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MORAL OBJECTIVITY AND RELIGION

A Thesis submitted for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the

Department of Moral Philosophy

at the

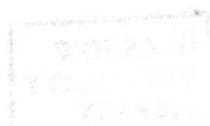
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

by

CHUKWUMA D. AHUMIBE

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to establish objectivity in morality by grounding it in theism. The general plan will be: to make a prima facie case for objectivism by showing how our moral language and attitudes point towards objectivism; to consider what is historically the major critique of this as given by subjectivist theories; and then to develop the theory of objectivism by showing (1) how we think it should not be understood, and (2) that it should be understood as grounded in theism.

The thesis will be presented in two unbalanced parts - PART ONE (Chapters I-VII), and PART TWO. The reason for this division is that Part One (in Chapters III-VI) is in general negative in its approach to moral objectivity by rejecting, first the claims of moral subjectivism (Chapter III), and then those 'objectivist' claims (Chapters IV-VI) which we are convinced are unsatisfactory in their location of objectivity. Part Two, on the other hand, presents a positive argument for objectivism. Chapters I, II and VII are however not 'negative'. Chapter I gives a preview of our case and sets out our whole project; Chapter II shows the importance of moral principles in moral justification - a factor which is essential to the establishment of moral objectivity; while in Chapter VII we shall try to deal with the problem of moral autonomy which could stand in the objectivist's way. Part Two will be in six sections, including a summary.

We have introduced the term 'quasi-objective' to describe such theories as Ethical Naturalism, Relativism, the Rational Theories and the theory of Transcendental Justification, because those theories, though cognitivist in nature - which is a springboard to objectivism -

and sometimes have traits which are invaluable to objectivism, fail, as we think, to establish it. So to us, though they bear some qualities of objectivism, only 'look like' objectivist theories.

We have classified Ethical Relativism as a quasi-objective theory. Some philosophers would classify it differently - as a subjective theory - and we do not consider them wrong; indeed it would not matter to us which way it came. But our reason for classifying it the way we do is that relativists, in our view, accept that there is something true in morality which can be known independent of the knower - that is, objectively - only that with them such moral truth varies with communities.

In these essays the terms 'moral' and 'ethical' will be employed synonymously, and we shall hold any distinctions that may be thought to exist between them as irrelevant to our purpose. This is worthy of mention because philosophers do not always use them alternately. Professor Hare, for instance, in his essay, 'Nothing Matters' (in Applications of Moral Philosophy, 1972) distinguishes between these terms. He speaks of 'relativism' as a moral term, and 'subjectivism' as an ethical term. On the other hand, it is interesting to observe that the sub-title of Dr. A.C. Ewing's book entitled Ethics is An Introduction to Morality, while that of Professor Bernard Williams's Morality is An Introduction to Ethics, suggesting, in each case, that no distinction is desired in the employment of those terms.

Finally we should make clear in what sense we shall use the term 'objective' in this thesis. The word 'objective' could be ambiguous, but in moral discourse it can be applied in at least two senses. First, it might mean 'impartial' or 'disinterested', or 'influenced only by those considerations which ought to be influential'.

We attain objectivity in this sense first through identifying our emotions and prejudices or preoccupations, and then seeing that they do not influence or colour our judgement. It is in this sense that examiners and judges might be said to be objective in their assessment, for they judge according to rules which they apply in the same way to all. A person who is morally objective in this sense is one who would not let his emotions or prejudices influence his conduct or judgement of moral situations. He would be applying the moral rules with some disinterestedness. Corollarily to see morality as objective in this sense would be to see it stripped of all such personal feelings as may otherwise affect it or alter one's view of it. It is, as it were, to see morality as-it-is-in-itself. Pursuance of this sense of 'objective' may ultimately lead one to the rather difficult position of an 'ideal observer'.

This sense of 'objective', although a legitimate one, and will sometimes be reflected in our discussion especially when we talk about moral rules and their application, is not the sense we wish to employ in this thesis when we talk about objectivity in morality. First, we would think that such a sense of 'objective' can easily strip morality of all human feeling; that is to say, sever it from the day-to-day life of the moral agent or judge. It would also be equating objectivity to justice or fairness or impartiality; but justice or impartiality is just a moral principle, an objective one too, and cannot itself substitute objectivity especially as other principles such as those of mercy, sympathy, or pity ought also to have a place on the objective scale.

Secondly, although we say it is legitimate, this sense of 'objective' does not enable us speak of moral rules themselves as

objective for, while it clearly presupposes the existence of rules, it does not imply anything at all about their status as rules. A judge can apply a rule objectively or impartially although the rule itself owes its existence to the arbitrary whims of a tyrant. (This will be shown as the main weakness of the principle of Universalizability.)

There is a second sense of 'objective' in which emphasis is not on how rules are applied, but on moral judgements themselves; that is to say, what is logically prior is not a rule such as 'You ought not to steal', but a moral judgement, such as 'Stealing is wrong'. Such a judgement can be true or false, while we do not think in terms of truth and falsity in connection with rules. So 'objective' here means capable of truth and falsity. Statements purporting to express facts are objective in this sense, or, to put it in philosophical jargon, they have a truth-value. Thus the moral judgement 'stealing is wrong' is objective in the sense that it will be true or false, and the rule 'You ought not to steal' objective in the sense that it expresses the truth of the prior judgement. It is this sense that we shall employ when we talk of objectivity in morality.

In order to facilitate subsequent reference, abbreviations have been used in connection with titles of certain materials, and for convenience these have been fixed against the related title on its first mention, e.g. Foundations of Ethics (FE).

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## SUMMARY

The language we use in moral discourse, the attitudes we express when we behave morally, our seriousness over what we take as our moral beliefs, and the fact that we can and do engage in moral disagreements, all presuppose that a correct answer can be given to moral questions; that is to say, that moral statements are capable of truth and falsity, and that therefore morality is objective. Some people reject this, but some others nevertheless accept it although philosophers vary in their approach to the subject and in the location of this objectivity. This thesis will be based mainly on the approach to it through the Moral law and its location in God.

A system of morality necessarily employs moral principles, for it is they which make our claims that moral judgements have a truth-value valid. It is in terms of them that we talk of right and wrong in morality; so it is because we have them that we can justify our moral acts. Moral principles are themselves justified by ultimate moral principles. Since we claim that all moral judgements make truth-claims, all moral justifying is based on truth. To state what is true is to state a fact, and vice versa, so the truths which our ultimate principles claim correspond to moral facts, and these moral facts justify the ultimate principles themselves. Our moral acts and judgements can therefore be said to be justified by moral facts. That our moral judgements can be ultimately justified also suggests that there is a correct view towards which our moral acts are directed, although we can never be sure that our judgements, far less our actions, ever fully realize this correct view.

That there is such a correct view is rejected by subjectivists - the non-cognitivists, such as Logical Positivists, emotivists and prescriptivists. To logical positivists ethical statements do not constitute knowledge; they are meaningless expressions and do not come within the category of truth and falsity. But we do not see ethical statements as meaningless and since this is the only criterion the positivist is using to deny them truth-value, they then have a truth-value. Emotivists ground their objection on the theory that words have emotive meaning, and from that argue that our moral utterances are expressions of our own feelings and attitudes, and so are not based on reason, and that our moral arguments are mere attempts to persuade others to share our attitudes. Thus commonly shared notions of right and wrong, good and bad, do not exist. But the term 'emotive meaning' as we see it is an equivocal one and seems to mistake on the use of the term 'meaning'; so all arguments against objectivity which are based on it are based on an error and are therefore misleading. Moral judgements and arguments are not expressions of feeling or emotion; they are judgements based on reason.

Prescriptivism opts to bring reason back to ethics, and also freedom which it says Naturalism denies it. It has a rather cognitivist prima facie belief that there is an answer to moral questions, but its two theses - that moral judgements are prescriptive and that they are universalizable - fail to substantiate this. We find that moral judgements, though they may lead to action, neither are nor entail prescriptions; and that the principle of universalizability, in spite of supplying consistency to ethics, is not necessarily based on notions of right and wrong, so misses the point of cognitivism and cannot be sufficient ground for deciding the moral. Moreover what constitute

reasons in Prescriptivism are actually people's own prescriptions. So Prescriptivism inadvertently ends up subjectivist. The subjective theories - at least the last two - have the merit of attempting at least to make ethics practical, but as we see, they all fail to establish that morality is not cognitive.

Now whereas we do not claim to have discussed every possible type of subjectivist theory, we have certainly discussed representative or composite versions of the most common sorts. It is therefore plausible to turn to what are historically the main rivals to subjectivist theories - the range of objectivist theories. Accordingly we consider the Naturalistic Theories and Ethical Relativism, the Rationalist Theories and the Theory of Transcendental Arguments, all of which ascribe ways in which morality may be said to be objective. They all are cognitivist. To ethical naturalists moral judgements are derived from the facts of the human situation; there are moral truths but they are located in and determined by these facts. Naturalists differ in the way they explain the connection they see between our moral principles and these facts. Some see a hard-line analytic connection, some a more liberal synthetic connection, while some brand of naturalists - the forms-of-life philosophers - see a connection between our moral disagreements and 'forms-of-life'. If moral truths are to be derived from natural facts, the connection is more likely to be synthetic than analytic; but while the analytic view makes the connection too logical to make room for moral autonomy, the synthetic view tends to make it too contingent to be effective. So we reject all attempts by naturalists to derive moral truths from natural facts, assert that since objectivity is to be maintained, it will therefore be non-natural, and suggest that the connection between the human situation and morality is not one of

derivation; but is rather metaphysical.

