maintain the beliefs and values on which we base our lives in the face of the rapid change in our moral landscape. In order for someone to maintain his or her values and beliefs in the midst of a maelstrom of moral habitats he or she needs to be able to be nurtured by the moral habitat in which his or her moral habits were formed. He or she will need to be able to return again and again to that moral habitat. This, of course, is a great challenge in a world in which nothing appears to remain constant. Commitment to common beliefs and values emerges out of the moral habitats formed by the immediate communities to which someone belongs not through the imposition of values from State or Church. If there are to be any common public values at all to which people are committed, these will emerge out of the local moral habitats to which they belong and which form the objective$_1$ moral world in which they are immersed. When human beings from different moral habitats interact in dialogue both habitats are changed and enriched and new moral habits emerge. Dialogue between people is vital for common understanding.

References

Aquinas, Thomas (1995) *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, tr. and intro. by John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, Indiana, Dumb Ox Books)

Aristotle (1976) *Nichomachean Ethics*, tr. Thomson, J.A.K. (Harmondsworth, Penguin)

Carr, B. (1977) "Popper's Third World" *Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (108), 214-226

Dewey, J. (1981) *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, McDermott, John J. (ed.) (Chicago, University of Chicago Press)

Dewey, J. (1910) *Educational Essays*, Findlay, J.J. (ed.) (Bath, Cedric Chivers)

Frege, G. (1997) "Uber Sinn und Bedeutung" in Beaney, M. (ed.) *The Frege Reader* (Oxford, Blackwell)

Frege, G. (1967) "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry" in Strawson, P.F. (ed.) *Philosophical Logic* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 17-38

Hare, R.M. (1972) *The Language of Morals* (Oxford, Oxford University Press Paperbacks)

Heath, T.L. (1926) *Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

James, W. (1891) *Principles of Psychology* (London, MacMillan)

MacIntyre, A. (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press)

Nagel, T. (1986) *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)

Peirce, C. (1955) *The Philosophical Writings of Charles Peirce,* selected and edited with an Introduction by Buchler, J. (New York, Dover Publications).

Peters, R.S. (1981) *Moral Development and Moral Education* (London, George Allen and Unwin)

Popper, K. (1959) *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London, Hutchinson and Co.)

Popper, K. (1962) *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 4th Edition, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul)

Popper, K. (1972) *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)

Popper, K. (1974) *Conjectures and Refutations*, 5th Edition (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul)

Rawls, J. (1996) *Political Liberalism* (New York, Columbia University Press)

Reck, E.R. (2002) "Education, Knowledge and the World of Objective Ideas" in Smith, B. (ed.) (2002) *Liberal Education in a Knowledge Society* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, Open Court

Smith, B. (ed.) (2002) *Liberal Education in a Knowledge Society* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, Open Court)

NOTES

[1] I have used moral education and moral upbringing somewhat interchangeably here. This is not to suggest that these may not be clearly distinguished, but the general thrust of this paper will be to show that these are very closely interconnected and that moral education needs to be reinforced by moral upbringing because of the importance of moral environment in the development of moral virtue.

[2] A discussion of the problems faced by behaviourism is beyond the scope of this paper. It suffices to simply note that it does not provide us with an adequate account of human decision-making and action.

[3] This has been amply shown by MacIntyre, A. (1988), Nagel, T. (1986).

[4] See also Reck's (2002) discussion of the distinctions between "objective ideas" and objective thoughts" which he says reside in the third world. In discussing Pythagoras's theorem, he notes that there are real problems in claiming that the theorem was created by human beings. Was it invented by Pythagoras, or by the Egyptians who used it much earlier? There does not seem to be anything prima facie contradictory in saying that two people (or more) independently discovered the same theorem. Reck thinks that there is no easy solution to the question of whether the theorem was created or whether it has existed a-temporally.

