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AN OBJECTIVIST ACCOUNT OF MORALS

A THESIS

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## SUMMARY

This thesis defends an account of the nature of moral judgements which shows them to be statements of fact whose correctness or otherwise is an objective matter.

In the first two chapters, some arguments which have been thought to show that moral judgements are not statements of fact are considered and rejected. In the next chapter, a more formidable argument against the view that moral judgements are statements of fact is noted. The difficulties raised by this argument, which I refer to as 'the reasons argument', are noted for attention later in the thesis.

In chapters IV and V, two influential alternatives to construing moral judgements as statements of fact, which I call, respectively, 'the attitudes theory' and 'the imperative theory', are described, and it is shown that these views entail moral relativism. In the next chapter, it is argued that if we accept moral relativism, we must accept that morals and moral philosophy are trivial.

In chapter VII, the attitudes theory and the imperative theory are criticised. Then, in chapter VIII, a different account of the nature of moral judgements, which entails that they are indeed statements of fact, is defended. It is shown that this account is proof against the reasons argument. In the following chapter, a serious objection to the suggested account is considered. The objection shows that if the account is to hold for *moral* 'ought'-judgements, we must claim that

moral considerations provide any man with reasons for acting, regardless of his particular desires and interests - and there appear to be conclusive grounds for denying that this could be true of *any* consideration.

However, it is argued in chapter X that there *could* be considerations of which this is true, and that it is in fact true of moral considerations. The argument used bears a close resemblance to that by which Kurt Baier tries to show that any man has reason to be moral, and seems open to a type of objection generally thought fatal to Baier's argument. An attempt to deal with this objection is made in chapter XI.

The arguments of chapters X and XI can be seen as attempting to show that any man has reason to be moral. However, it is sometimes argued that any such attempt necessarily overlooks a feature of morality which, once it is pointed out, can be seen to rule out the possibility of there being any reasons for being moral. Chapter XII is devoted to dealing with this type of argument.

The task attempted in chapters X and XI, that of showing that any man has reason to be moral without denying certain considerations about the nature of reasons for acting which seem incompatible with this, has been undertaken elsewhere by Professor G.R. Grice. I have therefore included an appendix to the thesis (Appendix A) in which I argue that Professor Grice fails to accomplish this task.

The arguments of chapters X and XI would show, if sound, that morality is required of any man by rationality. That this can be shown is denied by D.A.J. Richards and by Bernard Gert, both of whom also present some considerations which suggest that the implications

of this denial are less damaging to morality than one might think. The thesis therefore closes with a further appendix, in which I consider briefly the positions of Richards and Gert on these matters.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. Neither, to the best of my knowledge, does it contain any material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

(Winston L.S. Nesbitt).

## PREFACE

The main task to which this thesis addresses itself is that of defending an analysis of moral judgements according to which such judgements are a species of statement, the question of whose truth or falsity is therefore an objective matter. This task seems to me of especial importance in ethics because, as I shall argue, the major alternatives which have been suggested to construing moral judgements as statements of fact are, despite the disclaimers of some of their proponents, inevitably relativistic (my use of this now somewhat unfashionable term, and thus of the term 'objectivist', which I use with the opposite meaning, is explained in the first page or so of chapter 1), and I believe that moral relativism entails the triviality of morals and moral philosophy.

That certain theories would, if true, show morality and moral philosophy to be trivial is, of course, in itself no criticism of those theories - perhaps morality and moral philosophy *are* trivial, and the demonstration of this salutary. However, it also seems to me that these theories can be shown to be false, and that the rejection of the view that moral judgements are statements of fact, which has been the major impetus behind the development of such theories, is far from being justified by the arguments commonly advanced in its favour. An account of the nature of moral judgements can be provided which construes them as statements of fact and which can deal with

such of these arguments as are not either question-begging or merely confused. My attempt to show all of this proceeds in accordance with the following rough outline:

In the first three chapters, some arguments which have been thought to demonstrate that moral judgements cannot be statements of fact are examined. In chapters IV and V, two influential types of alternative views about the status of moral judgements, which I refer to respectively as 'the attitudes theory' and 'the imperative theory', are described, and it is shown that such views entail moral relativism. In the next chapter, it is argued that if moral relativism is true, morals and moral philosophy are trivial. Chapter VII is devoted to criticism of the attitudes theory and the imperative theory, and then in chapter VIII, a different account, which entails that moral judgements are indeed statements of fact, is defended. In chapter IX, it is seen that to accept this account involves accepting that any man has reason to be moral, regardless of his interests and desires, and the remaining chapters are devoted to making good this latter claim.

The task of showing that any man has reason to be moral is one which has been undertaken by Professor G.R. Grice, and if he were successful, the final chapters of this thesis, in which the same task is attempted, would be largely superfluous. I have therefore included an appendix in which it is argued that Grice is not successful.

If any man has reason to be moral, it would appear to follow that morality is rationally required of any man. That this can be so, however, is denied by D.A.J. Richards and by Bernard Gert, both of whom make some attempt to allay fears that this denial might be destructive of morality. I have therefore devoted a second appendix to a brief



consideration of their views on the rationality of morality.

Three passages in the thesis have been accepted for publication in more or less the form in which they appear here. My criticisms of Hare's attempt to show that value-judgements entail imperatives appeared in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, July, 1973, under the title 'Value-Judgements, Prescriptive Language, and Imperatives'; my discussion of Max Black's paper 'The Gap Between "Is" and "Should"' appeared in *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, August, 1973, entitled 'Performatives and the Gap Between "Is" and "Ought"'; and my discussion of Mrs. Foot's paper 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' has been accepted by *The Philosophical Review* as a paper entitled 'Categorical Imperatives - a Defence', and should appear in the April 1977 issue of that journal.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. J.H. Chandler, my supervisor at the University of Adelaide, and Mr. R.E. Ewin, who agreed to be my external supervisor while I completed the thesis at the University of Western Australia, for the help and advice they have given me (neither, of course, is in any way responsible for the mistakes which no doubt occur in what follows, and both would in fact disagree with much of what I have said).

## CHAPTER I

### 'NATURALISM' : MOORE'S ARGUMENTS

In this dissertation, I will argue against certain influential views in moral philosophy according to which moral judgements have a performative aspect, that is to say, according to which in uttering a moral judgement one is performing some action other than the mere making of a statement,<sup>1</sup> and for a view according to which such judgements *are* simply statements. The view to be defended also differs in another respect from those I shall criticise. The latter, as I will argue, have clear relativistic implications, while the former implies that the soundness or otherwise of any given moral judgement is an objective matter. Considerable attention will be given to this issue of relativism versus objectivism, which, for reasons I will mention later, seems to me one of the most crucial issues arising out of recent moral philosophy.

The terms 'relativism' and 'objectivism' have in fact become somewhat unfashionable, and it is sometimes suggested that they are too imprecise, or at least have too many different senses, for their

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the two most well known proponents of the types of views I have in mind have been C.L. Stevenson and R.M. Hare, both of whom I will discuss at some length.

use in ethical discussion to be conducive to anything but confusion.<sup>2</sup> However, there is at least a sense of these terms which can be made adequately clear. This is the sense in which relativism is the view that it is not possible to justify, in the sense of giving reasons for accepting, any moral judgement, view or principle, as against any other, and in which objectivism is the denial of relativism in this sense. Moreover, I think it probable that these are the senses of 'relativism' and 'objectivism' which those who wish to use the terms have usually had in mind. Be that as it may, however, these are the senses in which I use the words, and in which they refer us to the issue which I believe to be of such major importance in ethics.

I will begin by considering certain arguments which have been thought to show that moral judgements cannot be statements that something is the case, or, as it is often put, statements of fact. The first arguments I wish to consider are those advanced by Moore against ethical naturalism in *Principia Ethica*<sup>3</sup> at the beginning of this century. Moore's target was not, of course, the view that moral judgements are statements, but the view that they are statements about properties or objects observable by empirical means. However, his arguments would show that moral judgements are either statements about objects or properties *not* observable by empirical means, or not statements of fact at all. Now while Moore, of course, was happy to embrace the former alternative, most contemporary philosophers are not

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963) p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1903).

prepared to do so, and some therefore take him to have shown that moral judgements are not statements of fact. In fact, the word 'naturalism' tends to be used nowadays to refer to the view that moral judgements are statements of fact of *some* sort rather than merely to the view that they are statements of 'natural' fact. Since I too am disinclined to accept Moore's conclusion, but nevertheless wish to hold that moral judgements are statements of fact, I will try to show that his arguments are unsuccessful.

Moore's chief concern was with the analysis of the notion of goodness, and for him, naturalism was the view that the notion could be analysed in terms of words which stood for an empirical property or properties. Thus, examples he gives of naturalistic analyses or definitions of 'good' are "'good" means "pleasant"' and "'good" means "desired"' - for whether or not something is pleasant and whether or not something is desired are empirical questions.

Now Moore claimed that all naturalistic definitions of good necessarily involve a certain mistake, which he called 'the naturalistic fallacy'. What did he take this mistake to be, and is it indeed involved in all naturalistic definitions of 'good'? Certain passages in *Principia Ethica* suggest that the mistake was supposed to consist simply in the attempt to define goodness in terms of words which denote natural properties, or, as it is sometimes put, to identify goodness with some natural property or properties. For example, on page 73 he writes that the fallacy 'consists in the contention that good *means* nothing but some simple or complex notion, that can be defined in terms of natural qualities'. However, in other passages he makes it clear that he believes the mistake in question to be involved

in *any* attempt to define 'good', and not just in attempts to define it naturalistically. On page 13, he says that if a man confuses two natural objects with one another, 'defining the one by the other', the same fallacy would be involved, though there would be no reason to call this instance of it naturalistic; and on page 14, he says that even if good were a natural object, 'that would not alter the nature of the fallacy', though again, the name 'naturalistic fallacy' would not be appropriate. These passages suggest, moreover, that the naturalistic fallacy is simply a special case of the mistake of defining a property in terms of, or identifying it with, some property other than itself.

Still other of Moore's remarks, however, suggest rather that the fallacy is a special case of the mistake of trying to define an indefinable notion (Moore, as is well known, held that the property of goodness was non-natural *and* indefinable). Thus, on pages 12 to 13, he says that if anyone were to try to define 'pleasure' as being any other natural object, 'that would be the same fallacy which I have called the naturalistic fallacy'; and this comes immediately after a passage in which he argues that 'pleasure' is 'absolutely indefinable' (of course, it is trivial that pleasure cannot be defined as being any *other* object, and Moore clearly means to claim that a fallacy is involved in trying to define pleasure at all).

We have, then, two accounts of what Moore meant by 'the naturalistic fallacy', both of which can be supported from the text of *Principia Ethica*. One is that the fallacy is supposed to be a special case of the mistake of confusing goodness with some other property; and the other is that it is supposed to be a special case

of the mistake of trying to define an indefinable property, namely the mistake of trying to define the indefinable property of goodness.

W.K. Frankena, in a well known criticism of Moore's use of the notion of the naturalistic fallacy,<sup>4</sup> notes the possibility of these two accounts of the nature of the fallacy, and mentions a third possibility which also gains some support from Moore's remarks on the matter. This is the suggestion that the naturalistic fallacy consists in the error of confusing a universal synthetic proposition about what is good with a *definition* of goodness. Thus, supposing 'pleasure is good' to be a true universal synthetic proposition, a man would commit the naturalistic fallacy if he were to conclude from the fact that pleasure and goodness are always found together that 'pleasure' *means* 'good'. Now Frankena points out that on any of these three accounts, though to commit the naturalistic fallacy is to commit a mistake (for it is certainly a mistake to confuse one property with another, or to try to define an indefinable property, or to confuse a synthetic proposition about what is good with a definition of goodness), on none of them is the mistake committed a fallacy in the sense in which an invalid argument, like the fallacy of composition, is a fallacy. Frankena's point is not merely the verbal one that the naturalistic fallacy, though a mistake, is not strictly a fallacy. It is, rather, that when we understand the nature of the so-called fallacy, it becomes clear that it cannot be used as a weapon in an argument against naturalism, as can the notion of a logical fallacy like the fallacy of

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<sup>4</sup> W.K. Frankena, 'The Naturalistic Fallacy', *Mind*, 48 (1939) pp. 464-477.

composition. As he puts it, 'the charge of committing the naturalistic fallacy can be made, if at all, only as a conclusion from the discussion, and not as an instrument of deciding it'.<sup>5</sup> For anyone who offers a definition of goodness will of course deny that he is confusing goodness with some other property, or is trying to define an indefinable property, or that what he takes to be a definition of goodness is really a synthetic proposition. Since he believes his definition to be correct, such a person believes that the property in terms of which he tries to define goodness is *not* a property other than goodness; since he believes that he has just done so, he clearly believes that goodness *can* be defined; and since he believes the proposition which he offers as a definition to *be* a definition, he clearly does *not* believe that it is a synthetic proposition. Thus, it is question-begging merely to assume that anyone who offers a definition of goodness commits any of these mistakes, since the assumption that a definition of goodness must involve any of them is necessarily one which he rejects.

Before discussing this criticism of Moore, let us ask which of the three accounts of the nature of the naturalistic fallacy mentioned by Frankena we should take as most accurately reflecting Moore's intentions. We can, I think, eliminate the last-mentioned account. It seems highly unlikely that Moore thought that all naturalists confuse universal synthetic propositions about what is good with definitions of goodness. In the first place, there obviously *could* be a (faulty) definition of goodness which would be

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 465.

false even as a universal synthetic proposition about what is good - 'pain is good' would appear to be such a definition. In the second place, it is clear that confusing a universal synthetic proposition about what is good with a definition of goodness is merely one way in which someone might arrive at a faulty definition of goodness (one might instead, for example, consult an oracle); whereas, as we have seen, Moore thought that *any* attempted definition of goodness involves the naturalistic fallacy. It seems reasonable, then, to take Moore as holding the confusion of universal synthetic propositions about what is good with definitions of goodness to be what as a matter of fact lies behind many or all commissions of the naturalistic fallacy, rather than the fallacy itself.

What of the first two accounts mentioned, that is, the suggestion that the naturalistic fallacy was the mistake of identifying goodness with some other property, and the suggestion that it was the mistake of trying to define an indefinable property? Moore certainly thought that a naturalistic definition of 'good' involved both mistakes. Since he held that goodness was a non-natural property, he clearly thought that any attempt to define it in terms of a natural property involved the mistake of identifying goodness with some other property; and since he held that goodness was indefinable, he clearly also held that any such attempt involved the mistake of trying to define an indefinable property. However, Moore's *reason* for thinking that a naturalist necessarily commits the first mistake was not that he believed goodness to be a non-natural property, since he states, as we just saw, that even if goodness were a *natural* property, the same mistake would be involved



in trying to define it. Rather, his reason for thinking that a naturalist necessarily commits the first mistake was that this is a consequence of his view that they necessarily commit the latter. For if one tries to define an indefinable property P, the property in terms of which one tries to do so will necessarily be a property other than P (otherwise, the definition would be correct, and P would after all be definable). Hence, I suggest, if we are to try to decide which mistake Moore took to be *the* naturalistic fallacy, we should opt for the latter - that is, we should say that the naturalistic fallacy was supposed to be a special case of the attempt to define an indefinable property. As has just been pointed out, Moore's belief that naturalists commit the mistake of identifying a property (goodness) with some other property is a consequence of his belief that they commit the mistake of trying to define an indefinable property, and the latter mistake is in this sense more basic in Moore's thought than the former. At any rate we need only consider Moore's claim that any naturalist, or for that matter anyone who tries to define goodness, necessarily commits the latter mistake, that of trying to define an indefinable property. For if we decide that this claim is correct, we must accept the consequence, as we saw a moment ago, that a naturalist necessarily commits the former mistake, of confusing goodness with some other property; and if we decide that it is not correct, or that Moore provides no reason for believing it to be, it follows that he provides no reason either to accept that consequence.

Now Frankena is surely right in saying that it is question-begging to merely assume against naturalists that they are trying to define an indefinable property - for this is to assume, what a

naturalist clearly denies, that goodness *is* an indefinable property. However, it is not quite true to say that Moore merely assumed that goodness is indefinable; he presented an argument to show that this is so. The argument I have in mind is, of course, Moore's so-called 'open question' argument, which is produced on pages 15 to 16 of *Principia Ethica*. The argument runs as follows:

Suppose that goodness could be defined in terms of, i.e. was the same property as, some property P. This would make unintelligible the question 'Is P good?', since it would be equivalent to 'Is P P?'. But no matter what property we take P to be, the property of being pleasurable, desired, or whatever, we will find that we *can* intelligibly ask 'Is P good?'; we will find that we understand the question, as we would not understand the question 'Is P P?'. Hence, no definition of goodness can be correct.

Moore does, then, produce an argument to show that goodness is indefinable. However, the argument can readily be shown to be inadequate. First, let us note that its first premise, which in effect asserts that if 'P is good' is analytic, then 'Is P good?' cannot be intelligible, might well be questioned - it is a common view amongst philosophers that statements like '484 plus 263 equals 747' are analytic, yet 'Is 484 plus 263 equal to 747?' seems intelligible. Let us suppose, however, that Moore's first premise is true. This means that it is a consequence of naturalism that some questions of the form 'Is P good?' are unintelligible. In that case, Moore cannot be permitted to assert without argument that this consequence is false, for he is arguing against naturalists, who presumably believe that any consequence of their position is true. But Moore's second premise *does*

merely assert that no questions of the form 'Is P good?' are unintelligible. The open question argument, in short, begs the question.

However, as is pointed out by D.H. Monro and also by W.D. Hudson,<sup>6</sup> Moore also appears to have had in mind another argument designed to show that no definition of goodness can be correct. The argument is this:

The naturalist, who defines goodness in terms of some property P, wants to use the statement 'P is (by definition) good' to advocate the pursuit of P; he produces it as a *reason* for pursuing P. But his definition entails that 'P is good' is equivalent to 'P is P', an insignificant tautology which cannot state a reason for pursuing P, or anything else. Therefore, the naturalist's use of 'P is good' as a reason for pursuing P is inconsistent with his definition, and implicitly contradicts it.

Monro suggests that what the naturalist has to do here is to include in his analysis of 'good' a reference to feelings of approval, so that 'X is good' will mean (a) 'X has a given natural characteristic P', and (b) 'P is approved (by me or by men in general)'. This, he says, will after all entitle the naturalist to use his definition as a reason or argument for pursuing what he claims to be by definition good, because 'that an action is the kind of action you approve is a reason for doing it'.<sup>7</sup>

However, it does not seem to me that the move suggested by

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<sup>6</sup> See Monro, *Empiricism and Ethics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 92-93; Hudson, *Modern Moral Philosophy* (London, Macmillan, 1970), p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> Monro, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

Monro is of the slightest help to the naturalist in the face of Moore's criticism. The property in terms of which he claims 'good' to be definable will now be the complex one of 'having the natural characteristic P, which is approved (by me or by men in general)'. But this leaves him open to precisely the same objection as before; he cannot advocate the pursuit of whatever has this property by saying that it is good, because that would be to utter the tautology that whatever has the natural characteristic P, which is approved, has the natural characteristic P, which is approved; and this cannot be held to state a reason for pursuing whatever has the natural characteristic P, which is approved, or anything else. Of course, it seems reasonable to suggest that the fact that something has a property which is approved of is itself a reason for pursuing that thing, at least for those whose approval is being referred to, and Monro's analysis could therefore be said to show how one can provide a reason for pursuing something by calling it good. However, though the problem of how the assertion that something is good can provide a reason for pursuing that thing is an important one, which I will discuss at some length later in this thesis, it is not the problem raised by Moore, and nor, as we shall see, is it one he *can* raise. The problem which is posed by Moore's objection is, rather, that of how, if 'good' has the same meaning as some term 'P', 'P is good' can provide a reason for pursuing P - and as we have just seen, Monro's suggested reply does nothing towards dealing with *this* problem.

How, then, can a naturalist reply to Moore's objection? He can, I suggest, reply along the following lines: Let us concede that it is inconsistent to both claim that 'good' means the same as 'P', and to

try to advocate the pursuit of P by saying that it is good. Let us concede also that all naturalists have been guilty of this inconsistency. It follows from this, not that naturalism is an inconsistent view, but simply that naturalists have been inconsistent. To avoid running foul of Moore's objection, a naturalist needs only to be careful to avoid the sort of inconsistency mentioned; that is, he should bear in mind that should he wish to advocate the pursuit of P, the property in terms of which he tries to define goodness, he must avoid trying to do so by saying that P is good. This should impose no great hardship on him, for since he thinks that P is identical with goodness, one has as little (or as much) need to advocate its pursuit as to advocate that of goodness; and, moreover, he is not precluded by Moore's objection from advocating the pursuit of anything *other* than P (that is, goodness itself) by asserting that it is good.

This completes my discussion of Moore's attack on naturalism. It has been shown, I hope, that his arguments either beg the question against naturalism or only count against inconsistent naturalists, and thus do not force us to the conclusion that moral judgements are either statements about non-empirical properties or objects, or not statements at all.

## CHAPTER II

### HARE'S ARGUMENT

We have just seen that Moore fails to show that moral judgements cannot be statements of empirical fact. I will now consider another well known attempt to show this, and in fact to show that such judgements cannot be statements of fact at all.

In chapter 5 of *The Language of Morals*,<sup>1</sup> R.M. Hare attempts to restate Moore's argument against naturalism 'in a way which makes it clear why "naturalism" is untenable', for he believes that although Moore's formulation of it is faulty, the argument 'rests, albeit insecurely, upon a secure foundation'<sup>2</sup>. The argument he has in mind is Moore's 'open question' argument, which was discussed in the last chapter, and is an attempt to show that 'good' cannot be defined, not only naturalistically, but at all. As we shall see, Hare's formulation of it is no advance over Moore's, for both suffer from essentially the same defect.

Hare's argument is this: According to the naturalist, the term 'good' is definable in terms of some set of characteristics C. This will mean that 'P is a good picture' has the same meaning as 'P is a picture and P is C'. But in that case, we would be unable to

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<sup>1</sup> R.M. Hare *The Language of Morals* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

commend pictures for being C, for to say that P is good because it is C would be to say that it is C because it is C. Since to say that P is good because it is C is to commend it for being C, it follows that 'good' is not definable in terms of any characteristics C.

Hare considers the objection that his argument could be used to prove of *any* word that it cannot be defined in terms of others. He imagines it being suggested, for example, that if one accepts that 'puppy' means 'young dog',

...then the sentence 'a puppy is a young dog' becomes equivalent to 'a young dog is a young dog', and this is something that we would never want to say; but we do sometimes say 'a puppy is a young dog'; therefore the proposed definition prevents our saying something that in our ordinary talk we do meaningfully say, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Hare's reply (I paraphrase somewhat for brevity's sake) is that we normally use the sentence 'a puppy is a young dog', not to say anything of substance about puppies, but as a definition, that is, as a statement about the use of words. Thus, the sentence may be expanded into 'The English sentence "If anything is a puppy it is a young dog" is analytic'. Now if we substitute for the word 'puppy' in this sentence the words 'young dog', we get a statement which, though also true, does not mean the same. This should not surprise us since it is well known that if a sentence contains within it another sentence within inverted commas it is not always possible without changing the meaning of the whole sentence to substitute synonymous expressions for expressions within the inverted commas. Since, then, the sentences 'The English sentence "If anything is a puppy it is a young dog" is analytic' and 'The English sentence "If anything

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

is a young dog it is a young dog" is analytic' do not mean the same, there is no puzzle about the fact that though we sometimes do wish to utter the abbreviation of the former, 'A puppy is a young dog', we never wish to utter that of the latter, 'A young dog is a young dog'.<sup>4</sup>

However, says Hare, all this is entirely irrelevant to the case of the word 'good'. The objection being considered was

... that our attack on naturalistic definitions of the word 'good' could be pressed equally against definitions of the word 'puppy', and that, since these latter are obviously in order, there must be something wrong with the attack.

The attack, however,

... was based upon the fact that if it were true that 'a good A' meant the same as 'an A which is C', then it would be impossible to use the sentence 'an A which is C is good' in order to commend; for this sentence would be analytic and equivalent to 'An A which is C is C'.<sup>6</sup>

- and, Hare points out, it seems clear that we do use sentences of the form 'An A which is C is good' in order to commend A's which are C. Further, it is clear that in so commending, we are not doing the same sort of thing as when we say 'A puppy is a young dog' - 'That is to say, commending is not the same sort of linguistic activity as defining'.<sup>7</sup>

Hare's reply, then, is that his attack on definitions of 'good' in terms of some characteristics C depended on the fact that sentences of the form 'An A which is C is good' are used for commending; and that since the sentence 'A puppy is a young dog' is not used for

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>5</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 90-91.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 91.



commending, that attack cannot be pressed against the definition of 'puppy' as 'young dog'.

However, it is possible to construct an argument to show that 'puppy' cannot be naturalistically defined which is genuinely parallel to Hare's argument to show that 'good' cannot be so defined. Let us coin the expression 'to puppify': to puppify something is, by definition, to classify it as a puppy. Thus, to call something a puppy is to puppify it. It is true that this is a tautology, but the same can be said for the claim that to call something good is to commend it. The following argument can now be advanced against the possibility of defining 'puppy':

If 'a puppy' could be defined as 'an A which is C', then it would be impossible to use the sentence 'An A which is C is a puppy' to puppify; for this sentence would be analytic, and equivalent to 'An A which is C is C'. But it is clear that we do use sentences of the form 'An A which is C is a puppy' to puppify A's which are C. Since this would be impossible if 'a puppy' meant 'an A which is C', the definition must be rejected; and since this holds no matter what characteristics C denotes, it follows that we cannot define 'puppy' in terms of any set of characteristics C.

However, we know that 'puppy' *can* be defined in terms of certain characteristics, namely those of being young and being a dog. Where, then, is the mistake in this argument? There seems to be a choice here. First, we might reject the premise that if 'An A which is C is a puppy' is analytic, it cannot be used to puppify. It might be said that 'An A which is a young dog is a puppy' does classify, albeit vacuously, young

dogs as puppies. If we accept this premise, though, we will then have to reject the argument's other premise, that sentences of the form 'An A which is C is a puppy' are used to puppyify - for this needs, for the purposes of the argument, to be interpreted as asserting that *all* sentences of that form are used to puppyify, and we will have just accepted that some sentences of that form, namely analytic ones, cannot be so used.

Very similar criticisms can be made of Hare's argument. We might, in the first place, reject the premise that if 'An A which is C is good' is analytic, it cannot be used to commend. 'Justice is a virtue', for example, might plausibly be said to be both analytic and commendatory of justice. However, we cannot proceed from here in quite the same way as in our criticism of the 'puppy' argument. We cannot say that if we accept the premise that analytic sentences cannot be used to commend, we must reject the premise that all sentences of the form 'An A which is C is good' are used to commend, on the ground that the former tells us that analytic sentences of that form cannot be so used. For Hare, as an opponent of naturalism, must and does deny that any sentences of that form are analytic. He asserts that

'... a sentence of the form "An A which is C is good" cannot without change of meaning be rewritten "The English sentence 'An A which is C is good' is analytic"'.<sup>8</sup>

However, if it is question-begging to assume against Hare that there are analytic sentences of the form in question, it is equally question-begging of him to assume against the naturalist that there are none -

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

for a naturalist is just a person who claims that some sentence of that form is analytic. What is wrong with Hare's argument, then, is that its second premise involves the assumption that no sentence of the form 'An A which is C is good' is analytic - and this would not be accepted by any naturalist, for it is simply the assumption that naturalism is false. The question-begging character of the argument becomes especially plain in the final section of the chapter, where he summarises his findings. Value-words such as 'good', he says, have the function of commending, and so cannot be defined in terms of words which do not have this function. But of course, anyone who claims that some expression has the same meaning as 'good' will claim that it *does* perform the same functions, and Hare merely assumes that this must be false.

It might be said that if a man defines 'good' in terms of some expression which can be used to commend, he is not doing anything to which Hare would object, since his definition would not be naturalistic, in the (somewhat esoteric) sense that it would not be in terms of an expression which was not itself commendatory. However, to say this would be to render Hare's claim trivial - if he is merely making the point that expressions with different uses cannot be equivalent, he is indeed on safe ground. But his claim is not merely that 'good' cannot be defined in terms of an expression which does not have the same function - it is that the word cannot be defined in terms of *any* expression denoting characteristics which may be possessed by things which are good. This latter *is* a substantial claim, but, as

we have seen, his argument for it is unsatisfactory.

It is interesting to note, in conclusion, that the defects of Hare's argument are inherited from Moore's 'open question' argument, of which it is meant to be a reformulation. Moore's argument, it will be remembered, was this: If 'good' could be defined in terms of some property P, then the question 'Is P good?' would be unintelligible. But no matter what property we take P to be, the question 'Is P good?' is always intelligible. Therefore, no definition of goodness can be correct.

Now our earlier criticisms of this argument closely parallel those just made of Hare's. Just as we might well question Hare's first premise, that if 'An A which is C is good' is analytic, then it cannot be used to commend, so, it was pointed out, we might well question Moore's first premise, which in effect says that if 'P is good' is analytic, then 'Is P good?' cannot be used to ask an intelligible question. And just as if we accept Hare's first premise, his other premise, that all sentences of the form 'An A which is C is good' are used to commend, becomes question-begging, so, we saw, if we accept Moore's first premise, *his* other premise, that all questions of the form 'Is P good?' are intelligible, becomes question-begging. We see that Hare's reformulation of the open question argument and that argument itself are defective in strikingly similar ways; and the reformulation has thus been in vain.

Hare does in fact present another argument which, if sound, would count against naturalism. He argues that moral judgements are in a certain sense 'action-guiding', whereas no statements of fact are action-guiding; and therefore, that moral judgements cannot be

statements of fact. However, the argument is presented as a defence of his positive view that moral judgements are in fact a species of imperative, and I will defer consideration of it until later, when we will have occasion to discuss that positive view.

## CHAPTER III

### THE 'REASONS' ARGUMENT

I have tried to show that neither Moore's arguments against naturalism nor Hare's reformulation of them is successful. However, there are indications in the discussions of Moore by both Hudson and Monro that they confuse an argument they attribute to him with another and much more formidable argument against naturalism. As we saw in chapter I, they attribute to Moore the following argument (let us call it 'Moore's argument'): If, as the naturalist claims, 'good' means the same as some word P which denotes some natural characteristic, then 'P is good' is a tautology, and cannot be used to advocate pursuit of P. Now Hudson, in summing up his remarks on this argument, says,

The ethical naturalists set themselves up as able to do two things with the word "good": (I) to point out that it was only used to describe certain natural properties; and (II) to use it in ethical teaching [by 'teaching' Hudson seems to mean 'advocacy']. Moore's achievement was to see that they could not (logically) do both.<sup>1</sup>

However, the argument Hudson has been discussing does not show that a naturalist cannot use 'good' *at all* in advocating some course of action, and this is the first time Hudson has made so strong a claim for it. As we saw when discussing the argument in chapter I, all it shows is that the naturalist cannot use 'good' in the sentence 'P is good' (where 'P' is the term he claims to have the same meaning

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<sup>1</sup> Hudson, op. cit., p. 87,

as 'good') to advocate the pursuit of P, since that sentence would be a tautology. For all that is shown by the argument, a naturalist can legitimately advocate the pursuit of anything other than P by saying that it is good. The reason why he cannot use 'P is good' to advocate pursuit of P is that on his view, 'P is good' is a tautology. But nothing follows about the legitimacy or otherwise of his advocating the pursuit of anything Q other than P by saying that it is good, since on his view, 'Q is good' is necessarily not a tautology.

However, there is another well known type of argument against naturalism which *does* yield the conclusion that a naturalist cannot use the word 'good' *at all* to advocate any course of action, and which I suspect Hudson of confusing with the one he is supposed to be discussing. The argument is this: The naturalist cannot use any judgement of the form 'X is good' in advocating pursuit of X, not because such a judgement is always a tautology on his view, but simply because, on his view, it merely states that the object X has a certain property, just as (to use an example which *Monro* gives in a different context) the judgement that buttercups are yellow merely states that buttercups have a certain property, that of yellowness. For, as *Monro* points out, 'The yellowness of buttercups is no reason for growing them or picking them unless you happen to like yellow'<sup>2</sup>; and if the judgement that something is good, like the judgement that it is yellow, merely ascribes a property to that thing, it provides no reason for pursuing that thing. Let us call this 'the reasons argument'.

My reason for suggesting that Hudson confuses the reasons

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<sup>2</sup> *Monro*, op. cit., p. 81.

argument with Moore's is that, in his summary of the latter, quoted a moment ago, he states that why naturalists are supposed to be unable to use the word 'good' in advocating any action is that they hold the word to be 'only used to describe certain natural properties'. This is an inept summary of Moore's argument that since on the naturalist's view, goodness is identical with some property P, it follows that on that view, 'P is good' is a tautology, and provides no reason for pursuing P; but it is a perfectly good way of summarising the argument outlined a moment ago, that is, the argument that since the naturalist claims that to call something 'good' is merely to ascribe to it some (natural) property, it follows that he cannot use the word in advocating a course of action. Moreover, as we have seen, the reasons argument does, and Moore's does not, support the conclusion that the naturalist cannot use 'good' *at all* to advocate some course of action.

There is reason to believe that Monro too confuses the two arguments. In the first place, we saw that his suggestion that the naturalist can meet Moore's objection by including in his definition of 'good' a reference to feelings of approval is a *non sequitur*.<sup>3</sup> However, this is a very plausible reply to the argument that on the naturalist's view, the judgement that X is good cannot provide any reason for pursuing X. For if 'X is good' means in part, as Monro suggests, 'X has a property of which I (or men in general) approve', then it is plausible to say that it *does* provide reason for doing X, since to accept that X has a property of which one approves *is* to have been provided with a reason for pursuing X.

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<sup>3</sup> See ch. I, pp. 10-11.



Moreover, Monro claims without argument that Moore's point tells more heavily against Moore himself than against his opponents,<sup>4</sup> and this is much more obviously true of the reasons argument than of Moore's. It is obviously true of the reasons argument, which counts against the view that 'X is good' ascribes a property to X, for Moore held this view. But it is by no means obviously true of Moore's argument, which points out the inconsistency between claiming that 'P is good' is a definition and nevertheless using it to advocate the pursuit of P. For though Moore did advocate the pursuit of certain things, such as 'the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects',<sup>5</sup> by calling them good, he did not claim that goodness could be defined in terms of these things - in fact, as has already been laboured, he believed that goodness could not be defined at all.

Finally, Monro in his previous chapter explicitly propounds the reasons argument as an argument against the view that goodness is a non-natural property; and the suggestion that he confuses it with Moore's argument might therefore explain why he is prepared to assert *without argument* that the latter counts against Moore's own position.

Now different readers of *Principia Ethica* have notoriously found in it a considerable number of different arguments against naturalism, and it is not inconceivable that someone might suggest that though what I have called Moore's argument has not always been clearly distinguished from the reasons argument, the latter is nevertheless also to be found somewhere in the book. About this suggestion I will

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.99.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, op. cit., p. 188.

only remark that to accept it would be to impute to Moore the incredible failure to see that an argument against goodness's being a property was also an argument against its being a *non-natural* property. I wish now to consider the reasons argument more closely.

Let us note that the argument can be generalised in two ways. The first is not strictly a generalisation of the argument, but a re-statement of it which makes its scope more apparent. The argument is designed to show that if 'X is good' is merely a statement of fact to the effect that X has some property, then it does not state a reason for acting. However, the words 'to the effect that it has some property' are, strictly speaking, superfluous, since any statement of fact about X can be seen as a statement to the effect that it has some property. Thus, the statement that X is to the left of Y can be said to ascribe to X the property of being to the left of Y, and the statement that X is the tallest mountain in the world can be said to ascribe to X the property of being the tallest mountain in the world, and so on. The reasons argument, therefore, is really an argument to show that 'X is good' cannot, if it is to provide a reason for acting, be a statement of fact *at all*.