Ethical Relativism makes about the same claims as Naturalism only that its thesis is based on culture or man's social environment. There are moral truths, it seems to say, but they are located in, and determined by, the cultures of peoples, and are therefore relative to these. Moral truths are therefore not cross-cultural. But we find, first, that ethical relativism is inconsistent since it seeks to establish itself on an absolutist foundation; and secondly that truth and falsity by their nature are not relative notions and are extrinsic rather than intrinsic to beliefs. So cultural beliefs cannot determine our moral truths.

The three other cognitivist theories discussed - Ethical Rationalism, Moral Sense and Ethical Intuitionism - which we group together as Rational Theories, are all about moral epistemology, and all seek to establish objectivity through rational argument. For ethical rationalism some, at least, of our moral judgements are true by definition (i.e. the moral truths which they carry are analytic truths). Though this may be true of some judgements, such as 'murder is wrong', the same fact makes them trivial, and therefore of no practical significance. Thus logic alone cannot guarantee the truth of any moral judgements. Moral Sense theory claims that we can perceive rightness and wrongness through our 'moral' sense. But whatever can be said about there being a conception of moral sense, we find that the truths which our moral judgements carry are conclusions arrived at through a process of logical reasoning and cannot be 'perceived' as we perceive colours. Ethical Intuitionism claims, as its name suggests, that moral truths are immediately obvious and do not need reason to establish them. It

claims also, and rightly, that they are synthetic (i.e. not analytic) and a priori (i.e. self-evident or necessary); but it seems to confuse this necessity with that of mathematics to the extent that moral truths share the same a priorism as mathematical axioms. But we see that although moral truths will be shown to be necessary, their necessity is non-linguistic, therefore the truths they carry are not immediately obvious.

These quasi-objective theories - as we call them - do not exhaust all the attempts which moral philosophers have made to establish objectivity, but they represent some of the best-known.

We tried next to see whether moral objectivity can be established if argued transcendently. Though a quasi-objective theory by our classification, theory of Transcendental Arguments is not a moral theory as such, but a logical theory which, in the context in which we have examined it, seeks to establish objectivity through that the fact/some propositions have a self-guaranteeing character. It argues that moral principles are examples of such and that since we presuppose them in our moral discourse, the fact that we engage in moral discourse at all guarantees their truth. Insofar as the existence of moral principles is essential to the claim that morality is objective, transcendental arguments contribute to the objectivist claim by making us conscious of these principles; but ethical objectivity cannot be sufficiently established on presuppositions although they may provide us with necessary grounds for arguing for it.

Although the synthetic view held by some naturalists makes some room for individual autonomy in morality, the question of autonomy may still be legitimately raised with objectivism. This is because objectivism, by its very nature, would demand that the moral

agent act within certain definitive principles which bind both himself and his judgements, possibly against what he would take as his own moral standards. Through analysis we come to see that the autonomous moral agent is free to do his own moral acts and come to his own moral conclusions; but we find him still fallible and blameworthy for his actions, because he lacks autonomy for self-legislation. So his freedom is not without any strings. Once this fact is apprehended, human autonomy is compatible with moral objectivity, especially as the kind of objectivity which we have in mind binds up morality with the ideal of human nature.

Since moral judgements have a truth-value there must be facts to which these truths correspond; these are moral facts. These facts, which are non-natural, justify the moral judgements and thereby establish moral truth. In our moral experience moral facts are expressed as claims and demands (or statements of obligation) made upon moral agents. Statements of obligation are naturally futuristic in aspect and, in order to actualize them the moralist posits an Ultimate Being who is able to know and bring them about. 'God' answers to this description; so moral objectivity and religion meet in the concept 'God'. But this does not mean that morality is derived from God in any way, nor that morality depends on religion: the relationship is none of that type. What it means is that God and the moral duty (or moral law) are identified, such that practising the moral law (i.e. acting morally) is an 'index' to an understanding of God. Since God and morality do not exist apart, the moral demands (or moral facts) are within God; they are united in him and therefore are not pluralized. 'God' is that which binds men to respond to moral values which constitute the ideal of their nature. The world is made in such a way that what is moral cannot be other than it is; so it is necessary, and God, as the

unitary demand, can only demand that which he does demand. Since morality is necessary, God, the unitary demand, is also necessary. So God is a Necessary Being. God is also Father to the religious person, and is worshipped by him; but the objectivist's conception of God as the necessary ground of moral values and the religious conception of him as one who is worshipped are complementary, and the moral objectivist can hold them both without contradiction. So moral objectivity is theistic, and this conclusion shows that we both reject secular morality and presume on the existence of God.

PART ONE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

#### 1.

It is perhaps common among philosophers to indicate their philosophical position by means of the question they take to be the most central ethical question. To name a few, Professor R.M. Hare<sup>1</sup> has argued that the question 'What shall I do?' is the central ethical question 'since it would reveal in what principles of conduct a man really believed' (p.1). To Professor David Wiggins<sup>2</sup>, however, 'truth and the meaning of life' are the central questions of moral philosophy.

These questions, though they are important, do not seem to us to be the 'central question' of ethics. For us the central question seems to be 'What is morally right?' The process of ethical judgement is, we would think, the process of deciding what is right.

Let us advance a brief defence of the centrality of this question. It is unlike Hare's question which can be answered non-morally. Hare's question does not really put one in such an ethical perspective as to demand an invariably ethical answer. It may, for example, not be unusual for a servant who is not sure what his household duties are, and wants them defined, to ask such a question of his master, and expect an answer such as 'You are to iron my shirt' or 'You have to make my lunch ready by 1 p.m. every Tuesday'. Answers of this nature, though probably not what Hare would expect, would still be quite consistent with the demand of the question 'What shall I do?' So the question may be said to be too open-ended to demand only answers that would reveal principles of conduct.

Perhaps Hare's ground would have been safer if he had put his question in a different way, such as 'What ought I to do?' But

then this form which would surely give answers which may reveal principles of conduct, presupposes yet another question: 'What do I believe is right?' or 'What is right for me to do?', for it would be irrational for anyone who wanted to know what he ought to do to want to be told to do the wrong thing. So for Hare's question to yield an ethical answer it seems it would have to be amended in some ways, and as each of these amendments is a variation on my central question 'What is morally right?', it would seem that if the question 'What shall I do?' is to be ethically valid it would collapse into 'What is morally right?', or anything very near to it.

Wiggins' theme gives less loophole for such non-moral interpretation; indeed it would be quite consistent with our position, and presupposes it. Thus we shall try in the course of our argument to show that the question 'What is morally right?' makes sense only insofar as it presupposes that a correct answer can be given to moral questions: that is, that truth and falsity are possible in moral judgements. It follows then that to answer Wiggins' central question of truth would be at the same time to answer our question about the general nature of moral rightness. Again, to assert that the question of the meaning of life is central to moral philosophy is to presuppose that there is a rational and non-arbitrary answer to the question 'What is morally right?'. For the question of the meaning of life can be taken as a real question (i.e. a question with an answer other than 'It has no meaning') if, but only if, we presuppose that life is not a random ordering of experience but is rationally directed towards some purposes or rational ending. And seriously to ask 'What is morally right?' is to presuppose that we can make some progress towards this rational ordering in our action. Thus to ask what is meaningful to me in my life presupposes what is my ideal or what is morally right for me to do - for one who asks for

a meaning for his life is seeking for the right course of action to take in life; that is, what he is to do morally. Equally to ask what is morally right is to presuppose that there is a rational meaning to life.

So Wiggins' position, unlike Hare's, can only be held in an ethical context, that is to say, a context in which 'what is morally right?' is the overriding consideration. A life with a meaning or purpose therefore presupposes a life in which a correct answer can be given to the question 'What is morally right?'. It follows from this exposition that whichever way we look at it, the question 'What is morally right?' or 'What do I believe to be the right thing to do?' is inescapable whenever we are seriously concerned with morality.

There is at least one main feature of this question and the answer that we may give to it which must be considered. To ask 'What is p?' is at least to presuppose that there is a concept of p, although this neither proves nor establishes p. It is to speculate on p, just as it is to speculate on a unicorn to ask 'What is a unicorn?'. This question presupposes that there is a conception of unicorn, and what is further demanded (in answer to it) is what it is like; in other words, some instantiation of a unicorn. Similarly the question 'What is morally right?' first presupposes an ideal of moral rightness - that such an ideal exists in some sense of 'exists' and then what is further demanded in answer to the question is some instantiation of it, to find out what it is like or in what sense it can be said to exist.