[5] Frege means by *Bedeutung* the truth value of a proposition, that is, the state of affairs which makes the proposition true. *Sinn*, on the other hand, expresses meaning. The full quotation is missing in Popper, but is worth adding, since it offers support to Popper's idea of the third world. The complete quotation is "I understand by thought not the subjective act of thinking but its objective content which is capable of being the common property of several thinkers." (156, footnote) A similar point is made by Frege in "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry" in Strawson, P.F. (ed.) (1967) where he says, "….thoughts are neither things of the outer world nor ideas …. A third realm must be recognised." (29)

[6] Goldbach's conjecture takes several forms, but as originally stated in a letter by Christian Goldbach to Leonard Euler in 1742, asserts that every number that is greater that 2 can be expressed as the sum of three primes, where 1 is included amongst the primes. This conjecture and several variants has not been proved. For example, 3 = 1+1+1; 4 = 1+1+2; 5 = 1+1+3; 6 = 1+2+3, etc. Other variations do not include 1, so the smallest number than can be expressed as the sum of three primes will be 6 (2+2+2).

[7] Aquinas locates ethics and the nature of the good in God and the Natural Law, inscribed in our natures, provides us with a blueprint, which if followed, we lead to our flourishing. Since God wills our flourishing and is the source of the Law, morality is not manmade but God given.. For Aristotle, the nature of the good is located in that which enables human beings to flourish and this is determined in action.

[8] The distinctions between facts of the kind "Caesar crossed the Rubicon" and moral norms of the kind "Keep promises" are held to be quite distinct by Kant, but nevertheless, equally objective. Hume, does not think that it is possible to reduce an 'is' to an 'ought', but holds that values arise naturalistically through our likes and dislikes. See Hume, D. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, Book III, Section I and II. Popper calls the position he adopts *critical dualism*, that is, that decisions are never derivable from facts. See *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 62-63ff.

[9] Critical dualism, according to Popper, is the differentiation between humanly devised, or perhaps discovered, and enforced normative laws or conventions and the natural regularities which are observed in the physical world. Popper thinks that normative laws are not merely humanly made and could have their origins in God, but he asserts that they can be made and changed by human beings. Even though they are conventional, Popper does not think that this means they are arbitrary. It is the fact that human beings exist and have the power to make value judgements which introduces ethical values into the natural world. See Popper (1962, 60-61ff.)

[10] It should be acknowledged that there is a tension here in talking about what is revealed about the world, for it entirely unclear what is meant by "world". We have already said that Popper is ambiguous about the nature of objectivity, so world here could mean an objective$_1$ world or and objective$_2$ world. Discoverability here could be taken to mean in the first instance discovery of what the implications of our postulates are, if we take them to be true. If we take our language to encompass all that we can say about our world, then it is language which prescribes the limits of our world. This seems to be a point of agreement between Popper and Wittgenstein. On the other hand, objective$_2$ world implies a world independent of human beings, one against which we compare what we say about the world. That is, propositions are true if they correspond to a state of affairs in the world. In this situation, our postulates gain their plausibility by producing hypotheses which are tested by seeing whether the predictions we make are borne out. In this negative sense, if an hypothesis is falsified, we have eliminated something which is false about the world, but this is a rather minimal advance. The main point is that it makes us free to propose another more fruitful hypothesis which explains as much as the old hypothesis and which makes more novel predictions. The former, objective$_1$ world does not assume a real world beyond what is discoverable by the senses, while the latter, objective$_2$ world clearly does.

[11] See Aquinas (1995) *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Book12, lesson 8, par.2539, 807.

[12] Although the idea that moral principles fail to be self-subsistent objects, nevertheless there is a sense in which they are universal principles applicable to all human beings. In being the kinds of creatures that we are, a full specification of our nature involves a recognition that in order to flourish, human beings will need to act in accord with that nature. This leads to there being laws of God, or moral norms which express the specifications under which human beings flourish. In this important sense, these are norms independent of human beings because human beings do not determine their own nature. This gives us an objective$_2$ world which is not intersubjectively determined, but is not independent of human beings.

[13] The debate about the kinds of values which are recognisably Australian and how they are to be taught was raised by the Federal Minister for Education, Dr. Brendan Nelson in September, 2005. In a radio interview, Nelson said that he believed that the best way for such values to be taught was in all schools, including Muslim schools, without indicating in any way why he thought this would lead to a commitment to those values. After all, being taught Australian values is one thing, being committed to them is quite another. He went on to list nine key values which he said exemplified the Australian way of life, superimposing on these the image of John Simpson Kirkpatrick as exemplifying what lies at the heart of Australian identity. A transcript of the radio interview conducted with Nelson may be found at http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2005/s1445094.htm, accessed: 1/9/05

[14] See *Language of Morals*, 74-5.

[15] See Aristotle, Book 2 of the *Nichomachean Ethics,* Chapter 3