The second way in which the argument can be generalised is by widening it to include, not only judgements to the effect that something is good, but *all* moral judgements. For the claim that no statement of fact can be a reason for acting clearly entails that not only judgements of the form 'X is good', but *any* moral judgement (and, for that matter, any judgement at all) cannot be a statement of fact if it is to provide a reason for acting.

Thus the reasons argument can be stated as the argument that since no statement of fact provides a reason for acting, moral judge-

ments cannot be statements of fact if they are to provide reasons for acting, and this is in fact how it is often stated. To assume that the point made by the argument counts against the view that moral judgements are statements of fact is of course to assume that moral judgements *do* provide reasons for acting. However, I believe this to be true, and in fact will argue the point later, when it will also become apparent in just what sense it is true.

The reasons argument is in fact a particular version of a more general argument against the view that moral judgements are statements of fact. This more general argument does not commit itself to the view that moral judgements provide reasons for action, but merely points out that there is a logical connection between acceptance of a moral judgement and action in accordance with it, such that it would be odd to accept, say, that one ought to do X without acquiring at least *some* inclination to do X. It is then pointed out that it is difficult to see how statements of fact can have this sort of connection with action, and that the onus is on anyone who construes moral judgements as statements of fact to show how they can have such a connection.

Arguments of this general type, and the reasons argument in particular, are accorded a good deal of importance in recent moral philosophy by some writers. Monro describes the reasons argument as 'what has always been one of the main arguments against non-naturalism'<sup>6</sup> (By 'non-naturalism' Monro means the view that moral predicates ascribe non-natural (non-empirical) properties to the things to which they

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<sup>6</sup> Monro, op. cit., p. 86.

are applied. But he recognises that the argument counts equally against any view which construes moral utterances as statements of fact, or 'assertions that something is the case')<sup>7</sup>. Hare also makes the point that moral judgements provide reasons for acting, and mentions many famous arguments in ethics which have been founded on it<sup>8</sup> (unfortunately, he conflates the point with his own claim that moral judgements entail imperatives, which will be criticised later). Again, J.O. Urmson, in his book on emotivism, presents a version of the reasons argument as the main positive ground for rejection of the view that moral judgements are statements of fact and acceptance of the emotive theory.<sup>9</sup>

I believe that these philosophers are right in the importance they assign to this type of argument. It provides a test which any theory of the nature of moral judgements must pass, and the difficulties it raises for naturalistic theories in particular constitute, I believe, the main reason behind the rejection of any such view by so many philosophers. A major strength of the view which I will later defend is, as we will see, that it is capable of dealing with this argument.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Hare, op. cit., pp. 28-31.

<sup>9</sup> J.O. Urmson, *The Emotive Theory of Ethics* (London, Hutchinson, 1968), ch. 2.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ATTITUDES THEORY, THE IMPERATIVE THEORY, AND MORAL RELATIVISM - (I).

Of the arguments we have so far considered, only what was called the reasons argument was found to have any force against the view that moral judgements are analysable as statements of fact, and it is this argument, as I have suggested, which in one form or another has largely influenced philosophers to abandon that view. The search for an alternative analysis, which can account for the feature of moral judgements to which the argument draws attention, namely that they provide reasons for acting, has gone in two main directions.

One way in which philosophers have thought to allow for the fact that moral judgements provide reasons for acting is by saying that it is their essential function to express the approval or disapproval (pro- or con-attitude) of the speaker towards some object or action. The emotive theory, largely associated with the name of Stevenson, P.H. Nowell-Smith's views, and those of D.H. Monro, are examples of this type of theory.<sup>1</sup> On this theory, to say that

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. C.L. Stevenson, 'The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms', *Mind*, 46 (1937), pp. 14-31; Nowell-Smith, *Ethics*, (Penguin Books, 1954); Monro, *op. cit.*

X is good or bad, for example, is to express one's approval or disapproval of X, and to say that Smith ought to do A is to express one's approval of Smith's doing A. This (let us call it the 'attitudes theory') must be distinguished from the view that a moral judgement *states* that the speaker or some other person or persons has or have certain attitudes. On the latter view, moral judgements would after all be statements of fact, and moreover, as we shall see, that view seems unable to account for the possibility of moral disagreement, a difficulty which appears to be avoided if we say instead that moral judgements *express* attitudes. It can easily be seen how the attitudes theory can provide an explanation of the fact that moral judgements provide reasons for action. If to say that X is good is to express approval of X, then presumably anyone who comes to accept that X is good necessarily comes to approve of X; and presumably, anyone who comes to approve of X is thereby provided with reason for performing actions which promote X, if any such are available to him.

The other main attempt to account for the fact that moral judgements provide reasons for acting is the theory, of which R.M. Hare is the most influential proponent, that moral judgements are a species of imperative, so that to tell someone that he ought to do X is, in part at least, to tell him to do X. This view also ensures a connection between acceptance of a moral judgement and action in accordance with it, for as Hare points out, there is a connection between assenting, say, to 'Do A', and doing A.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Language of Morals*, pp. 19-20 (the notion of assent to a command is in fact an odd one, but I will not press this point; in whatever sense a man can be said to assent to a command addressed to him, it seems plausible to say that there is a connection between his doing so and his acting in accordance with it).

These two theories will be discussed at some length in later chapters. They represent the two main attempts to account for the connection between moral judgements and action, which apparently cannot be accounted for on the view, unquestioned by Moore and the intuitionists of the early part of this century, that such judgements state facts of some sort; and both, as I shall now argue, are relativistic.

An immediate difficulty for someone who wishes to say that the attitudes theory and the imperative theory are relativistic is that Stevenson and Hare, the leading proponents, respectively, of these two theories, both deny that their views are relativistic. I will begin, therefore, by considering the grounds each offers for this denial. Stevenson devotes an article<sup>3</sup> to the demonstration that his theory is not relativistic. He begins by distinguishing his view from a particular relativistic view, according to which 'X is good' means 'X is approved by -', with the blank to be filled, for varying utterances of 'good', now with a reference to the speaker, now with a reference to some group to which the speaker belongs, and so on. On this view, whether it is true that X is good or not is a relative matter - it all depends on who is being asserted to approve of X. On Stevenson's view, however, 'X is good' is normally used to *express* the speaker's approval of X, and not to *assert* that he or anyone else approves of X. Further, 'good', being a term of praise, usually commends X to others, thus tending to evoke their approval as well. Stevenson also points out some further differences between the two views, which

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<sup>3</sup> 'Relativism and Nonrelativism in the Theory of Value', in his *Facts and Values* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963).

stem from these ones.

However, he concedes that by merely contrasting his view with one sort of relativistic view, he leaves open the possibility that it exemplifies some other sort of relativism, and that there appear to be grounds for suggesting that this is in fact the case. While his view, he says, recognises that factual reasons may be given for evaluative conclusions or value-judgements, it precludes the possibility that either inductive or deductive logic can tell us whether or not any reasons given to justify a particular value-judgement do in fact justify it. This is precluded simply because reasons for value-judgements are reasons for approving, and the latter 'require inferences ... from belief-expressing sentences to attitude-expressing sentences'.<sup>4</sup> Now if the question of whether or not any given value-judgement is justified (i.e., supported by good reasons) cannot be settled by appealing to either inductive or deductive logic, it might appear to follow that it cannot be settled at all; and of course if Stevenson's view does have this consequence, it follows not only that he fails to show that his view is not relativistic, but that it is in fact relativistic.

Stevenson's reply is that the question of whether or not a particular value-judgement is justified by a given set of reasons is itself an evaluative one. This, he says, shows that his view, 'which we have seen to be nonrelativistic with regard to ordinary value-judgements ... is equally so with regard to justification'.<sup>5</sup> The trouble with this reply, of course, is that we have *not* seen

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 89.



Stevenson's view to be non-relativistic with regard to ordinary value-judgements. All that he showed was that it was distinct from a particular relativistic view. The objection to which he is now replying was that his view was nonetheless relativistic, since it is hard to see how, according to it, we could ever decide whether the reasons offered for a particular value-judgement in fact justified that judgement. By saying that such a decision itself involves a value-judgement, Stevenson not only fails to avoid the charge of relativism 'with regard to justification', but shows that that charge is a sound one. To see this more clearly, let us imagine how, according to him, the attempt to justify some given value-judgement would proceed.

I make value-judgement VJ, and try to justify it by producing reasons R. Have I succeeded? That is, do R in fact justify VJ? To claim that they do is to make a further value-judgement, VJ<sub>1</sub>. The question now arises, is VJ<sub>1</sub> justified? To try to show that it is, I produce reasons R<sub>1</sub>. But, we need to know, do R<sub>1</sub> justify VJ<sub>1</sub>? To say that they do is again to make a further value-judgement, which in turn must be justified, and so on, *ad infinitum*. However, Stevenson says that this will trouble us only if we approach *all* value-judgements with initial scepticism - but why, he asks, can we not start as we do in ordinary life, where we have attitudes we initially trust, and proceed to express them? The answer to this question, unfortunately, is that though we *can* no doubt start as Stevenson suggests we do in ordinary life, our concern is with the possibility, on his view, of showing that a given value-judgement is justified; and the fact that someone or everyone starts by trusting a given value-judgement (or the

attitude it expresses) clearly goes no way towards showing that it is justified. Moreover, enough has already been said to show that on his view, one cannot show that a given value-judgement is justified. For we have seen that, on that view, any attempted justification of a value-judgement will presuppose a further value-judgement, which is in no better case than the initial one. This will apply to any value-judgement whatsoever, so that any value-judgement, from the point of view of justification, will be as good as any other - and this is relativism.

Hare's disclaimer of relativism appears on page fifty of *Freedom and Reason*, where he repudiates the 'absurd doctrine' of relativism, and in a footnote, implies that there are different senses of the word 'relativism', accusing those who use it of seldom making clear which sense they have in mind. Unfortunately, he himself does not tell us in which sense of the word he denies that he is a relativist, nor does he explain what different senses there are. He does, however, refer his reader to his article 'Ethics' in the *Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers*,<sup>6</sup> for a 'crude and elementary attempt to sort matters out'; and from what he has to say in that article, it becomes clear why he denies that he is a relativist. He describes relativism as the view that everyone ought to do what he thinks he ought to do, and points out that this is a moral judgement, not a view about the meaning of such judgements. That is to say, he points out that what he calls relativism is a normative view, not a meta-ethical one. Now there can certainly be no grounds for claiming that Hare is a relativist in this sense, since the views

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<sup>6</sup> Ed. J.O. Urmson.

he expresses are in the field of meta-ethics. However, it is common for writers on the terminology of ethics to distinguish normative relativism from meta-ethical relativism. The former may well be an absurd doctrine, and we may take Hare's word for it that he does not hold that view. But anyone pondering the question of whether or not Hare is a relativist is unlikely to be engaging in speculation as to the nature of his unexpressed normative views. He is far more likely to be suggesting that Hare is a *meta-ethical* relativist, and basing his suggestion on his expressed meta-ethical views. Now meta-ethical relativism is the view that it is not possible to give reasons for accepting any given moral judgement, view or principle<sup>7</sup>, and this is the sense in which we have been using the term 'relativism'. It is not clear that *this* is an absurd doctrine (I shall argue that it is at any rate false). What *is* clear, however, is that Hare may be committed to it even though, as we may accept, he is not committed to the different doctrine of *normative* relativism.

Hare, then, no more than Stevenson, succeeds in showing that his position is not relativistic. We have seen, moreover, that Stevenson's view is in fact relativistic; and the same must now be shown for Hare's. According to Hare, value-judgements are imperatives, or, as he also puts it, prescriptions. But of course, they must be distinguished from *mere* prescriptions, since 'Eat up your breakfast', for example, cannot plausibly be said to be a value-judgement. Now one way in which mere prescriptions or imperatives differ from value-judgements can be brought out by considering the fact that if I say 'Smith, eat your breakfast;

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. W.K. Frankena, *Ethics* (N.J. Englewood Cliffs, 1963), pp.92-93; R.B. Brandt, 'Ethical Relativism', in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards.

but Brown, though your circumstances do not differ relevantly from Smith's, don't eat your breakfast', I say nothing *logically* peculiar, though I no doubt display some arbitrariness; whereas if I say 'Smith, you ought to eat your breakfast; but Brown, though your circumstances do not differ relevantly from Smith's, you ought not to eat your breakfast (or 'it is not the case that you ought to eat your breakfast')', I do not merely display arbitrariness - what I say *is*, at least without further explanation, logically peculiar. Hare notes this difference (he in fact takes it to be *the* difference between mere imperatives and value-judgements), and expresses it by saying that when I tell someone, for example, 'you ought to use the starting handle', I implicitly invoke or appeal to some general prescription or principle like 'If the engine fails to start at once on the self-starter, one ought always to use the starting handle', and thus commit myself to holding that anyone else in relevantly similar circumstances (that is, anyone else whose car has failed to start at once on the self-starter) ought also to use the starting handle; whereas, when I utter the mere imperative, 'Use the starting handle', I commit myself to no such general principle.<sup>8</sup> What this amounts to is that value-judgements, unlike mere imperatives, must be supported by reasons; for the point that when I tell someone that he ought to do X, I invoke some principle to the effect that in circumstances Y, which now obtain, one ought always to do X, is simply the point that when I say that someone ought to do X, I imply that he is in certain circumstances Y, which constitute reasons for a person in those circumstances to do X.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *The Language of Morals*, pp. 155-157.

<sup>9</sup> Hare himself refers to the process of appealing to a general principle in support of a value-judgement as that of giving reasons for, or justifying, that value-judgement (see *ibid.*, p. 157).

Let us now ask whether, on Hare's account, it is possible to give someone good reasons for accepting a given value-judgement. Suppose that I tell Smith, who is in circumstances Y, that he ought to do X, and that he is inclined to reject this. I appeal to the principle that in circumstances Y, one ought always to do X. This principle will only provide Smith with reason to accept my initial judgement if it is itself a principle which he has reason to accept. But of course it is also a value judgement, and therefore, according to Hare, merely a further (general) prescription of mine; which means that the question of justification arises for it no less than for my initial judgement. Now I may try to support this principle by a further, more general principle - but this too will be merely another prescription of mine, and while I may try to support it in turn by appeal to a still more general principle, this process will clearly have to end at some stage with a principle which I simply accept. Of course, Smith might happen to share some principle to which I make appeal and so may not press me for any further justification. But this would merely mean that I had been saved from having to attempt a justification of the principle in question; it would not mean that I had provided such a justification.

It may seem that Hare could avoid this conclusion by saying that providing reasons for one's prescriptions does not always take the form of appealing to principles, but sometimes consists simply in pointing to certain facts. Admittedly, Hare insists (and rightly, as I shall argue later) that no prescription can be entailed by any fact or set of facts, but presumably, a set of facts can provide reasons for a given prescription without entailing it. However, to assume that some fact or set of facts provides reason for a particular value-judgement is

necessarily to assume some general principle.<sup>10</sup> For example, to assume that the fact that Smith's helping Brown would increase the general happiness supports the judgement that Smith ought to help Brown is to assume the general principle that one ought to do what will increase the general happiness. Thus, adducing facts in support of a value-judgement is not an alternative to invoking general principles, for it involves an implicit appeal to such principles; and we see that Hare's view does indeed entail that the process of giving reasons for one's value-judgements always terminates in an appeal to some principle which one has not justified, but simply accepts. But, as we noted in the last paragraph, we cannot give a person reason for accepting some judgement by appealing to a principle which we have given him no reason to accept. It follows that on Hare's view, we can never give a person good reasons for accepting any given value-judgement or principle (though we may find that he happens to accept it) - which is to say that Hare's view is indeed relativistic.

The argument just put forward might seem to show, not only that Hare's position is relativistic, but that relativism cannot be avoided on *any* view. For it was not denied that the attempt to provide reasons for a value-judgement always involves an appeal to a general principle which must itself be justified if it is to support one's original judgement; and this would seem to be enough to enable us to conclude that any attempt to justify a value-judgement must terminate in an

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<sup>10</sup> As Hare himself, in effect, notes - see *ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

appeal to a principle which is not itself justified. However, a naturalist, at least, can avoid this conclusion.<sup>11</sup> For a naturalist holds that the ultimate principles to which successful appeal can be made in support of one's moral judgements do not need justification in terms of further principles, since they are analytic, which in itself provides us with an excellent reason for accepting them.

Hare himself discusses at one point the question of how one's ultimate principles are decided upon, and we should consider this passage here in case it provides some ground for revising the conclusions reached a moment ago. Having said that if pressed by someone to justify a moral decision completely, one would have to provide a complete specification of the way of life of which it is a part, he considers what we could say if, having been given such a specification, our enquirer still asks, 'But why *should* I live like that?'. He replies,

'... there is no further answer to give him, because we have already, *ex hypothesi*, said everything that could be included in this further answer. We can only ask him to make up his own mind which way he ought to live; for in the end everything rests upon such a decision of principle. He has to decide whether to accept that way of life or not; if he accepts it, then we can proceed to justify the decisions that are based upon it; if he does not accept it, then let him accept some other, and try to live by it. The sting is in the last clause. To describe such ultimate decisions as arbitrary, because *ex hypothesi* everything which could be used to justify them has already been included in the decision, would be like saying that a complete description of the universe was utterly unfounded, because no further fact could be called upon in corroboration of it.'<sup>12</sup>

Let us note, first, that Hare is certainly right in denying that on his view, the ultimate choice of the way of life in terms of which

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<sup>11</sup> I do not claim to have shown that *no* non-naturalist can avoid it. It would clearly be impossible to show this for every non-naturalist position which has been or could be espoused.

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., p. 69.

one justifies one's moral decisions is necessarily arbitrary; for that way of life may happen to be to one's taste, and it is not arbitrary to choose what is to one's taste. What Hare is supposed to be considering however, is the question of whether or not one can give another person reasons to accept one's moral decisions - and his admission that ultimately, one can do no more than specify fully the way of life of which one's decision is part, and leave it up to the other person to decide whether or not to accept that way of life, would seem to bear out the conclusion reached a moment ago, namely that it is not possible, on his view, to give another person such reasons. For if the way of life on the basis of which one ultimately tries to justify one's decisions cannot itself be justified, then neither can decisions based on it.

However, Hare seems to think that this conclusion can be avoided, or at least robbed of its force, by pointing out that the reason why it is not possible to say any more by way of justification of one's decision, after one has specified the way of life of which that decision is part, is that one will have already said everything that could be used in such a justification. But this is a *non sequitur* - for everything that could be used may not be enough, and it is the suggestion that on his view it is in fact not enough that we are considering.

Hare also implies that a decision to accept some way of life other than that which would be specified in an attempt to justify a moral decision, and of which that decision is a part, would be impossible or difficult to live by ('let him ...try to live by it'). To make sense of this, we would need to assume that we can somehow delimit the class of ways of life which could be specified in the attempt to justify



a moral decision - otherwise, Hare would have to be taken as suggesting that for *any* way of life, a decision to accept some other way would be difficult or impossible to live by. But even if we could do this, and he gives us no inkling of how, on his view, it could be done, the suggestion that to live by the decision to accept some way of life not of the delimited class would be difficult or impossible needs to be argued for, since it is at least not obvious that a moral way of life is more easy to lead than a non-moral one.

The passage just considered does not, then, provide us with any grounds for reconsidering our conclusion that if Hare's view were correct, it would never be possible to provide someone with reason to accept any given moral judgement. Hare does elsewhere make a further attempt to show, via his much-discussed doctrine of the 'universalizability' of moral judgements, that his theory does after all allow that, sometimes at least, we can give a man good reasons to accept a moral judgement. An attempt to assess his argument will be made in the next chapter, where one other device by which one might think to escape the relativistic implications of the theories we have been discussing will also be considered.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ATTITUDES THEORY, THE IMPERATIVE THEORY, AND MORAL RELATIVISM - (2).

I want now to consider some attempts which have been or might be made to avoid relativism while accepting an ethical theory of one of the types discussed in my last chapter. The first such attempt which I will discuss is one which is made by Hare, and which has attracted a great deal of philosophical attention.

In *Freedom and Reason*, Hare claims that moral judgements, as well as being imperatives or 'prescriptions', are also 'universalizable' (we shall consider what this means in a moment), and that this makes it possible sometimes to show a man who wishes to claim moral justification for some action that his claim would involve him in an inconsistency.<sup>1</sup> If this were so, it would after all be possible, sometimes at least, to give a man reason for accepting a moral judgement, for the fact that to claim moral justification for some action would involve inconsistency is a reason for concluding that that action is not morally justified, and this conclusion would be a moral judgement.

What, then, does Hare mean by saying that moral judgements are universalizable? As Peter Singer points out in a recent

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<sup>1</sup> *Freedom and Reason*, Part II.

paper,<sup>2</sup> Hare uses 'universalizable' in two senses, which I shall call, respectively, the 'weak' sense and the 'strong' sense, apparently without realising that he is doing so. To say that moral judgements are universalizable in the weak sense is to make a point which we had occasion to note in the last chapter, that to claim that certain facts constitute a reason for a particular judgement is to commit oneself to holding that, in any other situation in which relevantly similar facts obtain, the same judgement is appropriate. In this sense of 'universalizable', any judgement at all which is made for a reason is universalizable. Thus, if I judge that the figure before me is triangular because it has four sides, I commit myself to holding that any other figure that has four sides is also triangular; and if I judge that Smith ought to be eliminated because I dislike his mode of attire, I commit myself to holding that anyone else whose mode of attire I dislike ought to be eliminated.

In the strong sense of 'universalizable', however, not any judgement made for a reason is universalizable, but only judgements made for reasons of a certain sort. In particular, only those judgements made for reasons which can be stated without reference to any

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<sup>2</sup> 'Universalizability and the Foundations of Ethics', read at the Annual Conference of the Australasian Association of Philosophy, August 1976. Singer's main concern in this paper is with the attempt made by Hare, since *Freedom and Reason*, to show that arguments based on universalizability can be effective even against 'fanatics' of a sort whom he previously thought were impervious to such arguments. Singer argues that this attempt, which depends in effect on obliterating the distinction insisted on in *Freedom and Reason* between ideals and interests, is unsuccessful; but that it becomes unnecessary if one accepts a naturalistic theory of value. However, he thinks correct the more limited claims in *Freedom and Reason* regarding the universalizability of moral judgements and the sort of moral argument this makes possible.

particular individual are universalizable in this sense. To use an example of Singer's, if I judge that it is right for me to cheat the taxation department while denying that it is right for someone else to do so, simply because if I cheat I gain, whereas if anyone else cheats, I and other taxpayers lose, my judgement is not universalizable in the strong sense; for the only principle to which I commit myself is something like 'It is right to cheat when cheating will result in my gaining', and this does involve reference to a particular individual, myself. My judgement is, however, universalizable in the weak sense, for I do commit myself to holding that in any other situation in which cheating would benefit me, it would be right to cheat.

Let us now consider the type of argument (following Hare, I shall call arguments of this type 'golden rule' arguments) which, according to Hare, can on his theory be used to show a man that some moral judgement he wishes to make is untenable. Golden rule arguments are supposed to be applicable in cases where someone wishes to do something which would involve harming another, but would be strongly disinclined to allow himself to be harmed in the same way. Thus, suppose that I am a landlord who wishes to evict a tenant of mine who is a week in arrears with his rent, though I would be strongly disinclined to be evicted myself; and suppose also that I wish to claim that I *ought* to evict my tenant. According to Hare, given only my disinclination to be evicted, the facts of the case, and the logical features of moral discourse (that is, its prescriptivity and universalizability), the following argument will show me that I must withdraw my claim. If I claim that I ought to evict my tenant, then

because of the universalizability of moral judgements, I am committed to holding that anyone who is a week behind in his rent ought to be evicted. This commits me to saying, about a hypothetical situation in which I am a tenant who is a week behind in his rent (if I actually occupy such a situation, so much the better), that I ought to be evicted; which, because of the prescriptivity of moral judgements, involves *prescribing* that I be evicted. However, since by hypothesis I am strongly disinclined to be evicted, I am not prepared to prescribe this; and since my initial judgement would logically commit me to doing so, I must, in consistency, withdraw that judgement.

Before considering the merits of this type of argument, let us note again Hare's claims regarding what such an argument presupposes. He asserts that it presupposes only the logic of moral discourse, the facts of the case concerning which it is put forward, and a disinclination on the part of the person against whom it is advanced to be harmed in certain ways; and later, he claims that what he has shown in pointing to the possibility of such arguments is that '*...once the logical character of the moral concepts is understood, there can be useful and compelling moral argument even between people who have, before it begins, no substantive moral principles in common*'.<sup>3</sup> These claims are crucial to Hare's purposes, since if golden rule arguments presuppose acceptance of some substantive moral principle, then they could not provide anyone with reason for accepting or rejecting any moral judgement. For if such an argument did presuppose a substantive moral principle, *it* could not provide reason for accepting that principle;

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<sup>3</sup> Hare, *op. cit.*, p. 187 (my emphasis).

and as was pointed out in the last chapter, we cannot provide someone with reason for accepting some moral judgement by appealing to a principle which we have given him no reason to accept (of course, as we also noted, the person in question may in fact happen to accept the principle appealed to - but that would not mean that we had provided him with reason for accepting it, or, therefore, any judgement based on it). With this in mind we can now turn to an appraisal of the sample golden rule argument outlined in the last paragraph. The criticism I shall make of it is largely gleaned from Monro's much more thorough discussion of universalizability,<sup>4</sup> though I have made it in my own way.

We should note, first, that the argument depends on the view that moral judgements are universalizable in the strong, and not merely the weak, sense. If moral judgements were universalizable merely in the weak sense, I could say that I was indeed prepared to universalize my judgement, by accepting the principle 'Any tenant *of mine* who is a week in arrears with his rent ought to be evicted'. This would not commit me to judging that I ought to be evicted in the event of my being a tenant a week behind in his rent, since I would not be a tenant *of mine*. However, as Singer notes, in some early passages in *Freedom and Reason* Hare explains the notion of universalizability in a way which suggests that it *is* merely the weak sense in which he holds moral judgements to be universalizable. For he says in a number of places<sup>5</sup> that the sense in which such judgements are universalizable is simply the sense in which any descriptive judgement is universalizable, and it is clear that the reasons for a descriptive judgement need not be

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<sup>4</sup> Monro, op. cit., Chapters 13-16.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g. pp. 10, 12, 15, 21.

stateable without reference to any particular individual - one's reasons for the judgement, 'That woman is Stalin's daughter', for example, need not be so stateable.

Singer thinks it unfortunate that Hare should have chosen to explain the notion of universalizability in this way. He notes that in several later passages<sup>6</sup>, it is clear that Hare is using the term in the strong sense, and that, as we have noted, it is because he is using it in this sense that he is able to make use of it as he does in his golden rule arguments. Singer points out, moreover, that it is the strong sense which Hare employs in most of his writings; and he concludes that the earlier passages which seem to employ the weak sense should be disregarded. This, however, presents a difficulty.

There is no question that universalizability in the weak sense is a logical requirement on moral judgements (as we have seen, it is a logical requirement on *any* judgement made for a reason); but can the same be said of universalizability in the strong sense? As an instance of the operation of the strong universalizability requirement on moral judgements, Singer says of the case mentioned earlier, in which I wish to claim moral justification for *my* cheating the taxation department while denying it for someone else's doing so, that I must point to some difference between the two acts which does not depend on the gains or losses being *mine*. This seems to be true. But is it so because my judgement offends against some logical requirement on moral discourse, or is it rather because it offends against *moral* principles requiring fairness and impartiality, which happen to be very widely accepted?

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<sup>6</sup> Singer points to passages on pages 107 and 201 as instances.

Surely the latter explanation is the correct one. In the first place, it is clear that my judgement *does* offend against principles of fairness and impartiality, and these are in fact very widely accepted moral principles. In the second place, there is certainly nothing necessarily inconsistent about discriminating between actions by considering how they affect my interests - as Monro points out, to discriminate between interests on the grounds that some are mine, while others are not, is to use a perfectly intelligible ground of discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

Monro, who argues that the strong requirement of universalizability is simply the principle of impartiality, is prepared to concede that that principle, being a 'very fundamental moral principle', 'may very well be encapsulated in our use of moral terms'<sup>8</sup>, so that universalizability is both a defining characteristic of morality *and* a moral principle. This might seem to provide a possible way for Hare to both have his cake and eat it. It might seem that it would enable him to concede that his strong universalizability requirement is a moral requirement, but still claim that it is, also, a logical requirement, since anyone who claimed that a non-universalizable judgement was a moral one would be contradicting himself. It does not seem to me, however, that this position is a tenable one. If the principle of universalizability is to serve as a criterion for what is or is not a moral principle or judgement, then it cannot itself be a moral principle - otherwise, we would have to allow sense to the notion that the principle satisfied itself.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Monro, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, paragraph 50: 'There is *one* thing of which one can say neither that it is one metre long, nor that it is not one metre long, and that is the standard metre rod in Paris'.



Let us suppose, however, that the principle of impartiality or universalizability *could* be both a moral principle and a criterion of what is or is not a moral principle. Hare could then claim that a golden rule argument would be effective against any person who is prepared to argue about *morality* - he could say, as he does now,<sup>10</sup> that a man who does not use moral terms universalizably, or who declines to make moral judgements at all, is simply 'not entering the arena of moral dispute'.<sup>11</sup> However, it is clear that no one will enter the arena who does not already subscribe to the principle of impartiality, for entering the arena would involve being prepared to universalize one's judgements, that is, to judge impartially; and thus, it still follows that a golden rule argument depends for its success on prior acceptance of a substantive moral principle. Let us reiterate what follows from this. What follows is that Hare cannot employ the notion of universalizability, as he tries to, to provide a man with reasons for accepting or rejecting any moral judgement. For the principle of universalizability, in the required sense, is the moral principle of impartiality, so that a golden rule argument depends on an appeal to a moral principle, and thus will only provide reasons for accepting any judgement if that principle itself can be justified; but, as was argued in the last chapter, Hare's theory does not allow that any moral principle can be justified.

I will consider one other method by which one might try to show that one can accept the attitudes theory or the imperative theory without committing oneself to relativism. This method consists in denying

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g. *Freedom and Reason*, pp. 95, 101.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

an assumption which has been made throughout my discussion of this issue so far, namely that if either of these theories is correct, then moral judgements cannot be entailed by statements of fact. Clearly, if this assumption were false, the theories in question would after all allow that good reasons can sometimes be given for accepting a moral judgement. For it is certainly possible sometimes to give good reasons for accepting a statement of fact, and one way of giving good reasons for accepting some judgement is by giving good reasons for accepting statements by which it is entailed.

Now the assumption that if either the attitudes theory or the imperative theory is correct, then moral judgements cannot be entailed by statements of fact, would seem to need little argument. On either theory, moral judgements have a performative aspect - that is, on either theory, when one makes a moral judgement, one is performing some action other than the mere making of a statement. In the case of the attitudes theory, the action concerned is the expressing of an attitude, while in the case of the imperative theory, it is the issuing of an imperative. It would appear to follow immediately that on either theory, moral judgements cannot follow logically from any statements of fact, for actions are not, one would have thought, the sort of thing which can follow logically from statements of fact, or, for that matter, from anything else.

However, in an article entitled 'The Gap Between "Is" and "Should"',<sup>12</sup> Max Black denies that it follows from the claim that moral judgements

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<sup>12</sup> *Philosophical Review*, 73 (1964), pp. 165-181.

have a performative aspect that they cannot be entailed by any statements of fact. For he insists that 'ought'-judgements have such an aspect, but argues that they may nevertheless follow logically from factual premises. I will argue that he fails to show that the appearance of inconsistency between these two theses is illusory.<sup>13</sup>

Against the claim that 'should'-judgements cannot follow logically from factual premises (he points out that the differences between 'should' and 'ought' are immaterial in this context), Black presents the following counter-example:

You want to achieve E.

Doing M is the one and only way to achieve E.

Therefore, you should do M.

(In what follows, this will frequently be referred to as 'Black's example').

Black argues that a man who accepts the premises of this argument, given that he is to make some second-person 'should'-statement, cannot rationally utter anything other than the conclusion.<sup>14</sup> What we must consider is not whether this is true, but whether it is compatible with what Black has to say about the allegedly performative nature of second-

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<sup>13</sup> The criticism of Black's paper which follows formed the substance of my paper, 'Performatives and the Gap Between "Is" and "Ought"', which appeared in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 51 (1973), pp. 165-170. Black's paper has been previously criticised, for example, by Hare: 'Wanting: Some Pitfalls', in *Agent, Action and Reason*, ed. Binkley, Bronaugh and Marras (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1971), and by D.Z. Phillips: 'The Possibilities of Moral Advice', *Analysis*, 25 (1964), pp. 37-41. I lack space to discuss these criticisms here, and will merely state that they do not seem to me to expose the main error in Black's argument.

<sup>14</sup> Black, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

person 'should'-judgements such as 'You should do M'.

According to Black,<sup>15</sup> the primary element in the meaning of such judgements is their 'urging function'. Such a judgement stands 'as a sort of hybrid' between a neutral, non-performative comment on the situation, and a 'straight-forward imperative - a forthright verbal push'. It implies a valuation based on matters of fact, but partakes also of the imperative force of a bare incitement to action. The implied valuation, moreover, is not implied in virtue of the *meaning* of the 'should'-judgement: 'The speaker's evaluation of a selected action as preferable or obligatory gives him a reason for urging his hearer to perform that action', and although the use of the second-person 'should'-formula normally arouses a presumption that the speaker has reasons for saying what he does, 'since the same might be said about any kind of statement whatever, this cannot be a distinctive peculiarity of the meaning or function of "should"'.

Given this account of the nature of second-person 'should'-utterances, we must ask, can we agree that a man who accepts the premises of Black's example and is prepared to utter some 'should'-conclusion cannot rationally utter anything other than 'You should do M'? Surely we cannot. Such a man may not want his hearer to do M, and so may, without irrationality, decline to urge him to do so, or to give him a verbal push towards doing so. It might be replied that Black covers this when he says at one stage that 'nobody who understands the premises of the practical argument and knows the rules for the proper use of "should" can *honestly* offer any other

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 171-172.

"should"-conclusion'.<sup>16</sup> After all, even a man who accepts that P, and that if P then Q, will only assert that Q, even if he is rational, providing that he is honest. That this reply is not open to Black, however, can be brought out by a consideration of what he has to say regarding a difference he concedes to exist between inferences to factual conclusions and those to 'should'-conclusions.

Black points out<sup>17</sup> that a man who thinks that P and that if P then Q, though he may not *say* that Q, cannot fail to think or 'say in his heart' that Q, provided that he suffers no cognitive deficiency; whereas a man who is cognitively sound and accepts the premises of his example need not say, even in his heart, 'You should do M' - for he might have conscientious scruples about giving advice in such cases, and have trained himself so well to abstain from giving it that he does not even think 'You should do M' in his heart. (Black thinks that too much must not be made of this admission, since it remains true that providing a man who accepts his premises is to utter *some* 'should'-conclusion, that conclusion must be 'You should do M'). Two things need, for my purposes, to be pointed out here. Firstly, the saying-in-his-heart which a man could not fail to engage in if he accepted that P and that if P then Q is not a species of saying at all, but of believing; and secondly, regarding the saying-in-his-heart which, in the case of the *non*-factual inference, a man may abstain from without exhibiting cognitive deficiency, it must be pointed out that on Black's account this abstinence requires no training. If 'You should

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 179 (my emphasis).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 177-178.

do M' has the performative aspect that Black claims for it, one *cannot* think or say it in one's heart - verbal pushes, like any others, must be administered overtly. Let us see how this bears on the suggestion that though a man might rationally accept the premises of Black's example and yet utter some other conclusion than 'You should do M', he could not do so honestly.

When a man accepts that P and that if P then Q, then if he is to assert a conclusion, he certainly cannot honestly assert anything other than Q; and this is because, were he to do so, he would be asserting something other than what he believed to be the case - a paradigm example of dishonesty. Can we give a similar account of the dishonesty allegedly displayed by a man who accepts the premises of Black's example and then utters some 'should'-conclusion other than 'You should do M'? It seems not. We cannot say that he is dishonest in that he is saying something other than what he believes, for we have just seen that on Black's account, 'should'-statements are not the sort of thing which can be believed.