To answer the question 'What is morally right?' therefore involves looking for those things which constitute the ideal of moral rightness; that is to say, those things which are morally right, and a considerable part of this thesis (Chapters IV-VI) will be devoted to examining some of the attempts which philosophers have made in this direction. It is in looking for what is right that methods may

differ between the moral philosopher and, say, the physicist, and where the moral philosopher's problem may be said to begin. For how he identifies what is morally right differs from how a physicist may identify what, for instance, is an ion. Verificationists have cashed on this problem and have argued that moral judgements have no truth value, and indeed are no statements at all, because they cannot be verified in certain specified ways. We shall examine this claim in Chapter III, but what we are trying to emphasize now is that the most striking feature of the question 'What is morally right?' and any answer we may give to it is that both seem to presuppose an ideal of moral rightness, and, following from this, that morality is objective. This is borne out by at least four factors: (1) the language we use for moral judgements; (2) the attitudes we take when we are justifying morally; (3) our seriousness over our moral beliefs; and (4) the fact that we can and do engage in moral disagreements and arguments. We shall now examine these factors one by one.

(1) Moral statements tend to be basically indicative in form. If I say 'X is right' or 'X is good', I make a statement comparable to 'Snow is white' or 'the sky is blue'. It might be objected that I could address P and say to him 'You ought to X' and that this judgement is not indicative but imperative. But P may legitimately ask me, 'Why ought I?', thereby demanding a reason for the act I subscribe to him. This question which P asks demands an indicative answer: 'Because it is right to X'. So we can put the matter this way: 'You ought to X' invites the question 'Why ought I?'; this question presupposes the giving of reasons for an answer, these reasons must be indicative statements, and must include the statement 'It is right to X'. Thus when I say 'You ought to X' I am, in other words, 'indicating' to you that it is right for you to X. It follows then that either by comparing them straightforwardly with indicative

sentences such as 'snow is white' or by putting them in the form 'P ought to X', moral statements show the features of indicative sentences. And since indicative sentences have the characteristic of stating what is true or false - that is to say, they state that something is the case - moral statements ipso facto state what is true or false.

(2) Let us examine some of the things we do and attitudes we take when we are engaged in moral activity. Sometimes we talk of making up our minds whether any particular act is right, and this is a process of ethical judgement. Making up one's mind what one ought to do is simply a process of trying to find out the true answer to one's moral situation. This is brought out especially if we consider what we are doing when we seek moral advice.

When we ask for moral advice from a friend or a superior we do not merely want him to bring us into an emotional state of approval towards a proposed act. Sometimes perhaps this is just what we want; but when this is so we are not asking for advice in the right spirit, but merely wishing to be made to feel comfortable about what we had proposed to do. Nor is it merely that we wish him to induce us to perform some act or other as well as give us a feeling of comfort about what we do. If so, again, we are not behaving sincerely, but are merely wishing to escape the trouble of deciding for ourselves. What we do when we seek advice is that we wish to be helped to find out what is really right in the situation independent of our state of feeling about it. Even if we accept our adviser's opinion simply on authority, this can only be ethically justified, if at all, when we can naturally think this opinion is superior to ours - and such a thought is quite legitimate. But even at this our aim for seeking advice ought not to be that we want to have similar feelings about the action. This may probably be part of what we mean, but if it is all,

our motive is certainly not ethical at all. From the ethical point of view it is not until we have sorted out through advice whether an act is right or wrong that we can proceed to decide whether we ought to do it or not. So there is a distinct effort to discover what we ought to do which is prior to every moral action, and this effort presupposes that something independent of ourselves is being sought, that something is true and can be known.

To further illustrate what we are saying, can we really believe that our judgment that, for instance, James Jones<sup>3</sup> acted wrongly or that the needless infliction of suffering on, or causing the death of, others is wrong are not claims to truth? When we pass such judgements our state of mind is such that we are convinced that our judgements are true and that other people of similar moral maturity as we are will pass similar judgements. If this were not so, that is, if the cognitive element of ethics were not presupposed, then a judgement like that we pass on Jones would be mere emotional outburst with hardly any claim to rational justification. On that model there would be no good reason for one ethical judgement rather than another for, if there were any ethical judgements at all, they would be of equal value, being neither true nor false. It would also mean that no argument could establish or refute any ethical judgement or even make it less true or probable. Nobody, for instance, could refute our judgement on Jones by saying that he did not act wrongly. It may therefore be said, on the basis of these arguments, that the presuppositions that we make when we make ethical judgements show that any claim that ethical judgements lack a truth value may be seen to be in flagrant conflict with our ethical consciousness, which forces us to insist that our ethical judgements cannot be justified unless they are seen to be true.

(3) A third factor which suggests moral objectivity is moral seriousness. The central idea of seriousness is consistency:

seriousness is shown by sticking to one's guns. We disapprove of the wayward moralist who fluctuates and makes arbitrary decisions. He would, for instance, make promises and break them without any compunction, or maintain honesty by being honest only when he is not likely to lose by it while defrauding no sooner than it is to his advantage to do so, and so on. Such a person is said to lack consistency and to be morally lax. Moral seriousness therefore implies a high consistency of policy in moral matters. We expect that what people say in morality should be reflected in their conduct, and that their conduct shows a policy of action which does not vary from day to day. This does not mean that people should be morally unproductive or conservative: a change of mind in this direction is compatible with a general maintenance of a policy of action.

Moral seriousness can therefore be analyzed in terms of consistency; but consistency is itself a show of rational, rather than arbitrary, behaviour; for moral agents who are consistent in their behaviour are able to support their judgements and conduct with reason, and are prepared to answer questions related to them in not an arbitrary manner, nor in a manner depicting mere feelings and lacking moral defence.

Since moral seriousness reflects consistency, and consistency reflects rationality, so a morally serious person shows rationality in his conduct. His judgements are derived from reason, and not arbitrarily, and therefore cannot be something about which he can just please himself. This implies that once we hold a moral principle as our principle of action, we feel we must adhere to it. We do not feel that we should have been able to choose another principle if we were not so committed. In other words, an agent takes a moral position and holds it to be so important that he refuses to envisage other possibilities for himself or anyone else: he holds his position

as a morally necessary one; that is, as something which cannot be otherwise than it is, and to which he cannot help being seriously committed. The situation is such that the principle presents itself to him as the right one, without his having any say in the matter (since it is not emotion but reason that has led him to adopt it). He is, as it were, responding to something outside himself, and this is comparable to the situation in a belief, which is the reflection of something seen independently of the behaviour. Thus, holding moral principles is like holding beliefs: in each case we cannot choose to change our mind.

When we say that a man is serious, it is plausible to ask 'serious about what?', for seriousness generally has an object. People do feel that the conduct of themselves and others matters, and, in some sense, are ready to stake anything on it to maintain their position. It seems difficult to make sense of this kind of seriousness, or any consistency of policy for that matter unless we presuppose that the agent thinks that there is something objective which he is trying to identify in his moral judgements and embody in his conduct.

(4) We have said that when the agent takes up a moral position, or holds beliefs which he takes as right, he is not ready to give it up. It follows naturally from this that he will be prepared to defend it by argument if it is threatened. Arguments result from disagreements, and disagreements entail that there is something germane to the point at issue over which the parties disagree, something at stake, as it were. So where there is argument, there is suggestion of some objective standard or value over which the argument develops.

Now if disagreements can arise only where there are objective standards, and moral judgements do disagree, it follows that moral disagreements suggest by their nature that there are objective

standards in morality, standards which are true whatever may be the personal feelings of the parties in conflict over the issue. If our moral judgements were mere feelings, there could be no interpersonal moral disagreements, and two persons expressing what would normally be conflicting views could not be doing so since each would be expressing how he felt about the matter in question and their judgement would be autobiographical remarks. But it is evident that moral argumentators do not just do this, that their judgements do genuinely conflict, and may persist even after one party has persuaded the other to accept its feelings. Moral judgements are claims such as can be rejected by anyone who utters a contrary judgement; but feelings (or 'autobiographical remarks', as we have chosen to call them) cannot genuinely be rejected: they, so to say, prove their own mettle.

The same argument which makes moral arguments possible also makes moral discussions possible. Moral discussion is a joint investigation between parties to find out the truth on the force and relevance of reasons given; it therefore presupposes the truth or falsity of moral views. So moral arguments and moral discussion are based on reason, and it follows from this that where there are moral disagreements they can be settled. This seems to follow necessarily from our arguments; for if disagreements suggest that there are objective standards (or values), then these disagreements can, at least in principle, be resolved by appeal to those standards.

One last point must be made, not because we count it as a factor suggesting moral objectivity, but because it helps prop up our acceptance of those factors: that is, that morality does not present us with any situations or positions which do not have parallels or analogues in other areas of experience and knowledge.

Bambrough<sup>4</sup> has argued that a belief such as that a child who is to undergo a painful surgery ought to be given an anaesthetic

is a common-sense belief, and that to reject it is being sceptical. But more so, to reject it while accepting such non-moral judgements as that there is a physical world is simply self-contradictory. If we accept Bambrough's claim, then moral judgements do not present us with any peculiar experiences of everyday life. In moral contexts, just as in non-moral ones, we can speak of beliefs, opinions, arguments, conclusions; of dilemmas and problems and solutions; of learning, teaching and finding out. It is not being argued that the fact that we can and do speak in a particular way is a justification for speaking in that way. What is being argued is that if we accept such modes of speech in everyday life, we ought, by the same logic, to do the same for morality, if to avoid inconsistency, unless we have relevant reasons to show that morality is not part of our everyday life.