Another way of putting the problem is this. If we say that a rational man who accepts that P and that if P then Q must assert that Q, we are faced with the difficulty that whether he will do so or not depends on what reasons, if any, he has for doing so. If he has no reason to do so, or even has reason *not* to do so, he may refrain from doing so without irrationality. The difficulty is overcome by supposing that he wishes to assert what he believes to be the case; for this is what the stipulation that he be honest amounts to here. This is a justifiable stipulation, since failure on the part of an assertor to believe what he asserts renders his assertion, to use Austin's expression,

infelicitous.

In the case of an inference to a 'should'-conclusion, we are faced with a somewhat similar difficulty. We cannot say that a rational man who accepts the premises of Black's argument must say 'You should do M', for he may have no reason for doing so, or even have reason for not doing so. Black cannot, however, get over this difficulty by stipulating that our man is willing to assert some 'should'-conclusion, and is honest. For what would the stipulation that he is honest amount to? As we have seen, it could not be cashed in terms of his wishing to say what he believes to be the case. We could ensure his utterance of the required conclusion by some such stipulation as that he had his hearer's interests at heart, but this would be a purely *ad hoc* stipulation concerning his motives. There seems to be no reason for preferring it to the stipulation that he desired the frustration of his hearer's aims, beyond the fact that it *would* ensure his utterance of the required conclusion.

The only stipulation we could make here which would have the same justification as the stipulation, in the previous case, that the speaker was prepared to assert what he believed, would be that our speaker was prepared to urge his hearer to do what he wished him to do. For the infelicity of an assertor's failing to believe what he asserts, to which asserting is prone, is paralleled in the case of urging by the infelicity of the speaker's failing to wish his hearer to do what he urges him to do. Unfortunately, this stipulation is manifestly inadequate for Black's purposes. The premises of a valid argument to a factual conclusion force a rational man to believe that conclusion, but the premises of Black's example do not force a

rational man to want 'you' to do M.

If this is correct, it follows that a man may accept the premises of Black's example, but have no reason whatsoever to utter the conclusion, even if he is prepared to utter *some* 'should'-conclusion. Further, there is no stipulation Black could make regarding his motives which would both ensure that he had reason to utter the required conclusion and have more than a purely *ad hoc* justification. However, this conclusion directly contradicts a claim made by Black in a passage which I will now quote in full:

... it is obvious that the truth of the factual premises [i.e., of his example] provides at least a good reason for saying 'You should do M'. Indeed, the truth of the premises constitutes a conclusive reason for saying, in the given context, 'You should do M'. Given that my interlocutor is playing chess and solicits advice about the game, the fact, if it is a fact, that he can mate the opponent only by moving the Queen provides me with a *conclusive* reason for urging him to do that rather than anything else.<sup>18</sup>

Black does not merely assert this, moreover, but provides the following extremely plausible argument for what he says: If we heard someone say 'The one and only way you can mate the opponent is by moving your Queen - and that's why I say you should not move the Queen', we could make no sense of the supposition that he understood what he said, spoke literally, and still meant what he seemed to be saying, any more than we could make sense of the same supposition regarding the assertion, 'P, if P then Q, therefore not-Q'.

Clearly, if what Black says in the passage just quoted is true, we will have to re-examine our argument for the contrary conclusion. It can readily be shown, however, that this will not be necessary. The claim that the truth of Black's premises provides me with a conclusive

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 176.



reason for urging you to do M rests on a confusion between what *you* have reason to do and what I have reason to urge you to do. If you want to achieve E and can only achieve E by doing M, then unquestionably, you have at least a good reason for doing M. But whether or not I have any reason at all for urging you to do M depends on whether or not *I* want you to achieve E, and so to do M. If E is the mating of your opponent in a game of chess, I may not want you to do M, since I may want you to lose; if E is my demise, I shall almost certainly *not* want you to do M; while even if E is the avoidance of pointless pain, I may be a sadist, and so fail to want you to do M. In each case, the fact that you want to achieve E, and can only do so by doing M, need provide me with no reason whatsoever for urging you to do M.

If this is so, how can we account for the alleged fact that we could not make sense of the supposition that a man might say, understanding and meaning what he said, 'The one and only way you can mate the opponent is by moving your Queen - and that's why I say you should not move the Queen'? The answer is that, on Black's account of the meaning of 'You should move the Queen', we can make perfectly good sense of the supposition that my reason for saying 'You should not move the Queen' is that moving the Queen is the one and only way of achieving your aim of mating your opponent - as has been pointed out, I may want you to lose. We could not, of course, understand my *telling* you that what I urge you to do will frustrate your aims; but this is not because what I tell you is unintelligible - what would astonish us is my thus giving the game away by my perfectly intelligible remark. The same, in fact, is true of the assertion, 'P, and if P then Q, therefore not-Q', on one interpretation of that assertion. The speaker

might be saying that he has no good reason for believing that not-Q, but is trying to mislead his hearers. On this unlikely interpretation, his assertion would show an almost incredible lack of guile, but would be intelligible. The interpretation suggested by the form of his utterance, however, is that he is telling his hearers the premises which lead him to believe that not-Q; and on this interpretation, what he says is indeed unintelligible. Unfortunately, there is no parallel for this latter interpretation to be given of the utterance 'The one and only way you can mate the opponent is by moving your Queen - and that's why I say you should not move the Queen' - not, at least, on Black's account of the meaning of 'should'-utterances. For on that account, such utterances are not the sort of thing which can be believed.

It has been shown, I think, that if second-person 'should'-statements have the performative aspect Black attributes to them, it is false that a rational man who accepts the premises of his example must utter its conclusion if he is to utter some 'should'-conclusion. Moreover, the argument presented does not seem to rely for its success on the particular account Black gives of the nature of the supposed performative aspect. For a man who accepts Black's premises will not therefore have reason to perform *any* particular action rather than any other, and so will have no reason to say 'You should do M' rather than, e.g., 'You should not do M', if to say either of these things is to perform some action. If this is so, the argument I have used shows that the conclusion of Black's example cannot follow from his premises, not only if it has the performative aspect Black says it has, but if it has a performative aspect at all.

Finally, it is worth considering to what extent my argument has depended on the fact that Black couches his example in the second person. It seems clear that had Black cast it in the *third* person, at any rate, he would still be vulnerable to essentially the same argument. A man who accepts that Smith wants to achieve E and can only do so by doing M cannot be said therefore to have reason to perform any particular action, unless some arbitrary stipulation is made regarding his goals or desire, such as that he wants Smith to achieve E.

There remains the first-person case, and this in fact turns out to be the most favourable one for Black's position. For it is not implausible to say that if I want to achieve E and can only do so by doing M, I have reason to urge myself to do M. This, however, by no means *shows* that to say 'I should do M' is to urge myself to do M. The same facts also provide me with reason to *do* M, but it is certainly not true that to say 'I should do M' is to do M. Now if we want to claim that 'should'-judgements may follow logically from premises of the sort Black produces, and are forced by this, in the case of second and third-person instances, to abandon the view that they have a performative aspect, there seems little point in insisting that the view holds at least for first-person cases, simply because the same considerations do not force us to abandon it there. If we are forced to find some other explanation, in the second and third-person cases, for the aspects of 'should'-judgements which led us to hypothesise that they were performatives, the same explanation will presumably also render the hypothesis unnecessary in the first-person case. In any case, to the best of my knowledge, no philosopher who has held that

'should'-judgements are a species of performative has been prepared to limit his claim to first person cases of such judgements. On the contrary, the fact that the most usual forms of the hypothesis are, respectively, that 'should'-judgements are imperatives, and that they are expressions of attitude, shows that such philosophers have had in mind primarily those 'should'-judgements which are addressed to others, that is, those in the second and third persons; for imperatives and expressions of attitude are usually, if not always, addressed to others.

Black's claim regarding the relations 'should'-judgements can have to factual statements cannot, then, be accepted *together with* the claim that such judgements have a performative aspect. This means that Black fails to provide any reason for questioning, what is surely unquestionable in any case, the suggestion that on the attitudes theory and the imperative theory, both of which hold that moral judgements do have a performative aspect, moral judgements cannot be entailed by statements of fact; and this in turn means that he provides us with no reason to revise our earlier conclusion that both these theories are relativistic.

I do not claim to have shown, in this and my last chapter, that *any* view according to which moral judgements are something other than statements of fact must be relativistic. The criticism just made of Black's arguments, for example, merely disposes of one way in which a proponent of such a view might try to avoid relativism; and even if it *were* true that any such view was necessarily relativistic, there need be no single argument or limited number of arguments capable of showing this. What I have been concerned to argue is that the two most influential alternatives to naturalism which have been propounded are relativistic, and my aim in this has been to establish a connection between the rejection of naturalism and widespread acceptance of ethical theories with relativistic implications.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF RELATIVISM

I have stressed the relativistic implications of the attitudes theory and the imperative theory because, as I indicated at the start of this dissertation, I believe the issue between relativism and objectivism to be one of crucial importance to ethics. In this chapter, I will try to show that this belief is justified.

My reason for assigning such importance to the question of the truth or falsity of relativism is, as we have just seen, that some influential views in recent moral philosophy are relativistic, and as I will now argue, if relativism is true, morality, and therefore moral philosophy, is trivial.

The view that morality would be trivial if relativism were true might seem to need little justification. For it follows from relativism that there is no 'right' answer on any given moral issue, since if relativism is true, no reason can be given for accepting one moral view rather than any other. Now surely, a man who comes to accept this should resolve to pay less attention to moral considerations in future. Why should he do what in his opinion he ought to when doing so would be inconvenient if he recognises that his opinion is no more correct than its denial? Why should he blame others for acting in a manner which he considers immoral if he recognises that the opinion that they are *not* acting immorally is as correct as his? Moreover, why should he strive to bring his children up to behave as he considers

is required by morality, given that what he takes to be required by morality can with equal correctness be denied to be so? In fact, how could he claim to hold moral opinions at all if he believes that his 'opinions' are no more correct than their contradictories?

However, Monro, who, unlike Stevenson and Hare, recognises that his position is a relativistic one, denies that relativism entails that of two conflicting moral opinions, neither can be really right. He considers the charge that it follows from a relativistic theory such as his that

... if A and B have different fundamental attitudes, it does not make sense to say that one of them has the right attitudes, and the other the wrong ones. Thus, if A happens to prefer to be kind to other people and B happens to prefer to be cruel to them, it is just as if one happened to have a taste for beer and the other happened to have a taste for whiskey. ... there is no rational ground for saying that the tribe [in an earlier example of Monro's] which happens to enjoy skinning babies alive for sport is misguided or in any way worse than we are. Naturally, we think that they are wrong, but equally naturally they think that they are right. Neither we nor they can be properly said to be really right or wrong.<sup>1</sup>

To this, he replies that

To talk of 'really' right and 'really' wrong is to assume an objectivist standpoint which [the relativist] explicitly repudiates. When a consistent relativist says an action is wrong, he means nothing more than this, that it is not in accordance with the fundamental moral principles which he himself adopts. According to this definition, the behaviour of our hypothetical tribe is wrong. Moreover, the naturalist will say, his analysis of 'wrong' is the correct one, the one which underlies everybody's use of the word, including the objectivist's, whether he realises this or not. Consequently the skinning of babies is wrong simply and without qualification. There is no other sense in which it can be said to be 'not really wrong'.<sup>2</sup>

Let us, however, distinguish between two questions here. One

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<sup>1</sup> Monro, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-114.

is 'Is the skinning of babies alive for sport right or wrong?'. The other is 'We think the skinning of babies alive for sport is wrong, but members of tribe X think it is not wrong - who is right?' To avoid confusion of these two questions, let us restate the first in terms of whether or not we ought to skin babies rather than whether or not it is right to do so, thus: 'Is it the case that one ought not to skin babies?' (as Monro points out,<sup>3</sup> 'ought' and 'right' are interchangeable in this way). Now it is true that Monro's account permits us, since we are not members of tribe X, to say simply and without qualification that one ought not to skin babies - for on that account, this is just to say that our basic attitudes are opposed to such conduct. Of course, members of tribe X, whose basic attitudes are *not* opposed to such conduct, can *deny*, also simply and without qualification, that one ought not to skin babies. But the question raised by the objection being considered was not about whether or not one can say, on Monro's account, that one ought not to skin babies - the answer to this question is clearly 'Yes, providing one disapproves of skinning babies'. The question raised was, rather, 'When we claim, and members of tribe X deny, that one ought not to skin babies, can either be properly said to be really right or wrong?' To reply, as Monro does, that talk of 'really' right or wrong assumes an objectivist standpoint explicitly repudiated by him is to answer this question in the negative. If there is no sense in which either we or members of the tribe are really right or wrong, then indeed neither we nor they can be properly said to be really right or wrong. In fact, of course, it follows from Monro's

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

position that *both* are right - for we are claiming correctly that the skinning of babies runs counter to our basic attitudes, and members of the tribe are just as correctly claiming that it does not run counter to theirs. But to raise the question of which of us is *really* right is to assume that both cannot be, and since this turns out to be false on Monro's account, it is indeed true that on that account, neither is really right.

Monro fails, then, to cast doubt on the suggestion that relativism undermines morality by entailing that no moral opinion is any more 'right' than its denial. However, the claim that relativism would undermine morality might also be rejected on more general grounds. For relativism, as I have been using the term, is a meta-ethical, not a normative thesis - that is, it is a view *about* moral judgements, opinions, etc., and not itself a moral judgement - and it is sometimes claimed that to suggest that any meta-ethical theory could undermine or be destructive of morality is necessarily to be confused. A typical argument for this claim is to be found in A.J. Ayer's 'On the Analysis of Moral Judgements'.<sup>4</sup> Ayer points out that meta-ethical theories are theories *about* moral views; they are not themselves expressions of moral views or attitudes (that is, they are not normative views), and nor do they entail any views of the latter sort. Now, he argues, any statement to the effect that morals are trivial, or that it does not matter what we do, *does* express a view of the latter sort; it expresses a normative view, or, as he puts it, a value-judgement. But since no meta-ethical view is, or entails, any given normative view or value-

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<sup>4</sup> In A.J. Ayer, *Philosophical Essays* (London, Macmillan, 1965), pp. 231-249.



judgement, no meta-ethical view can be said to undermine morality.<sup>5</sup>

W.D. Hudson has an even simpler argument to show that it is a confusion to suggest of any meta-ethical view that it is destructive of morality. In defending emotivism against just this suggestion, he says that

Theories such as emotivism are meta-ethics, not ethics. The very existence of emotivism as a theory of morality entails the existence of morality. It is as absurd to say that emotivism destroys morality as it would be to say that some cartographer had drawn a map of a country which showed that the country was not really there.<sup>6</sup>

The best way to show that there is something wrong with these arguments to the conclusion that no meta-ethical theory could be destructive of morality is to produce a meta-ethical theory which clearly *would* be destructive of morality. Let us then consider the 'burp' theory of ethics, according to which to say that X is good is to say that X causes in one a tendency to burp, or strictly to *express* such a tendency - as we might put it, moral judgements are sophisticated burps. This, of course, is a meta-ethical theory - it is *about* moral judgements, and not itself a moral judgement. Yet if someone were to accept the burp theory, he would surely consider morality trivial, or at least of much less importance than it is generally thought to be. In this sense, he would consider that his theory undermined, or was destructive of, morality; and he would surely be right.

It is possible, then, for a meta-ethical theory to be destructive of morality. Let us briefly consider where the two arguments just des-

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 245-248 (What Ayer actually says is more diffuse, but the argument I have attributed to him is readily to be found in it).

<sup>6</sup> *Modern Moral Philosophy*, p. 134.

cribed fail. It may perhaps be conceded to Ayer that no meta-ethical theory entails any normative judgement (perhaps we should say 'provides reason for accepting' rather than 'entails', since on some views, Ayer's included, value-judgements are not the sort of thing which can be entailed - but I shall ignore this complication). However, this can only be conceded if we take 'value-judgement' to mean '*moral* value-judgement' - there is no reason whatsoever for supposing that a meta-ethical theory, or any other, cannot entail a value-judgement of *some* sort. Now the judgement that morality is trivial is clearly *not* a moral judgement - it is a judgement ~~from~~ 'outside' morality. Hence, there is no reason for supposing that it could not be entailed by some meta-ethical theory, and, as we have just seen, it is in fact entailed by at least one such theory, viz. the burp theory.

What of Hudson's argument? It is probably true that the existence of a theory of X entails the existence of X, and therefore that the existence of a theory of morality, even a relativistic one, entails the existence of morality. But it is obvious that when it is suggested that a given meta-ethical theory would destroy morality, it is not meant that it would demonstrate its non-existence. Rather, it is meant that the theory in question would show morality to be in some sense trivial, or not worthy of serious consideration. In the same way, a theory of the nature of the judgements of astrology - for example, one which held such judgements to be the ambiguously expressed results of pure guesswork - might be said to destroy astrology without its being suggested that the theory implied the non-existence of astrology. Now while the existence of a theory of morality perhaps entails the existence of morality, it does not necessarily entail its existence as something worth serious

consideration. It may, like the burp theory, entail that morality indeed exists, but also that any importance placed on it by rational men is wholly mysterious; and if it did this, it would be destructive of morality in the sense in which the philosophers to whom Hudson is replying claim emotivism to be.

The fact that relativism is a thesis in meta-ethics, then, in no way shows the claim that it would be destructive of morality to be confused. Now if relativism forces us to conclude that morality is trivial, it also, of course, forces us to the same conclusion about the philosophical investigation of morality - that is, about moral philosophy. But there is in fact another way, which I shall now try to bring out, in which relativism trivialises moral philosophy.

Much recent moral philosophy concerns itself with questions about the nature and meaning of terms and judgements occurring in moral discourse, and shows little concern for questions about what types of behaviour are or are not morally required or permissible, or about what reasons, if any, there are for taking moral considerations into account when acting. That is, it concerns itself with meta-ethical rather than normative questions. To many, this seems a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs, for one would think that it is the latter, normative type of question which is of major interest in its own right, the point of doing meta-ethics being largely that it might help us in dealing with questions of that type. Thus, we sometimes find philosophers like Hare and Stevenson being criticised for neglecting the most interesting and important questions about morals.<sup>7</sup> However, to criticise these

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<sup>7</sup> Cf., G.J. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (London, Macmillan, 1967), pp. 2-3.

philosophers for neglecting normative questions as though this springs from a mere preference for dealing with trivia rather than with substantive moral issues, is in a sense question-begging. For the philosophers concerned usually have a conception of moral philosophy according to which the only field proper to it is that of meta-ethics - insofar as a moral philosopher deals with normative issues, it is alleged, he ceases to do philosophy. Thus, in his preface to *The Language of Morals*, Hare says, 'Ethics, as I conceive it, is the logical study of the language of morals'; and A.J. Ayer, in the essay referred to earlier, after saying that his theory is 'an attempt to show what people are doing when they make moral judgements', and not 'a set of suggestions as to what moral judgements they are to make', adds, 'And this is true of all moral philosophy, as I understand it'.<sup>8</sup>

Now given this conception of moral philosophy, the 'barrenness' of a good deal of recent moral philosophy is not a defect, but simply a consequence of its *being* moral philosophy, and not, say, preaching or moralising. However, the idea that meta-ethics is the only proper concern of moral philosophers is, I suggest, itself dependent on a particular type of meta-ethical view, namely the relativist view. In the first place, the relativist usually holds that we arrive at our basic moral views, not by a process of reasoning, but by a species of introspection - we ask ourselves which actions we are prepared to prescribe universally, or which views express our most basic attitudes. A man who believes this will naturally also believe that the rational methods of philosophy cannot be, and so ought not to be, employed in

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<sup>8</sup> Ayer, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

attempts to answer normative questions. In the second place, the relativist holds that there is no 'correct' answer to any given normative question, and so of course thinks the attempt to find such answers necessarily misguided. Someone who is not a relativist, however, will see matters differently. He holds that there *is* a correct answer to any given normative question, and so will consider the task of finding such an answer at least a possible one. Further, he usually holds that such answers can be arrived at by objective rational means, and so for him there will be no *a priori* reason why they should not be sought by philosophers.

We see that relativism implies a conception of moral philosophy according to which what would otherwise be thought to be its most important problems in fact lie outside the range of its proper concerns - and this is the second way in which I wish to say that relativism trivialises moral philosophy. Thus, apart from the fact that it entails, as we saw earlier, that morality itself is unimportant, relativism in any case trivialises moral philosophy by implying a conception of its nature according to which it cannot legitimately concern itself with substantive moral issues.

Of course, the fact that a given type of ethical position would, if correct, be destructive of morality and moral philosophy, in itself provides no reason for rejecting that type of position. But my purpose in this chapter has not been to provide reasons for rejecting relativism; it has been simply to support my contention that relativism would in fact be destructive of morality and moral philosophy, and that since some influential ethical theories are relativistic, the question of the truth of relativism is of crucial importance in ethics.

## CHAPTER VII

### REFUTATION OF THE ATTITUDES THEORY AND THE IMPERATIVE THEORY

In the course of the last three chapters, I have argued that the attitudes theory and the imperative theory, which constitute the two main attempts which have been made to account for the connection between moral judgements and action by construing the former as something other than statements, are inevitably relativistic; and that relativism renders morality, and moral philosophy, trivial. It would of course be question-begging to take this as a criticism of the theories concerned, though as we have seen, their proponents tend to treat the claim that their theories are relativistic as a charge to be answered. However, I shall try in this chapter to show that the imperative theory is in fact false and that the attitudes theory at least appears to have a serious deficiency. It will then be time to examine more closely the plausible assumption which, as I have suggested, has been largely responsible for the development of such theories, namely the assumption that if we are to account for the connection between moral judgements and action, we must abandon the view that the former are statements of fact.

The suggestion that moral judgements are a species of imperative is to be found in the work of a number of writers on ethics,<sup>1</sup> but

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd ed. (London, 1946), p. 108; K.R. Popper, 'What can logic do for Philosophy?', *Aristotelian Society*, supplementary Vol. 22 (1948) p. 154; C.L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language*, esp. ch II; Max Black 'The Gap Between "Is" and "Should"', p. 165.

nowhere has it been developed so fully and explicitly as by Hare in *The Language of Morals*, to which book we have already had occasion to refer. I shall therefore approach my examination of the imperative view by considering his defence of it in that book.<sup>2</sup>

On page two, Hare makes the following brief statement of the strategy he proposes to adopt in his study of moral language:

An old-fashioned, but still useful, way of studying anything is *per genus et differentiam*; if moral language belongs to the genus 'prescriptive language', we shall most easily understand its nature if we compare and contrast first of all prescriptive language with other sorts of language, and then moral language with other sorts of prescriptive language. That, in brief, is the plan of this book.

In implementing the first stage of this plan, that of investigating the nature of the genus 'prescriptive language', Hare takes as his model 'the simplest form of prescriptive language, the ordinary imperative sentence'. A large part of the book is therefore taken up with a discussion of imperatives - 'the study of imperatives', Hare says, 'is by far the best introduction to the study of ethics'.<sup>3</sup>

Hare's reason for asserting that the study of imperatives will shed important light on the nature of moral judgements is, of course, simply that he claims that value-judgements, including moral ones, *are* imperatives. This claim he more usually makes by saying that value-judgements *entail* imperatives; but that this, for Hare, amounts to saying that they *are* imperatives is clear from his insistence on the

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<sup>2</sup> The following discussion of Hare's argument has been published in essentially the form in which it appears here as an article entitled 'Value-Judgements, Prescriptive Language, and Imperatives', in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 23 (1973), pp. 253-257.

<sup>3</sup> p. 2.

principle that only imperatives can entail imperatives.<sup>4</sup> It is with his arguments in support of this claim that we will be concerned.

Hare directly defends the thesis that value-judgements entail imperatives in chapter 11, "'Ought" and Imperatives'. He defends it, essentially, by making it true by definition. That is to say, as he proposes to use the expression 'value-judgement', 'the test, whether someone is using the judgement "I ought to do X" as a value-judgement or not is, "Does he or does he not recognise that if he assents to the judgement, he must also assent to the command 'Let me do X?'".<sup>5</sup> This procedure is, of course, open to the objections, first, that in the sense of 'value-judgement' defined, it may be that no 'ought'-judgements are value-judgements; and second, that even if some are, we need to be given reasons for restricting the application of the term to these cases. Hare is aware of this, and says:

The substantial part of what I am trying to show is this, that, in the sense of 'value-judgement' just defined, we do make value-judgements, and that they are the class of sentences containing value-words which is of primary interest to the logician who studies moral language.<sup>6</sup>

Hare has set himself, then, two tasks. First, he must show that we do make value-judgements in his sense. Second, he has to show that it is value judgements in this sense which are of primary interest to those who study moral language. I will not consider how he fares in the latter enterprise (which, curiously, he attempts first), since I shall argue that he fails in the former; and if there are no 'ought'-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *The Language of Morals*, ch. 2. section 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.



judgements which are value-judgements in his sense, we may safely assume that the attempt to show that they are of primary logical interest in ethics is doomed to failure.

Hare's argument to show that at least some of the value-judgements we make are or entail imperatives (i.e., are value-judgements in his sense) is this: Judgements using value-words have it as their distinctive function 'either to commend or in some other way to guide choices or actions';

But to guide choices or actions, a moral judgement has to be such that if a person assents to it, he must assent to some imperative sentence derivable from it; in other words, if a person does not assent to some such imperative sentence, that is knock-down evidence that he does not assent to the moral judgement in an evaluative sense.

And this, Hare adds, is true by virtue of his definition of 'evaluative'. Now it is certainly true by Hare's definition of 'evaluative' that if a person does not assent to some imperative derivable from a moral judgement, he does not assent to that judgement, at least in an evaluative sense. But what Hare has to show, and reiterating his definition will not achieve this, is that imperatives are *ever* derivable from evaluative judgements - that is, that evaluative judgements are ever evaluative in his sense. The passage quoted, however, does contain a claim which, if true, *would* constitute a conclusive reason for accepting that 'ought'-judgements entail imperatives. This is the claim, in effect, that in order to guide choices or actions, a moral judgement must entail an imperative. If this were so, it would indeed follow that 'ought'-judgements are imperatives, unless we deny the plausible claim that it is the function of such judgements to guide actions. Hare's whole case

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 171-172.

rests ultimately, then, on the claim, made here and elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> that only imperatives can guide actions; and there is little doubt, I think, that this or some closely related assumption has also been in the minds of the many philosophers besides Hare who have been inclined to assimilate moral judgements to imperatives. What we must now consider is whether this claim, for which Hare nowhere presents any argument, is true.

First, we must understand what it is about a sentence that makes it 'action-guiding'. To say that a judgement is action-guiding in Hare's sense is clearly to say more than that it *could* guide actions in conceivable circumstances. At the start of chapter 11, he notes that 'The train is about to depart' could in some sense guide the actions of a man who wants to catch the train, but this does not make the judgement that the train is about to depart action-guiding in his sense. Action-guiding sentences are *typically* used to guide actions; it is their *function* to do so.

Hare's use of 'action-guiding' comes out in the following passages:

The reason why actions are in a peculiar way revelatory of moral principles is that the function of moral principles is to guide conduct. The language of morals is one sort of prescriptive language. And this is what makes ethics worth studying: for the question "What shall I do?" is one that we cannot for long evade.<sup>9</sup>

... it must be part of the function of a moral judgement to prescribe or guide choices, that is to say, to entail an answer to some question of the form "What shall I do?"...<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> E.g. *ibid.*, pp. 29, 46.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

A statement, however loosely it is bound to the facts, cannot answer a question of the form "What shall I do?"; only a command can do this. Therefore, if we insist that moral judgements are nothing but loose statements of fact, we preclude them from fulfilling their main function; for their main function is to regulate conduct...<sup>11</sup>

These passages show that for Hare, 'action-guiding' is interchangeable with 'prescriptive', and that what is distinctive about action-guiding or prescriptive sentences is that they provide answers to questions of the form 'What shall I do?'. What we are considering, then, is whether, as Hare asserts, only a command can answer a question of the form 'What shall I do?'<sup>12</sup>

The first thing to be pointed out here is that there are at least three different things which might be meant by the question 'What shall I do?':

- (a) The question could implausibly be interpreted as requesting a prediction of one's future actions. Needless to say, Hare does not have this interpretation in mind.
- (b) It could be interpreted as 'What do you order me to do?', asked of a person who is in a position to issue orders to the speaker. Equally clearly, Hare does not have this interpretation in mind.
- (c) It could be interpreted, and this *is* the interpretation Hare has in mind, as a request for advice on how one should act. Here one is

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> H.N. Castaneda seems to commit himself to the same claim in his paper, 'Imperatives, Decisions and Oughts', in *Morality and the Language of Conduct*, edited by H.N. Castaneda and G. Nakhnikian (Detroit, 1963). On page 262, he defines an imperative as 'Any assertion which is in fact used to formulate, or used as if it were the formulation of, an appropriate answer to the question "Shall I (we) do that?"'; and he shortly substitutes for this question the question 'What shall I do?'.

not asking for a prediction or a command; what is really being asked is 'What *ought* I to do?'.<sup>13</sup> Now such a question is often in fact answered by an apparent imperative, 'Do X'. But this answer is shorthand for 'You ought to do X', or perhaps, 'I think you ought to do X', just as it is when it is given in reply to the explicit 'ought'-question, 'What ought I to do?'. Now of course, Hare claims that 'You ought to do X' is itself an imperative, and not, as it seems to be, an indicative. But his ground for this assertion was the claim that only thus could we explain how this sentence could be an answer to the question 'What shall I do?'; and when we see that in the cases Hare has in mind, a person who asks this question wants to know what he ought to do, any further explanation of the fact that he may be answered by being told what he ought to do becomes unnecessary. In fact, even in the case where 'What shall I do?' means 'What do you command me to do?', the appropriate answer is an indicative - 'I command you to do X'.<sup>14</sup> For a command to be the appropriate response to 'What shall I do?', on any interpretation, the question would have to be taken as a request to be told to do something; and it is difficult to conceive of circumstances in which one would wish to make such a request. Certainly the need for advice does not constitute such a circumstance.

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<sup>13</sup> Sometimes, Hare seems to have in mind one's addressing the question, 'What shall I do?', to *oneself*. But here too, one is not asking oneself for a prediction or command, but is wondering what one *ought* to do. In any case, not all 'ought'-judgements, but only first person ones, could be claimed with any plausibility to be answers to the question 'What shall I do?' *addressed to oneself*.

<sup>14</sup> It might be claimed that to say 'I command you to do X' *is* to command someone to do X, and not to assert that one does so. I would say, however, that though this is usually the case, it is not the case when the utterance is an answer to 'What do you command me to do?'; *qua* answer to this question, it merely states what it is, in fact, that the speaker commands.

It seems to me arguable, indeed, that not only is 'What shall I do?' not appropriately answered by an imperative, but no question is. For questions are requests for information, that is, they ask 'What is the case?', and answers to them must therefore be expressible by means of sentences beginning 'It is the case that ...'; but no sentence beginning in this way is an imperative. Apart from rhetorical questions, the only exceptions which come to mind to the rule that questions are requests for information are such locutions as 'Will you please open the door?' and 'Would you mind opening the door?'. It seems clear that the appropriate response to the utterance of either of these two sentences is not the provision of information, but the performance of an action, namely the opening of the door. However, it seems equally clear that it would be odd to say of a person who uttered either that he had asked a question at all, and I suggest that this is just because to ask a question *is* to seek information.

It is, in fact, probably tautological that questions are requests for information; and what this shows is that if, as Hare claims, only a command can answer the question 'What shall I do?', we would have to conclude that this utterance is not a question after all. We need not, however, press this point too strongly. It is sufficient to point out in answer to Hare that if a command were the 'answer' to 'What shall I do?', then a person uttering this sentence would have to be taken as requesting, or perhaps commanding, his hearer to tell him to do something; whereas, in the cases Hare has in mind, a person who asks 'What shall I do?' does not wish to be told to do something, but merely to know what he ought to do. This means that not only is a command not the *only* appropriate response to his question, but it is not an appropriate

response at all. It follows that the fact that 'ought'-judgements *are* answers to such questions does not, as Hare claims, entail that they are imperatives; on the contrary, it entails that they cannot be imperatives.

The question which we set out to answer was that of whether or not Hare provides any reason for supposing that there is something to be learnt about ethics from the study of imperatives. His claim that there is depended on the view that moral judgements are themselves imperatives, and this in turn was supported by the claim that unless such judgements were imperatives, they could not fulfil their distinctive prescriptive or action-guiding function. However, by 'prescriptive' or 'action-guiding' sentences, Hare means sentences which can be answers to questions of the form 'What shall I do?', and we have seen that imperatives cannot be answers to questions of this form. This means that the imperative sentence, far from being, as Hare takes it to be, the prescriptive sentence *par excellence*, is not a species of prescriptive sentence at all; and this in turn means that the study of imperatives, far from being 'by far the best introduction to the study of ethics', is no introduction to it at all.

We must now consider the attitudes theory, that is, the view that the role of moral judgements is to express the attitudes of the speaker. In his *Ethics*, Moore produced roughly the following argument against the perhaps less sophisticated view that moral judgements *state* the attitudes or feelings of the speaker:<sup>15</sup> On this view, if you say 'X is good' and I say 'No, it is not', we are not really in

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<sup>15</sup> Moore, *Ethics* (London, Home University Library, Williams and Norgate, 1912), p. 100.

disagreement. For each of us is merely making an assertion about his own feelings, and your assertion that your feelings are of a certain sort is perfectly compatible with my assertion that mine are not of that sort. However, it is clear that when you say that X is good and I say that X is not good, we *do* disagree. Hence, moral judgements cannot be mere statements about the speaker's feelings or attitudes. In short, Moore's criticism of the view he considers is that it fails to account for the fact that people who make opposed moral judgements are necessarily in disagreement.

Now on the attitudes theory as I have described it, moral judgements do not *state*, but *express* the attitudes of the speaker, so that it cannot be said that according to it, people in apparent moral disagreement are merely engaged, as Stevenson puts it, in a 'comparing of introspective notes'.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the attitudes theory too would appear to be vulnerable to Moore's criticism, for if you express, say, a favourable attitude towards something, and I express an unfavourable attitude towards it, there does not seem to be any sense in which we are disagreeing. If you say 'Hurrah!' and I say 'Boo!' then though we thereby express differing attitudes, we cannot, one would have thought, be said therefore to disagree.

Now Stevenson, whose emotive theory is a version, perhaps the most well known one, of the attitudes theory, recognises that an acceptable analysis of moral judgements must be such as to allow for the possibility of moral disagreement, and that Moore's type of criticism might be thought

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<sup>16</sup> Stevenson, 'Moore's Arguments Against Certain Forms of Naturalism', in *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore*, ed. P.A. Schilpp (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1942), pp. 71-90.

to show that his theory does not allow for this possibility. He therefore attempts to show that on the emotive theory, two people who utter conflicting moral judgements *do* disagree. His argument is this:<sup>17</sup>

It is true that on the emotive theory, if one person says that X is right and another says that X is not right they do not therefore disagree in any of their beliefs. But disagreement in belief is not the only sort of disagreement - there is also disagreement in attitude, or 'interest'.<sup>18</sup> Disagreement in belief and disagreement in interest or attitude are distinguished in the following way:

Disagreement in belief occurs when A believes *p* and B disbelieves it. Disagreement in interest occurs when A has a favourable interest in X, when B has an unfavourable interest in it, and when neither is prepared to leave the other's interest unchanged.<sup>19</sup>

Now on the emotive theory, though if A says X is right and B says X is not right, they do not disagree in belief, they *do* disagree in attitude. For on the emotive theory, A is evincing a favourable attitude towards X, and B an unfavourable attitude towards X; and since the theory asserts that the utterer of a moral judgement not only evinces his attitude, but is trying to influence the attitudes of his audience, it follows also that neither A nor B is prepared to leave the other's

<sup>17</sup> In stating Stevenson's argument, I have drawn on both the version of it he produces in 'The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms' and the one he produces in his actual reply to Moore (see footnote 16):

<sup>18</sup> In 'The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms' he uses the word 'interest', not, as he says, 'in the most usual way', but as roughly equivalent to 'attitude'. In his later reply to Moore, as well as in *Ethics and Language*, he prefers to use 'attitude' itself.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms', p. 27.



interest unchanged. Hence, on the emotive theory, if two people utter conflicting moral judgements, there *is* disagreement between them, for there is disagreement in attitude.