Let us borrow an example from Bambrough for illustration. It is sometimes - and we think, rightly - argued that moral disagreement is more widespread, more radical and more persistent than disagreement over matters of fact. One characteristic of this argument is that it sometimes involves us to compare the incomparable. We are called upon to contrast our common agreement that there is a pen in my hand now, for instance, with the vigour and tenacity of our agreements over war, abortion, euthanasia or capital punishment. We can balance the absurd comparison by contrasting our common agreement that a child who is to undergo a painful surgery ought to be given an anaesthetic with some such factual disagreement as is sometimes seen between cosmologists and radio-astronomical observers. Once however we compare only the comparable, it will be seen that this argument from widespread disagreement against the suggestions made in our ethical consciousness is invalid. What is true is that problems are of various types and some are more difficult than others: some moral problems are more difficult than others just as some non-moral

problems also are more difficult than others. Ethics does not place us in a peculiar world, so most of the considerations by which we meet the problems of our everyday non-ethical life are also applicable in ethical situations.

We need now to summarize what we have said about our moral language and attitudes. Moral judgements are couched in moral language and tend to be basically indicative in form and therefore presuppose some factual content. Our moral attitudes show that we do make up our minds in moral issues, can be in moral perplexity and can seek and obtain moral advice: that we hold our moral beliefs seriously, argue them when disagreements arise, or through discussion try to resolve them. All these suggest that in our moral language and thinking we hold that truth and falsity are in a prime position in morality, and thus that morality is objective. These facts are revealed if we sincerely examine what we do when we make moral judgements and, since our ethical language and thinking presuppose them, it is quite legitimate to assume that this is how things are, especially as this is the procedure we take with regard to other enquiries of our everyday life.

## 2.

In spite of what has been said so far, there are nevertheless strong objections to the objectivist thesis among philosophers: that is to say, some philosophers are opposed to the idea that there are objective values or that moral judgements make truth-claims. Philosophers of the subjectivist school - and under this heading we shall include emotivists and prescriptivists - especially make this counter-claim. Many reject the suggestions that we claim to have been made by our moral language and attitudes. We shall examine their position in Chapter III.

It is possible also to accept our foregoing arguments

and still reject moral objectivity; that is to say, to accept that our moral language and attitudes suggest that morality is objective, but that it is not. J.L. Mackie is a case in point.

Of most moral sceptics, Mackie<sup>5</sup> seems to us to have seen the logic of the objectivist position most clearly. He appreciates the wealth of historical support which objectivism enjoys, dating back to Plato, and his arguments constitute some of the strongest in favour of the objectivity of morality; yet he rejects it. To him it seems true, but is not really so. His arguments from 'relativity' and 'queerness' need particular mention here.

In Mackie's argument from 'queerness' he describes objective values as entities of a strange sort 'utterly different from everything else in the universe' (p.38), and wonders what the relationship can be of a natural fact and the moral argument we assign to it. We appreciate his problem; indeed the relationship of natural facts and moral judgements is the basic problem of ethical naturalism, and we shall consider this in Chapter IV. But there are two particular comments to make here. First, to ask for a causal link between natural facts and value judgements, as Mackie seems to demand, is, as we know, to invite naturalism to solve the problem of objectivity. A causal link is not the only link there can be between natural facts and value judgements.

Let us consider a similar case. What, it might be asked, is the causal link between the various subjects we learn at school and what we ultimately call our education? There does not seem to be such a link. For what we call our education is not just a summing-up of the various subjects we have learnt at school - indeed we can remain 'educated' even though we may have forgotten them, and although we may be properly described as uninformed, the sentence 'he is no longer educated' sounds absurd. Yet the absence of this causal link does

not mean that school subjects do not educate us; for we would perhaps not be called 'educated' at all if we had not studied a certain range of school subjects. This suggests that the link is a necessary one; that is to say, if we are educated it must be the case that we have studied a range of school subjects; but the necessity is not a causal one. It is possible that there is a similar connection between natural facts and our moral judgements - moral judgements being necessitated neither logically nor causally by natural facts, while at the same time we could not have had them if there were no natural facts.

Next, we agree with Mackie that being 'socially condemned' is a feature, indeed - we may add - a strong feature, of a morally bad action; but we reject that this is all that there is to it. For although an action which is socially condemned may be morally wrong, an action may still be morally wrong even though it may not be socially condemned, unless we mean by 'society' here all rational beings rather than some or even the greater proportion. And to accept this latter interpretation of 'society' is to accept ethical objectivism. So being socially condemned is neither necessary nor sufficient for being morally wrong, as Mackie seems to suggest.

In arguing from relativity, Mackie finds human goals too diverse to be unified in an objective manner, and contends that 'the actual variations of moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than the hypothesis that they express perception of objective values' (p.37). We shall again meet this objection in Chapter IV when we consider ethical relativism, although not as a subjectivist thesis, but as a quasi-objective one.

Mackie's objections raise another matter which is of major interest to us, namely, the relationship of objective values and religion. To meet the radical difficulty of human goals and the

objectivity they suggest, Mackie suggests that the objectivist may have to take recourse to the thesis of the purpose of God; that is, that the true purpose of human life is fixed by what God commands man to do and be. He observes, and we think, rightly, that if the theological doctrine has to be defended, 'a kind of objective ethical prescriptivity could be thus introduced' (p.48). He further argues, and we agree with him too, that the theological doctrine cannot be maintained. In Part Two we shall reject theological naturalism, but unlike Mackie, shall maintain ethical objectivity, by analysing a theistic doctrine of morality which will identify objective values with the nature of God.

## 3.

We have seen that it is possible to accept that moral objectivity is presupposed in our language and attitudes and yet to reject it as a metaphysical truth. It is also possible to accept moral objectivity and then to interpret it differently; that is to say, moral objectivists are varied in the way they approach their subject. Here we shall note, and briefly discuss three such approaches, and some of these will not be acceptable to us.

The first school is what we might call the Wittgensteinian school, and its thesis is that objectivity is related to language and human communication; that it is a linguistic necessity. Objectivity, it claims, should be approached through ordinary language or 'what human beings say'. Wittgenstein has said:

If language is to be a means of communication, there must be agreement not only in definitions but also ... in judgements ....

'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true or false?' - It is what human beings say that is true or false; and

they agree in the language they use.

That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

(Phil. Inv. p.88e)

The 'agreement in judgements' about which Wittgenstein speaks is not what a given individual may do, but what must be the case generally in a society if human communication is ever to be possible.

Some contemporary philosophers have developed this theme. In his essay 'Nature and Convention' Peter Winch<sup>6</sup> argues that there are certain aspects of morality which make it necessary that morality is not entirely based on convention, but that, on the contrary, it is presupposed by all possible conventions. Moral laws and laws of nature (i.e. scientific laws) cannot be distinguished in terms of the alterability of the former and non-alterability of the latter, and as morality is not based on individual decisions since a decision may be unintelligible and can only be made intelligible 'within the context of a meaningful way of life' (p.235), the idea of man not adhering to norms of behaviour is made unintelligible by certain features of the social life of human beings. Moral conceptions, he continues, belong to any common human life and do not presuppose any particular form of activity, and what is necessary to any common human life, and hence to the very possibility of any convention, is language, and without the acceptance of some norms such as truth-telling, there could be no language:

... the social conditions of language and rationality must also carry with them certain fundamental moral conceptions. (p.241)

An individual who can talk can of course deliberate on a given occasion whether to tell the truth or not, but he will have learned just what truth-telling is, and

... learning to speak and also learning to speak truthfully is the norm and speaking untruthfully a deviation. (p.242)

To communicate it must be necessary for people's utterances to be taken in specific ways by other people; so it would be nonsense to call the norm of truth-telling a 'social convention', if by that were meant there "might be a human society in which it were not generally adhered to" (p.243). So, Winch concludes, the acceptance of the norm of truth-telling is 'a moral condition of language' (ibid.).

Almost what Winch does with truth-telling, Oswald Hanfling<sup>7</sup> does with promising. Promising, he says, "presupposes certain conditions and leads to certain consequences" (p.19), and one who says 'I promise' is emphasizing his commitment and expressing "one of the factors which determine the degree of his obligation" (p.17). Promising is not a game, he contends, but "to keep a promise is a moral obligation" (p.22). Then Hanfling argues from promise-keeping to truth. Promise-keeping is tied up with stating an intention, and can be false, thus

... there is the same sort of necessity about the norm of promise-keeping as there is about the norm of truth-telling. (p.24)

A pre-promising society is inconceivable, and to deny ourselves the application of situations where promising is possible is to deny ourselves not the non-adoption of a practice or institution, but "the use of language" (p.28). The moral obligation of promising is therefore common to all users of language, irrespective of whether they use the word or not, so long as they can hold intentions, and without our common use of such concepts, human communication will be impossible.