It does not seem to me, however, that this reply by Stevenson succeeds in answering Moore's criticism. In the first place, it is questionable whether what he calls 'disagreement in attitude' is a species of disagreement at all. Suppose that A has a favourable attitude towards spicy food, while B has an unfavourable attitude towards it. So far, surely, there is no question of their being in *disagreement* of any sort; and it is far from clear to me that the position is changed if we add that A and B are each bent on converting the other from his present dietary prejudices. Nevertheless, let us concede that there is a sense in which A and B disagree, and let us express this by saying that they disagree in attitude. Let us also concede that Stevenson's theory allows that there is disagreement of this type between people who make conflicting moral judgements. We have nevertheless seen that, as Stevenson admits, the theory does *not* allow the possibility of any other sort of disagreement between such people. This means that if we are to accept his reply to Moore, we must accept that the only sort of disagreement which is necessarily present when conflicting moral judgements are made is disagreement in attitude. I will now try to show that this cannot be accepted.

Let us note that for two people to disagree in belief, it is not necessary that they be unprepared to leave each other's beliefs unchanged. As Stevenson says, disagreement in belief occurs merely when one person believes something and another disbelieves it. Thus, I disagree with the president of the Flat Earth Society over the shape

of the earth, though I am in fact by no means inclined to try to eradicate beliefs such as his, which provide such excellent philosophical examples, and he, having never heard of me, cannot have conceived any wish to alter my belief. But, as we have seen, it is different with disagreement in attitude. Before two people can be said to disagree in attitude, they must not only hold conflicting attitudes, but each must also be unprepared to let the attitude of the other remain unchanged. Thus, if I am repelled by the shape of the earth, which I know in my heart of hearts to be flat, whereas the president of the Flat Earth Society approves of it, then though we hold opposing attitudes, we do not therefore *disagree* in attitude. For it to be true that we disagree in attitude, it must also be true that we are each determined that the attitude of the other shall be changed. This provides us with a means of deciding whether or not it is true that if two people issue conflicting moral judgements, the only sense in which they disagree is that they disagree in attitude. If, when A says that X is right, and B says that it is not, we are not prepared to say that they disagree unless each is also disposed to try to change the other's position (I say 'position' rather than 'belief' or 'attitude' to avoid question-begging), it would appear that their disagreement is merely one of attitude. But if, on the other hand, we are prepared to say that A and B disagree *whether or not* each is disposed to try to change the other's position, then we must conclude that whether or not there is also disagreement in attitude between A and B, there is necessarily disagreement of some other sort. In the latter case, of course, it will follow that the emotive theory, which does not allow that A and B necessarily disagree except in attitude, is indeed unable to meet Moore's objection.

Now this test, it seems to me, tells conclusively against Stevenson. If A holds that X is right, and B holds that it is not, this is surely a sufficient ground for saying that they disagree over the rightness of X, even if it turns out that neither has any inclination to try to change the position of the other. Again, it is surely true that most of us disagree with the Pharaohs over the acceptability of slavery, though it cannot be true that we are unprepared to allow their attitudes to remain unchanged, or *vice versa*. I conclude that even if, as is doubtful, there is a type of disagreement called 'disagreement in attitude', it remains true that if two people hold conflicting positions on the rightness of something, they necessarily disagree in some sense other than that they disagree in attitude. It follows that the emotive theory, which entails that this is not the case, is after all vulnerable to Moore's criticism: people who make conflicting moral judgements do indeed necessarily disagree in a sense which cannot be accounted for on the theory. This weakness of the theory arises from the fact that it makes moral judgements expressions of attitude rather than statements of fact, and is therefore a weakness of attitudes theories in general, which share this feature, rather than of Stevenson's theory in particular.

The arguments I have produced against the imperative theory and the attitudes theory seem to me to be adequate to justify their rejection. Nevertheless, they will in effect be supplemented later in this dissertation, when it will be seen that the alternative analysis which will be argued for can account for those features of moral judgements which make the attitudes theory and the imperative theory attractive, and can do so more satisfactorily than can either of the latter theories.

It is with the task of providing this alternative analysis that I shall be concerned in the following chapters.

I wish to conclude the present chapter by commenting on a certain feature of nearly all of the arguments concerning the nature of moral judgements so far considered. In each case, the aim is to establish something about moral or evaluative terms, or judgements employing them, *in general*, but the point is usually argued for one such term only. Thus, for example, in 'The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms', Stevenson tries to show that evaluative terms in general have 'emotive meaning' by arguing that this is true of the word 'good'. This may be objected to, since there is more than one key ethical term, and, it may be said, what is true of one cannot be assumed without argument to be true of the others. Why do moral philosophers tend to assume that an investigation of any one of the terms 'good', 'right', and 'ought', for example, will tell us anything about the meaning of the others? The answer to this question is that it is usually held that 'good', 'right', and 'ought' are to all intents and purposes interdefinable, so that to get clear about the meaning of one is indeed to get clear about the meaning of the others. This is explicitly claimed to be so by Monro, for example,<sup>20</sup> and argued in some detail by Hare.<sup>21</sup> Since I am in agreement with Monro and Hare here, I too, in investigating the nature of moral judgements, will largely restrict my attention to those using one key moral term, namely the term 'ought'. That the terms mentioned are in fact interdefinable seems to me fairly clearly true, and in any

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<sup>20</sup> *Empiricism and Ethics*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> *The Language of Morals*, pp. 180-187.

case to be adequately argued by Hare.

However, the practice of trying to show that something is true of moral judgements in general by showing that it is true of those employing, say, 'good', might be objected to without its being denied that 'good', 'right', and 'ought' are interdefinable. For, it might be pointed out, there are many moral terms which are clearly *not* interdefinable with these terms. The words 'generous', 'courageous', 'cruel', 'lying', and 'murder', for example, all specify *particular sorts* of behaviour which are morally desirable or undesirable, whereas 'good', 'right', 'ought', 'wrong', etc., do not. Thus if we know that a man acted cruelly, we know that he caused suffering to another or others, whereas if we know only that he acted wrongly, or otherwise than he ought, we know no more than that he acted in *some* way which is morally undesirable. Since there are moral terms not interdefinable with 'ought', 'right', and 'good', it might be said, it follows that moral philosophers are not justified in basing claims about moral terms in general on arguments about any or all of these terms.

It must certainly be admitted that there are a great number of terms which are in some sense moral terms and which are not interdefinable with 'ought', 'right', and 'good'. Nevertheless, I believe that there are good reasons, when undertaking an analysis of moral judgements, for restricting one's attention to those which use these latter terms. Let us consider the word 'cruel'. As we have noted, the notion of being cruel, unlike that of doing what one ought not to do, specifies a particular way of behaving which is morally undesirable. The way of behaving in question is not, of course, adequately characterised as 'causing suffering to others' - a dentist, for example, sometimes causes suffering without therefore being cruel. However, without

trying to decide just what would constitute an adequate characterisation of the type of morally undesirable behaviour involved in being cruel, let us suppose that 'doing X' is such a characterisation. Now the reason why 'cruelty' can be called a moral term is not merely that most of us believe that one ought not to do X, but that this belief is encapsulated in the notion of cruelty, so that 'one ought to be cruel' is not merely believed by most of us to be false, but is unintelligible. We may say, therefore, that 'Smith acted cruelly' means, roughly, 'Smith acted otherwise than he ought, and did so by doing X'. Thus, part of what is asserted by someone who says 'Smith acted cruelly' is that Smith acted otherwise than he ought. But this shows that what is true of 'ought'-judgements is indeed true of judgements about cruelty, for the latter *are* (in part) 'ought'-judgements; and the same type of argument will show that it is also true of judgements containing words such as 'generous', 'courageous', 'lying', and other moral terms which specify particular sorts of morally desirable or undesirable behaviour.

Granting this, however, it may nevertheless still be claimed that the notion of cruelty (for example) deserves separate consideration by the moral philosopher. For we have seen that the judgement that someone acted cruelly asserts not only that the person concerned acted otherwise than he ought, but also that he did X - and why should we take the latter assertion to be of less interest than the former?

The reply to this is that the notion of doing X is only of interest to moral philosophy if the belief that one ought not to do X is correct, so that to say that we should investigate the notion of doing X is to assume the truth of this belief. But though most of us may believe that one ought not to do X, it does not seem to me that moral philosophers should simply assume the truth of prevailing moral

beliefs. Of course, the suggestion that the moral philosopher should initially suspend judgement on prevailing moral beliefs carries with it the implication that he might come to the conclusion that some of them are unsound; whereas, it is sometimes suggested, moral philosophy cannot (or perhaps should not) alter moral beliefs, but can only analyse them. However, this suggestion probably springs from the view, criticised earlier, that meta-ethics is the sole proper concern of moral philosophy; and if there are other grounds for accepting it, I can only say that I am unaware of them. No doubt we all think it highly unlikely that any investigation of the matter will reveal that the type of behaviour we call cruel is in fact morally permissible, and expect that a sound moral philosophy will show that it is not; but we should surely demand that it show this by a more convincing method than that of assuming it.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MEANING OF 'OUGHT'

A point often made about the nature of 'ought'-judgements is that a man who makes such a judgement commits himself to holding that there are reasons to support what he says.<sup>1</sup> In support of this claim, it is usually pointed out that whenever it is said that someone ought to do something, the question, 'Why?' (i.e. 'For what reasons?') is in place; and that we would be at a loss to understand a man who said that something ought to be done, though there was no reason why it should be done.

This fact, that, as Charles E. Caton puts it,<sup>2</sup> "'ought"-judgements are logically a kind of statement which must be supportable by reasons', though widely acknowledged, is not usually thought to be of much help to those who wish to avoid relativism. And indeed, it would seem to leave quite unaffected the relativist's claim that we cannot give anyone good reasons for accepting any given moral judgement. Though, if I say 'Smith ought to do A', I must have reasons for saying

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Language of Morals*, p. 157; Charles E. Caton, 'In What Sense and Why "Ought"-judgements are Universalisable', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 13 (1963), p. 50; K. Baier, *The Moral Point of View*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Caton, loc. cit.



this, it would not appear to follow that I can provide *another* person with reasons for doing so - for it cannot be maintained that one person's having reason for doing a certain thing entails that anyone *else* has such a reason. I will argue, however, that to reason in this way is to misunderstand the sense in which it is true that 'ought'-judgements must be backed by reasons. When this is properly understood, it will be seen that it does by itself place some restrictions on the range of possible 'ought'-judgements which can intelligibly be made in a given situation, and more importantly, opens the way for an account of the meaning of such judgements which restricts that range very narrowly indeed.

Let us begin by considering some comments made by Monro on a passage in *The Language of Morals* to which we have already had occasion to refer,<sup>3</sup> where Hare discusses the difference between 'ought'-judgements and other imperatives, to which class, as we have seen, he believes the former to belong. Hare says that a singular imperative like 'use the starting-handle' applies only to the occasion on which it is uttered; whereas 'you ought to use the starting-handle', while it applies to an individual occasion, 'invokes or appeals to' some more general principle like 'If the engine fails to start at once on the self-starter, one ought always to use the starting-handle!'<sup>4</sup>

As Monro says, 'What this amounts to is that ought-sentences are, and singular imperatives are not, backed by reasons, and that it is a characteristic of reasons that, if they apply to this occasion, they

<sup>3</sup> Ch. IV, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> *The Language of Morals*, p. 156.

apply to all relevantly similar occasions'.<sup>5</sup> Monro is inclined to question this, not because he denies that 'ought'-statements need to be backed by reasons, but because he suspects that the fact that they do does not distinguish them from singular imperatives. He says that 'Use the starting-handle; there is no particular reason; just use it' seems odd or 'logically illegitimate' in just the same way as 'You ought to use the starting-handle; but there is no particular reason; you just ought to use it'.<sup>6</sup>

However, Monro is prepared to concede, at least for argument's sake, 'that some commands are arbitrary';<sup>7</sup> and this is surely a prudent concession. The utterance of commands would be an odd activity indeed if to engage in it without reasons were, not merely unusual, or even irrational, but *logically* illegitimate. Monro concedes, then, that some commands can be arbitrary; but he denies that this marks a difference between singular imperatives and 'ought'-sentences. Rather, he says, it marks a difference between nearly all imperatives, including 'ought'-sentences, and 'a few very rare, quite unimportant, quite uncharacteristic imperatives'; and this, he says, 'will not tell us very much about what marks ought-sentences off from all other types of sentence'.<sup>8</sup>

It seems clear, though, that if Hare's point is conceded, then

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<sup>5</sup> Monro, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*

we *have* learned something about 'ought'-sentences which distinguishes them from singular imperatives - namely that while the latter are usually backed by reasons (no doubt because people generally have reasons for what they say), the former *must* be backed by reasons, in the sense that to say that someone ought to do something, though there is no reason why he ought to, is to say something logically illegitimate. Unfortunately, if it is odd to suggest of commands that it is logically impermissible to utter them arbitrarily, it seems no less odd to make the same suggestion regarding 'ought'-judgements. It is difficult to see how there could be *any* human activity such that by engaging in it without reason, one breached the laws of logic. We need not, however, concern ourselves with the question of how there could be such an activity. That question I believe, is indeed unanswerable, but as I will now argue, in the sense in which it is true that an 'ought'-judgement needs to be backed by reasons, it does not follow that it cannot be arbitrary, in the sense that its utterer cannot fail to have reasons for his utterance.

If I tell Smith either to do A or that he ought to do A, there are two sorts of reasons whose presence might be in question. More accurately, there are two performances the presence of reasons for which might be in question. I might be asked what reasons *I* have for *telling* Smith to do A or that he ought to do A, or I might be asked what reasons there are *for Smith* to do A. Let us distinguish between these by calling reasons which would be mentioned in an answer to the former question 'reasons-for-utterance' and those which would be mentioned in an answer to the latter 'reasons-for-performance'. Sometimes, the same facts can be both reasons-for-utterance and reasons-for-performance.

For example, the fact that by doing A Smith will avoid harm to himself would be a reason for him to do A, and might, say if Smith were my friend, also be my reason for telling him to do A or that he ought to do A. It is clear, however, that this need not be the case. If my reason-for-utterance is that by doing A Smith would make me wealthy, this would not necessarily be a reason-for-performance, since Smith may be indifferent to my fortunes; and the fact that Smith would avoid harm to himself by doing A, which constitutes a reason-for-performance, need not be my reason-for-utterance, since I may be unconcerned about his welfare (my reason for telling him to do A or that he ought to do A may be that by doing A, he will also make me wealthy). Thus, the presence of a reason of one of these two kinds does not entail the presence of a reason of the other.

Now if I say to Smith, 'Do A', that is, if my utterance is a singular imperative, I do not commit myself to the presence of either sort of reason. I need not claim that there are reasons for Smith to do A, though there may be, and I need not claim that I have reason for telling Smith to do A, though if I do not, I must admit that my command is arbitrary. Both Hare and Monro would presumably agree so far, since the former claims, and the latter concedes, that singular imperatives need not be backed by reasons. It is also claimed, however, that 'ought'-judgements *do* need to be backed by reasons, that to utter such a judgement while denying that there are reasons for what one said would be, not to admit arbitrariness, but to display logical confusion. Now this is clearly not true if we take 'reasons' to mean 'reasons-for-utterance'. A bookmaker will probably have no reason for telling a punter who relies on horoscopes that he ought to rely instead on form-guides,

but he would not be saying something unintelligible were he to admit this and nevertheless insist that the punter ought to switch to form-guides. This shows that 'ought'-judgements and commands may be arbitrary in just the same way - namely, by being uttered in the absence of reasons-for-utterance - and that to admit the absence of such reasons for one's 'ought'-judgement need not be to display logical confusion. We have seen that the absence of reasons-for-performance, on the other hand, does not render a command arbitrary; and the same is in fact true of 'ought'-judgements. When a confidence man tells his victim that he ought to buy certain shares which, being worthless, the victim has no reason to buy, what he says is not arbitrary, since he has reason for saying it, namely that purchase of the shares will profit him. What the professional utterances of confidence men are criticised for is not arbitrariness, but disingenuousness, and the utterance of our confidence man is disingenuous because it implies, what he knows to be false, that his victim has reason to buy the shares; and since his utterance implies this, were he to *admit* that his victim has no reason to buy the shares, but nevertheless insist that he ought to buy them, he would then display logical confusion.

The position, then, is this. To command Smith to do A *or* to tell him that he ought to do A while admitting that one has no reason for doing so is to admit that what one says is arbitrary, but not to show logical confusion. To command Smith to do A while admitting that he has no reason to do A is neither to admit that one's utterance is arbitrary *nor* to show logical confusion. To tell Smith that he *ought* to do A while admitting that he has no reason to do A is not to admit that one's judgement is arbitrary, since it is left open that one has

reason for uttering it; but to do this *is* to display logical confusion, for it is to deny, what is implied by one's judgement, that Smith has reason to do A.

The sense in which it is true, then, that 'ought'-judgements need to be backed by reasons is that if I tell someone he ought to do something, I commit myself to the view that he has reason to do it. This is quite distinct from the odd claim that one cannot make an 'ought'-judgement without having reason for doing so, and its conflation with this latter claim is a result of a failure to distinguish between what I have reason to tell someone (disingenuously, perhaps) he ought to do and what he has reason to do.

The same conflation, stemming from the same confusion, is also evident in Black's paper, 'The Gap Between "Is" and "Should"', which was discussed earlier.<sup>9</sup> As we saw, his claim that if you want to achieve E and can only do so by doing M, I have reason to urge you to do M depends on a confusion between what you have reason to do and what I have reason to urge you to do. And the reason he gives for rejecting, as he does, the view that 'should'- and 'ought'-judgements need to be backed by reasons shows that he too conflates that view with the view that a man must always have a reason for uttering such a judgement. For he says that while the use of the second-person 'should'-formula normally arouses a presumption that the speaker has reason for saying what he does, '... since the same might be said about any statement whatever, this cannot be a distinctive peculiarity of the

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<sup>9</sup> See ch. 5.

meaning or function of "should".<sup>10</sup> This, of course, is an argument against the view that it is distinctive of 'should'-judgements that a man must have reason for uttering one, which is not what is meant when it is said that 'should'-judgements need to be backed by reasons. What is meant is that if I say that you ought to do something, I imply that there is reason *for you* to do it; and it cannot be said of *this* thesis that 'the same might be said of any statement whatever', since in the case of most statements, there is no question of the hearer's being commanded, recommended, or advised to perform any action. In fact, not only does Black fail to cast doubt on this thesis, but the main claim made in his paper tends to bear it out. For he is concerned to argue that the conclusion 'You should do M' follows from the premise that you want to achieve E and can only do so by doing M, and it certainly also follows from this premise that you have reason to do M. This means that at least in the case where you should do M because of the truth of this premise, you also have reason to do M - which is what we should expect if it is true that 'You ought to do M' implies 'You have reason to do M'.

We can now see that, properly understood, the fact that 'ought'-judgements need to be backed by reasons does place a restriction on the range of possible 'ought'-judgements which can be made in a given situation. For it shows that conclusive reason for rejecting a judgement to the effect that a given person ought to perform a given action can be provided by showing that the person does not have reason to per-

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<sup>10</sup> Black, *Op. cit.*, p. 172.

form that action. It does not follow, however, that we can provide someone with conclusive reasons for *accepting* that a given person ought to perform a given action by showing that the person *does* have reason to perform the action. If 'Smith ought to do A' implies that Smith has reason to do A, then it does follow that one cannot claim that Smith ought to do A if it is shown to be false that he has reason to do A. However, it may be that one could accept that Smith has reason to do A while denying that he ought to, just as while one cannot claim that Smith is a bachelor while denying that Smith is unmarried, one *can* claim that Smith is unmarried but deny that Smith is a bachelor, on the grounds that Smith is female. In the bachelor case, this is possible because 'Smith is unmarried' does not exhaust the implications of the assertion, 'Smith is a bachelor'. Whether or not the further implications of this assertion are true is, of course, a matter of fact, so that further empirical evidence could settle beyond dispute whether or not Smith is a bachelor. But it may be that the implications of 'Smith ought to do A' include some that are of a sort which is not open to confirmation or refutation, so that a man may not only accept that Smith has reason to do A while disputing the claim that he ought to do A, but may do so without its being possible even in principle to produce any evidence to refute him.

Accordingly, we must now investigate fully the implications of 'ought'-judgements; that is, we must investigate their meaning. Since we have seen that one implication of such judgements is that the person of whom it is said that he ought to do something has reason to do that thing, it might seem that we have already isolated one element in their meaning; for it seems a tautological step from the claim that 'Smith



ought to do A' implies 'There is a reason for Smith to do A' to the claim that the latter is at least part of what is meant by the former. However, if I understand him correctly, H-N Castaneda accepts the former view, but denies the latter, in his paper, 'Imperatives, Decisions, and Oughts'.<sup>11</sup> For he says that normatives such as 'X ought to do A' 'point through the normative word to the existence of reasons for or against the performance of the action mentioned in them', and 'even formulate such reasons through the qualifier'<sup>12</sup> (by 'qualifier', Castaneda means such words as 'morally', 'legally', etc.); yet he argues that it cannot be part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A' that there are reasons for X's doing of A. Since I wish to claim that it is indeed part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A' that there are reasons for X's doing of A, I will try to show that his argument is unsuccessful.

Castaneda considers the view that the central part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A' is 'There are reasons for X's doing of A' in sections nine to thirteen of his paper. On this view, which I shall refer to as 'the reasons analysis', he suggests that we could distinguish between 'X ought *prima facie* to do A' and 'X ought *simpliciter* to do A' by defining the former as 'There are some good reasons for X's doing of A' and the latter as 'There are conclusive reasons for X's doing of A'. However, this distinction has no relevance to the criticisms he makes of the reasons analysis, and for simplicity's sake I will take the view to be discussed as the view that the central part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A' is 'There are reasons for X to do A', leaving

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<sup>11</sup> In *Morality and the Language of Conduct*, eds. Castaneda and G. Nakhnikian (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1963), pp. 219-299.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

it open whether the latter asserts that there are conclusive reasons, or merely that there are some reasons, for X's doing of A, just as 'X ought to do A' leaves it open whether X ought *simpliciter* to do A or ought *prima facie* to do A.

In making some preliminary remarks about the reasons analysis, Castaneda says that it does not provide an adequate partial definition of 'ought' 'unless the phrase "reason for doing" is furnished with a clear and adequate meaning'.<sup>13</sup> This seems false to me, and seeing why it is false will help us avoid some red herrings when considering his subsequent attack on the reasons analysis.

What Castaneda thinks to be needed, presumably, is neither a dictionary definition nor a stipulative definition of the phrase in question, but a philosophical analysis of its meaning. Now either he thinks that an analysis of *any* expression is inadequate unless it in turn has some analysis supplied for it, or he thinks that it is the analysis of 'ought'-judgements in terms of reasons for doing *in particular* of which this is true. If the former, he would seem to be clearly wrong, since if no analysis could be adequate unless it was itself provided with an adequate analysis, there could be no adequate analyses. If the latter, we need to be told what is special amongst philosophical analyses about the reasons analysis - and Castaneda does claim that 'At first sight it looks as if the phrase [i.e. "reason for doing"] is as difficult and obscure as the word "ought"'.<sup>14</sup> But ordinary speakers of the language do not find the phrase difficult or

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>14</sup> Loc cit.

obscure - if one were to say, for example, that there were reasons for outlawing the use of marihuana, one might well be asked to name them, but one would not be asked, at least by anyone who spoke English, what one meant. No doubt, though, what Castaneda means is that analysis of the phrase presents *philosophical* difficulties. This may well be true, but it is also irrelevant. As was pointed out a moment ago, it cannot be the case that an analysis of a given phrase is inadequate unless it is itself provided with an analysis.

There is no reason, then, to accept Castaneda's suggestion that to espouse the reasons analysis is to commit oneself to producing an analysis of the notion of a reason for doing something. Let us bear this in mind as we consider his criticisms of the reasons analysis, that is, the view that the central part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A' is 'There are reasons for X's doing of A'.

Castaneda considers two versions of the reasons analysis, one of which takes reasons 'as facts which justify, which somehow imply the correctness of some action',<sup>15</sup> and the other of which thinks of reasons as causally explaining an action. Since it is the first of these that I am inclined to defend, I shall only consider what he has to say about that version.

It was pointed out a moment ago that the question of what would be a correct analysis of the notion of reasons for doing something is quite separate from that of whether or not the reasons analysis is sound. Nevertheless, it would be a legitimate way of attacking the reasons analysis to provide an analysis of the notion of a reason for

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

acting, and then to show that it is a consequence of this analysis that 'There are reasons for X's doing of A' cannot be part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A'; and this is in fact Castaneda's strategy.

He begins by pointing out that 'When we speak of reasons for believing, saying, supposing, etc., we are talking about premises which in a relevant mode of inference ... imply a certain conclusion, namely the proposition believed, supposed, etc.', so that '... to say that there are reasons to hold that the center of the earth is hot is often short for saying that there are true propositions which inductively imply, on the assumption of certain laws of nature, that the center of the earth is hot. Likewise, to assert that there is a conclusive reason for believing in the divisibility by 6 of the number 24,684 is to assert that there is a mathematical fact which entails that 24,684 is divisible by 6 without remainder'.<sup>16</sup> Castaneda therefore restates the view that part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A' is 'There are reasons for X's doing of A' as the view that part of the meaning of the former is that there are facts or true propositions which imply some utterance S about X's doing of A. The problem now reduces, he says, to the determining of the utterance S. He points out that S cannot be 'X ought to do A' itself, for 'we would be defining "ought" in terms of reasons, where "reasons" can only be understood in terms of "ought"'; and again, that S cannot be the statement that X performs A, for this would have the consequence that if the 'ought'-assertion is true, the agent performs the action in question - 'But it is notorious that on some occasions some persons have failed to do what they ought, *simpliciter*, to have done'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

He next suggests that we may try to get a clue to the identity of S by considering statements like

(1) 'The fact that you have no tea is a good reason for your going to the store to buy some'.

This statement, he says, can legitimately be regarded as a compact way of putting

(2) 'Since you have no tea, you ought to go to the store to buy some',

which can be expanded into

(2a) 'Since you have no tea (and your going to the store is a necessary condition for your buying some tea, and you want to get some by buying it), you ought (*prima facie*) to go to the store', which we may accept as a formally valid inference.<sup>18</sup>

Castaneda denies, however, that the connection between (1) and (2a) is of any help to the reasons analysis. It would lead us, he says, to regard 'You ought to go to the store' itself as the utterance S, a suggestion which he has already criticised. He concludes that 'If the reasons analysis is to escape circularity, it must explain how a statement about the good reasons for doing something can be understood to refer to an argument, whose conclusion is neither a statement about a person's performances nor one about oughts'.<sup>19</sup>

Castaneda's criticism of the reasons analysis, then, amounts to the claim that whatever utterance we take as S, the proposition about X's doing of A which is implied by facts which are reasons for X's doing

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 249-250.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

of A, the statement that there are facts which imply S cannot be part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A'.

Now there is one proposition about X's doing of A which is certainly implied by facts which constitute reasons for X's doing of A, and which suffers from none of the defects of the candidates considered by Castaneda. This is the proposition that X has reason to do A, or perhaps, that it would be rational of X to do A. Of course, to point this out is to be quite uninformative as to the nature of reasons for acting, and if our goal were enlightenment on that topic, we would want to ask what *else* is true of facts which constitute reasons for X's doing of A. Before we ask, however, as Castaneda does, what other proposition about X's doing of A is implied by such facts, we need to be given reason to suppose that there must be some such proposition.

Castaneda presumably thinks that he provides a reason for supposing that there must be some proposition about X's doing of A which is non-trivially implied by facts which are reasons for X's doing of A when he points out that a reason for believing a proposition is a fact which implies that proposition. Since facts which are reasons for believing imply some proposition other than the uninteresting one that there are reasons for believing whatever they are reasons for believing, it might be said, and this appears to be Castaneda's argument, the same must therefore be true of facts which are reasons for acting. But this is clearly a *non sequitur*. To say that reasons for believing P imply that P is to give an account of what it is to be, not simply a reason, but a reason for *believing*. And to assume that there must therefore be some proposition similarly implied by reasons for *acting* is like

assuming that since winning a race involves passing the finishing-line first, winning a game of chess must involve passing some other sort of line first.

If it is now asked, 'Given that Castaneda's account of what it is to be a reason for acting is unsatisfactory, or at least not adequately argued for, what would be a true, non-trivial one?', we need only reiterate what was pointed out earlier - that in suggesting that 'There are reasons for X to do A' is a partial analysis of 'X ought to do A', one does not place oneself under any obligation to provide also an analysis of the former sentence, which is of a form familiar to any speaker of the language.

My reply to Castaneda so far has been that while it may be true that 'There are facts which imply (non-trivially) some proposition S about X's doing of A' cannot be part of the meaning of 'X ought to do A', there is no reason for supposing that the former is equivalent to 'There are reasons for X's doing of A'. I wish now to consider what Castaneda has to say about the connections he concedes to exist between statements (1), (2) and (2a), mentioned a moment ago. As we saw, he denies that these connections can lend support to the reasons analysis, since it would lead us to regard 'You ought to go to the store' as the utterance S which, by definition of the notion of reasons for acting, is entailed by facts which constitute reasons for going to the store. However, we have seen that the quest for the identity of S is a wild goose chase, motivated by the unwarranted assumption that what is true of reasons for believing must also be true of reasons for acting. Moreover, the task of defining the notion of reasons for acting is not, to stress the point once more, one which we need undertake. Leaving that

task to a more appropriate occasion, let us consider whether it is true that the reasons analysis gains no support from what Castaneda says about the statements (1), (2) and (2a).

(1) is conceded to imply (2a), which is accepted as a formally valid inference. Let us set out this inference a little more formally as

(3) 'You have no tea (and your going to the store is a necessary condition for your buying some tea, and you want to get some by buying it). Therefore, you ought (*prima facie*) to go to the store.'

Now just as (2) is elliptical for (2a), (1) is clearly elliptical for

(1a) 'The fact that you have no tea (and your going to the store is a necessary condition, etc.) is a good reason for your going to the store';

which is undeniably true.

We see that the same facts which (1a) truly asserts to constitute reasons for your going to the store form the sole premises of the formally valid inference in (3). Now this would seem to provide strong support indeed for the reasons analysis. If facts which constitute reasons for your going to the store *by themselves* entitle us to infer that you ought to go to the store, what is suggested is not merely that 'There is reason for you to go to the store' is *part* of the meaning of 'You ought to go to the store', but that it is the *whole* of the meaning of the latter statement.

Castaneda, then, fails to show that 'X ought to do A' cannot be partially analysed as 'There are reasons for X's doing of A', and in fact provides, albeit unwittingly, grounds for accepting the stronger



thesis that it can be *wholly* analysed by the latter. However, though I believe that the stronger thesis is in fact correct, I will not rely on the support thus provided for it by Castaneda. That support depends entirely on his concession that (2a) is a valid inference, and to assume that he is right in conceding this would be question-begging in this context. For the question with which we are concerned is precisely that of what sort of inferences to 'ought'-conclusions, if any, are valid.

So far, we have seen that in making an 'ought'-judgement, such as 'X ought to do A', one commits oneself to the claim that there are reasons for X's doing of A, and that Castaneda fails to place any obstacles in the way of our drawing the natural conclusion that this is because at least part of what is meant by 'X ought to do A' is that there are reasons for X's doing of A. Let us therefore draw this conclusion, and ask what reason we have for supposing that there is any *other* element in the meaning of 'X ought to do A'.

There are two closely-related features of 'ought'-judgements which, I suggest, provide the major motivation for postulating some other element as part, or even the whole, of the meaning of such judgements. The first we have already noted.<sup>20</sup> It is that a person who accepts that he ought to do A is more likely to do A than he would have been had he not accepted this. The other is that a man who tells some person or persons that he or they ought to do A usually intends thereby to influence him or them to do A. The distinctive aspects of the theories of Hare and Stevenson can be seen as arising from the attempt to account for these

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<sup>20</sup> See ch. 2.

features.

Stevenson tells us that one of the facts with which any account of the meaning of 'good' must reckon is that the word is 'magnetic'<sup>21</sup> in the sense that 'A person who recognises X to be "good" must *ipso facto* acquire a stronger tendency to act in its favour than he otherwise would have had'.<sup>22</sup> The counterpart of this in the case of 'ought' is that a person who recognises that he ought to do A *ipso facto* acquires a stronger tendency to do A than he otherwise would have had - and this is the first of the two features of 'ought'-judgements mentioned above. According to Stevenson, this feature is catered for by his theory, which holds that included in the meaning of moral judgements is a reference to the 'interest' of the speaker<sup>23</sup>, that is, the 'approval, or similar psychological attitudes'<sup>24</sup> of the speaker; and indeed, if a person who acknowledges that he ought to do A thereby indicates that he approves of his doing A, no further explanation is needed of his having a stronger tendency to do A than he would otherwise have had.

This alleged reference to the attitudes of the speaker, however, does not seem to account for the second of the two features of moral judgements which I mentioned, a feature which Stevenson describes by saying that the 'major use' of such judgements is to 'create an influence'.<sup>25</sup>

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21 "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms', p. 18.

22 Ibid., p. 16.

23 Ibid., p. 27.

24 Ibid., p. 15.

25 Ibid., p. 18.

For there is no reason to suppose that I will influence someone to do A simply by making him aware that I approve of his doing so. Accordingly, Stevenson postulates another element in the meaning of moral judgements, to account for this major, influence-creating use - the element of 'emotive meaning'. This is explained as 'a tendency of a word, arising through the history of its usage, to produce ... *affective* responses in people'.<sup>26</sup> It is this element in the meaning of moral judgements and value-judgements in general which, in Stevenson's view, enables them to be used to influence others.

Hare's views are also shaped to a great extent by his concern that they be capable of explaining these two features of moral judgements. His often-repeated claim that only by supposing that moral judgements have an imperative component can we explain how they can be 'action-guiding' amounts to the claim that the imperative theory, and no other, can account for these features. Unfortunately, as we saw earlier, he makes it a criterion of a judgement's being action-guiding that it can be an answer to the question, 'What shall I do?', and since this question *means*, in the relevant cases, 'What ought I to do?', this renders trivial the thesis that 'ought'-judgements are action-guiding; for it is uninteresting that a man who asks what he ought to do may be answered by being told what he ought to do. Nevertheless, there is a non-trivial sense in which moral judgements are action-guiding, namely the sense in which to say that they are action-guiding is to draw attention to the features we have mentioned; and despite Hare's unfortunate choice of a criterion for action-guidingness, it is clear that he has

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

something like this sense in mind. For while the imperative hypothesis cannot be held to explain why a man who wants to know what he ought to do is answered when he is told what he ought to do, it certainly can be held to explain why if someone accepts that he ought to do A he will acquire a tendency to do A, and why someone who tells another that he ought to do A is usually concerned to influence him to do A. As Hare points out, to sincerely assent to an imperative *is* to act in accordance with it or to resolve to do so; and to sincerely command someone to do something *is* to try to influence him to do it.<sup>27</sup>

The distinctive aspects of the theories of Stevenson and Hare, then, can be seen as reflecting the anxiety of both philosophers to accommodate the facts, firstly, that in accepting that one ought to do A one usually acquires a stronger tendency to do A than one would otherwise have had, and secondly, that in telling someone that he ought to do something, one is usually trying, in Stevenson's phrase, to 'create an influence'. Stevenson's claim that moral judgements express the attitudes of the speaker is designed to cater for the first of these points, and his claim that they have 'emotive meaning' is designed to cater for the latter; while Hare's thesis that moral judgements are imperatives is designed to cater for both. Further, both Stevenson and Hare seem to be justified in holding that their theories can, each in its own way, accommodate both points. What we must now ask is, can the reasons analysis by itself also provide an explanation of these features? If it cannot, it will presumably have to be supplemented by postulation of some other element as also being present in the meaning of 'ought'-judgements.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. *The Language of Morals*, p. 13.