What the Wittgenstein school is saying is that morality, like language, can be possible only where there are shared concepts;

and as far as that argument goes, it is objectivist. But it must be observed that general agreement, although a necessary condition of the use of objective language, is not a test of truth. The Wittgensteinian thesis is linguistic and one of its presuppositions is that the meaning of a word is in its use in the language, so to grasp the use of a word we must know everything about the situation in which it is used and how the word functions in that situation, and if one wishes to resolve one's philosophical problems about the nature of ethical language, one describes the way it is actually used. A particular slant of this thesis is taken by Phillips, Mounce and Beardsmore who argue that people get their moral viewpoints from the 'forms of life' in which they learn them. This thesis, which is a form of naturalism, will be discussed in Chapter IV and rejected for its relativist undertones.

The second school has its classical source in David Hume, and looks at moral objectivity as a causal necessity. Hume has argued<sup>8</sup> that

... the notion of morals implies some sentiments common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it. (p.272)

When a man makes a moral judgement, as opposed to 'self-love', he "must move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string to which all mankind have accord and symphony" (ibid.). Hume does not consider the vices of men a part of their common nature, but "the humanity of one man is the humanity of everyone, and the same object touches this passion in all human creatures", and the sentiments which arise from humanity "produce the same approbation or censure ..." (p.274).

Thus Hume, though he believes elsewhere that no rule or conduct follows logically from any description of man, being the sort

of creature he is, comes to accept certain rules. Man, and the human condition are, in some respects, everywhere the same, and therefore there are some rules which are everywhere accepted, or should be accepted if men understood themselves and their condition. Objectivity is thus a causal necessity: it is conditioned by the human situation.

This line of thought too has been followed in contemporary times by such philosophers as H.L.A. Hart, R.S. Downie and G.J.

Warnock. Hart<sup>9</sup>, arguing from Natural law, asserts that

... every nameable kind of existing thing, human, animate and inanimate, is conceived not only as tending to maintain itself in existence, but as proceeding towards a definite optimum state which is the specific good - or the end appropriate to it. (p.184),

and the laws of a thing's development therefore should show both "how it should and how it does regularly behave or change" (p.185). For man the optimum state is not his good or end simply because he desires it, it is rather that he "desires it because it is already his natural end" (p.186).

R.S. Downie<sup>10</sup>, developing the argument of Hart, sees the "raw material of human capacities and the human environment" as 'truisms' which yet "bring out the close link between the kind of nature we have and the kind of morality we have" (p.26). But this, he adds, should not preclude any notion which suggests that we should (ought to) act contrary to our nature. In what he calls 'trivial truths about human beings' he outlines that human beings lack self-sufficiency, are approximately equal in power, have a limited benevolence and limited understanding, and so depend on one another for bare existence. Moral rules and principles are therefore necessary, or we face extinction.

G.J. Warnock<sup>11</sup> sees the human state as a 'predicament' which it should be the 'general object' or 'proper business' of morality to expurgate. But although Warnock shares the common view with the other philosophers of his school that objectivity is a feature of the human situation, he differs from them in seeing a logical rather than a causal necessity. To him it is logically absurd for man to act contrary to his situation, that is, not to do what he ought to do. Since, however, the moral theory of the school is naturalist, we shall examine this difference of detail in Chapter IV when we discuss ethical naturalism. In general it can be said that the Humean school takes moral objectivity as a causal necessity: because man and his natural state are what they are, and men share this nature commonly, certain common rules and principles are necessary for human existence.

The third approach we shall outline is Kantian. Although Kant may be said to be an objectivist rather more by implication than by arguing a straight objectivist thesis, his approach to objectivism, which may be termed metaphysical, is quite distinct from any of the others outlined. He establishes moral objectivity in the necessity of the Moral Law.

In the Critique of Practical Reason Kant assumes that moral experience has its own two distinctive poles - the subjective pole of the moral agent and the objective pole of 'real' goodness. How then does this distinction relate to man, the moral agent? How does he attain 'real' goodness?

Man has two natures, Kant argues - the phenomenal and the noumenal. The noumenal world itself is as orderly as the phenomenal world, and has its own law - the Moral Law - and it is this law which man apprehends in his profound moral insights. It is what impels him to formulate and obey the Categorical Imperative, but, because his nature is both noumenal and phenomenal, the moral law is not alien to him nor is it imposed upon him from outside. It is the law of his

highest nature. It is possessed of all rational beings although the degree at which they do so varies with the degree of their rationality. It is not possessed relatively except insofar as men relatively possess rationality, which can, of course, be best judged only at its maturity. The essential nature of all men is therefore noumenal and it is this moral reason which endows them with intrinsic and indestructible value and makes them worthy of respect. God himself is worthy of man's respect too, not because of His power, but because He too, as the supreme rational Being, acknowledges the Moral Law and conforms to it.

Man's moral life seems then to be a conflict between the phenomenal and the noumenal worlds or realities. As moral reason seeks to overcome the seductions of mere prudence and substitute duty for pleasure, the noumenal seeks, as it were, to ingress into the phenomenal. Man's phenomenal nature will then be subdued by man's will provided that the will is 'good', is dedicated to duty for duty's sake, that is. Man is autonomous, so alone can and ought to save himself by his own moral efforts. Noumenal reality can thus, through man, manifest itself increasingly in the phenomenal world.

Let us go a little further here than we did with the other approaches we outlined. What Kant has developed here is a dualism, and his formulation of it creates him a problem. How, in the first place, can one and the same person be simultaneously obedient to the regularities of both phenomena and noumena, even though his two natures enable him to participate in both realms? How can man, as a psycho-physical being, be wholly obedient to the compulsions of phenomenal activity and still be able to act in obedience to the Moral Law?

Kant's problem would be eased, if not completely solved, if his 'noumenal reality' were conceived of, not as another 'world' which competes, so to speak, with the phenomenal world, for allegiance, but

rather as the dimension or quality of morally objective value with which man can, with appropriate moral effort, impregnate his own character and behaviour. On this view the moral task is not to combat or resist phenomenal causality, but rather to envisage objective moral value so clearly and cherish it with such loyalty that it will, in fact, express itself in his motivations and actions. The 'good will' which Kant so highly prizes is still man's will which conforms to all phenomenal regularities to which the human will is subject. It becomes 'good', not by violating the phenomenal laws of volition, but by allegiance to an objective moral law as the subject of its dominant motivation. The noumenal will no longer conflict with, but will, as it were, transcend the phenomenal.

In saying this we are admittedly re-interpreting Kant's account of the noumena. We do not contradict it but re-state it in terms of the modern concept of 'value' which was probably not within Kant's reach in the 18th century. We do not today think that logical thinking and the basic laws of psychology are in conflict: they are conformable. The autonomous individual and objective moral values are compatible.

Kant posits the Moral Law, and the Moral Law possesses, for the morally serious person, all the characteristics which, in combination, serve to define 'objectivity' in this phenomenal realm. First, it is coercive, so coercive that it dictates the Categorical Imperative from which no one can escape, however much he may transgress it. It is coercive in the manner of obligating without compelling. But this is precisely the nature of objective values: they evoke loyalty, seriousness, a kind of necessity, and the greater our loyalty, the more intensive and categorical our moral obligation becomes. Kant is perfectly aware that we do breach the Moral Law, but when we do so we do violence to our nature, because the Moral Law is based there.

Secondly, the Moral Law, and all that it entails, is public and universally available to all men, to all rational beings, that is, whether finite or divine. It is in essence the same law however much it is ignored or misconstrued. Kant knows nothing of a wholly private morality or idiosyncratic conscience. Everyone's conscience, he believes, dictates the same duty for duty's sake, the same respect for persons, the same quest for the 'kingdom of ends'.

Thus Kant posits the Moral Law, not only as something objective - being established in our nature - but also as something which we cannot ignore without at the same time ignoring our own essence. Moral objectivity is therefore part of the nature of man. He does not come by it either because he has to or wants to make existence possible for himself, or as a way of communicating with others of his own species, he exists in it; it is part of his inner being, his essence.

In this chapter we have tried to show that facts of our moral language and consciousness suggest that our moral judgements are objective; that is to say, that they express truths which are independent of us. Although this thesis is rejected by some philosophers, it is nevertheless accepted by many and has been approached in various ways. Three of these approaches have been described here - the Wittgensteinian, the Humean and the Kantian approaches. In order to develop our argument we shall take the last of these which treats moral objectivity not just as necessary for man in society but sees it as part of his being, and therefore as something to which he is necessarily committed. Taking the Kantian approach does not mean that we are going for the Kantian ethical position. To him, for instance, what makes a moral principle true is the fact that it is legislated a priori by Reason: the moral fact, for him, may therefore not be the will of God but the dictate of Practical Reason. We shall neither

discuss nor debate this view. To us the moral fact will be synthetic a priori truths and identified with the will of God. What we therefore mean by taking the Kantian approach is that which in our argument we shall accept what we consider relevant in any of the other approaches outlined, our basic position will reflect the Kantian one for we shall adopt his metaphysical approach to the issue of moral objectivity. We shall, for example, while accepting the Wittgensteinian thesis that human communication is impossible in morality as in other spheres of life unless there are shared concepts, reject the 'forms of life' argument in morality. Again we shall accept that there are natural facts and that these play an indispensable part in moral justifying, yet we shall not be accepting causal necessity - the thesis of the Humean school - for, that man accepts standards of morality because he needs it for his survival does not offer a moral reason for acting, much less so if he is logically bound to accept it. We shall accept that by and large men share a common human nature however immense their social and cultural diversities may seem, but we shall nevertheless reject that morality is ex hypothesi device for social survival. So we shall reject naturalism. We shall try to establish a relationship between moral objectivity and religion by presenting the Moral Law as objective truth and shall identify God with it, so that the moral agent who acts objectively is ipso facto being religious, that is to say, accepts God. Meanwhile in the next chapter we shall try to investigate our prior claim that moral judgements are statements of truth.

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## CHAPTER II

### MORAL JUSTIFICATION AND TRUTH.

#### 1.

Although some philosophers argue that moral principles are not really necessary, that we can, and do take moral decisions "without recourse to principles"<sup>1</sup>, we shall begin this chapter by arguing that moral principles really are necessary, and that it is, in fact, because of them that moral questions and problems, and indeed all moral justifying, are possible.

If saying that someone ought (or ought not) to do something commits one to claiming that there is some fact in the situation which is a reason for doing (or not doing) the act in question, then this reason must be subject to the requirements which reasons in general must satisfy: that anything which is a reason for acting in any one case must be a reason for acting in every similar case unless there are some prima facie reasons for treating any case as special. Such a reason for acting, because it has been seen to apply universally except in particular cases, lays the foundation for a general rule or principle guiding such actions.

Following from this, we may, for general purposes, define a principle as what ought to be appealed to, or what ought to be taught irrespective of who the individual teacher is, or in what circumstances he may be. Moral principles can then be regarded as statements picking out those factors of situations which can be appealed to as reasons for moral acting, or, in effect, ought to be used as criteria for moral justifying. If, for example, I condemn the strike-action of the fuel-tanker drivers, I might be doing so on such a principle as "It is wrong for those who supply the needs of the public to withhold their services" or "One ought not to agitate for higher pay", and so on.

And I would expect my principle to apply not only to fuel-tanker drivers in Scotland, but to all - unless it is otherwise stated - fuel-tanker drivers, and indeed to all "who supply the needs of the public" wherever there are such people.

It is such a condition as this which leads to the claim that moral principles ought to be universalized. Professor R.M. Hare, for instance, seems to imply this when he defines a principle as 'that we can act on, or in conformity with, or, on the other hand, in breach of'<sup>2</sup>. Principles indeed must be universal, at least to the degree that they pick out factors which universally determine what we ought to do in certain situations, even though not necessarily determining what we ought to do in every particular case.

It might be argued against this that in other forms of value judgement, such as in aesthetics, we do not look for common properties which universally determine what we ought to do when faced with a situation. We admire a painting, for instance, because it appeals to us not because we have considered any general principles about admiring paintings, and we are therefore not justified in not using the same method for ethics as we do for our other value-judgements. What special characteristics of ethics, it may be asked, justify our special treatment of it?

Truly, ethical judgement, qua judgement, has nothing to distinguish it from aesthetic judgement; nevertheless such a question would be misguided. For it would be ignoring the fact that when we use the term 'good', to give value to, say, a work of art or a piece of music, we do so because of certain features which we see the particular work to possess, and our judgement would be suspect if we do not use the term to describe other works with similar qualities or features, whatever the peculiar taste we may claim to have as adjudicators.

These features or qualities which characterize the work of art or music are the reasons for judging it a good one, and they play the same role in aesthetic evaluation as the reasons which make us judge a moral act. They, in fact, constitute the principles, or general rules for aesthetic judgement. So the objector who argues from aesthetics will fail to show us why reasons for judging in aesthetics should constitute principles while those for moral justifying should not.

But it may still be pointed out that although any feature pointed to in support of a judgement that a work of art is good must also be relevant to the criticism of other works of art, there may be in every other case many other relevant features which may alter the situation completely, thereby suggesting that generally acknowledged criteria for relevance do not always apply. The objector may make a similar case for moral justification. He may contend that every human situation is so infinitely complicated that however many the relevant features one may pick out in a particular case, there will always be a host of others which may be set against them. This objection looks valid, but as we shall see later in this chapter, it is based on a confusion between principles and rules. Principles apply always but rules apply only generally; and moreover a principle can include exceptions, provided they too are universal.

Yet we might answer by reiterating that generally a principle is set and taught not because it is better than what the individual teacher may have to offer (although it may well be the best he can offer), but because unless there is some sort of agreement on what ought to be taught, learning, and indeed any achievement within a school of thought, would be impossible. This reminds us of Wittgenstein's "agreement-in-judgements" which we discussed in Chapter I; for unless people agree on some general rules, no teaching, or

learning, or any communicative behaviour can take place.

Refusing to act according to any set principles does not imply that one is not following any principles in any case. Suppose we have a principle that incest is morally wrong, we may go further to argue that even when a man insists that incest is morally good (for himself or his community) and proceeds to act according to the principle he has set himself, he is applying a principle; for to justify incest entails that reasons for doing it are morally approved, and such approval would be based on a somewhat unusual principle which the objector would, if he was acting sincerely, like everyone else to adopt. We accept or reject modes of conduct on the ground that we accept some moral principles necessarily.

From the foregoing it would be true to say that the correctness of the universal principle involved in a judgement is a necessary, although not a sufficient condition of the correctness of the particular judgement about what ought to be done. This is true for moral as for non-moral judgements.

Such a necessity may further be emphasized in relation to moral problems (as different from moral judgements) for although on their own moral principles may not be sufficient to the solving of all moral problems, it is doubtful whether moral problems and solutions can exist at all if there are no moral principles. If, for instance, as Sartre's young man, we are in a position to ask 'Shall I do this rather than that?' that question itself presumes a moral involvement. In other words, to ask such a question is to be in moral dilemma, and 'this' and 'that' are putative alternative moral actions to either of which we are to be committed. We can only choose 'this' rather than 'that' after we have put certain considerations together, under a heading, that is, when we have applied some principle of moral action. If, on the other hand, we

are unable to choose, our failure or indecision may be not because we have set no principles before us, but because we have set various principles so convincingly on our minds that we are unable to choose between them.

In moral discourse it is therefore necessary that there be moral principles, because if there are moral problems, there must be moral principles over which they can arise; to put it paradoxically, moral principles make moral problems possible. They also establish moral rules since it is only because we have them that moral justifying can be undertaken in the first place. To deny their relevance is to deny the possibility of moral situations, for the occurrence of a question or a problem presupposes that an answer can be given, either wrong or right, and it is only by the application of a principle that we can do this; that is to say, that we can talk in terms of right or wrong at all. A moral situation is one in which we decide what is morally wrong or right for us to do, and such situations present themselves all too often in our daily life.

So far, we have argued that moral principles are not only simply relevant for moral justification, but are also logically necessary for it in the sense that it cannot take place without them. Now, it may be asked, if moral judgements need moral principles for their justification, how do we justify our moral principles? That is to say, if principles are necessary for justification, what is sufficient for it? The answer is 'another principle': we justify a moral principle by appeal to another moral principle.

In the process of justifying particular moral acts we usually find ourselves resorting to moral rules, and to justify these in their turn, we find that the necessary conditions are the moral principles. But moral principles if they have to be accepted would need to be justified in terms of other moral principles. Let us take an example. We may justify an act on the principle that stealing is

wrong. Relatively this is a fundamental principle, but as it would itself need to be justified by some other principle, let us call it a less fundamental moral principle. To justify this less fundamental principle we will usually find a variety of more fundamental (or higher-order) moral principles coming into play, such as

- (a) It is wrong to incriminate other people.
- (b) It is right to respect the rights of other persons.
- (c) Persons deserve respect as persons.

and so on.

But however complicated such a process may be, it is obvious that we cannot suppose it to go on indefinitely. At some point we would call off the regress and reach some point (let us call it n) which we would regard as the most fundamental, or ultimate principle. We can, for example, lead from 'stealing is wrong' to 'one ought to be kind' though not because the latter has any analytical relation with the foregoing principle. But it is synthetically related to it in that in a world situation it can be shown that when a person steals from another he is not showing any of the acts we may describe as kind. Moreover the principle 'One ought to be kind' is not meant to lead to any further principles beyond itself: for example, we may condemn X for stealing because stealing is wrong, and stealing is wrong because it deprives people of their property and also inconveniences them; depriving is wrong because it infringes the rights of other people, and infringement on rights is wrong because... it is an act of unkindness and trespasses upon the principle that one ought to be kind. Then one ought to be kind because ... one ought to be kind ... (in other words one ought to be kind because kindness is good). Common sense suggests that we shall dispense with 'because' at this stage since the reason for goodness seems at this last stage to lie within goodness itself. 'One ought to be kind' then becomes our principle n. Unkindness is

wrong therefore, not because of anything that experience can offer us beyond that it is wrong. In other words we can say

'One ought<sub>1</sub> to be kind, because one ought<sub>2</sub> to'  
(with 'ought'<sub>2</sub> being an ultimate ought).