It can readily be seen, I think, that the reasons analysis needs no such supplementation to enable it to explain the features of 'ought'-judgements in question. If to accept that one ought to do A is to accept that one has reason to do A, we can see why a person who accepts that he ought to do A usually acquires a stronger tendency to do A than he would otherwise have had - for a person usually acquires a stronger tendency to do something than he would otherwise have had if he accepts that he has reason to do that thing. And given this, we can also see why a person who tells another that he ought to do A is usually concerned to influence him to do A; for one does not usually tell a man something which will lead him to acquire a tendency to do A unless one wishes to influence him to do A.

It must be admitted that on this account, the connections both between telling someone that he ought to do A and having the intention of influencing him to do A, and between accepting that one ought to do A and acquiring a tendency to do A, are not as they would be if either Hare's or Stevenson's view were correct. On either of these latter views, both connections are logical. According to Hare, to tell someone he ought to do A *is* to try to influence him to do A, for it is to tell him to do A; and to accept that one ought to do A *is* to do A, for it is to assent to a command that one do A. While on Stevenson's account, the emotive, influence-creating aspect of 'ought'-judgements is part of their *meaning*, so that to tell someone that he ought to do A *is* to try to 'create an influence'; and to accept that one ought to do A *is* to acquire a favourable attitude towards one's doing of A, and so, as Stevenson says, *ipso facto* to acquire a stronger tendency to do A than one would otherwise have had.

On the reasons analysis, however, both these connections are contingent. It is quite possible to tell a man that he has reason to do A without trying to influence him to do anything, just as it is possible to tell him that there is a spider on his back without trying to influence him to do anything. In both cases, what we tell him will almost certainly *in fact* influence him to do something (but not necessarily, since he may be unreasonable, or may be aware that the only spider in the room is his pet tarantula), but we need not intend to create this influence - we might be making small talk, or giving him a list of facts we know to be true of him. Similarly, it is quite possible on the reasons account that a man may accept that he ought to do A and yet fail even to acquire a tendency to do A - for a man will only acquire a tendency to do what he comes to believe he has reason to do if he is rational; and men are not always rational.

However, that the reasons account differs from those of both Stevenson and Hare in taking action-guidingness to be merely a contingent, though extremely common, feature of moral judgements, seems to be clearly a point in its favour. On either of the latter accounts, it is impossible to sincerely tell someone that he ought to do A without having the intention or desire to influence him to do A - yet this clearly is possible. Brer Rabitt believed that Brer Fox ought (prudentially speaking) to refrain from throwing him into the bramble bush, and might have told him this under the influence of a truth-drug, without in the least desiring that he so refrain. Again, Hare notoriously has difficulty in accounting for the fact that a man may sincerely accept that he ought to do A and yet fail to do A, since on his account, to accept that one ought to do A *is* to do A; and Stevenson is confronted

with a similar difficulty, since it seems equally a fact that a man may accept that he ought to do something without thereby acquiring any tendency to do it. None of these difficulties arise, however, if we accept the reasons account; for as we saw a moment ago, it construes the connections between telling someone he ought to do A and trying to influence him to do A, on the one hand, and between accepting that one ought to do A and acquiring a tendency to do A, on the other, as both contingent. It explains why these connections hold in the majority of cases, but does not have the troublesome consequence that they always hold.

It was argued earlier that at least part of what is meant by the judgement that some person or persons ought to do something is that there is reason for him or for them to do that thing. We have now seen that the connections such a judgement has with action in accordance with it, which might seem to call for the postulation of some further element in its meaning, can be explained quite adequately without such postulation; moreover, explaining them in this way enables us to understand certain other facts about 'ought'-judgements which present serious difficulties for the two most favoured alternative accounts of the meaning of 'ought'-judgements. These are the facts that, firstly, we may believe that another person ought to do A, and may tell him so, without the slightest intention of influencing him to do A, and secondly, that a man may accept that he ought to do A without acquiring any tendency whatever to do A. I conclude that when we say that some person or persons ought to do A we mean nothing more or less than that there is reason for him or them to do A.

Now I wish to claim that this analysis of the meaning of 'ought'-

judgements shows relativism to be false, for it shows them to be a species of statement of fact. This involves the assumption that statements to the effect that some agent has reason to do something are themselves statements of fact. However, I shall not argue for this assumption. To do so would involve defending some view of the nature of such statements from which it follows that they are indeed statements of fact; and although I hold such a view, I have found that an adequate defence of it would require a separate dissertation. This means that one can accept the arguments of this chapter but still deny that relativism has been refuted, if one claims that statements of the form 'X has reason to do A' are not statements of fact, but some other species of utterance such that good reasons cannot be given for accepting any utterance of that species. However, the assumption that statements of this form *are* statements of fact, on which my claim to have shown relativism false depends, is by no means a controversial one. While the accounts given of the notion of a reason for action by recent writers on the topic differ from one another in more or less significant respects, they have in common that they entail that the question of whether or not a given person X has reason to perform some action A is a question of fact. Thus, for example, on G.R. Grice's account, it is the question of whether or not doing A is in some way in accordance with X's interests or conduces to X's aims;<sup>27</sup> on Donald Davidson's account, it is the question of whether or not X has certain desires and beliefs;<sup>28</sup> on P.H. Nowell-Smith's account, it is the question of whether or not X has

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<sup>27</sup> *The Grounds of Moral Judgement* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), chapter 1.

<sup>28</sup> 'Actions, Reasons and Causes', *Journal of Philosophy*, 60 (1963), pp. 685-700.



certain 'pro- or con-attitudes';<sup>29</sup> on Bernard Gert's account, it is the question of whether or not X believes that by doing A, he will decrease his chances or those of someone else of suffering certain evils, or increase his or someone else's chances of gaining certain goods;<sup>30</sup> while on the account of D.A.J. Richards, it is the question of whether or not X's doing A is required by certain principles of action which are taken to define rationality and morality.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it seems a simple matter to produce examples of statements to the effect that a certain person or group of persons has reason to do a certain thing which are clearly statements of fact which could not be denied by anyone familiar with the language and in possession of certain relevant information - 'Burglars have reason to wear gloves while at work' and 'Smith, the jockey, has reason to watch his weight' would seem to be such examples. The onus of proof, therefore, is very heavily on anyone who wishes to say that statements to the effect that some agent has reason to do a certain thing are *not* in general statements of fact. Thus, while it must be admitted that my claim that the arguments of this chapter show relativism to be false depends on the assumption that statements to this effect are statements of fact, this concession is hardly a damaging one.

Unfortunately, as we will see in the next chapter, the analysis of 'ought'-judgements just provided seems open to a serious objection which appears to show that it cannot be applied (at least) to *moral* 'ought'-judgements. The rest of this thesis will be largely concerned

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<sup>29</sup> *Ethics* (London, Penguin Books, 1954), Chapter 8.

<sup>30</sup> *The Moral Rules* (New York, Harper and Row, 1973), Chapter 2.

<sup>31</sup> *A Theory of Reasons for Action* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971) Chapters 2 and 3.

with providing an answer to this objection, and exploring and defending the consequences of the answer given.

## CHAPTER IX

### MRS. FOOT AND THE HYPOTHETICAL NATURE OF MORAL JUDGEMENTS

In a recent paper entitled 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives',<sup>1</sup> Philippa Foot argues against the view that moral judgements are categorical imperatives. Her arguments raise, directly and indirectly, serious difficulties for the analysis of 'ought'-judgements just given, and I will therefore consider them at some length.

Early in her paper, Mrs. Foot calls attention to what she says are 'two different uses of words such as "should" and "ought"'.<sup>2</sup> She points out that if we tell a traveller that he should take a certain train, believing him to be journeying home, and find that he has in fact decided to go elsewhere, we will have to withdraw what we said - 'the "should" will now be unsupported and in need of support'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, we must withdraw what we said if it turns out that we were wrong in supposing that catching the train was a means of getting to his home or that it was the best among the possible means. Mrs. Foot is, of course, in effect drawing attention here to a feature of 'ought'-judgements which was stressed in my last chapter - if we tell a man he ought to do something, we imply that he has reason to do it.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophical Review*, 81, (1972), pp. 305-316.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*

However, Mrs. Foot says, the use of 'should' and 'ought' in moral contexts is quite different: 'When we say that a man should do something and intend a moral judgement we do not have to back up what we say by considerations about his interests and desires; if no such connection can be found the "should" need not be withdrawn. It follows that the agent cannot rebut an assertion about what, morally speaking, he should do by showing that the action is not ancillary to his interests or desires'.<sup>4</sup> This is certainly true - if we told a man that he ought to keep some promise he had made, we would not withdraw what we said on learning that doing so would not be 'ancillary to his interests or desires'. Let us call this feature of moral judgements their 'non-dependency'. Now it might seem that we could readily account for the non-dependency of moral 'should'-and 'ought'-judgements without abandoning the view that they, like other such judgements, imply the presence of reasons for the agent to act. We could, it might seem, say that they imply the presence of such reasons, but do not need to be supported by considerations about the interests and desires of the agent because moral considerations provide *any* man with reason to act, and not only men with certain interests and desires. However, this thesis, that moral considerations give reasons for acting to any man, is what Mrs. Foot takes to be at the heart of the view that moral judgements are categorical imperatives, and is the very thesis she is concerned to reject in her paper. In her view, whether or not moral considerations provide a man with reasons for acting depends entirely on whether or not he cares for moral ends. If she is right, we cannot of course account for the feature of moral 'ought'-judgements

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 307-308.

to which she draws attention in the manner suggested. We would seem to be forced to accept instead Mrs. Foot's account of the matter, namely that moral 'ought'-judgements do not, like others, imply that the agent has reason to act - such judgements imply the presence of moral considerations, but do not imply that these considerations are reasons for the person addressed to act. To accept this, of course, would be to admit that the account given in my last chapter of the meaning of 'ought'-judgements is inapplicable to the very cases on which it was meant to throw light - namely those cases of 'ought'-judgements which are moral ones. This means that the success or otherwise of Mrs. Foot's arguments is a matter of vital concern to me. I will try to show that the view that moral considerations provide reasons for acting for any man (following Mrs. Foot, I will call this the view that moral judgements are categorical imperatives) survives her attack unscathed.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that moral judgements are non-dependent, we have seen, is readily explained on the view that they are categorical imperatives, and would therefore appear to provide support for that view. However, Mrs. Foot denies that it provides any such support. Her own explanation of the non-dependency of moral judgements is that they employ a special 'non-hypothetical' use of 'should' and 'ought', such that it does not follow from the fact that a man ought to do something that he has any reason to do that thing. She argues that there are other 'should'- and 'ought'-judgements which are non-dependent, but which no one would claim to be categorical imperatives. As instances, she cites 'sentences enunc-

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion of Mrs. Foot's paper which follows forms the substance of my article "Categorical Imperatives - a Defence", due to appear in *The Philosophical Review* for April 1977.

iating rules of etiquette' and uses of 'should' 'in contexts where something like a club rule is in question'.<sup>6</sup> Let us consider, then, whether or not these are in fact instances of non-moral judgements which have the feature of non-dependency. I will take the latter first.

In support of the assertion that 'should'-judgements based on club rules are non-dependent, Mrs Foot points out that the club secretary who has told a member that he should not bring ladies into the smoking room does not say 'Sorry, I was mistaken' on learning that this member is resigning tomorrow and cares nothing for his reputation in the club.<sup>7</sup> However, club rules are not 'should'-judgements. When those authorised to lay down the rules of a club consider what rules they will lay down, they do not ask themselves what members should do, but what members shall be required to do on pain of incurring certain penalties. The answer to the first question is something to be discovered, and they are not in any special position to discover it; the answer to the latter question is to be settled by fiat (though not necessarily arbitrary fiat), and they are the only ones in a position to settle it. What may cause confusion here is that failure to obey the rules of one's club often amounts to failure to do one's share towards providing some good from which one benefits (cf. 'Sprigs must not be worn in the bar'), and moreover, a man is usually admitted to membership of a club on the understanding that he will abide by its rules. With this sort of point in mind, a club secretary or anyone else might well tell a member of a club that he ought to do A, where the rules of the club require him to do A, and refuse

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<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Foot, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309.

to withdraw his judgement on learning that doing A would not further the member's interests or desires. Here we would indeed have a non-dependent 'ought'-judgement - but it would not be a non-moral one.

What of 'should'- or 'ought'-judgements based on rules of etiquette? Mrs. Foot says that we find her non-hypothetical use of 'should' in sentences enunciating rules of etiquette such as that an invitation in the third person should be answered in the third person, 'where the rule does not *fail to apply* to someone who has his own good reasons for ignoring this piece of nonsense, or who simply does not care about what, from the point of view of etiquette, he should do'.<sup>8</sup> She appears to hold that this special sense of 'should' is shorthand for 'should from the point of view of etiquette'. This is suggested by the passage just quoted, and a little later, the meaning of 'should<sub>e</sub>', the special sense in question, is explicitly given as 'should from the point of view of etiquette.'<sup>9</sup> However, this is clearly a mistake. The judgement that from the point of view of etiquette one should do a certain thing is not 'a "should" statement based on rules of etiquette',<sup>10</sup> it is not a 'should'-judgement at all, but a theoretical judgement about what etiquette requires, and is quite consistent with 'But of course, it's nonsense that you should do any such thing'.<sup>11</sup> A 'should' state-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>10</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup> The same sort of point can be made regarding the judgement that from the moral point of view one should do something (or that morally speaking, one should do something, when 'morally speaking' has much the same force as 'from the moral point of view', and is not meant merely as an indication that one's judgement is based on moral considerations). This is not a moral 'should'-judgement, but a theoretical judgement about what morality requires. Hence, of course, when I speak of 'moral "should"-judgements', I wish to be taken as referring to 'should'-judgements based on moral considerations, and not judgements about what one should do from the moral point of view.

ment based on the rules of etiquette is not a judgement to the effect that one should from the point of view of etiquette do A, but one to the effect that one should *simpliciter* do A, because the rules of etiquette require it (Mrs. Foot, who appears not to hold etiquette in high regard, would presumably not base 'should'-judgements on some rules of etiquette).

Nevertheless, it does seem to be true that genuine 'should'- and 'ought'-judgements based on the rules of etiquette have the feature of non-dependency. If someone were to say that Smith ought to catch train X, on no other ground than that doing so will enable him to get home, we would find unintelligible his refusal to withdraw what he said on learning that Smith had decided to go elsewhere; but if someone were to say that Smith ought to do A merely on the ground that it is required by etiquette, and refuse to withdraw his judgement on being told that doing so would not promote Smith's interests or the attainment of anything he desired, we would not find this unintelligible - we know that judgements of etiquette, unlike judgements about what train a man ought to catch, are not made on the assumption that the agent has particular interests and desires. Given this, Mrs. Foot can present her opponents with what amounts to a dilemma: either we explain the non-dependency of judgements of etiquette by saying that they employ a non-hypothetical sense of 'should', in which case there seems to be no reason why the non-dependency of *moral* 'ought'- and 'should'- judgements shouldn't be explained in the same way; or we explain it by saying that considerations of etiquette give a man reason to act regardless of his interests and desires, a course which she assumes her opponents would not wish to take. Now one might well have qualms about the



*ad hoc* postulation of different senses of 'should' which appears to be involved in accepting the first of these alternatives, which is, of course, Mrs. Foot's account of the matter. Nevertheless, let us grant that the non-dependency of judgements of etiquette would be explained if we were to accept the first horn of her dilemma. Her argument requires that it also be granted that the second horn cannot be accepted. I suggest, however, that this should not be granted; that is to say, I suggest that the reason why people who make judgements of etiquette do not withdraw what they say on learning that following the rules of etiquette would not further the interests or desires of the agent in question, is that such people believe that considerations of etiquette provide a man with reason to act regardless of what his interests and desires happen to be. Anyone who thinks this belief *obviously* absurd probably needs to be reminded of such facts as that the rules of etiquette are closely related to, and shade into, things like codes of honour and of professional ethics; and that the breach of even trivial rules of etiquette is often a conventional means of giving offence.

Mrs. Foot has not succeeded, then, in producing examples of non-moral 'should'-judgements which are non-dependent, but which could not seriously be claimed to be categorical imperatives. It does not follow, of course, that the non-dependence of *moral* 'should'-judgements shows them to be categorical imperatives; for though she has failed to support the claim, she may yet be right in claiming that such judgements are non-dependent merely because they employ a 'non-hypothetical' sense of 'should'. Moreover, even if she is wrong, so that the moral judgement that Smith should do A *does* imply the presence

of considerations which provide Smith with reasons for doing A which are not dependent on his particular interests and desires, it may nevertheless be that the considerations on which moral judgements are based do not *in fact* provide one with reasons for acting, regardless of one's particular interests and desires (although it would then follow that all moral 'ought'- and 'should'-judgements are false). Accordingly, we must now turn to certain other considerations which she presents against the view that moral judgements are categorical imperatives.

Mrs. Foot suggests that the impression that moral judgements are categorical imperatives is attributable to the stringency of moral teaching, which makes many of us *feel* we have to or must do what we morally ought to do.<sup>12</sup> Of course, even if this is how we gain the impression in question, it does not follow that that impression is not correct. But she goes on to argue that it is hard to see what could be meant by some of the things said by those who believe that moral judgements are categorical imperatives unless we connect them with the feelings implanted by stringent moral teaching. She says:

People talk, for instance, about the "binding force" of morality, but it is not clear what this means if not that we *feel* ourselves unable to escape. Indeed the "inescapability" of moral requirements is often cited when they are being contrasted with hypothetical imperatives. No one, it is said, escapes the requirements of ethics by having or not having particular interests or desires. Taken in one way this only reiterates the contrast between the "should" of morality and the hypothetical "should", and once more places morality alongside of etiquette. Both are inescapable in that behaviour does not cease to offend against either morality or etiquette because the agent is indifferent to their purposes and to the disapproval

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<sup>12</sup> Op. Cit., p. 310.

he will incur by flouting them. But morality is supposed to be inescapable in some special way and this may turn out to be merely the reflection of the way morality is taught.<sup>13</sup>

Mrs. Foot then goes on to 'try other ways of expressing the fugitive thought', but finds them, too, senseless unless they are connected with the feelings implanted by moral teaching. However, there seems to be no need to search for ways of expressing the thought in question beyond the one she initially considers - namely, by saying that no one escapes the requirements of ethics by having or not having particular interests or desires. When she says that this once more places morality alongside of etiquette, she is referring, of course, to her earlier claim that judgements of etiquette, like moral judgements, are non-dependent, that is, they do not need to be backed by considerations about the agent's interests and desires. But we have seen that this can be accepted - it is not obviously absurd to suggest that considerations of etiquette provide any man with reasons for acting. Of course, as we have conceded, the non-dependency of moral judgements *may* merely show, as Mrs. Foot suggests, that they employ a special sense of 'ought'; but we have yet to be given a good reason for supposing that this must be so. In the meantime, it is equally open to us to conclude that moral 'ought'-judgements, like any others, imply that the agent has reason to act, but are non-dependent because they are categorical imperatives, which is to say that moral reasons are reasons for a man to act no matter what his interests and desires; if we ought to have difficulty giving sense to *this* claim, it has yet to be shown that we ought.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 310-311.

There is in fact another passage in Mrs. Foot's paper in which she expresses puzzlement as to what could be meant by the claim that moral judgements are categorical imperatives. After concluding that what this means is that moral considerations 'necessarily give reasons for acting to any man', she says:

The difficulty, of course, is to defend this claim which is more often repeated than explained. Unless it is said, implausibly, that all "should" or "ought" statements give reasons for acting, which leaves the old problem of assigning a special categorical status to moral judgement, we must be told what it is that makes the moral "should" relevantly different from the "should" appearing in normative statements of other kinds.<sup>14</sup>

Now part of what was argued in my previous chapter was just that all 'should' or 'ought' statements *do* give reasons for acting, in the sense that they imply that the agent has reason to act. As to the problem of assigning a special categorical status to moral judgements, this would seem to be solved by saying that while all 'ought'-judgements give reasons for acting, moral judgements are categorical in the sense that they give reasons for acting which are reasons for *any* man. Of course, Mrs. Foot denies that moral judgements are categorical in this sense; but whether or not she is right is precisely what we are trying to ascertain.

She next goes on to argue against a claim which she apparently takes to be equivalent to, or to follow directly from, the view that moral considerations give reasons for acting to any man. This is the claim that 'some kind of irrationality is involved in ignoring the "should" of morality'. Attempts to show that this is so, she says,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

... have all rested on some illegitimate assumption, as, for instance, of thinking that the amoral man, who agrees that some piece of conduct is immoral but takes no notice of that, is inconsistently disregarding a rule of conduct that he has accepted; or again of thinking it inconsistent to desire that others will not do to one what one proposes to do to them.<sup>15</sup>

Now of these two assumptions, only the latter, that it is inconsistent to desire that others refrain from doing to one what one proposes to do to them, is obviously illegitimate. The former, that a man who agrees that some piece of conduct is immoral but takes no notice of that is inconsistently disregarding a rule of conduct that he has accepted, *may* be illegitimate; but it is too closely related to the claim that such a man would be irrational for Mrs. Foot to assume in this context that its illegitimacy is self-evident. The only further argument she presents, however, amounts to a series of mere denials that such a man is irrational. She says:

The fact is that the man who rejects morality because he sees no reason to obey its rules can be convicted of villainy but not of inconsistency. Nor will his action necessarily be irrational. Irrational actions are those in which a man in some way defeats his own purposes, doing what is calculated to be disadvantageous or to frustrate his ends. Immorality does not necessarily involve any such thing.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear, I think, that none of this amounts to an argument to show that immorality and amorality are not necessarily irrational. Nevertheless, the claim that they are does seem to run counter to our intuitions, and it is therefore worth considering whether or not it does in fact follow from the view that moral considerations necessarily provide reason for acting to any man.

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15 Ibid., p. 310.

16 Loc. cit.

A man who fails to act as dictated by moral considerations either does or does not believe that these considerations provide him with reason to act. If he does, we would certainly say that he was irrational, but we would say this whether or not we held that moral considerations in fact provided him with reason to act. If he does *not* believe that moral considerations provide him with reason to act, then if they do, it certainly follows that he is mistaken - but does it follow that he is irrational? It would not seem so - on the contrary, given his mistaken belief, it would be irrational of him to act on moral considerations. It might be said that although, given his belief, he is not irrational to act as he does, nevertheless he is irrational in *believing* what he does. But mistaken beliefs are only irrational when their falsity is self-evident, and it has not been suggested that it is self-evidently true that moral considerations provide any man with reasons for acting - only that it is in fact true that they do.

It might now be suggested, however, that what commits one to holding that immorality is irrational is not the view that moral considerations as a matter of fact provide any man with reasons for acting, but the view that moral 'ought'-judgements, like any others, *imply* that there are reasons for the agent to act. For the immoral man presumably does not deny that he morally ought to act otherwise than he does, and to admit that one has reason to act otherwise than one does is to admit that one is irrational. Let us recall, however, the distinction made earlier between what one ought *simpliciter* to do and what one ought to do from some point of view, such as that of etiquette or of prudence. On the view that to say that a man ought to do something is to imply that he has reason to do so, a man who fails

to do what he believes he ought *simpliciter* to do is certainly irrational. But a man who fails to do what he believes he ought to do from the point of view, say, of etiquette, is not irrational unless he takes considerations of etiquette as providing him with reason to act, for then he believes that he ought *simpliciter* to do what he ought to do from the point of view of etiquette.

Similarly, a man who fails to do what he believes he morally ought to do is only irrational if he believes that moral considerations provide him with reasons for action - if he believes, that is, that what he morally ought to do is also what he ought *simpliciter* to do. Now there is one sort of immorality which consists in the failure to do what one believes one ought *simpliciter* to do - this is the sort of immorality exemplified in the weak man who fails to live in accordance with his sincere moral convictions. But this is not the only sort, nor perhaps even the most typical sort, of immorality. There is also the man who agrees that from the moral point of view he ought to pursue moral ends, but does not do so because he does not believe that he *really* ought, or ought *simpliciter*, to pursue them; and whether or not he is mistaken, he is not, as we saw, necessarily irrational.

It does not seem to be true, then, that if one holds that moral 'ought'-judgements imply the presence of reasons for acting and that moral reasons for acting are reasons for any man, one is committed to the claim that immorality is necessarily irrational; and in any case, what Mrs. Foot has to say against the latter claim amounts to little more than the assertion that it is false.

There appears to be no reason, then, why we should take the non-dependency of moral judgements as indicating that they employ a

special use of 'ought' which does not imply the presence of reasons for the agent to act, rather than as a reflection of the fact that moral judgements are categorical imperatives, that is, that moral considerations provide reasons for acting which a man may have no matter what his particular interests and desires happen to be. The suggestion that we find this special use of 'ought' in some non-moral judgements which are clearly not categorical imperatives is not borne out by the examples Mrs. Foot provides, and though she rejects the view that moral considerations provide reasons for action which are independent of the particular desires and interests of the agent, this rejection seems at least premature when her arguments are considered.

However, I suspect that though it is nowhere explicitly stated, Mrs. Foot has another reason for doubting the sense of the claim that moral considerations give reasons for acting to any man, no matter what his interests and desires. The sense of this claim would immediately be in doubt to someone who holds that a man has reason for performing some action if and only if by doing so he will promote some end he happens to desire or takes to be in his interest; and there are strong indications in Mrs. Foot's paper that she is assuming just this account of the nature of reasons for acting. We had occasion earlier to note her remark that 'Irrational actions are those in which a man in some way defeats his own purposes, doing what is calculated to be disadvantageous or to frustrate his ends'. If for 'irrational actions' we substitute, as seems permissible, 'actions which the agent has reason not to perform', this remark suggests strongly that what we have reason to do is a matter of what will promote our interests or the goals we happen to have. Again, her own alternative to the view that moral



judgements are categorical imperatives, namely that whether or not one has reason to pursue moral ends depends on whether or not one cares about such things, and that the amoral man who does not care about such things may properly deny that he has reason to trouble himself about them,<sup>17</sup> takes it for granted that a man only has reason to do something if he will thereby promote some end which he happens to 'care about' or desire.<sup>18</sup>

The unstated argument which I attribute to Mrs. Foot, then, is that moral considerations cannot give reasons for acting to any man, no matter what his interests or desires, because whether or not any consideration gives a man reason for acting depends on what his interests or desires happen to be.

Whether or not I am right in attributing this argument to Mrs. Foot, it seems to me to raise the most crucial difficulty facing the claim that moral considerations provide reasons for acting for any man. In fact, given the theory of reasons for acting which forms its premise, it appears to constitute a knockdown objection to that claim - how, if it is true that whether or not a man has reason to act depends on what his interests and desires happen to be, can it also be true that moral considerations, or any others, provide reasons for a man to act, regardless of what his interests and desires happen to be? The argument,

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Op. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>18</sup> In a paper entitled 'Reasons for Action and Desires', (*Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 46, 1972) pp. 203-209, Mrs. Foot denies that what a man has reason to do depends on what he wants. But the only counter-example she presents is the case of prudential reasons, or reasons 'having to do with the agent's interests' (p. 203), and she argues that moral and aesthetic reasons, and in general reasons based on one's evaluative beliefs, *do* depend on the wants of the agent. This is at least compatible with the view I attribute to her, i.e., that what a man has reason to do depends on what his desires and interests happen to be.

of course, assumes a theory of reasons for acting for which Mrs. Foot provides no support - but I am not prepared to dismiss it on that score. I do not wish my position to depend on the rejection of a theory which is widely held, and which, moreover, I myself find extremely plausible. In what follows, therefore, I shall assume that it is true that a man has reason to act only if he will thereby further his interests or promote some end he happens to desire; and the task which now confronts us is that of reconciling this with the at first sight flatly contradictory thesis that certain considerations, namely moral ones, provide a man with reason to act no matter what his interests and desires happen to be. It should be stressed that though, as I have indicated, I believe this theory to be true, no untoward consequence would follow for the position I have defended should it turn out to be false - all that would follow would be that a major obstacle to acceptance of the claim that moral considerations provide reasons for acting for any man, to which my analysis of 'ought'-judgements commits me, had been removed.

The task of showing that moral considerations provide any man with reason to act, while accepting that one only has reason to do what is in some way in one's interest, has in effect been undertaken by Professor G.R. Grice, in his *The Grounds of Moral Judgement*. If Grice were successful, this would render much of the remainder of this thesis, which is devoted to the same task, superfluous. Unfortunately, I believe that Grice's argument fails, and to demonstrate that the task still needs to be done, I have included a criticism of those arguments as an appendix to the thesis.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See appendix A.

## CHAPTER X

### 'MORAL CONSIDERATIONS GIVE ANY MAN

### REASON TO ACT'

The task which faced us at the close of the last chapter was that of reconciling the view that certain considerations, namely moral ones, give a man reason to act no matter what his interests and desires happen to be with the view that a man has reason to perform any particular action if and only if by doing so he would promote his interests or some end he happens to desire. In arguing for the former view, we shall of course be undertaking the same task as is undertaken by those philosophers who have tried to show that anyone has reason to be moral. For acting morally is acting on the basis of moral considerations, and if moral considerations provide any man with reasons for acting, it follows that any man has reason to act morally, that is, on the basis of moral considerations. In what follows, therefore, I shall often refer to the task before us as that of showing that anyone has reason to be moral, consistently with the thesis that a man has reason to act only if by doing so he will promote his interests or the ends he happens to desire. Let us begin by considering the following account of the role of morality, which clearly owes much to Hobbes, and resembles closely that put forward by Kurt Baier in *The Moral Point of View*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1958, ch. 12.

Suppose that men always acted only out of self-interest. Then, because the good things of the world are in limited supply, the success of one man's self-seeking would often be incompatible with that of another or others. Since, by hypothesis, he cares nothing for the interests of others, a person involved in such a conflict of interests would try to achieve his ends by force, or if this was unlikely to be successful, by stealth and stratagems; and those with whom his interests conflicted would do likewise. Hence, a man would frequently find himself involved in violent battle, or in stratagems against others, or having to be on guard against the stratagems of others against him. Nor would it be only occasions on which interests actually conflicted which would contribute to this situation. For even when the interests of another did not actually conflict with one's own, nevertheless, they would be likely to do so in the future. Even if a man were not inclined to take pre-emptive action against others who in this way constituted a threat to his future interests, he could not rely on others being equally slothful in the safeguarding of *their* interests, and so would have to spend his time in perpetual vigilance, if not in actual defence of his person and property. In short, the conditions in which men would live would be those which Hobbes believed would exist in a 'state of nature'. They would live in a state of war, and 'such a war, as is of every man against every man'. In such a state, as Hobbes says,

... there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man,

solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.<sup>2</sup>

Now this would not be a state in which it would be desirable to live. We do not live in such a state, and this is because we do not always act only out of self-interest, but take the interests of others as being relevant in deciding how we should act - that is to say, we take account of moral considerations when acting. Thus, morality ensures that life is free from most of the evils Hobbes enumerates.

It might be said that it is false that life in a state of nature would be as unpleasant as Hobbes claimed, or even that it would be unpleasant at all. For, it might be said, it is false that men are naturally wholly self-interested - on the contrary, it is society which has perverted men, and accounts for the self-centredness we find in many. This may or may not be so, but it is in any case irrelevant to what I have said. Hobbes did indeed claim that his account of the evils of a state of nature was an inference 'from the passions',<sup>3</sup> and Baier holds that 'in a state of nature people, as a matter of psychological fact, would not follow the dictates of morality';<sup>4</sup> but I do not wish to insist that people would in fact be wholly self-centred in a state of nature, or in any other. What I do wish to insist on is that *if* men acted only out of self interest, life would indeed be as Hobbes thought it would be in a state of nature. If this is granted, and I think it must be, then it is irrelevant, even if true, that men are naturally moral. For if the evils envisaged by Hobbes would in fact be avoided in a state of nature through the natural morality of men, it would remain true that they would not be avoided if men did not

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<sup>2</sup> *Leviathan*[1651] (Oxford, Basil Blackwell. Edited with an introduction by Michael Oakeshott), p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Baier, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

behave morally, naturally or otherwise; and this is enough to establish the claim that it is morality which makes the conditions under which we live vastly preferable to those which would prevail in a state of nature if Hobbes was right about human nature.

Morality, then, enables us to live in a state clearly preferable to that in which we would otherwise live. Now Monro himself endorses the foregoing account of what might be called 'the point of morality'. Such an account, he believes, serves to explain why people have the moral attitudes they have - 'As Hobbes would put it,' he says, 'it is by developing these attitudes that men are able to attain their ends in a world in which they need the co-operation and sympathy of other men'.<sup>5</sup> And he thinks the same account also explains why in practice variations between individuals in their fundamental moral attitudes will be restricted within at least some limits. But he points out that it is nevertheless 'at least logically possible that men may differ in their fundamental moral attitudes',<sup>6</sup> and would claim that in such a case, there is no objective sense in which one can be right and the other wrong.

I have argued, however, for an analysis of 'ought'-judgements according to which to say that a man ought to do something is to say that he has reason to do it. This analysis, given only that whether or not one has reason to perform any given action is a question of fact,<sup>7</sup> entails that, of differing views about what any person or group of

<sup>5</sup> Monro, *Empiricism and Ethics*, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> I have argued earlier (pp.111-112) that the onus of proof is very much on anyone who wishes to deny this.

persons ought to do, one at most can be correct; for of differing views on any question of fact, only one can be correct. Unfortunately, as we saw in the last chapter, this account of matters runs into serious difficulties when we try to apply it to moral judgements. For it appears to have the consequence that any 'ought'-judgement will have to be withdrawn if the agent is found to lack certain desires or interests, whereas it is a feature of moral 'ought'-judgements that they need not be withdrawn if it is found that the agent lacks any particular desires or interests; and this raises the problem with which we are at present concerned: If we wish nevertheless to maintain that moral 'ought'-judgements, like any others, assert the presence of reasons for the agent to act as it is said he ought to act, we are committed to saying that moral reasons are reasons which a man may have irrespective of his particular desires and interests - but this seems incompatible with the view, whose truth we are assuming, that one has reason to act only if by doing so one will promote one's interests or some end one in fact desires.

However, let us note what Monro says about the undesirability of a state in which each person pursues only his own interests (I will refer to this state as 'a state of war', but we must bear in mind that it is no ordinary state of war, where at least among the members of either side there may be trust, co-operation and friendship, but one in which each person is the enemy of every other). Such a state, Monro says, '... is not a good state; that is, it is not one in which any man has much chance of gratifying many of his desires'.<sup>8</sup> Again, a little later, he says that if society were to collapse into a Hobbesian state

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

of nature, 'I shall have very little chance of gratifying any of my desires';<sup>9</sup> and in the passage quoted a moment ago, he tells us that it is by developing moral attitudes that men 'are able to attain their ends in a world in which they need the co-operation and sympathy of other men'. What is wrong with the state which morality enables us to avoid, then, is that in it, a man has very little chance of gratifying his desires or attaining his ends. It follows that to avoid such a state is to promote the gratification of one's desires and the attainment of one's ends; and it is certainly in one's interest to do this. This surely shows that any man has reason to avoid such a state; and clearly, in saying this we are saying nothing inconsistent with the view that a man has reason to act if and only if he will thereby promote his interests or the gratification of his desires. But morality is what enables us to avoid such a state; it would therefore seem to follow that any man has reason to be moral. It should be noted that I have not claimed that everyone, or even anyone, desires to avoid a state of war. I have merely claimed that by avoiding such a state, one will promote the gratification of one's desires and the attainment of one's ends, and, therefore, one's interests - and this by itself is enough to show that any man has reason to avoid such a state.