At this stage we might well conclude that we have arrived at an ultimate principle. But it is important to note that in this procedure it was perhaps possible for us to have stopped at any point in our hierarchy of principles, with the same effect. This means that we do not really know (i.e. experience does not tell us) when we have come to an ultimate principle in our hierarchy of moral principles, for there is nothing linguistic or otherwise which makes an ultimate principle stand out. The choice seems to a great extent arbitrary, or it may have been derived by intuition<sup>2a</sup>. But, as we shall show in Part Two, the choice of an ultimate principle is not just arbitrary. What is more likely however is that what may be an ultimate principle in one kind of discourse may not be in another; but this does not preclude its being ultimate in its own context.

When, however, we accept an ultimate principle, we seem to have united all the separate principles into one totality. Such a principle is 'ultimate' in the sense that it is necessary for the justification of all other principles in its hierarchy, while no other principle, nor any experiential fact, is relevant for its truth and acceptability. Thus its correctness is a necessary condition of the correctness of all the other principles and moral judgements. This means that once we accept an ultimate principle as what we ought to go by, all related moral actions may be plugged into place as it were. Thus we would think it appropriate to say we ought not to steal, we ought not to lie, we ought to help the aged ... because we ought to be kind.

It must be admitted that this argument from hierarchy seems ad hominem and rather unconvincing. But unsatisfactory though it may seem, the argument would not be peculiar to moral philosophy. In mediaeval cosmology, for instance, the argument for the Great Chain of Being puts the Sun highest in the hierarchy of the Heavenly Bodies, the Lion in that of animals and the King in that of men. When the King is irresponsible (like Shakespeare's Lear), or murdered (like in Hamlet or Macbeth) there is generally disorder in the ranks of men, and this generally coincides with commotion in the heavens shown in eclipses, storms, etc. The character and circumstances of the highest in the hierarchy determines the states and conditions of those lower in the cadre.

Aristotle has argued that all skills, arts and techniques are subordinated to yet others, and that the chain goes on until 'in all these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to those of the subordinate skills, for it is the former that provide the motive for pursuing the latter'<sup>3</sup>. Although at the opening of The Nichomachean Ethics Aristotle has talked of 'Every act, and every science ... and in like manner every action and moral choice' aiming at 'some good', thereby implying teleologically that all activities aim at some end, in the passage cited above he is illustrating that there must be some end at which all activities aim, and that this end is ultimately determined by a 'master' activity.

These illustrations are not devised to cover the problems posed by our geneology of the ultimate principle, for, as we know, the quality of anything, not even an argument, is not necessarily improved by the mere fact that it has siblings here and there, nor does the successful employment of an argument in a non-moral context necessarily recommend it for effective deployment in moral justification. Yet, following Aristotle, one may hazard stretching a hierarchy of moral

principles until one comes to a "master" principle of moral judgement - perhaps meaning by this no more than the principle by which conflicts between other principles may be resolved. And following from this, it may then be affirmed that unless ultimate principles are appealed to, no moral judgements or acts can be shown to be justifiable.

But it may legitimately be asked how we justify the ultimate moral principle. If we accept that some principles have such ultimate position that other principles and moral rules are justified only by appeal to them, how do we know that they themselves are justified, or, on what grounds do we exempt them from justification?

It is in answer to this question that some philosophers have adopted the Transcendental Argument<sup>4</sup>. We find this argument unsatisfactory but shall defer discussion of it to Chapter VI when it appropriately comes as a quasi-objective theory of justification. Yet we think that ultimate moral principles, qua principles, need to be justified, and we think they can be though not by reference to the presuppositions they make themselves as the transcendentalist may think, nor by reference to other moral principles, since we have given them an ultimate status, but by reference to moral facts. We shall discuss this in Section 3 of this chapter, but before we do this we shall examine how justification actually takes place within a system of moral rules and principles, and this will bring us to seeing how principles are involved in the justification and establishment of moral rules.

## 2.

Moral principles can be distinguished by being described as procedural (or methodological) and non-procedural. A principle such as the principle of consequences - which states that if the consequences of A's doing X would be undesirable, then A ought not to do X -

is a non-procedural. Such principles are, so to speak, more generalized forms of the moral rules and, like the moral rules, have content, and may lead to conflicting interpretations, so do not always apply. For although it is doubtful whether anyone can question the principle of consequences as it is stated above, there may be cases in which it may be disregarded or violated, mainly if the term 'undesirable' is misunderstood. The term may be understood in two ways which are, of course, consistent with each other. One sense of 'undesirable' is that of 'undesirable on the whole'. On this interpretation the principle does not mean that if some of the consequences of A's doing X would be undesirable, then A ought not to do X; rather the principle is consistent with it, for some of the consequences of an act may be desirable and others undesirable. The desirable consequences may outweigh the undesirable ones. In the second sense of 'undesirable' it does not have this proviso 'on the whole'. On this interpretation the fact that some of the consequences of A's doing X would be undesirable is a reason for asserting that A ought not to do X, but it is not a conclusive reason. On the basis of this fact we would reasonably presume that it would be wrong for A to do X. But this presumption can be rebutted by showing that not all the undesirable consequences are outweighed by the desirable ones; in other words that the consequences of A's doing would not be desirable on the whole.

For the procedural principles (i.e. the methodological principles) the matter is different: they characteristically do not conflict and can always apply. This is because they lack content and are relatively free from context. Such principles are those of liberty, equality (with impartiality and justice) and utility. Also in this group are others such as those of generalization and justification that we shall be concerned with, and we shall begin with the principle of justification.

The principle of justification is a key methodological principle. It states that any violation of a moral rule must be justified. To examine this principle it is perhaps necessary to make clear what we shall mean by 'violation of a moral rule'. We shall use this expression in the sense that any act of a type that is generally wrong can be said to violate a rule. Synonymous with this we can think of an act's conflicting with or infringing or breaking a moral rule. Thus we shall say that to tell a lie is to violate the rule against lying; to steal, to violate the rule against stealing, and so on. Since, as we shall see, most moral rules are open-ended, an act of violation is not to be interpreted as entailing that an act is wrong. If there is good reason to believe that one has stolen something, then there is good reason to believe that his action has violated the rule against stealing. In this sort of case the action apparently violates the rule, and such an action is in need of justification. One can of course justify oneself in this sort of case by showing that one did not really steal the object, that he had permission to take it, or that it was his in the first place. But there is certainly a difference between showing that one did not really steal, even though one appeared to, and thus did not violate a rule, and showing that in the circumstances one was justified in stealing.

When we ask a person whether he is justified in his action, we imply that there is a conflict between his action and a rule, thus the question whether an act is justified would normally not arise unless there was such a conflict, either real or apparent. For the demand that an act be justified implies or presupposes that there was such a conflict, or else it would be somewhat unintelligible. In other words to claim that an act requires justification is to imply that there is some reason for thinking it to be wrong. The principle

of justification therefore states that any action that violates a moral rule is in need of justification. The converse of this appears true also: an action that does not violate a moral rule is not in need of justification.

But though an action may not require or be in need of justification, we do sometimes talk of justifying it. Following from this it may be necessary to distinguish two senses of 'justification' - a weak and a strong one - or, to distinguish those actions (or kinds of action) that demand a justification because there are reasons for believing them to be wrong, from those that do not demand it, and yet can be justified, or shown to be right. An act may be justified (in the weak sense) though it is not in need of justification (in the strong sense)<sup>5</sup>. In the weak sense of the term, to say that an act is justified is simply to say that it is right, and not to imply that there is some reason for believing it to be wrong. In some ways, to be sure, it seems to imply more than this. It seems to imply that the action has been shown to be right (as in the strong sense); but the distinguishing feature of the two senses is that in the strong sense the term implies that there is some reason for believing the act to be wrong, and thus that it apparently violates a moral rule. This is the sense in which it can be said that an act requires or demands justification.

Now the way in which an act which demands justification would be justified differs from the way in which an act which does not would be. One can justify an act that does not demand justification merely by showing that there are reasons for it. In an act that demands justification it would not suffice merely to give reasons for it; one would have to show, in addition, that these reasons outweigh the reasons against it. But much as we make this distinction in theory, it still holds that in practice a justification is not demanded for an

action unless there is some question about it.

Once an action is to be justified, the generalization principle (or line of argument) may be found very feasible. This is the principle which underlies the use of such a familiar question as 'what would happen if everyone did like that?' In other words, it says that "If the consequences of everyone's acting in such a way would be undesirable, then it would be wrong for anyone to act in that way"; that is to say, "It would be wrong for anyone to act in a way that would be considered undesirable for everyone to act".

And closely related to the generalization principle is the principle of impartiality, which states that "What is right for one person must be right for another person in similar circumstances". This principle is indeed presupposed in the application of the generalization principle. In other words, the principle of impartiality states that "If not everyone has the right to act in a particular way, then no one has the right to act in that way without a reason or justification".

When both the principle of generalization and the principle of impartiality are considered together, a re-formulation of the generalization principle may run thus: "If the consequences of everyone's acting in a certain way would be undesirable, then no one has the right to act in that way without a reason or justification", or "No one has the right to act in a way which is undesirable for everyone to act in".

These three procedural principles - generalization, impartiality and justification - are, as we can see, related; and in moral justifying the generalization principle and the principle of impartiality will be seen to be interdependent, and sometimes the (non-procedural) principle of consequences is deployed in order to elucidate their function, while the principle of justification creates the rational basis on which the whole notion of moral justifying is

based. But the generalization principle in particular serves to generate moral rules and establish them, and is also involved in determining the range of their application; and in cases where the moral rules conflict it serves as the deciding or mediating factor between them.