Is it really the case, though, that avoidance of a state of war will better enable any man to gratify his desires?<sup>10</sup> Certainly, men

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> For brevity's sake, I shall henceforth speak only of the gratification of desires, and omit reference to the attainment of ends. I believe that there is a broad sense of 'desire' in which any end a man pursues can be said to be desired by him, so that this is legitimate; and if anyone thinks otherwise, he can take 'desire' as I will use it as a term stipulatively defined to cover both what he would concede to be cases of someone desiring something and cases of the pursuit of ends which he denies to be desired.



of whom this would not be true would be very rare indeed, to say the least, for as has been pointed out, the constant conflict and need for vigilance, as well as the high incidence of injury and death which are attendant upon a state of war, apart from being in themselves repugnant to most men, seem likely to drastically reduce the opportunities a man would have to pursue gratification of any desires whatever, as well as the effectiveness of any such pursuit. One counter example to this claim which has been suggested to me is that of a tribe whose members subscribe to an extreme warrior ethic, and think a life of peace not fit for a man to live. However, to subscribe to a warrior ethic is not to enjoy the business of war for its own sake. One may subscribe to such an ethic while finding no more enjoyment than would any other person in killing, being in constant danger of being killed or maimed, and so forth. Nor is it merely to be prepared to fight in certain circumstances, such as when one's country is invaded. To subscribe to a warrior *ethic*, presumably, is to think that engaging in war is *as such* something which a man *ought* to do, whether or not he enjoys warfare, and whether or not any further desirable end is to be achieved thereby. Now on the analysis of 'ought'-judgements for which I have argued, it follows that to subscribe to a warrior ethic is to hold that engaging in warfare is *something* a man has reason to do, whether or not he enjoys warfare or will by engaging in warfare promote some desirable end. But it is simply false that a man has reason to do this, which means that to subscribe to a warrior ethic is to hold a false view about what a man has reason to do. Thus, though a man who subscribed to a warrior ethic would no doubt deny that he had reason to avoid a state of war, we can reject his position as being based on a false belief.

Nevertheless, we could imagine a man with such unusual desires that he was better able to gratify them in a state of war, for we need only suppose of such a man that he desires the very things we have pointed to as being undesirable in a state of war. There is nothing self-contradictory in supposing that a man might *like* constant conflict and a need for ceaseless vigilance, and have little or no fear of bodily injury and death. After all, we often hear of, if we do not actually meet, people who choose to engage in activities which involve conflict and genuine risk of injury and even death.

However, instances of men with such unusual desires that they would be better able to gratify them in a state of war are not so easy to produce as it might seem. In the first place, it can be argued that many who indulge voluntarily in dangerous pastimes do not genuinely have a lesser regard for life and limb than those who only do so when it is necessary for the sake of some further end which they consider worthwhile. For there is a common tendency amongst men to underrate the chances that disaster, in the form of serious injury or death, will befall *them*. Very often, we tend to look on disaster, especially violent death, as something which happens to others (no doubt because so far, we have found that violent death *is* always something which happens to others). Now the belief that one is less prone to disaster than others simply because one is oneself, and not another, is, most of us would agree, a false one; and if such a belief accounts for a given person's voluntary indulgence in activities dangerous to himself, then we need not conclude that he fears bodily injury or death less than do others - and if he does not, he has as much reason as anyone else to wish to avoid a state of war.

Another point which should be stressed concerning the dangerous pastimes in which men sometimes voluntarily indulge is that they *are* pastimes. A man who drives racing cars because he enjoys facing the dangers involved nevertheless usually spends only a relatively small part of his time doing so. In between the times when he is actually behind the wheel, his life is presumably as free from risk of death and injury as that of anyone else, and it is doubtful whether he would voluntarily drive racing cars if this were not so. In a state of war, however, danger of death and injury is not something which a man faces in small, compartmentalised episodes. It is a constant feature of life, from which there is no respite; and it does not follow, therefore, from the fact that some people choose to engage in dangerous pastimes with a full appreciation of the risks involved that they would be better able to gratify their desires in a state of war.

Nevertheless, though most of us find the thought of injury or violent death very distasteful indeed, there are no doubt men who find it less so, and we can at least imagine a man who was virtually indifferent to it. But even of such a man it would not follow that he would not be better able to gratify his desires if a state of war were avoided. For though avoidance of injury and death is desired by most, and perhaps all of us, we also desire many other things - to eat good food, to live in relatively comfortable houses, to enjoy the company of friends, to see others happy if we are altruists, and so on, not to mention the innumerable desires like the desire to play golf, or to read books, or to walk in the country, or to grow roses, which, though each individually is less universal than those just mentioned, in fact account for a major part of the voluntary activity of any given person. Now in a state of war, where

men must be forever on guard against threats to their persons and property, when they are not engaged in actual defence of them, a man has little chance to pursue, and less to pursue effectively, the gratification of any of these other desires. This means that, for a man's desires to be of such an unusual sort that he will not be better able to gratify them if war is avoided, he must be supposed not only to be indifferent to bodily injury and death and to actually like having to be perpetually on guard against or involved in violent conflict with his fellows, but also to desire nothing else; or, if he does desire other things, to desire them so little that he would willingly forego all of them to indulge his taste for a life of conflict.

All of this does not affect the point, of course, that we can conceive of such a man; and that if there were such a man, he could correctly deny that he had any reason to avoid a state of war, and so to act as required from the point of view of morality. However, this is merely to concede that the 'most general true moral convictions', as Baier puts it, '... are not true for "all rational beings", as Kant thought, but only for human beings, and they would not necessarily remain true for human beings if there were radical changes in human nature'.<sup>11</sup> That is to say, the claim that any man has reason to behave as morality requires, because morality is what enables us to avoid a state of war, depends on a theory of human nature. But the theory involved is by no means a daring one, being simply the theory that men desire many things, prominent if not foremost among these being

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<sup>11</sup> Baier, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

continued life and avoidance of injury. If the only objection to the claim that any man has reason to behave morally is that it presupposes this theory, I think we can be well satisfied. Unfortunately, the argument I have presented in its support, which closely resembles Baier's argument for the same conclusion, seems open to a more serious objection which is often thought conclusive against Baier. In the next chapter, we will see what this objection is, and consider how, if at all, it is to be answered.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE PARASITE

In the previous chapter, I tried to show that any man has reason to do as is morally required of him because morality enables us to avoid a state of war, which any man has reason to wish to avoid. The argument presented bore a close resemblance to that by which Baier tries to establish the same conclusion, and appears to have a weakness which is best brought out by considering Baier's presentation of it. Baier asks us to consider two worlds, one in which everyone behaves only as dictated by self-interest, and another, in which everyone always subordinates the dictates of self-interest to those of morality when these clash. He argues that the latter world is better from the point of view of *anyone*, because the former would be of the sort called by Hobbes 'a state of nature'. This, Baier believes, shows that anyone should be moral.<sup>1</sup> This is clearly the same argument, in essence, as the one presented in my last chapter, and we must now consider the following objection, which in various forms has been thought decisive against it.

Baier's argument is meant to show of *anyone* that he should be moral. But it seems that a totally self-interested man could object,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Moral Point of View*, p. 311.

'Why only two worlds, and why *those* two? There is at least a third possibility, exemplified by the world in which we actually live. In this world, it is neither true that everyone always acts only in accordance with the dictates of self-interest, nor that everyone always acts as required by morality. Instead, a state of war is avoided by the morality of enough people, enough of the time, while others, including myself, pursue self-interest only. And clearly, I think this world preferable to either of Baier's alternatives. In it, life is free from most of the evils of a state of war, and I can pursue self-interest whole-heartedly, doing what is morally required of me only when the possibility of retribution of some sort makes it also required of me by self-interest. That is the rational course for me to adopt, and it is therefore false that I should be moral'. I will try to show that this objection, which I shall refer to as 'the parasite's objection', can be met.

The parasite does not deny that life in the first of Baier's two worlds would be unthinkable, to him as much as to anyone else, nor that it is morality which ensures that he does not lead such a life. However, he argues, since we do not live in a state of war, despite the presence in our society of immoral men, it is clearly not necessary that *everyone* behave morally. Some can live as he proposes to, and it is clearly more rational for him to do so.

We might point out to the parasite that though enough people at present live as morality dictates to render it unnecessary that *he* do so, this could conceivably change. People are constantly dying, growing up, changing their attitudes, and so forth, so that there could occur an increase in the number of people who lead the sort of life he

proposes to, an increase, perhaps, which will be sufficient to plunge us into a state of war; and should this occur it may be that his contribution could have had a significant effect in averting disaster. Given the admitted repugnance of life in a state of war, we might ask, is it not irrational of him to take this risk?

However, the parasite could reasonably reply that if a change in general behaviour of the sort envisaged were to occur, the probability that *his* contribution would have saved the situation is minute indeed. It would be futile to argue that the probability that his contribution will have such an effect, though minute, is not nil, and that he therefore takes a finite risk in withholding it. For, although this is true, it seems clear that when the probability that a course of action would have some favourable consequence is sufficiently small, it can be rationally ignored by the agent in deciding whether or not to adopt that course of action, no matter how desirable the consequence in question. Otherwise, we would have to admit, for example, that we are irrational in failing to wear portable lightning conductors whenever we venture outdoors, since there is no doubt a finite possibility that such a course will have the desirable effect of saving our lives - and we are not prepared to admit this, despite the fact that we think preservation of our lives a very desirable consequence indeed, and that the chances of our producing this consequence by wearing portable lightning conductors are at least as good as those of the parasite's averting a state of war by behaving morally. It seems, then, that we cannot show that the parasite is irrational by appealing to the possibility that were he to adopt moral behaviour, this might be instrumental in averting a state of war.



A point of importance which does emerge from this, however, is that the parasite does not after all base his claim that he acts rationally on the fact, if it is a fact, that there are at present considerably more non-parasites than are required for continued avoidance of a state of war. For even if this were not the case, the chances that *his* contribution might avert the dreaded state would be negligible; and if that state is precipitated, it will be virtually certain that *his* contribution would not have saved the situation. It is not that he feels complacent about the possibility of descent into a state of war; rather, he feels that there is nothing he can do to avert such a descent. For all practical purposes, he reasons, his behaviour will have no effect in determining whether or not we continue to avoid such a state. That will depend on whether or not large-scale shifts in the behaviour of people take place, and *his* behaviour could not constitute anything like a shift of the required proportions, nor will it cause one, and nor could it be an essential part of one, should it occur.

Now if it is true that practically speaking, the parasite's behaviour can have no effect in averting or promoting a state of war, this is not in virtue of any special features he possesses, but merely in virtue of the fact that he is only one person; and since this is also the plight of every other person, it would follow that everyone whose behaviour at present ensures that we do not live in a state of war is either not rational or not wholly self-interested. There is, perhaps, no reason why the parasite should not accept this. But his position has a further consequence which at least at first sight appears paradoxical: If we accept his reasoning, we must conclude that in a world of self-interested men, though it would be in the interests of all to

avoid a state of war, such a state could not be avoided as long as everyone behaved rationally. Yet, since the avoidance of such a state *would* be very much in the interests of all, and since the means of avoiding it are known, aren't we inclined to say that it would be rational for them to do what is required for its avoidance? The parasite, of course, would argue that if we are inclined to say this, we are deluded. Avoidance of a state of war requires the adoption of moral rules by a vast number of people, whereas the most any individual can do is to adopt moral rules himself. *His* behaviour can have no significant effect in determining whether or not such a vast number adopt moral rules, thus bringing it about that a state of war is avoided. In these circumstances, each man would rationally refuse to adopt moral rules, and though it is true that if a sufficient number did adopt moral rules, they would thereby greatly further their own interests, it is false that they would be acting rationally in doing so.

This conclusion, that in a world of self-interested men, peace could not be achieved as long as all the inhabitants behaved rationally, follows also from an argument which has been advanced by some writers on group action,<sup>2</sup> and which is in fact a more rigorous form of that which we have imagined being put forward by the parasite. The argument deals with situations of the sort exemplified in our imaginary world of self-interested men, that is, situations in which each of a group of men would benefit if they co-operated to bring about some end (let us call these 'G' situations), and purports to show that, contrary to what one might expect, it does not follow from the fact that some group

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. B. Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*. (London, Collier-Macmillan, 1970) esp. ch.1; Mancur Olson Jnr., *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1965).

is in a G situation that it will act to achieve the end in question if its members are rational. The argument can be put in this way:

A man who is part of a group in a G situation and is deciding whether or not to co-operate in the pursuit of the end in question must decide whether the benefits he will gain by doing so outweigh the costs to him of doing so. He cannot, however, take the benefits of co-operation simply as those he would gain if the end were achieved, (let us call these 'the full benefits'), for whether or not it is achieved may not be determined by what he does. It may be achieved even if he does not co-operate, and it may not be achieved even if he does co-operate. In deciding whether or not to co-operate, therefore, he should take as the benefits of doing so, not the full benefits of the end's being achieved, but what we might call the 'discounted benefits', arrived at by multiplying the full benefits by the probability that the number of others who co-operate will be such that the end will be achieved if and only if he does so too. It is this discounted benefit of which he must ask whether it is worth the cost of co-operation. Now when the group concerned is large, the probability that whether or not the end is achieved will depend on whether or not any particular member co-operates will be small, and the discounted benefits to each of co-operation will be correspondingly small; and when the group is sufficiently large, even if the full benefits to each are enormous, the *discounted* benefits to each of co-operating will not be worth the effort of doing so; and if each man is rational, none will co-operate. Thus, in some G situations, namely those in which the number of people in the group concerned is sufficiently large, the group will not act to achieve the end in question if its members are rational.

Now whether or not this argument would show that in our imaginary world (let us call it 'W') war would not be avoided as long as all acted rationally would depend, not only on the size of the population of W, which we must suppose to be, like that of our world, large, but also on the extent to which each individual would benefit if peace were achieved; and I have argued that this would also be large. Moreover, it is not clear how we should decide whether or not the discounted benefits of co-operation would be worth the efforts of co-operation. This would require us to make sense of the instruction to multiply those benefits by some probability, and when we consider that they would include such items as greater peace of mind, it might be thought doubtful that we can do this. However, I will assume that these difficulties could somehow be overcome, and that the argument under consideration would, if sound, show that each inhabitant of W should decide against adopting moral rules. I am inclined to think these assumptions ultimately acceptable, and to examine more closely the extent to which they are in fact justified would in any case be pointless, for I will try to show that the argument is *not* sound, and that the inhabitants of W would, if they were rational, pursue peace.<sup>3</sup> In the discussion

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<sup>3</sup> In what follows I shall at times speak of this aim as that of trying to show that it would be rational of the inhabitants of W to pursue peace. However, Bernard Gert, in his '*The Moral Rules*', has argued that we must distinguish within the class of actions which it would be rational to perform between those which are required by reason and those which are neither required nor prohibited, but merely *allowed*, by reason. If this is so, the claim that it would be rational of the inhabitants of W to pursue peace is ambiguous between the claim that reason requires, and the claim that it merely allows, them to pursue peace. I wish therefore to make it clear that when I speak of its being rational of W's inhabitants to pursue peace, I mean that reason *requires* such pursuit of them. I have in any case pointed out in appendix B to this thesis that what Gert means by saying that some activities are allowed by reason is quite consistent with maintaining that for any given activity, every agent is either required by reason to engage in it, or forbidden by reason to do so.

which follows, I will call a group in a G situation 'large' or 'small' according to whether or not the argument would show that its members would not, if rational, co-operate in pursuit of the relevant goal ( although as we have just noted, whether or not the argument would show this depends both on the size of the group *and* on the extent to which each member would benefit if the goal were achieved).

Before arguing that it would be rational of the inhabitants of W to pursue peace, I will deal with a possible objection to this claim which seems to show that it is not merely false, but logically confused. That the suggestion that it would be rational for the inhabitants of W to pursue peace is a confused one becomes apparent, it might be said, when we ask, of *whom* is it being suggested that it would be rational of them to pursue peace? If the answer is 'of each individual inhabitant', we are faced with the difficulty that it has already been conceded, in effect, that no individual on W can pursue peace - for we have conceded that adoption of moral rules by any individual can have no significant effect in promoting peace, and one can only try to promote some end if one believes that one's actions can have a significant effect in promoting it. The alternative is presumably to say that it is the inhabitants of W *considered as a group* for whom the pursuit of peace would be rational; but this too seems to lead to difficulties. For if no individual on W can pursue peace, the pursuit of peace on W would presumably have to be conceived of as *irreducibly* an activity of the inhabitants considered as a group, and it is doubtful if we can make sense of the notion of pursuit of a goal which is irreducibly an activity of a group.

However, not only can we make sense of the notion of pursuit of a goal which is irreducibly the activity of a group, but instances

of such pursuit are in fact quite common. It is true that often, when we say of some group that it pursues some goal, what we say is equivalent to the assertion that each member of the group pursues the goal. Thus, the psychological hedonist's assertion that all men pursue pleasure is equivalent to the assertion that each man pursues pleasure. Of course, here the appearance that it is being claimed that there is some one goal, the attainment of pleasure, which all men pursue, is misleading, for what the psychological hedonist really means to claim is that each man pursues *his own* pleasure, and thus pursues a *different* goal from that of any other man. However, even when a statement to the effect that some group pursues a certain goal is not misleading in this way, it is often still equivalent to the statement that each member pursues the goal. For example, if there is a hole in the dike, and a number of people, inspired by the well known story, rush to put a finger in it, we may say that they all aim at plugging the hole, meaning to imply that there is one goal, the plugging of the hole, at which they all aim; but what we say will nevertheless be equivalent to the assertion that each aims at that goal. The position is different, however, when we consider situations, unlike these, in which a group of men *co-operate* to pursue a goal. When a number of men try to push-start a heavy car, or when the members of an isolated community try to preserve their water supply in a dry season by restricting their consumption, or when a football team aims at victory, we have instances of pursuit by a group of some goal - but we cannot say in any of these cases that any particular member of the group pursues the goal in question. We cannot say, for example, of a man who co-operates with others in the attempt to push-start a heavy car that *he* is trying to start the car,

for if the car starts, it will not be his actions by themselves which bring this about, but his actions together with those of the others. It might be objected that if we accept that he cannot be said to be pursuing the goal of getting the car started because if the car starts it will not be his actions by themselves which bring this about, we will be forced to the absurd conclusion that when a man, say, strikes a match and applies it to a cigarette, he cannot be said to be trying to light the cigarette. For if the cigarette lights, it will not be his actions by themselves which have brought this about - it will also have been necessary that there was oxygen in the air, that there were certain chemicals in the match-head, and so on. This, it might be said, shows that for it to be true of a man that he pursues some goal, his actions need not be such that they are by themselves capable of bringing it about that the goal is achieved - all that is necessary is that they be capable of doing so in the circumstances in which they are performed; and since it cannot be denied of a man who participates with others in an attempt to push-start a car that if the car starts his actions will have brought this about *in the circumstances in which they were performed*, it need not after all be denied that what he does can constitute an attempt to start the car. However, when a group of men co-operate to achieve some goal, it is often false that what any member of the group does brings about the attainment of the goal, even in the circumstances in which he does it; for it will often be the case that the goal would have been achieved even without his co-operation. In the second place, even when *just* enough people co-operate to achieve the goal, so that it would not have been achieved had any one of them not co-operated, we still cannot say of any one of them that the actions of the others constitute the

circumstances in which he brought about the attainment of the goal, for we could just as reasonably, or unreasonably, say of each of the others that *he* brought this about. What the others do is not a part of the circumstances in which he acts - rather, the relationship between what they do and what he does is that of one part or aspect to another of an activity of *the group*, which *does* bring about the achievement of the goal and which alone constitutes pursuit of the goal. This is confirmed when we consider that we would not in fact say of a man who, say, takes part with others in an attempt to push-start a car that *he* is trying to start it. The most we would be prepared to say is that he is *helping* to try to start it, or that he is taking part in the attempt to start it - locutions which stress that what he does is merely *part* of an activity, that of a group, which constitutes an attempt to start it.

The objection we set out to consider was that since no individual on W can significantly increase the chances of peace being achieved, the assertion that it would be rational of the inhabitants of W to pursue peace is unintelligible, since we would presumably have to conceive of that pursuit as irreducibly an activity of the group which they constitute. We can now answer that though we would indeed have to conceive of the pursuit of peace on W as irreducibly an activity of the group consisting of the inhabitants, this can simply be accepted; for pursuit of peace on W would clearly have to be a co-operative enterprise of the sort just discussed, and we have seen that any such activity not only can be, but must be conceived of as irreducibly that of a group.

However, it might now be said that if the pursuit of peace on W would be irreducibly an activity of the inhabitants considered as a group, the claim that it would be rational of them to pursue peace is



in any case unintelligible. For if no individual inhabitant, but only the inhabitants considered as a group, can pursue peace, then that claim will have to be construed as being irreducibly about the rationality of a group - and we certainly cannot understand talk about the rationality of a group which is not reducible to talk about that of its members. Moreover, it might be said, even if we *could* intelligibly construe the question of whether or not it would be rational to pursue peace on W as being irreducibly about the rationality of the group comprising W's inhabitants, it is not clear how this could bear on the issue which we started out to consider, namely that of whether or not we must accept the parasite's claim that *individual* self-interested men like himself would be irrational to lead moral lives.

This apparent difficulty, however, can be met without trying to give sense to talk of the rationality of a group which is not reducible to talk of that of its members. The solution is provided by the rather obvious point made a moment ago, that although no individual's actions in such a case can count as pursuit of peace, what each does is a part or aspect of the activity of a group, which can. An individual on W cannot indeed see what he does as *by itself* constituting pursuit of peace, but he does not see his activity as being put forward by itself; he sees it as part of a group's activity, and *as such* constituting (an aspect of) the pursuit of peace.

This obvious point, however, has some less obvious and seemingly problematic implications. For the assertion that in cases of the sort we are considering, an individual's activity is part of a group's activity, must be taken seriously. His activity is not part of a group's activity merely in the sense in which, say, an act of robbery may be

said to be part of a pattern of widespread lawless activity in some community - that is, it is not merely that his actions take place at the same time as many other such actions. His actions and those of the rest of his group are part of an activity which itself has, as we might put it, a rationale - whereas, though the individual lawless acts constituting widespread lawless activity in some community no doubt have a rationale, this is not true of the activity itself. By saying that a given activity has a certain rationale, I mean that a chain of reasoning, leading to the conclusion that it should be performed, can be constructed, and that, though this reasoning might not actually have been carried out by the agent, it succeeds in stating his reasons for engaging in the activity in question. To say that my sprint down the street has a rationale is to say that a chain of reasoning something like the following can be constructed: 'My aim is to catch the seven o'clock bus. Unless I run, I will not catch it. Therefore, I should run'; and that this reasoning, though it may not actually have gone through my mind ( I may have simply glanced at my watch and started to run), successfully captures my reasons for running. When a number of people co-operate in the pursuit of a common goal, their activity has in this sense a rationale, and widespread lawless activity usually has not. However, when we say that a given chain of reasoning captures an agent's reasons for doing something, though we need not imply that he actually went through that reasoning, it must at least make sense to suppose that he might have - unless he *could* have gone through it, that chain of reasoning cannot give us the rationale of what he did. Now it clearly makes sense to suppose of some individual that he might deliberate and decide in a certain way on what he should do. Does it make sense, however, to talk of a *group* deliberating and deciding on

what *it* should do? It might seem not, since a group has no faculties for deliberation and decision-making over and above those of its individual members, and, it might seem, each individual can only decide what *he* should do. Nevertheless, we are all familiar, I suggest, with at least one sort of instance of deliberation and decision by a group on what it should do - namely, instances of such deliberation and decision which take place at a mass meeting of the members of some group. The question to which such a meeting addresses itself is not that of how any individual should act, but of how *it*, the group, should act. Nor is the connection between such a decision and action by the members of the group in accordance with it any more mysterious than that between an individual's decision that he should act in a certain way and action by him in accordance with that decision. It has been pointed out that the question to which such a meeting addresses itself is that of how *it*, the group, should act, and each member is (a part of) the group. We need not, however, conceive of deliberation and decision on how a given group should act as necessarily taking place at a mass meeting of its members. The question, 'How should this group act?', is one which can be considered by anyone, just as anyone can consider the question, 'How should Smith act?'. And just as, if the person considering the latter question is Smith, he will, if he is rational, act in accordance with his decision, so, if the person considering the former happens to be part of the group concerned, *he* will act in accordance with his decision if he is rational. Of course, he needs to have reason to believe that other members of the group will also act. This condition could be met in various ways - for example, a number of others, whom he takes to be representative, may have told

him that they will also act, or may to his knowledge already be doing so. An important consequence of this is that when a man co-operates with others in pursuit of some goal, the rationale of what he does is the rationale of the group's activity of which it is a part. His decision that he should act as he does is a mere consequence of the decision that the group should act as it does. I will describe this by saying that in co-operating with others in pursuit of a common goal, an individual must adopt the group's point of view.

We are now in a position to clarify somewhat the assertion that when a group of people co-operate in pursuit of a given goal, each member of the group can see what he does as pursuit of that goal, although only the group's activity can count as such pursuit, because each member can see what he does as a part or aspect of the activity of the group. What is involved in such a person seeing what he does in this way is that the rationale of what he does is the rationale of the group's activity. He sees himself not merely as an individual, but as part of a group with a certain goal, and his decision that he should act as he does follows from his decision that the group should act as it does.

The foregoing excursion into the logic of group action was undertaken to enable us to see just what we would have to be asking when we asked if pursuit of peace by the inhabitants of W would be rational. It seemed that since if peace were to be pursued, that pursuit would have to be conceived of as irreducibly an activity of the group which pursued it, and not of any individual, our question would have to be construed as being irreducibly one about the rationality of the group - and so understood, it would be doubtful that it made sense. We see now, however, that our question can after all be understood, and, of

course, must be understood, as being about the rationality of individuals. The point that pursuit of peace could only be an activity of a group does not rule out that any individual can rationally see what he does as the pursuit of peace, but merely indicates the manner in which he must conceive of his actions if he is to see himself as pursuing peace. He must see his actions as an aspect of those of the group, in the sense that he must see himself as part of the group which aims at peace, and guide his actions in accordance with considerations about how the group should act to achieve its goal - that is, he must adopt the group's point of view.

The question of whether it would be rational of an individual on W to pursue peace is, then, an intelligible one. We must now consider the suggestion, mentioned earlier, that it must be answered in the negative, because the rational way for an individual in a G situation to decide whether or not to co-operate in the pursuit of the end in question is by multiplying the full benefit to him of its being attained by the probability that whether or not it is attained will depend on whether or not he co-operates, and then weighing the resulting discounted benefit against the cost of co-operation; and because this procedure will decide him against co-operation. I will say that a man who reaches such a decision in this way employs 'formula S', and will argue that he does not decide rationally.

Let us begin by noting why it is sometimes necessary to employ formula S in deciding whether or not to do something. I take as uncontroversial the principle that a man should act to achieve some goal only if the benefits to him (in terms of money, pleasure, the happiness of others, or whatever he happens to value) of achieving it outweigh the

costs to him of doing so. Often, however, it is not certain that a man's attempt to achieve a given goal will be sufficient, or even necessary to achieve it, so that we cannot say simply that the benefits to him of his acting are those he would gain if the goal were achieved - for his attempt may be either unsuccessful, in which case he will not gain those benefits, or unnecessary, in which case he will, but not as a result of his efforts. Thus, a man contemplating giving up smoking in an attempt to avoid getting lung cancer cannot count as the benefits he will gain by doing so those he will gain if he does not get lung cancer. For it may be that he will get lung cancer even if he does give up smoking, or that he will not get lung cancer even if he does not. Formula S enables a man to apply the principle mentioned a moment ago, that it is only rational to act if one will gain more by doing so than one will lose, to this sort of situation; and to suggest that formula S should be employed by a man deciding whether or not to co-operate with others in pursuit of a common goal is to imply that such a man is in a position of this sort. It is to imply that he is trying to decide whether or not *he* should attempt to achieve the goal, and looks on the likely behaviour of others as factors which will influence the probability that *his* actions will bring it about that the goal is achieved. Now if he sees his position in this way, he will only act if the group of which he is part is small. If it is small, so that he does act, he will do so on the chance, not merely that the goal will be achieved, but that *his* acting will turn out to be necessary to its achievement. This means that even if the goal is achieved, unless it turns out that just enough others have co-operated to bring about its achievement, his 'gamble' will have failed, just as much as it would have failed if the

goal had not been achieved - for in either case, the possibility on which he acted, that *his* action would prove crucial in achieving the goal, will not have been realised.

This, however, does *not* seem to be how men who co-operate in pursuit of some goal usually see what they do. If their goal is achieved, even if they believe that more than enough of them co-operated in pursuing it, each man will not usually feel his efforts to have been wasted - on the contrary, he will feel that they have achieved their purpose. This suggests that a man who decides to co-operate with others in pursuit of a common goal does not usually employ formula S in reaching his decision. How else, though, might he arrive at his decision? I suggest that he might reason in the following way, which is, moreover, sound, and would lead a man in any G situation, including that on W, to act to pursue the end in question.

'We can pursue and achieve E (the end in question). The benefits to each of us of pursuing E would outweigh the costs to each of us of our doing so. Therefore, we should pursue E.' (I will say that a man who reasons in this way employs 'formula G').

This seems, superficially at least, perfectly sound reasoning. If someone were part of a group in an actual G situation and were to advance this line of reasoning, we would usually say that he had advanced a good argument for the pursuit by the group of E. What reason can be given for questioning this opinion? The premises of the argument are true by definition of a G situation, and apparent difficulties associated with the notion of reasoning which is about what a group, as opposed to an individual, should do, have already been dealt with, as have those concerning the relationship between such reasoning and action

by members of the group concerned. It might be claimed that the suggestion that it would be rational for each inhabitant of W to pursue peace by itself leads straight to a paradox, for each individual could then argue that the others, being like himself rational, will pursue peace, so that it is unnecessary, and therefore irrational, for *him* to pursue peace. However, this would be to beg the question. An inhabitant of W who reasoned in this way, calculating the chances that his actions would prove necessary to the achievement of peace, would clearly be employing formula S, and whether or not it would be rational for an individual on W to apply formula S is precisely what we are trying to decide.

It might be objected, though, that formula S has already been independently justified; for it was seen earlier that formula S is simply a means of applying a principle which was conceded to be sound in certain sorts of situation where it cannot be applied directly. The principle may be expressed as follows: 'It is only rational to do X in order to achieve Y if the benefits of doing so outweigh the cost of doing so'. In situations where the benefits of doing X cannot be taken simply as the 'full' benefits the agent would gain if Y were achieved, because he may not achieve Y by doing X, formula S tells us what is to be counted as the benefits of his doing X - namely, the full benefits multiplied by the probability that by doing X he will achieve Y.

However, formula G is equally a means of applying the principle mentioned in certain sorts of situation where it cannot be applied directly, though the sort of situation involved is not the same as that in which formula S is called for. In this sort of situation, our



principle cannot be applied directly, not because the benefits of doing X cannot be taken simply as those of Y's being achieved, but because the action X which the agent is contemplating cannot be taken simply as what *he* would do were he to decide to pursue Y. It cannot be taken in this way because what he is contemplating is not an attempt to bring about Y by *his* actions, but an attempt to do so by participating in group action in pursuit of Y. Hence it is the benefits to him of the *group's* acting to achieve Y which he must weigh against the costs to him of its doing so. Formula S *can* have relevance in such a case, of course - if it is uncertain that the group can achieve Y by doing X, the benefits to him cannot simply be taken as those of Y's being achieved, but must be taken as those benefits discounted by multiplying them by the probability that by doing X, the group will achieve Y. In such a case, formula S must be used, not instead of formula G, but as supplementary to it.

If what has just been said is correct, to ask whether formula G or formula S should be used in deciding whether or not to co-operate with others in pursuit of a common goal amounts to asking whether to be faced with such a decision is to be in a situation of the sort to which the former is appropriate, or one of the sort to which the latter is appropriate. Now if a man faced with such a decision sees his situation as being of the former sort, he commits no error. He *does* form part of a group each member of which would benefit from attainment of the goal in question, and which *can* act as a group to attain that goal; and the question of whether the group (and he as part of it) should so act is an intelligible one. However, he *could* see his situation as being of the latter sort - for he *is* an individual con-

templating action towards a desired end (though this may be questioned if the group of which he is part is large - when the chances that an individual's actions will bring about a desired end are sufficiently remote, it is doubtful whether he can intelligibly see them as action toward that end), and it is not certain that his action will prove crucial to the achievement of that end. This means that we cannot decide which of formula G and formula S should be employed in G situations by deciding whether such situations are really of one sort rather than of the other; for the situations in question can be seen with equal correctness as being of either type. How, then, are we to decide which formula gives a man the 'right' answer about what he should do in such a situation?

We saw earlier that if we say that formula S gives him the correct answer, we will have to accept that large groups of men, even if they can attain a given goal in such a way that the benefits to each of their doing so will far outweigh the costs to each, will rationally fail to pursue that goal. Now we may perhaps be prepared to accept that large groups of men (and even small ones, for that matter) will in fact often behave in this way, for we know that men are often less than rational. But to suggest that it would be *rational* of them to do so is surely paradoxical. Imagine, for example, that the inhabitants of W each employ formula S in deciding whether or not to pursue peace, and therefore decide against doing so, so that life for them continues solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. W is now visited by the first emissary from Mars, where, it turns out, the inhabitants are equally self-interested, but long ago decided to pursue peace, reasoning that since peace would be very much in the interests of all and

was in their power to achieve, it should be pursued. The resulting benefits to all martians have been great, not the least of them being the perfection of space travel, which has made possible visits, such as the present one, to some of the backward planets of the system. Surely, the emissary could be forgiven for laughing outright at the suggestion that the inhabitants of his world should, like the inhabitants of W, have seen that the pursuit of peace was irrational since they formed, not a small, but a large group.

Now sometimes, we are prepared to accept a proposition which has counter-intuitive consequences. We are prepared to do this when denial of the proposition in question, or of some other of which it is a consequence, would be, or would have implications which would be, even more strongly counter-intuitive. However, the suggestion that formula S gives rational guidance to a man in what we called a G situation is not such a proposition. Although formula S unquestionably gives rational guidance in certain sorts of situation, we can deny without paradox that it does so in the cases with which we are concerned, because we can point out that these are relevantly different from those in which it does. And while formula S is the application to a particular sort of case of a principle whose soundness is beyond question, we do not question that principle in suggesting that formula G rather than it should be adopted in the cases with which we are concerned; for formula G is equally an application of that principle. I conclude that formula S can without violence to our intuitions be rejected in favour of formula G as the rational means of deciding whether or not one should co-operate with others in pursuit of a common goal, and should be so rejected, since its acceptance *does* do violence to our intuitions.

It follows from what has just been said that the inhabitants of W would rationally decide to pursue peace. It might now be said, however, that even if it is accepted that the inhabitants of W should pursue peace, it does not follow that the 'moral rules' they should adopt would be precisely like moral rules as we know them. For the latter require of all men, all the time, that they limit their self-seeking in accordance with moral considerations; but since we know that peace can be achieved, as it is in our world, merely by *most* people, *most* of the time, limiting their self-seeking in this way, would it not be more rational of the inhabitants of W to permit a number of men (selected, say, by the drawing of lots), or all men for some part of their time, to do as they pleased?

The absurdity of this suggestion becomes obvious when we ask how we are to conceive of the behaviour of the selected few, or of people on their 'off' days. If no restraints are placed on them, they will make life very unpleasant indeed for the rest, who in a state of war were at least free to take action against those who threatened their interests. It might be said, though, that it is not that a selected few, or everyone occasionally, could be permitted to run amok without defeating the purpose of having moral rules at all. Rather, they could be permitted to behave as the parasite does, heeding the dictates of morality only when they would otherwise be found out - and *this* would not defeat the purpose for which peace is pursued. The trouble with this suggestion, of course, is that it is vacuous. For there is no difference in practical consequences between 'We will permit X to ignore moral rules as long as we do not find him out' and 'We will require X to obey moral rules at all times'. I think it

is clear, then, that the citizens of W would, if they were rational, require everyone at all times to pursue self-interest only within the limits set by moral considerations. This, incidentally, also accounts for another feature of moral principles which is often stressed by writers on ethics, namely their 'over-ridingness'<sup>4</sup>. For if one is required to follow moral rules at all times, it follows that one is required to do so even when there are non-moral reasons for not doing so.

In the preceding paragraph, I have talked of what it would be rational to *require* of the citizens of W, and of what they should be *permitted* to do, as though these expressions had a clear application in the situation under discussion. But it is by no means obvious that this is so. For so far, we appear to have been envisaging the pursuit of peace in W as consisting of men co-operating freely, and talk of what men in W might be 'permitted' or 'required' to do seems to introduce something for which there is no place in this picture. We can only talk of permissions and requirements when we can also talk of sanctions against those who act without the former or with disregard for the latter; and while there exist in our world the institutions of punishment and praise and blame to legitimise such talk, if these are to be supposed to have arisen in W, some account needs to be given of their origin. Moreover, even if such an account could be provided, it would seem to be of doubtful relevance to our present concerns; for we are surely interested in the question of what a man has reason to do *without* the prospect of sanctions, which could presumably be used to provide him with reason to act in *any* given way, and not only in accordance with moral considerations. I will deal with these points in turn.

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., *Monro, op. cit.*, ch. 17.

Firstly, it is easy to see how the practice of adopting sanctions against those who fail to do their share towards avoidance of war would arise in W. The inhabitants will correctly see such failures as a threat to the end for the sake of which they limit their self-seeking, and it will be natural for them to adopt measures, varying in degree of unpleasantness according to the seriousness of the type of default, to discourage those who might be tempted to act otherwise than they ought from the group's point of view. The practice of blame and punishment which would naturally arise in this way, however, can also be seen as deriving from even more basic features of the situation. When a group of people act together for their mutual benefit, it is *their* interests, that is, those of the group of people who thus act together, that they aim to promote - promotion of the interests of others is no part of their aim. The rules which it would therefore be rational for those who pursue peace on W to adopt would require each to take into account in his actions, not the interests of *all* others, but only the interests of others who similarly pursue peace. They aim at the avoidance of the evils of war, not for everyone, but for themselves. Now a person who fails to act as required by these rules is to that extent not a member of the group which pursues peace so that the others are not required to accord his interests any more consideration than they would receive in a state of war; and this means that they may rationally deprive him, to a greater or lesser extent, of the benefits of peace. Thus, apart from their role as a means of deterring men from acting in ways which constitute a threat to peace, the institutions of blame and punishment would arise on W as a reflection of the fact that those who pursue peace do not therefore have any reason to consider the interests of those

who do not, but may rationally view them in much the same way as they would view them in a state of war. This means that sense can indeed be given to my earlier talk of what sort of behaviour it would be rational of the inhabitants of W to require of one another, and what sort of behaviour it would be rational of them to permit.

We must now deal with the second objection raised in connection with talk of the sanctions it would be rational to employ on W against those who fail to limit their self-seeking in accordance with moral considerations. The objection was, in effect, that to show that it would be rational on W to have sanctions to encourage certain sorts of behaviour is not to show that it would be rational for an individual on W to indulge in behaviour of those sorts - of course, suitable sanctions *themselves* would no doubt provide him with reason to engage in such behaviour, but this is true of *any* sort of behaviour. The reply to this is that if it is rational for the inhabitants of W as a group to require, in their pursuit of peace, certain behaviour of individual inhabitants, then it is rational for individual inhabitants to require such behaviour of themselves, for I have argued that it is rational for each inhabitant to adopt the point of view of the group.

I have tried to show that in a world of self-interested men, the inhabitants would, if they were rational, adopt moral rules in order to avoid the evils of a Hobbesian war of 'every man against every man'. It follows that the parasite's position, which, as we saw, entails the opposite conclusion, is untenable. Moreover, it follows that in the world we actually occupy, it is rational for an individual to adopt moral rules, for though peace has been attained in our world, we still, like the inhabitants of W, occupy a G situation, the relevant goal being

*continued* peace. Both for those of us whose behaviour has been responsible for the present state of peace and those who pursue self-interest exclusively, the question arises of whether or not it is rational to co-operate in the pursuit of continued peace, and since each of us would benefit from continued peace, it follows from my earlier arguments that those who do so act rationally.

It must be conceded, of course, that in our world, the really efficient parasite does better than the moral man. For morality often requires that one forego opportunities to further one's interests, whereas the parasite never foregoes such an opportunity. This, however, is quite compatible with the assertion that the parasite is less rational than the moral man; for the rational course is not always the course by which one in fact does best, a truism illustrated by the following example. Suppose that the properties of two men, A and B, will both be flooded unless a certain dam is strengthened, and neither A nor B knows how the other will act in the situation. A takes no action to avert disaster, while B carries out the necessary work. Both men thus avoid having their properties flooded, but A does better, for he does so without expenditure of time or effort. Would we therefore say, however, that A acted more rationally than B? Clearly not, for had not B acted as he did, both he and A would have done considerably worse.

I conclude that in our world as in *W*, any man has reason to act in accordance with moral rules, since in both worlds, it is by the adoption of moral rules on the part of the populace that peace can be achieved, and the interests of any man are better served by peace than by war.

In the foregoing argument, I have often spoken of *worlds* the



inhabitants of which may or may not decide to treat each other morally. This was largely because the type of objection being considered is one which has been advanced against Baier's attempt to show that we should be moral, and Baier argues in terms of the relative desirability of different sorts of worlds. However, the fact that I have spoken in these terms might be thought to conceal an important limitation of the type of argument I have employed. For, it might be argued, it is clearly not the case that if everyone pursued only self-interest, what would result would be a war of every man against every man, if we take 'every man' quite literally. For any given person, there are innumerable others with whom he simply does not come into contact, or is highly unlikely to come into contact, for the simple reason that they live in some place remote from him. The most that can be said, therefore, is that if everyone pursued only self-interest, then amongst the members of any given group of people each of whom could affect the interests of the others by his activities a state of war of all members against all members would exist; and that to avoid the evils of this state, such a group needs to adopt rules requiring members to behave morally in their dealings *with one another*. This would seem to show that even if the arguments which have been put forward in this chapter are sound, it is quite possible that everyone should avoid the evils of a state of war while no one accepts rules requiring him to treat all other people as objects of moral concern, as long as within each group, members see each other as objects of such concern. This, in fact, seems to have been the actual situation in some primitive lands until quite recently, and at some sufficiently early stage of the world's history, was probably the situation in many other lands, where the

inhabitants were divided into tribes or clans, members of each of which regarded the members of others much as they would in a state of nature. Of course, such tribes would be likely to be in a state of more or less perpetual war with one another, but this would not be a Hobbesian war of all against all.

It must be accepted, I think, that the most that can be shown by appealing to the unpleasantness of a Hobbesian state of war is that anyone, regardless of his particular interests and desires, has reason to adopt rules which require him to accord consideration to the interests of other members of his own group. Now this is by no means insignificant, for it is enough to show relativism, which entails that we cannot give anyone reasons why he should accept one moral principle rather than any other, to be false. It might be argued that the rules which any man has reason to adopt, given my arguments, could not be called moral principles, on the ground that, whatever the way in which a principle requires one to show concern for others, it cannot be a *moral* principle unless it requires that one show concern in that way for *all* others. However this amounts to the claim that moral principles are necessarily universalizable in what we called in chapter 5 the 'strong' sense, and it was pointed out there that the principle requiring universalizability in this sense is in itself a moral principle, which cannot therefore serve as a criterion of what is or is not a moral principle. And since the sort of concern for others which would be required by the rules in question is of the same sort as is required by what are normally called moral rules, it seems quite proper to speak of such rules as constituting a morality, even if a limited one.

There is, however, a more telling reply than this to the charge

that my arguments show at best that any man has reason to show moral concern for other members of his own group. This is that by 'one's own group' we have been referring to that group of people whose activities can affect one's interests, and whose interests can be affected by one's activities; and that though it may have once been true that for any given person, the only others whose activities had any likelihood of affecting his interests were those living in his fairly immediate vicinity, such factors as advances in methods of communication and travel, and the increasing complexity of economic and political relations between people for which they have been partly responsible, have made this increasingly less true with the passage of time. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that today there is no group of people anywhere of whom one can say that there is no likelihood of their activities affecting one's interests. Moreover, if this *is* an exaggeration, it will soon cease to be, for the influence of factors of the sort just mentioned shows, to put the matter conservatively, no sign of waning. Thus, to accept that one has reason to show moral concern for those whose interests one can affect, and who can affect one's interests, seems compatible with claiming that one has reason to show such concern for the vast majority, if not all, of mankind; and it is certainly compatible with claiming that one has reason to show such concern for all those with whom one is likely to have any dealings.

However, there is another sort of consideration which seems to show that at least some groups do not have reason to extend moral consideration to outsiders. It might be said that a group may find it not in its interests to treat outsiders morally, not because there is no likelihood of the outsiders being able to affect the interests of

members, but because the group is very strong, and so in a position to exploit the outsiders with impunity. This in fact appears to be the situation of the whites of Rhodesia and South Africa with respect to the blacks of their respective countries, and is argued by many to be the situation of the developed countries of the world with respect to the so-called 'third world' countries.

I am by no means sure that I have an adequate answer to this type of objection. Perhaps an answer is to be found in the claim frequently repeated by those anxious to persuade the developed countries to change their attitude towards the third world nations, that it is in their interest to do so, because otherwise, the latter will attempt to right the situation by force, and the similar and even more plausible claim that the whites of South Africa and Rhodesia run a constant and ever-increasing risk of bloody revolt by the blacks. If these claims are accepted, then it can be argued that even such groups as the whites of South Africa have reason to treat all men, including those they exploit, as the proper objects of moral concern. If they are not, then it must be conceded that despite all I have said, there are some groups at least for members of which reason does not dictate the adoption of rules requiring concern for the interests of all men. My arguments will have shown at best that any man has reason to adopt moral rules requiring him to treat morally a class of people which may be smaller than the class of all men. As I have pointed out, this would still be a significant achievement, sufficient to refute ethical relativism; and it need hardly be mentioned that what my arguments have left undone it may be possible for other arguments, which have not occurred to me, to do.

I have tried to show that rationality requires morality of any

man.<sup>5</sup> That this can be shown is sometimes denied even by philosophers who do not see themselves as in anyway debunking morality - Mrs. Foot, of course, is one example - and it has been suggested to me that I should try to unearth the reasons, at least in some cases, why it is denied. I have consequently devoted an appendix<sup>6</sup> to a brief examination of the relevant portions of two recent books in which it is claimed that morality is not a requirement of rationality, and which are also of interest in that they present certain considerations which might be thought capable of rendering this conclusion less unpalatable to those who might have hoped otherwise.

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<sup>5</sup> I have suggested, in my discussion of Mrs. Foot's argument to the contrary, that this does not commit me to holding that immoral or amoral people are necessarily irrational.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix B, in which I discuss D.A.J. Richards' *A Theory of Reasons for action* and Bernard Gert's *The Moral Rules*.

## CHAPTER XII

### CAN THERE BE REASONS FOR BEING MORAL?

In the last two chapters, I have been concerned to try to show that moral considerations provide reasons for acting for any man. There are a number of difficulties which have been or might be raised either for any such attempt, or for mine in particular, and I wish now to consider some of these.

The first type of objection I want to consider claims to draw attention to a feature of moral action which any attempt to show that we have reason to be moral necessarily overlooks. The objection can be put in the following way.

If we learn that a given action was performed in order to promote some moral end - the alleviation of suffering, say, or the avoidance of injustice - we have not yet learnt enough to enable us to say that the agent, in performing that action, acted morally. For a moral end, like any other, can be pursued for the sake of some further end - a man may, for example, give to the poor so as to gain a reputation for charity; and we would not call the pursuit of moral ends in such cases 'acting morally'. It follows that before we can say of a man that he acted morally, we need to know not only that he acted to promote a moral end, but also that he wished to promote that end for its own sake. Now, the objection runs, any attempt to give reasons for

being moral necessarily overlooks this feature of what it is to act morally. Such attempts, presumably, are not aimed at producing moral reasons, that is, reasons in terms of moral ends, for acting morally - for no-one doubts that *moral* reasons can be found for acting morally. Yet, to try to produce *non*-moral reasons for acting morally is to neglect the point to which attention has just been drawn. Once we see that to act morally is to pursue moral ends for their own sake, we also see that there *could* not be non-moral reasons for acting morally; for a man who pursues moral ends for non-moral reasons does not pursue them for their own sake.<sup>1</sup>

The crucial claim in the objection just outlined is that to be moral is to pursue moral ends for their own sake (for brevity's sake I will refer to this as 'the autonomy thesis', without implying that this is always what is meant by those who talk of the autonomy of morals). Now while some philosophers are quite happy to accept this claim, it may seem that essentially the same objection could be raised without anything more contentious being assumed than the tautology (at least I am prepared to accept it as such) that to be moral is to act for moral reasons, whatever might constitute the correct characterisation of such a reason. For, it might be said, even this tautology must have escaped the notice of a man who tries to provide non-moral reasons for being moral (as we remarked a moment ago, it is trivial that there are *moral* reasons for being moral) - otherwise it would be clear to him that

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<sup>1</sup> This objection, it will be noticed, assumes that there is an identifiable class of ends which are generally recognised as moral ends. This seems to me a reasonable assumption, but I will not attempt to defend it here. If it is not a reasonable assumption, then the objection cannot be formulated.

to act for non-moral reasons is necessarily *not* to act morally, so that there cannot be non-moral reasons for acting morally. I will show, however, that this argument does not dispense with the view that to be moral is to pursue moral ends for their own sake, but covertly assumes it.

Since the argument is not supposed to rely on any particular account of the nature of moral reasons, the peculiarity of trying to give non-moral reasons for being moral presumably does not arise from the fact that to act morally is to act for *moral* reasons, but simply from the fact that to act morally is to act for reasons of a specific sort - as it happens, moral ones. That is to say, the peculiarity of trying to show that there are non-moral reasons for being moral is a special case of the peculiarity of trying to show of an activity defined as an activity engaged in for reasons of a certain sort that we have reasons for engaging in it which are not of that sort. Now it might seem that such an attempt is indeed peculiar. If an activity A is defined as being an activity engaged in for reasons of sort R (let us call such an activity an A-type activity), then, it might seem, there cannot be reasons *not* of sort R for engaging in A - for if one's reasons for doing something are not of sort R, then one is not engaging in A. Nevertheless, examples of A-type activities being engaged in for reasons not of the type specified in their definition can easily be produced.

The activity of tuning cars may be defined as doing things to cars for reasons connected with their better running. It is thus an A-type activity, that is, one which is by definition an activity engaged in for a certain sort of reason, namely the sort connected with the better running of cars. Nevertheless, many people engage in this



activity for reasons not of that sort - people tune cars for all sorts of reasons quite unconnected with the better running of cars. Some tune cars because it is a means of making a living, others do so to ensure better fuel consumption and so to save money, and so on. There is therefore nothing necessarily confused in the suggestion that a man might engage in an A-type activity for reasons not of the sort specified in its definition; and nor, therefore, is it necessarily confused to ask for, or to try to provide, reasons for engaging in such an activity.

Of course, when a man tunes cars because, say, he thereby earns money, his *ultimate* reason for acting has nothing to do with the better running of cars. He turns a particular nut, for example, for the reason that this will make the car run better, but this is not his ultimate reason - he is only concerned to make the car run better because by doing that sort of thing he makes money. Now if it were true (as it is not) that a man does not tune cars unless his *ultimate* reason for acting is connected with their better running, then it would indeed follow that the man who does things to cars to make them run better because that is how he earns his daily bread does not tune cars. For though he acts for reasons connected with the better running of cars, his *ultimate* reasons are not so connected. Similarly, it would not be possible to act morally for non-moral reasons if, to act morally, not only must one act for moral reasons, but one's *ultimate* reasons for acting must be moral ones.

Now in fact, the claim that to act morally is to act for moral reasons could quite naturally be taken as asserting that one does not act morally if one's *ultimate* reasons are not moral ones. After all,

we would be disinclined to say that a man who acted to alleviate suffering because he wished to be well thought of acted for moral reasons. Moreover, it might be said that this is obviously how, in the context of the argument we are considering, the claim is meant to be taken, since as we have just seen, it would not otherwise justify the argument's conclusion. This, I think, would be a fair comment. My purpose has been simply to stress that unless we *do* understand the claim that to act morally is to act for moral reasons in this admittedly natural way, it does not support the contention that there cannot be non-moral reasons for being moral - for I will now argue that so understood, it cannot be allowed to pass as a mere tautology.

Let us begin by asking just what is involved in this notion of the ultimate reason for which a man acts which appears in the claim, so understood. The notion can best be explained, I think, in terms of the ends for the sake of which a man acts. In our earlier example, when it was said that the mechanic turned a certain nut for the reason that he would thereby make the car run better, this amounted to saying that the end for the sake of which he acted was that of making the car run better. However, his *ultimate* reason for acting was not that he would thereby make the car run better, for though he acted for the sake of making the car run better, he pursued that end for the sake of a further one, namely that of earning money. Now the fact that his action enabled him to earn money may not have been his ultimate reason for acting either (and no doubt would not be in most actual cases), for he may have wished to earn money for the sake of some yet further end, such as that of being able to provide adequately for his wife and children. We will only have arrived at his ultimate reason for acting

when we arrive at an end which he pursues, not for the sake of some further end, but for its own sake - and his ultimate reason will then be that his actions promote this end.

It might be objected to this that it construes all reasons for acting on a means-end model, whereas, it might be said, some reasons are not of this type. For example, the man who avoids certain activities for the reason that they are degrading does not avoid them with some end in mind, but because of the sort of character they would exemplify. However, another way of describing this is by saying that such a man acts as he does because amongst his ends is the non-exemplification of certain types of character, and it would be perfectly proper to ask of him whether he pursues this end for its own sake, or, for example, because he wishes not to be thought poorly of; and I conclude that no substantial thesis about the nature of reasons for action is presupposed in the account I have given of the notion of the ultimate reasons for which a man acts.

It is now clear, however, that to understand the claim that to be moral is to act for moral reasons as being about the *ultimate* reasons for which a morally good man acts is to understand it as a statement of what I called the autonomy thesis - that is, as the claim that to act morally is to pursue moral ends for their own sake; and as we saw, only if it is understood in that way does it entail that there can be no non-moral reasons for being moral. It follows that the autonomy thesis is after all crucial to the objection we are considering.

Now the view that to act morally is to pursue moral ends for their own sake is by no means an uncommon one, and as we have seen, it does indeed entail that there can be no non-moral reasons for being

moral. We will consider shortly what there is to be said for it. I wish now, however, to draw attention to certain of its implications which seem not to have been noticed by its proponents.

In her paper, 'Moral Beliefs'<sup>2</sup>, Mrs. Foot tried to show that anyone has reason to be just - a view which, as we saw in chapter 8, she abandons in her more recent 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives'. She also took to task those who like Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, deny that this is so, but who, unlike Thrasymachus, do not therefore conclude that it is a fraud to recommend justice as a virtue. In this she would have, I think, the support of philosophers such as Baier, who are also concerned to show that there are reasons for being moral. It is felt by such philosophers that the conclusion that there are no reasons for being moral would be destructive of morality, and that is why they take their question to be a crucial one.

However, though Mrs. Foot now argues that there are no reasons for being moral, she does not herself draw Thrasymachus' conclusion - and in general, those who assert that there are no reasons for being moral on the basis of the sort of argument we have been considering do not see what they say as being in any way an undermining of morality. For example, at the start of his article 'Why be moral?'<sup>3</sup>, A.I. Melden says that there is a sense of the question 'Why be moral?' which is '... apt to be most disturbing to the moral theorist because it suggests a skepticism with respect to the foundations of moral theory'<sup>4</sup>, and

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<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 59 (1958-9) pp. 83-104.

<sup>3</sup> *The Journal of Philosophy*, 45 (1948), pp. 449-456.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.

undertakes to dispell any such skepticism by showing that it is in principle impossible that there could be reasons for being moral. Again, D.Z. Phillips and H.O. Mounce, in chapter 4 of their book, *Moral Practices*,<sup>5</sup> assert that a just man cares about just actions, and argue that there can be no further reason for being just - but it is clear from the tone of the chapter that they take themselves to be, not undermining morality, but showing its irreducibility to more sordid pursuits, such as that of profit.

These philosophers are prepared, then, to accept Thrasymachus' premise but not his conclusion. I will argue that in this they are inconsistent. First, however, I wish to forestall a possible objection to what has just been said. We have been representing the difference between proponents of the autonomy thesis and those who try to provide reasons for being moral (that between, say, the Mrs. Foot of 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' and the Mrs. Foot of 'Moral Beliefs') as being that the former believe, and the latter deny, that there are reasons for being moral. Now this is harmless, it might be said, in a context where the question is that of whether or not there are reasons for being moral - for the interesting question is of course that of whether there are *non-moral* reasons for being moral (it being trivial that there are *moral* reasons for being moral), and 'reasons' in this context will therefore be understood to mean 'non-moral reasons'. However, it might be said, it is not harmless in the present context, where the question is that of whether the autonomy thesis undermines morality. For since morality would only seem to be

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<sup>5</sup> London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

undermined if there were no reasons *at all* for being moral, the important question in this context is that of whether there are *any* reasons for being moral; and it is therefore important here to stress that the autonomy thesis only implies that there are no *non-moral* reasons for being moral. We will not then lose sight of the fact that there are, even on the autonomy thesis, *moral* reasons for being moral, and will not be inclined to suggest, as we have been, that that thesis is destructive of morality.

It is time to point out, however, that the autonomy thesis does not merely entail that there can be no *non-moral* reasons for being moral. If to be moral is to pursue moral ends for their own sake, then there can be neither moral *nor* non-moral reasons for being moral. For to say of a man that he pursues an end for its own sake is to say that he has no reason (at all) for pursuing it. It follows that proponents of the autonomy thesis are indeed committed to denying that there are *any* reasons for being moral. This point is also worth making for another reason. 'Non-moral reasons' in our discussion so far has had the sense of 'reasons not in terms of moral ends'. But there is a temptation to read it as also meaning something like 'reasons inappropriate to moral action', and this can give the suggestion that there may be non-moral reasons for acting morally an unduly paradoxical air. The fact that we can consider instead the suggestion that there may be reasons (of *some* sort) for being moral enables us to avoid this complication.

The autonomy thesis, then, does entail that there can be no reasons *at all* for being moral. Let us now return to the question of whether or not it is therefore destructive of morality. As we saw

earlier, Mrs. Foot now holds that there is in fact no reason for anyone to pursue moral ends, and that the moral man is simply a man who happens to care for such things. She considers the objection that 'this way of viewing moral considerations must be totally destructive of morality', because unless a man pursues such ends 'out of respect for the moral law', he does what he does for the sake of pleasure or happiness, and acts selfishly.<sup>6</sup> She dismisses this objection by pointing out that it assumes the truth of psychological hedonism, and then considers a further objection: Her view allows that a moral man *does* care for moral ends; 'But what,' she imagines it being asked, 'if he never cared about such things, or what if he ceased to care?'.<sup>7</sup> To this, Mrs. Foot replies that a man who takes her view of what it is to be moral

... will agree that a moral man has moral ends and cannot be indifferent to matters such as suffering and injustice. Further, he will recognise in the statement that one *ought* to care about these things a correct application of the non-hypothetical moral 'ought' by which society is apt to voice its demands. He will not, however, take the fact that he ought to have certain ends as in itself reason to adopt them. If he himself is a moral man then he cares about such things, but not "because he ought". If he is an amoral man he may deny that he has any reason to trouble his head over this or any other moral demand.

Mrs. Foot avoids the conclusion that it is false that we ought to pursue moral ends, then, by means of the claim, which we discussed in chapter 8, that there is a special moral sense of 'ought' ('ought<sub>m</sub>')

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<sup>6</sup> 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives', pp. 312-313.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 314-315.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

which allows one to say that we ought to pursue moral ends without implying that we have any reason for doing so. Now I have already argued that there is no such special sense of 'ought'. But even if there were, Mrs. Foot could not rebut the suggestion that her view is destructive of morality because it entails that it is false that one ought to pursue moral ends by pointing out that she *can* allow that one ought, in this special sense, to pursue such ends. For the reason why it is thought destructive of morality to deny that we ought to pursue moral ends is that usually, to deny that we ought to pursue certain ends is to deny that we have reason for pursuing them. It is therefore irrelevant, even if true, that though Mrs. Foot claims that we have no reason for pursuing moral ends she can still allow that we ought (in the special sense) to pursue them - for it is the former claim *itself* which appears destructive of morality, and as I shall now try to show, is in fact destructive of morality.

Since she holds that there are no reasons for pursuing moral ends, Mrs. Foot would appear to be committed to the view that there are no reasons for preferring moral ends to those, say, of etiquette, which as we saw earlier, she seems to hold in low regard. She recognises this consequence of her position but nevertheless tries to distinguish between the pursuit of moral ends and the pursuit of the ends of etiquette, to the advantage of the former. Although on her view there is no distinction in point of rationality between the moral man and the man who cares for the ends of etiquette, she says

That [men] are prepared to fight so hard for moral ends - for example, for liberty and justice - depends on the fact that these are the kinds of ends that arouse devotion.



To sacrifice a great deal for the sake of etiquette one would need to be under the spell of the emphatic "ought<sub>e</sub>". One could hardly be devoted to behaving *comme il faut*.<sup>9</sup>

However, it is certainly not logically impossible that a man might be devoted to behaving *comme il faut* - in fact if Mrs. Foot has not actually encountered men who are so devoted, I suspect she is more fortunate in this than most. Moreover, if the devotion of such men shows them to be under the spell of the emphatic 'ought<sub>e</sub>', Mrs. Foot has given us no reason why we should prefer those under the spell of the emphatic 'ought<sub>m</sub>'. Although it is true that moral ends *do* arouse devotion in many, this is of little interest unless it is taken as an indication that they are such that men have reason to be devoted to them. But in the first place, it need not be taken in this way - on the contrary, it is adequately accounted for by the 'stringent moral teaching' which she believes to explain the feeling that one cannot escape the demands of morality; and in the second place, even if there were reasons why a man should be devoted to moral ends, on Mrs. Foot's view these are necessarily not the reasons a moral man has for devoting himself to them - for on her view, a moral man has no reason for his devotion to moral ends.

If the autonomy thesis is true, then, being moral is, so far as rationality is concerned, on a par with being devoted to behaving *comme il faut*, and for that matter with being sadistic, for the sadist presumably cares for sadistic ends for *their* own sake. Admittedly, rather more men are devoted to moral ends than to sadistic ones or to behaving *comme il faut*, but if etiquette or sadism were taught

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

with the same stringency as is morality, it might well have been otherwise.

Now Mrs. Foot certainly does not think of herself as a moral relativist. On the contrary, in 'Moral Beliefs' she was concerned to argue, in effect, that what, if any, moral judgement is appropriate in a given situation is determined solely by the facts of that situation, and most of her other papers in ethics are in one way or another aimed at demonstrating this same conclusion.<sup>10</sup> (As we have seen, she now repudiates the claim made in 'Moral Beliefs' that any man has reason to be moral, but she thinks that the rest of the article can stand<sup>11</sup>). And indeed, given that we can distinguish moral ends from others (she suggests that they are ends concerned with human good and harm) her position is not, strictly speaking, a relativistic one. A relativist like Monro is committed to saying that if a man's basic attitudes favour the skinning of babies alive for sport, he can claim that one morally ought to engage in such behaviour, and there is no way of showing that he is in any way mistaken. Mrs. Foot, however, is not committed to saying this. Since for her, being moral is pursuing ends connected with the promotion of human good, a man who claimed that one morally ought to skin babies, unless he also claimed that this somehow promoted human good, would be guilty of logical confusion, and whether or not he in fact approved of skinning babies would be simply irrelevant.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. 'When Is a Principle a Moral Principle?', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 28, 1954, pp. 95-110; 'Moral Arguments', *Mind*, 67, 1958, pp. 502-513; 'Goodness and Choice', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 35, 1961, pp. 45-60.

<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Foot, *op. cit.*, p. 308 (footnote).

However, this victory over relativism is an empty one. If we accept Mrs. Foot's position, then though a man who says that one ought to skin babies alive for sport is confused if he thinks he is making a moral judgement, such a man could accept this, but point out that what he said *was* nevertheless a sadistic judgement, and that anyone who says that one ought to promote human good is confused if he thinks he is making a sadistic judgement. He could add, moreover, that though the moral man, who happens to care for such things, has reason to promote human good, it would be positively irrational of him, the sadist, to do so, since he happens not to care a fig for such things. In short, on the view that to act morally is to pursue moral ends for their own sake, though it is an objective matter whether or not to act in a certain way is to act morally, it does not follow from this that we ought to do anything but pursue our inclinations (of course, we ought<sub>m</sub> to act morally, but then we ought<sub>s</sub> to act sadistically). If our inclinations do not happen to lead us to pursue human good, we will not be able to say we are acting morally, but there is no reason why this should concern us - given our inclinations, it would be irrational of us to concern ourselves with the requirements of morality.

Such, then, are the implications of the autonomy thesis. While there may be room for some disagreement about just what would amount to 'undermining morality', it surely cannot be denied that at least anyone advocating a view with these implications is engaged in something deserving of that description. This means that the question of whether or not there are reasons for being moral is not only not necessarily confused, but of the utmost importance for morality.

Since the implications just noted follow very directly from the view that there can be no reasons for being moral, it is difficult not to ask why those who hold this view have not seen themselves as in any way debunking morality, and it may be not altogether beside the point to suggest an answer to this question. The line of thought which, I suspect, lies behind the idea that it is a mistake to suggest that unless we can find reasons for being moral, we must conclude that morality is a fraud, is in fact fairly explicit in the first paragraph of Melden's paper, mentioned earlier. It is something like this:

Those who ask what reasons there are for being moral assume that they are at least asking an intelligible question. But once we are clear about what it is to be moral, we see that their question is in fact confused, for we then see that there *could* be no reasons for being moral. It follows that it is absurd to suggest, as Mrs. Foot did in 'Moral Beliefs', that if it turns out that the demand for reasons for being moral cannot be met, morality will have been exposed as being pointless, or otherwise debunked. For that demand is logically confused, and it need not dismay us that we cannot meet confused demands.

This reasoning, however, is itself confused. It is true that if the very concept of morality excludes there being reasons for being moral, then it is absurd to demand reasons for being moral. It is absurd because once we understand what it is to be moral, we already understand that there are no reasons for being moral. But it does not follow that morality is not pointless. All that follows is that once we understand what morality is, we already understand that it is pointless.

Now the fact that the autonomy thesis has consequences which

are destructive of morality does not of course show it to be false. Perhaps morality *is* a fraud, and its destruction a consummation devoutly to be wished. Let us consider, however, what reasons there are for accepting the thesis.

One type of argument which might seem to show that the autonomy thesis must be accepted was mentioned briefly at the beginning of this chapter. The argument was this: If a man acts to promote some moral end, such as the alleviation of suffering, we would nevertheless not say that he acted morally if it turned out that he had a reason for trying to promote that end which was not itself a reason in terms of some moral end or ends. It follows that to act morally, a man must not merely pursue moral ends, but must do so for their own sake.

Now to assert without argument that a man does not act morally if he pursues moral ends for some further reason not in terms of moral ends is to beg the question in favour of the autonomy thesis, for this assertion must of course be denied by an opponent of that thesis. Nevertheless, the assertion has some plausibility, and it might reasonably be said that at least the onus is on an opponent of the autonomy thesis to explain this plausibility. I will therefore essay such an explanation. One reason why it might seem self-evident that to act in pursuit of moral ends for reasons not in terms of moral ends is not to act morally is that this description tends to call to mind cases where the further reasons the agent has for pursuing moral ends are morally unacceptable ulterior motives about whose true nature he tries to deceive others. Thus, we think of the philanthropist who is concerned to alleviate the suffering of others only because he wishes to acquire an undeserved reputation for charity, or of the man who

is kind to an old lady because he hopes to be remembered in her will. However, not all cases of the pursuit of moral ends for a reason not itself in terms of moral ends need be of this sort. The further reason a man has for pursuing moral ends need not be morally unacceptable - it may be, for example, that he believes he morally ought to pursue them - and he need not try to deceive others as to its true nature. In such a case, it is certainly not self-evident that the agent does not act morally, and in the present context, the claim that he does not can indeed be dismissed as question-begging.

Another type of argument for the autonomy thesis is one put forward, in essence, by Phillips and Mounce on pages 34 -35 of *Moral Practices*. The argument is this: If a man pursues moral ends, not because he happens to care for them, but for some further reason, it follows that he pursues them only because it suits some further purpose of his to do so. This means that if on some occasion he finds that it does not suit this or any other of his purposes to pursue such ends, he will have no reason to pursue them. The moral man, however, always takes moral considerations as reasons for acting. His reasons are such that they always dictate the pursuit of moral ends, and the only reason of which this could be true is the reason that he cares for those ends for their own sake. If he had any other reason for pursuing moral ends, we could not be sure that it would always dictate that he pursue them.

However, it is again question-begging in this context to simply assert that if a man pursues moral ends for some reason other than that he happens to care for them, it follows that he pursues them to further some purpose he happens to have. I have argued that there are reasons

for being moral which a man has independently of the particular desires and interests he happens to have, and in fact philosophers who try to produce reasons for being moral are usually concerned to produce reasons of this sort, and not reasons which are reasons only for men with particular desires and interests. It cannot, therefore, be simply asserted against the view that there are reasons for being moral and in support of the autonomy thesis that if a man pursues moral ends for some reason other than that he happens to care for them, he will only do so as long as he will thereby promote some end or ends he happens to have.

Yet another argument which might be produced against any attempt to provide reasons for being moral, and so in favour of the autonomy thesis, is that such an attempt would reduce morality to something else - self-interest, perhaps. But to assume that any such attempt will reduce morality to something else is once again merely to beg the question in favour of the autonomy thesis. Of course, it would be a valid criticism of such an attempt to point out that it reduces morality to self-interest, if it does that, for it is notorious that the demands of self-interest often conflict with those of morality; and Phillips and Mounce are right to take Mrs. Foot to task for trying to defend justice as a virtue in terms of its profitability. But we can only assume that any attempt to give reasons for being moral will be an attempt to reduce morality to self-interest if we suppose that all reasons are reasons of self-interest; and this, if it is not nonsense, needs to be argued for. I conclude that we need not accept the autonomy thesis, and nor, therefore, need we accept its consequence, that there can be no reasons for being moral.

It may be thought that although it cannot be said that *any* attempt to give reasons for being moral would reduce morality to self-interest, this *can* be said of the attempt made in this thesis. For I have claimed that the ultimate reason for being moral is that one will thereby promote a state of affairs in which one is better able to attain one's ends; and is this not a reason of self-interest? The answer is that it is not - at least, not unless we hold that to act to attain one's ends is necessarily to act for self-interested reasons. But in any ordinary sense of 'self-interest', to act out of self-interest is not merely to act so as to promote one's ends, but to act so as to promote *self-interested* ends. Now the ultimate reason for being moral is, on my account, not that by doing so one will promote a state of affairs in which one can better attain *particular* ends that one might have, and so *a fortiori* not that by doing so one will promote a state of affairs in which one can better attain self-interested ends; the ultimate reason is, rather, that one will thereby promote a state of affairs in which one can better attain one's ends, no matter what they happen to be. To act on such a reason is not to be self-interested, but merely to be rational. If my thesis subsumes morality under anything else, then, it subsumes it under rationality; and this I am happy to accept.

I want finally to consider a somewhat different argument against any philosophical claim to have uncovered the reasons there are for being moral. What, it might be asked, is meant by the assertions that these are *the* reasons there are for being moral? Presumably not that all moral men have the proffered reasons in mind whenever they act morally - for it is absurd to suggest that all moral men accept a



philosophical theory, and, moreover, the same one, about why one should be moral. But then, what role *are* the alleged reasons for being moral supposed to play? If it is said that there just happen to be such reasons, though most moral men are unaware of them, it may be asked, 'Even granted their existence, of what relevance are they to moral philosophy? Perhaps pointing out their existence will make some who would not otherwise have done so behave morally - but the moral philosopher's task is not to get people to behave morally; it is to get clear about what it is to behave morally'.

The reply to this, it seems to me, is that most of us believe we should be moral, i.e., that we have reason to be moral, not because we have accepted a philosophical theory, but because we have been brought up to believe this. To believe that one has reasons for doing things of a certain sort, however, is not necessarily to have any beliefs about what those reasons are, and so it does not follow from the fact that moral men believe they should be moral that they are moved by the reasons there are for being moral. However, as they grow up, many people cease to accept the fact that they have been brought up to believe something as a guarantee of its truth. Hence, people will sometimes find themselves asking what these reasons are which one is supposed to have for being moral - and if no answer is forthcoming, they may decide, justifiably as I have suggested, that morality is a fraud. It is as an attempt to answer this question, and to show that morality is not a fraud, that accounts of the reasons there are for being moral are intended.

This reply implies that the belief that we ought to be moral is crucial in determining the behaviour of a moral man. But it may with some plausibility be said that it is not, and that most moral men

would behave as they do even if they had no such belief, because they happen to care for moral ends. Thus, Mrs. Foot suggests that a moral man cares for such ends, 'but not "because he ought"';<sup>12</sup> and Nowell-Smith asserts that the sense of duty (which may be thought of as the inclination to do as one believes one ought) 'plays little part in the lives of the best men and none at all in the lives of saints', since such people 'do what they do for its own sake, and not for the sake of duty'.<sup>13</sup> This may be asserted, not on the grounds which we have already criticised, namely that moral men *must* pursue moral ends for their own sake (since otherwise they would not be moral men), but on the grounds that as a matter of fact moral men care for moral ends for their own sake, and so do not need the belief that they ought to be moral to move them to pursue those ends. Now whether the belief that we ought to be moral is or is not crucial in determining those who act morally to do so is, it might seem, an empirical question, and one that would be extremely difficult to decide. For most moral men *both* care for moral ends for their own sake (Mrs. Foot's 'stringent moral teaching' ensures this) *and* believe that they ought to care for them. However, I believe that the issue is *not* an empirical one, and *can* be decided here. The belief that one ought to be moral is not merely *in fact* held by moral men - for only on the assumption that he believes that one ought to be moral is the behaviour of a moral man intelligible.

To see this, let us imagine a man who does not believe that he ought to be moral, but merely cares for moral ends for their own sake

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<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., p. 315.

<sup>13</sup> *Ethics*, p. 259.

(we will, of course, have to assume that he cares a great deal for them, since otherwise he would not be prepared to make genuine sacrifices for them, as morality sometimes requires). His behaviour, we will see, would differ in a number of important respects from that which we would expect of a moral man.

In the first place, such a man would never make moral judgements. If he happens across someone torturing children for amusement, he will not say, even to himself, that the person in question ought not to behave in this fashion; for he does not believe that one ought not to behave in this fashion. Neither will he in any sense condemn the child-torturer - one does not condemn those who simply happen not to care for the things one happens to care for oneself. Perhaps this can be accepted, however. After all, it seems reasonable to say, what makes us judge a man morally good is not the judgements he makes about others, but how he himself acts. Worse, however, is to come.

It can happen that a man finds himself ceasing to care for the things for which he once cared. Now if our man finds one day that he is losing his distaste for, say, harming others, he will not be alarmed by this. If he asks himself, 'Am I becoming callous?', it will be out of curiosity, and not out of fear that perhaps he is; for since he does not believe he *ought* to care for the interests of others, his ceasing to do so will be to him much like ceasing to care for golf. In fact, given that a concern for the interests of others is often rather inconvenient, he might well feel relief at the waning of such a concern, even taking steps to hasten its disappearance. But a moral man *does* view with alarm the prospect of his ceasing to care for moral ends - and this is surely because he does believe that one ought to care for

them.

Again, a moral man will try to instil a concern for moral ends into his children, since he believes that they ought to have such a concern. But there is no reason why the man who merely happens to care for moral ends should do this. In fact, as we suggested a moment ago, a concern for moral ends complicates life considerably, and he should, if anything, try to ensure that his children are *not* handicapped by infection with his inconvenient concerns.

Finally, to such a man, the conflict between morality and inclination or desire (between, say, visiting his child in hospital and playing golf) could only present itself as a conflict between incompatible inclinations, like the conflict between the inclination to play golf and the inclination to watch television in comfort. But this is not how such a conflict presents itself to a moral man, who believes that while the inclination to play golf is one he happens to have, the inclination to relieve the loneliness of his child in hospital is one he *ought* to have.

Now it might be said that in much of this, I have been treating the desire to promote moral ends as being on a par with desires like the desire to play golf, as though to say a man cares for moral ends is the same as saying that he likes them. Whereas, it might be said, the concern we have for moral ends is of an altogether different sort from that which we have for golf or, say, for beer-drinking. This, I think, is perfectly true - but what I have been suggesting is that at least a major part of the difference between our attitude towards moral ends and a beer drinker's attitude towards beer is that we believe that we *ought* to be concerned about moral ends; and that with-

out this belief, out attitude *would* be like the beer-drinker's attitude towards beer.

## APPENDIX A

### PROFESSOR GRICE ON OBLIGATIONS AND REASONS

In chapters X and XI, I tried to show that any man has reason to act morally, and that this is quite consistent with the view that one has reason to act only if one will thereby promote one's interests or the ends one desires. I mentioned at the end of chapter IX that this is a task which is also attempted by G.R. Grice in *The Grounds of Moral Judgement*, for while holding that one has reason to do something only if doing that thing is in some way in accordance with one's interests or conduces to one's aims<sup>1</sup>, he tries to show that if a man ought morally to do something, then he has a reason for doing that thing. I undertook to criticise his attempt at this task later in the thesis, since if it were successful, my own similar attempt would be superfluous. It is to this that I shall now turn.

In chapter 3, section 13, Grice argues that if a man has a basic obligation to do something, then he has a reason for doing that thing, and, moreover, a reason which is better than any reason in terms of his independent interest for either doing it or not doing it. I will argue that he fails to establish this conclusion. First, however,

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Grounds of Moral Judgement*, p. 18.

it is necessary to explain some of the terms in which it is couched. Grice uses the expression 'is under an obligation to' as equivalent to 'ought to', and I will take it that this is legitimate. The notion of basic obligation he uses to contrast with that of 'ultra' obligation, the other of the two categories into which he divides moral obligations. Ultra obligations are obligations a man may have to do more for others than he has a basic obligation to do. They also differ from basic obligations in that if one has an ultra obligation to someone else to do x, it does not follow that that other person has the right to one's doing x, and in that whether or not one has any ultra obligations, and if so, what they are, depends on one's character. As an example of the fulfilment of an ultra obligation, Grice cites the action of Sir Philip Sidney in giving a mug of water brought to him as he lay fatally wounded and parched with thirst to another who lay beside him in a similar condition. It will be seen that the class of ultra obligatory actions coincides, at least roughly, with the class of what are often called supererogatory actions. Since in the argument to be discussed Grice is speaking only of basic obligation, we may in what follows speak simply of 'obligation' rather than 'basic obligation', bearing in mind that he has different things to say of ultra obligation.

Finally, and, as we shall see, most importantly, Grice's distinction between independent and non-independent interest needs to be understood. The distinction is explained in Section 9, Chapter 1. Grice points out there that when none of the alternative actions between which a man chooses has any foreseeable effect on others, he consults his own interest in a straightforward sense, without considering the interests of others. This, he says, is certainly an assessment of his

interests independently of the interests of others. However, he proposes to use the expression so that it also covers a different kind of case. If one judges that A ought to help B on the ground that others are watching, that they will praise A if he offers help, and that A enjoys praise, this might be said to involve an assessment of A's interest which is *not* independent of the interests of others, since it is in B's interest to receive help. Nevertheless, as the expression is used by Grice, this too counts as an independent assessment, for B is being considered 'as a means and not as an end'; and 'If A's interest is assessed in such a way that the interests of other people are considered *only* as a means to bringing about states of affairs which are in A's interest, then A's interest will be said to be assessed independently of the interests of others'.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes, however, it is in a man's interest to act in a particular way because it is in the interest of others that he should act in this way. This is so, Grice says, in the case of the altruistic man. He points out that there is a good sense in which it is in the interest of the altruist to act in the interests of others - and, he says, 'When we speak in this way of its being in his interest to act in the interests of other people, I wish to say that this is an assessment of his interest which is not independent of the interests of other people'.<sup>3</sup> He concludes:

To establish that it is in a man's independent interest to act in certain ways, no premiss asserting such actions to be in anyone else's interest is needed. But it cannot be

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 30.



established that it is in a man's non-independent interest to act in certain ways without employing a premiss that it is in the interest of other people that he should do so. The presence of this premiss in its ground distinguishes a proposition asserting a kind of action to be in a man's non-independent interest from a proposition asserting actions of the kind to be in his independent interest.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is clear that this needs qualifying. Not *any* premise to the effect that it is in the interests of others that a man should do x appearing in the ground of the proposition that doing x is in his interest shows that proposition to be about his non-independent interest. As we saw, Grice wants to exclude from the class of non-independent assessments of a person's interest those in which the interests of others are considered only as a means to some state of affairs which is in the interests of the person concerned. What we must say, therefore, is that an action is in a man's non-independent interest only if in establishing that it is in his interest we need to employ premises about the interests of others *and* if the interests of others do not enter into consideration merely as a means to something else which is in his interest.

With this understanding of the distinction between independent and non-independent interests, let us turn to Grice's argument to show that if a man has an obligation to do x, he has a reason for doing x which is better than any in terms of his independent interests for doing either x or not-x. He begins by arguing that there is a relation of mutual implication between the proposition, which he calls 'the contract ground', that it is in everyone's interest in some society to make a contract with everyone else to do actions of a certain class X,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

and the proposition that X is obligatory in that society. His next step is to argue that if the contract ground is true of a class of actions in some society, it follows that an individual in that society has a reason for doing actions of that class which is better than any he might have in terms of his independent interest for doing or not doing them. If this is so, then given the mutual implication between the obligatoriness of a class of actions and the contract ground's being true of the same class, it will follow that, indeed, a man has a reason for doing what he ought (what is morally obligatory on him) which is a better reason than any he might have in terms of his independent interest for doing or not doing what he ought.

I wish to focus on the second step in Grice's argument, where he attempts to establish that if the contract ground is true of some class of actions in a given society, it follows that a member of that society has a reason for doing actions of that class which is a better reason than any in terms of his independent interest which he might have for either doing or not doing them.

Grice's first move is to argue that the interests referred to in the contract ground must be understood to be non-independent. He points out that in saying that it is in everyone's interest to make a contract to do X, we are saying, *inter alia*, that it is in A's interest to make a contract with everyone else, and then argues: If A's independent interest were in question, it may be that it is in his interest to make, not this contract, but some other which benefits him more. But it may nevertheless be true that it is in his interest to make precisely this contract with everyone else, because this is the

best he can get in bargaining his interests against those of others - and in saying this we cannot be speaking of his independent interest. In seeking to establish that it is in his interest to make precisely this contract with everyone else, we would need premises to the effect that it is in the interests of others to make this contract with him - 'And when premisses referring to the interests of others are needed to establish that it is in a man's interest to do such and such, it is established that it is in his interest, assessed non-independently, to do such and such'.<sup>5</sup>

Having thus argued that the contract ground must be taken to refer to non-independent interests, Grice next asks us to suppose that there are classes of actions such that if we consider any individual member of a society, we may say

(a) that it may be against his interest, independently assessed, that he alone should do actions of these classes; but that

(b) his and everyone else's greater interest is served by the presence rather than the absence of the requirement upon everyone to do actions of these classes, even though (a) is true, and even though, in speaking of his and everyone else's greater interest, interests are being assessed, not independently, but along with the interests of others.

If there are classes of actions of which (a) and (b) are true, Grice argues, we must admit that the requirement to do actions of those classes is a rational requirement - 'It is a requirement which is more conducive to everyone's interest than its absence, and we could not

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

have a better ground than that for claiming practical rationality for it';<sup>6</sup> and if there are classes of actions such that it is rational that every member of a society should be required to do such actions, he says, then we cannot deny that each member has a reason for *doing* such actions: 'For we are saying that a state of affairs in which everyone can be called upon to do actions of certain kinds is a rational state of affairs; and we cannot then deny that it is rational that action of those kinds be done; we cannot then deny that there is a reason for everyone's doing them'.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Grice says, despite (a) there is by virtue of (b) a reason for everyone's doing actions of the classes in question. But if (a) is true, then for any individual, there may be a reason in terms of his independent interest for *not* doing such actions; and if despite (a) there is a reason *for* his doing them, then it must be a reason which is better than a reason in terms of his independent interest - 'For we are saying that despite there being a reason in terms of his independent interest for not doing such actions it is nonetheless rational for him to do them; and this is to say that there is a better reason for doing them than the reason in terms of his independent interest for not doing them'.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, this superior reason cannot be a reason in terms of his independent interest: '... once we have said that it is against his independent interest to do actions of that class, we have ruled out the possibility of there being a reason in terms of his independent interest for doing them'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>7</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

If Grice's argument so far is sound, it has been established that if there are classes of actions of which (a) and (b) are true, there is a reason for everyone's doing actions of those classes which is better than any reason in terms of his independent interest for doing or not doing them. The final step is to argue that if the contract ground is true of a class of actions, then (a) and (b) are also true of that class:

First, it may plainly not be in anyone's interest, independently assessed, to do actions of these classes. Therefore (a) is true. Second, it could not be in everyone's interest to make a contract to do actions of a certain class unless the requirement placed upon them by the contract was more conducive to everyone's interest than its absence. And as the interests referred to in the contract ground are, as we have seen, not independently assessed interests, (b) is also true.<sup>10</sup>

Grice has argued, then, that if (a) and (b) are true of a class of actions, then everyone has a reason for doing actions of that class which is better than any reason in terms of his independent interest for doing or not doing them; and that if the contract ground is true of a class of actions, (a) and (b) are also true of that class. It follows that if the contract ground is true of a class of actions, then everyone has a reason for doing actions of that class which is better than any reason in terms of his independent interest for doing or not doing them; which is what Grice set out to prove in this section of his argument.

I will now try to show that the argument just outlined fails. Let us begin by examining Grice's grounds for asserting that the in-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

terests mentioned in the contract ground are non-independent interests. These, it will be remembered, were that the contract ground asserts, *inter alia*, that it is in any given individual's interest to make a particular contract with everyone else; and that to establish this, we would clearly need to show that this contract is one he could actually get in bargaining his interests against the interests of others, and that it is the best one he can get in those circumstances - otherwise, we might conclude that some other contract which favoured him more was in his interest when in fact he couldn't get others to be party to it, or that some other contract which favoured him less was in his interest, when in fact he could get others to be party to one which favoured him more. Since, in establishing that this particular contract was the best he could get in bargaining his interest against the interests of others, we would have to employ premises about the interests of others, it is established, Grice claimed, that the interests spoken of in the contract ground are non-independent.

Let us recall, however, that Grice needs to qualify the assertion that if a premise about the interests of others is needed to establish the proposition that it is in a man's interest to do a certain thing, that proposition is about his non-independent interests. Qualification is needed because as it stands, this assertion would allow as a non-independent assessment of interest the proposition that it is in A's interest to do x because x will help B, which will bring it about that A is praised, which is in his interest. This type of case has to be excluded because in a non-independent assessment of a man's interests, the interests of others must be considered, not simply as means, but as ends; and in the case in question, B's interests are clearly being considered only as means to something else, praise, which

is in A's interest. It must now be pointed out that further qualification is needed, for very similar reasons.

Suppose that gangster A is considering whether he should try to muscle in on the protection racket, now monopolised by gangster B, in his town. He reasons, 'Though it would be to my advantage if I could diversify my interests in this manner, it would not be in the interests of gangster B. Moreover, I know that gangster B is just as powerful as I, and that he would react forcefully to any such threat to his interests, thus precipitating a costly gang war whose outcome could not easily be predicted. All things considered, therefore, it seems that my interests would be best served by allowing gangster B to maintain his present monopoly'. Gangster A here employs considerations about the interests of B in deciding what is in his interests, but it is clear that this assessment of interests is not non-independent; for the interests of gangster B are considered, if not as means, at least certainly not as ends. Gangster A's sole concern is for his own interests, and though he considers the interests of gangster B, this is merely because he has no choice. This case makes it clear that the criterion of non-independent interest we are discussing needs further qualification. We must say that for an action to be in a man's non-independent interest, the ground of the proposition that it is in his interest must include a premise about the interests of others, and that the interests of others must not come into consideration merely as a means of promoting something else which is in his interest; *and* that neither must the interests of others be considered only as obstacles to alternative courses of action even more advantageous to him.

It now becomes clear, however, that Grice's grounds for claiming

that the interests spoken of in the contract ground are non-independent are inadequate. Although it is no doubt true that in deciding that it is in his interest to make a particular contract with everyone else, an individual must take into consideration the interests of others, the fact that others have these interests is relevant to his decision only because it constitutes an obstacle to his making other contracts, which would benefit him even more, with them. It should be pointed out that in any case, if it were true that the interests mentioned in the contract ground were non-independent, this would have consequences which Grice would not wish to accept. We have seen that an action is in a man's non-independent interest if it promotes the interests of others, and if it is in his interest to promote the interests of others, not merely as a means to something else, but for its own sake (i.e. as an end). Now from this it follows not only that, as Grice suggests, altruists provide *an* example of people who have non-independent interests; it also follows that altruists are the *only* example of people who have such interests. For it is in the interests only of altruists to promote the interests of others for its own sake. This means that if the contract ground is taken as asserting that it is in everyone's *non-independent* interest to make a certain contract with everyone else, it could only be true of a class of actions in a society consisting solely of altruists - and this would make it certain that it is not in fact true of any class of actions in any actual society. Given the mutual implication between the contract ground asserted of a class of actions and the obligatoriness of that class, this would mean that no class of actions is obligatory in any actual society.

Grice does not succeed in showing, then, that the interests



referred to in the contract ground are non-independent; and if they were, the contract ground would not be true of any class of actions in any actual society. Could he perhaps have got by without insisting that the contract ground speaks of non-independent interests? Let us consider how his argument is affected if it is allowed that the interests in question are after all independent. In the first place, he can no longer claim that both (a) and (b) are true of classes of actions specified in the contract ground, because (b) is not true of such classes - that is, it is not true of such classes that it is in everyone's greater interest that there be a requirement on everyone to do such actions, even though (a) is true *and even though in speaking of everyone's greater interest, interests are being assessed, not independently, but along with the interests of others*. He can no longer claim this because it is false that the contract ground refers to interests non-independently assessed.

We might try to overcome this difficulty by omitting from (b) the clause specifying that the interests to which it refers are non-independent. Let us call this modified version of (b) '(b<sub>1</sub>)'. It will now be true that from the contract ground asserted of a class of actions, it follows that (a) and (b<sub>1</sub>) are both also true of that class. Moreover, Grice would appear to be able to argue of (b<sub>1</sub>) as he does of (b), that if it is true of a class of actions, the requirement on everyone to do actions of that class is rational, and that if it is rational, then everyone has a reason to *do* actions of that class. But the reason in question will now be one in terms of independent interest; and if (a) is true of any class of actions, there *cannot* be a reason in terms of independent interests for everyone to do actions of that class - as Grice says himself, once we have said that it is against an individual's independent interests

to do actions of a certain class, '...we have ruled out the possibility of there being a reason in terms of his independent interest for doing them'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, if (a) is true of a class of actions, (b<sub>1</sub>) cannot be; and since, as we saw, the contract ground, interpreted as referring to independent interests, implies that both are true of any class of actions of which *it* is true, it follows that the contract ground, so interpreted, is necessarily *not* true of any class of actions.

We saw earlier that Grice fails to show that the contract ground refers to non-independent interests, and that if he had succeeded, it would follow that the contract ground is as a matter of fact false of any class of actions in any actual society. It now appears that if the contract ground is taken as referring to *independent* interests, it is *necessarily* false of *any* class of actions; for taken this way, it implies that both (a) and (b<sub>1</sub>) are true of any class of actions of which it is asserted, and we have just concluded that (a) and (b<sub>1</sub>) cannot both be true of the same class of actions.

However, is it really true that (a) and (b<sub>1</sub>) cannot both be true of the same class of actions? Consider a society which contains one or more members who are like the man introduced earlier by Grice as the Master Criminal<sup>12</sup> - they enjoy, let us say, killing, and are so clever that they can kill without being detected. It is not in the interest of such people to refrain from killing, so (a) is true of refraining from killing in this society. But (b<sub>1</sub>) could also be true of refraining from killing in the same society, since a general re-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

quirement on everyone to do so could be in the interest even of the master criminals - it might ensure that others less clever than they refrain from killing them, while they ignore it with impunity.

It seems, then, that (a) and (b<sub>1</sub>) can indeed both be true of the same class of actions in some societies. How, in that case, were we able a moment ago to derive the contrary conclusion? Our reason for saying that (a) and (b<sub>1</sub>) asserted of the same class of actions could not both be true was that the latter implies that every individual has a reason in terms of his independent interest for doing actions of that class, whereas the former implies that for some individuals, it may be false that they have such a reason. We took (b<sub>1</sub>) to have the implication mentioned on the basis of Grice's claim, used in trying to establish a similar implication in the case of (b), that if it is in everyone's interest that there be a requirement on everyone to do actions of a certain class, then everyone has a reason to do actions of that class. However, this claim is false. In the society just imagined, it was in everyone's interest that everyone be required to refrain from killing; but it was false that everyone had a reason to refrain from killing, for it was false that those who enjoyed killing and could do so with impunity had such a reason. We see then that if (b<sub>1</sub>) is true of a class of actions X, it does not follow that everyone has a reason for doing X; which means that (a) may also be true of X, even though this would imply that any given individual may have reason not to do X.

This, however, is clearly of no help to Grice. If (a) and (b<sub>1</sub>) can both be true of a class of actions, then indeed, the contract ground, taken as referring to independent interests, may after all be true of

some classes of actions, even though this would imply that (a) and (b<sub>1</sub>) are both true of those classes. But since it does not follow from the fact that (b<sub>1</sub>) is true of a class of actions that everyone has reason to do actions of that class, it could no longer be claimed that since the contract ground asserted of a class of actions implies that (b<sub>1</sub>) is true of that class, everyone has a reason to do actions of which the contract ground is true.

There is no way, then, of rescuing Grice's argument for the claim that if the contract ground is true of a class of actions, everyone has a reason for doing actions of that class which is better than any in terms of his independent interests for either doing or not doing such actions. Since this claim was a crucial premise in his attempt to show that a man has such a reason for doing as he morally ought, I conclude that he fails in that attempt.

## APPENDIX B

### RICHARDS AND GERT ON THE RATIONALITY OF MORALS

As was indicated at the end of chapter XI, I will in this appendix consider some views expressed by D.A.J. Richards and Bernard Gert on a claim for which I have been concerned to argue, the claim that morality is required of any man by rationality.<sup>1</sup> I will consider these two authors in turn.

Richards holds that though everyone has reason to be moral, morality is not therefore rational for everyone, and that for some, it would in fact be irrational to be moral. This position is a direct consequence of the account he gives of the nature of reasons for action. According to this account, reasons for acting are defined by 'principles of action', so that for one to have reason to do something is for one to be required to do that thing by a principle of action. Principles of action are divided into two classes, those of rationality and those of morality (the principles of morality are asserted to be equivalent to those 'ultimate standards of conduct', which would be chosen by perfectly rational egoists from what is essentially

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<sup>1</sup> As I have already argued, this does not entail that an immoral or an amoral man is necessarily irrational - see ch. IX, pp. 124-126.

Rawls' 'original position' - that is, from 'a position of equal liberty, and in the absence of any knowledge of their own *particular* desires, nature, and circumstances, but with knowledge of all other circumstances of human life and desire'<sup>2</sup>). I will refer to this view of the nature of reasons for action as 'the two-domains view', since it postulates two radically different and quite independent types of reasons for action.

Given the two-domains view, we certainly all have reason to be moral, for this is just to say that the principles of morality require us to be moral. It does not follow, however, that it would be *rational* of us to be moral, for the principles of morality are not the principles of rationality. Moreover, given this view, it would be hard not to agree with Richards' suggestion that it 'can only be through misunderstanding and confusion' that many philosophers have viewed with distaste the conclusion that for some of us, it may be irrational to be moral.<sup>3</sup> As Richards points out, those who attempt to show that rationality requires us to be moral have usually assumed that if this can not be shown, it will follow that we have no reason to be moral - they have assumed, that is, that all reasons are reasons of rationality. But on the two-domains view, it is guaranteed that there are reasons for being moral by the tautology that the principles of morality require us to be moral, and the attempt to show that rationality requires us to be moral becomes a very curious one. For if the principles of morality are principles of action on all fours with those of rationality, in the sense that the

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<sup>2</sup> Richards, *A Theory of Reasons for Action*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

applicability of a principle of either sort is by itself enough to establish a reason for action, this attempt would be rather like the attempt to show that one set of the rules of chess was somehow entailed by another - it would be altogether mysterious why it should be thought that any such attempt might be successful, and if it were successful, it would not follow that the rules which turned out to be entailed by others had somehow been validated, since they antecedently had as much validity as the rules by which they were discovered to be entailed.

Given the two-domains view, then, if it were to turn out that rationality requires morality of us, this could only be a remarkable coincidence, in no way necessary to establish that we have reason to be moral. Unfortunately, Richards nowhere argues for the two-domains view.<sup>4</sup> He merely asserts that reasons for action are defined by principles of action, and that the latter include, not only the principles of rationality, but those of morality as well. He does mention some confusions which he thinks account for its being widely held that all reasons are ultimately based on principles of rationality<sup>5</sup>, but needless to say, even if his suggestions were correct, it would not follow that there are reasons *not* based ultimately on the principles of rationality, and still less would it follow that there are reasons which are ultimately based on the principles of morality. In the absence of any argument

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to do more than merely assert that this is so, but the difficulties involved in trying to establish a negative existential proposition are well known. I can only say that a careful reading of Richards' book failed to uncover any argument for the two-domains view.

<sup>5</sup> Richards, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-283.

presented by Richards for the two-domains view which we could consider by way of assessment of it, I will argue against the view by pointing out some of its consequences which seem clearly unacceptable.

We have seen that Richards holds that reason requires morality of all of us, though for some of us, morality will be irrational. This means that there are requirements of reason on some people which it would be positively irrational for them to obey. This, surely, is paradoxical.

Again, it is commonly thought that if there are reasons for a person to do something, and if he is aware of them, this is enough to explain his doing that thing - but this is not so on Richards' account. For in his view, if the reasons in question are moral reasons, they will explain the person's actions only if it is known that he desires to be moral - as he says, truly to explain a person's actions by reference to moral reasons 'implies that the person did have certain desires and capacities to regulate his life by the principles of morality'<sup>6</sup>. This is not an accidental feature of Richards' position, for it is not at all obvious why anyone should be moved to do something by the mere fact that he is required to do it by principles which would be chosen by rational egoists in Rawls' 'original position', unless he happened to wish to guide his life by such principles (the same cannot be said of his principles of rationality, which amount to a set of guides to be used in choosing plans for best securing one's desired ends<sup>7</sup>). But this means that not only will those of us for whom, if Richards is right, morality is irrational, in fact not be moved by moral consider-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.



ations - it would be quite inexplicable if we were to be moved by them. Moreover, when a person's action *is* explainable by reference to moral reasons, this will be because he desires to behave morally, so that the action is required of him by rationality.<sup>8</sup> That is, this will merely be a special case of the requirements of morality happening to coincide with those of rationality. Thus, though Richards' account does allow a sense in which one's actions can sometimes be explained by reference to moral reasons, this will be possible only when one also has rational reasons for one's actions. It follows that we can only accept Richards' account at the price of having to allow a class of reasons for acting which lack what is surely one of the central features of the notion of a reason for acting, namely the capacity to explain actions.

The other difficulty which I wish to point out in Richards' view concerns the question of whether the requirements of morality take precedence over those of rationality, or *vice versa*. This question arises for Richards because, as we have seen, he holds that moral reasons do not depend on the principle of rationality, but derive from a quite independent set of principles. Richards' answer is that morality should take precedence, for he holds that the principles of morality are in a relationship of 'priority' to those of rationality, in the sense that the latter are only to be applied after the former have been satisfied or shown to be irrelevant. He suggests that it is in part failure

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<sup>8</sup> The relevant principle of rationality would appear to be Richards' 'principle of effective means', which is that 'given a desired end, one is to choose that action which most effectively, and at least cost, attains that end, *ceteris paribus*' (p. 28).

to take account of this priority relation that accounts for the reluctance shown by many philosophers to accept that morality may sometimes be irrational.<sup>9</sup> Now it is nowhere made clear on what grounds Richards asserts that the priority relation in question holds. Presumably, this is supposed to follow from the claim that the concept of a moral principle is equivalent to that of 'those *ultimate* standards of conduct',<sup>10</sup> which would be agreed to in the original position. But the fact that certain principles would be agreed to as ultimate standards of conduct in a hypothetical situation bearing little resemblance to any actual situation which has ever existed has no tendency to show that those principles *are* ultimate standards in any sense.

However, the real difficulty is not that Richards fails to support the claim that moral principles are to take precedence over those of rationality, but that on his view, it is difficult to give sense to this claim. For we need to enquire into the status of the requirement that the former take precedence. It cannot, it would seem, be either a moral requirement or a rational requirement. While it is trivially true that morality requires us to give precedence to moral considerations when they conflict with others, such a requirement, as a moral requirement, cannot be appealed to to adjudicate between moral requirements and others. On the other hand, it seems self-contradictory to suggest that it is a requirement of *rationality* that rationality on occasion should give way to anything else, unless this

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 80 (my emphasis).

was a paradoxical way of saying that what appeared to conflict with rationality did not really do so. That Richards has no solution to this problem emerges in a remark he makes in attempting to explain the sense in which moral principles are supposed to be prior to those of rationality. He says on page 282 that 'What it means for there to be such a priority relation, and what it means for the prior moral principles to be principles is simply that there is no appeal, by way of justification, beyond these principles, when they apply'. Richards tells us here that what it is for moral principles to be prior to those of rationality is that there is no appeal beyond them when they apply. But he also tells us that this is what it is for moral principles to *be* principles; and since the principles of rationality are also principles, it follows that there is no appeal beyond *them* when *they* apply. This means that moral principles are prior to those of rationality, but that the reverse is also true. This is not a mere slip on Richards' part - as long as we hold that there are two sets of principles, each constituting a source of reasons for acting which is quite independent of the other, we must concede that both are ultimate in the sense that from the standpoint of either, there is no appeal beyond the requirements of its principles. Needless to say, it would be no solution to suggest that the requirement that morality take precedence over rationality is neither a moral *nor* a rational requirement, but one of some third kind. For we would then have to ask whether or not requirements of this third kind are to take precedence over those of rationality and morality, and would encounter exactly the same kind of difficulties in trying to give sense to this question as those which we have seen to arise with regard to the question of whether or not morality is to

take precedence over rationality. The difficulty which Richards is in disappears, of course, if all reasons are taken, as they usually are taken, to be *rational* requirements. For then, the question of whether or not we should give morality precedence over (other) requirements of rationality can be answered unambiguously, and, I have argued in this dissertation, affirmatively.

An attempt might be made to play down the seriousness of the difficulty just raised for the two-domains view, by pointing out that it does allow that reason gives unambiguous guidance at least in cases where there is no clash between the requirements of rationality and those of morality. It must be pointed out, however, that if Richards is right, then except on those occasions when rationality and morality happen to require the same action of one, morality *always* clashes with rationality. For if an action is required of one by morality, but not by rationality, then there is no rational ground for performing that action. But any action involves some cost to the agent in terms of time and effort, opportunities foregone, and so on; and since incurring any cost when there is no rational ground for doing so is irrational, there can be no occasions on which an action which is required by morality is, so to speak, rationally neutral. Of course, the cost to an agent of a morally required action will sometimes be slight (though often it will not be - morality not infrequently requires considerable sacrifices); but it would be a mistake to suppose that at least in such cases, since the irrationality of doing what is morally required will be slight, it would be outweighed by the immorality of not doing it. For on Richards' view, though in such a case there may be overwhelming reason, morally speaking, to do what morality requires, there is, rationally speaking,

no reason whatever for doing so. This means that to assert, even here, that reason would dictate doing what is morally required is to assume the priority of moral requirements to those of rationality; and as we have seen, the intelligibility of this assumption, let alone its truth, is, given Richards' view, dubious. Thus, on Richards' view, except when the demands of morality and those of rationality coincide, morality will always conflict with rationality (though the reverse does not seem to be true, since it is not necessarily immoral to expend time and effort in morally neutral pursuits); and reason itself can provide no solution to any such conflict.

If Richards' account of the nature of reasons for acting is accepted, then, it follows, (1) that reason can require us to do what it would be irrational for us to do; (2) that the fact that one has reason for doing something, and is aware of this, may be quite incapable of explaining one's doing that thing; and (3) that there is an embarrassingly large number of situations of human choice where the dictates of reason are radically ambiguous. This, surely, constitutes an adequate ground for rejection of that account and its implication that the attempt to show morality to be required by rationality must stem from confusion and misunderstanding.

Gert also denies that it can be shown that morality is required by rationality. However, while Richards provides some ground for doubting that this can be shown (namely what we called the 'two-domains' view of reasons for acting), Gert provides no such ground. Rather, he gives the impression that he would like to have been able to show that morality is required by reason, but recognises that his own 'justification of the moral rules' achieves less than this, and simply does not see how it could

be shown. Thus at one stage, after concluding that reason does not require impartiality, he includes himself among the moral philosophers whose hopes are disappointed by this conclusion.<sup>11</sup> At any rate, there is certainly nothing in Gert's general account of the requirements of reason which, if accepted, would cast doubt on my argument to show that reason requires morality of all men. For Gert's view is that the only things required of all men by reason are the avoidance of evil for oneself, and the non-avoidance of good;<sup>12</sup> and it is at least consistent with this claim that all men have reason to try to avoid a Hobbesian state of war. For failure to avoid such a state certainly involves failure to avoid a number of notable evils, and to gain a number of notable goods.

There is another aspect of Gert's remarks on the rationality of morality, however, which is of some interest to us. As we noted in the last paragraph, he recognises that his conclusion that reason does not require morality is something of a blow to the hopes of many moral philosophers. However, he is inclined to imply that this blow will be more easily borne if one takes note of a distinction he draws between what is *required* by reason and what is *allowed* by reason. Given this distinction, we need not conclude from the fact that reason does not require morality that it does not *allow* morality, and, Gert claims, it does in fact allow morality. Thus, he says on page 43 that while reason 'does not provide the support to morality that it is sometimes claimed to', yet 'despite appearances it is not the enemy of morality that it has also sometimes been claimed to be'. However, Gert's

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<sup>11</sup> Gert, op. cit., p. xix.

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., ch. 3.

distinction cannot really do much to console those disappointed in their hope that morality had the support of reason. By saying that some type of activity is allowed by reason, Gert means that it is neither the case that all rational men would engage in it, nor that all rational men would avoid it. Now there are, clearly, many activities of this sort - for example, not all rational men play golf, nor do all rational men not play golf. But an activity allowed by reason in this sense may nevertheless be such that for any given individual it is either required or prohibited by reason. For it does not follow from the fact that reason neither requires *all* rational men to engage in a certain sort of activity nor forbids *all* rational men to do so that it does not require of *each* individual either that he do so or that he not do so. Thus the fact that morality is allowed by reason in Gert's sense leaves open the possibility that for some, perhaps even most people, morality is irrational; and I conclude that the fact that morality is allowed by reason in this sense is cold comfort to anyone who would have liked to have been shown that it is required by reason.

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