Having seen some moral principles let us examine the notion of moral rules. Almost every human action is governed by some rule or other. There are certain kinds of action or courses of conduct which are generally prudent or generally imprudent. It is, for example, generally imprudent to attempt the ascent of Ben Nevis without making the necessary preparations, or to undertake to swim across the English Channel in the bleak midwinter. It follows that there are certain rules or maxims which serve as guides to judgement of particular actions and state that certain kinds of action are generally prudent or imprudent. Similarly there are certain kinds of action which may be said to be generally wrong, or generally right; such as depriving people of their rightful possessions, or being kind to people. Such "truths" are so generally acknowledged that it might be said that to ask why kindness is right is as unintelligible as asking why it is imprudent to attempt the ascent of Ben Nevis without adequate preparation. If we accept this analogy then it would seem true to say that when a particular act is of a kind that is generally right or generally wrong, then it is governed by a moral rule. We need certain rules if our conduct is to be described as good just as we need to keep certain rules if we are going to ascend Ben Nevis safely. But while it would perhaps be foolish to go against a rule of prudence, it would be wrong to violate an act governed by a moral rule without a good reason.

A moral rule then, as we shall understand it, is simply a proposition to the effect that a certain kind of action is generally

right or generally wrong, and such an act may reasonably be presumed to be wrong (or right) in the absence of any evidence to the contrary. From our analysis of the principle of justification it follows that an act that violates a moral rule, or appears to do so is in need of justification. A moral rule can prohibit, require or permit a certain kind of action. If a certain kind of action is prohibited by a rule, then actions of that kind are generally wrong; if it is required, then it is generally wrong not to do an act of that kind; and if it is permitted, then actions of that kind are generally not wrong. Moral rules therefore determine the moral quality of particular moral acts; they state what is wrong or right for the most part, or usually, though this may not be, and ordinarily are not, stated with that qualification.

As examples of moral rules we may take the rules that stealing is wrong, that it is wrong to deceive people, and that everyone ought to keep their promises. These rules must all be understood with the qualification generally or usually; it is, for example, not always right to keep a promise, though it is generally right to do so. To say that an action is always wrong is to say that an action of that kind would be wrong under all circumstances; but this is not implied when we state moral rules.

That moral rules require the qualification "generally" is shown by the fact that they can conflict. When, for instance, the rule that everyone ought to keep their promises conflicts with the rule that we ought to save life, what may be termed good moral action may demand that one of these rules be violated, that is to say, it should be seen not to apply always. This cannot be avoided, and perhaps it might be prudent to take the existence of conflicting claims or obligations to be a fact of the moral life, as obviously there are conflicts of interests and desires. Since moral rules do not hold in

all circumstances, they can be described as open-ended or open-textured. This is the main source of moral problems, and any analysis of moral rules that denies that they may conflict may be mistaken.

In Section 1 we defined moral principles as what ought to be applied to in moral justifying. We can now see how this is so, for just as moral rules justify and determine the quality of particular moral acts, moral principles justify and sometimes are the sources and grounds for the moral rules. It is because of this that we sometimes speak of the principle underlying a certain rule, determining its scope and justifying exceptions to it. For just as it is necessary for an adequate understanding of any rule that we should understand the intent behind it, for an adequate understanding of a moral rule one must know the principles on which it is based and the reasons for which it is established. In order to do this, we shall need to distinguish different kinds of moral rules since, as we shall see, this distinction affects their justification. When we have done this then we shall see how the principles we have chosen for our illustration do justify, and sometimes establish the moral rules.

There are three different kinds of moral rules which it may be necessary to distinguish:

- 1) Such rules as the ones against killing, stealing, lying and so on, fall into a class we shall call fundamental, because they are fundamental to moral life.
- 2) There are such rules as traffic rules which we shall call "neutral norms".<sup>6</sup>
- 3) Then there are "local" rules. This class includes various standards, customs and traditions peculiar to groups and communities, as well as such rules as the rule that everyone ought to pay taxes. All these rules are similar in the fact that a violation of them requires justification (as different from justification which may be

done when the situation does not necessarily call for it); but they differ in the way the generalization principle is applied to them in their justification.

Let us begin by considering the nature and justification of the group we have called the neutral norms. Such rules are 'neutral' because it would make no difference if their opposites were adopted. As an example of a neutral norm we may take the rule that everyone is required to drive at the right-hand side of the road. For this rule it would not matter, and no moral difference would be made, if the rule had stipulated that people should drive at the left-hand side of the road rather than the right-hand side. And here lies the difference between this type of rule and other types: there is nothing antecedently wrong (or right) with what the rule enjoins before its adoption; indeed it might be said not be a moral rule at all. But when it is violated it is wrong to do so, as a consequence of the fact that it has been adopted and individuals are expected to observe it. The peculiar characteristic of a neutral norm is that the same results would have been attained by adopting precisely the opposite, while it is still necessary to adopt some rule.

But then why is it necessary to adopt some rule at all if the adoption of its opposite would not have made any difference? This is where the need for a principle arises and where the generalization principle (or generalization argument) comes in: that it is necessary to have some rule is established by the application of the generalization principle. What would happen, it may be asked, if there were no rules for directing and ordering traffic, if, for instance, people drove on the side of the road on which they felt like driving? The inconveniences to be caused would be enough to show that not everyone ought to drive on the side of the road they felt like. It follows that everyone ought to drive on the side of the road - right or left -

stipulated by the rule about road traffic in the community, unless he has a good reason to the contrary. What the rule is devised for is to serve the purpose and prevent catastrophe in the community and it is clearly indifferent which rule is adopted so long as it serves this purpose. The generalization principle therefore justifies the moral rule that everyone ought to drive on the side of the road stipulated. The rule is justified within the system of rules of which it is part, that is, coherently.

It is evident that a neutral norm involves an essential reference to a special need or purpose, which is advanced in the general observance of the rule and would be defeated by the general disregard of it. It is in terms of this need or purpose that it would be disastrous, or undesirable, if there were no such rule, and it is in terms of this purpose or need that the rule must be justified; non-observance of such rules would frustrate such social needs. This is why we describe the justification as one within a coherent system.

Local rules also involve an essential difference to social needs and purposes on which they depend and in terms of which they may be justified. They are closely tied to their contexts, and so are dependent on variations in social and geographical conditions. One instance of a local rule, as we have defined it, is the rule requiring people to pay taxes. Such a rule by its nature depends on local conditions in a way in which the fundamental rules, for instance, do not. Not every government requires its citizens to pay taxes, and even where they do, not all citizens would be required to do so; so this rule differs from the neutral norms in that it may not necessarily involve everyone, and from the fundamental moral rules which are more like the pre-conditions for any moral life.

Since local rules include traditions and customs, ethical codes of the professions, and so on, they have no meaning to those

who do not belong. Many of the rules in this class may sound foolish and outmoded, nevertheless they have prima facie claim to acceptance. This is shown by what would happen if everyone in a community disregarded its customs and traditions. Thus these rules are binding simply because they are accepted by a dominant part of the group to which they apply, and so members of a group expect and depend on others to act in accordance with them. So, once again, the principle of generalization is applied to establish and justify a moral rule.

To illustrate the application of this principle in the context of local rules, let us borrow an example from Singer<sup>7</sup>. Singer tells of how this principle was applied to safeguard rules affecting water problems in parts of the U.S. If every riparian in Arizona had the right to use as much water as he would need there would not be enough water to go round - none of them would obtain as much water as he would need - hence not every riparian in Arizona ought to have equal right to the water of that State. The fact that if everyone had equal rights none would have enough water sets a problem, which is to determine a fair way of distributing rights to the use of water. So the rule was made that the water-user who first made a beneficial use of the water of a stream, e.g. for ranching or irrigation etc., had the foremost right to the stream. (This example illustrates the way in which a local rule is more closely tied to its context than a fundamental moral rule. Such a rule guiding the use of water would not be necessary where there was no need to ration the use of water. The result here would have been disastrous if everyone had equal right to the water.)

We therefore see that the generalization argument can be used to justify, and indeed establish, moral rules of the types we have called neutral norms as well as local rules. We shall now turn to the question of the justification of the fundamental moral rules.

For an illustration any fundamental moral rule could do: for they all share one characteristic - their general freedom from context. Let us then take the rule that we ought not to tell lies. What is the justification for this? Since to justify a moral rule is equivalent to explaining or giving reasons why a certain kind of action is generally wrong (or right), to justify the rule against lying is equivalent to explaining that lying is wrong; in other words, it is to ask why it is wrong to lie.

It would be futile to answer this question by merely saying that lying is wrong because I, or society, disapprove of it. This might serve as a device to keep someone from lying, but it seems irrelevant to the question why it is wrong to lie, for it would be wrong to lie even if one could get away with it; that is, even if it was not socially disapproved. The fact of social disapproval as the source (and sometimes the consequences) of customs and traditions, can establish local rules - and maybe, neutral norms - but not fundamental moral rules.

The principle of generalization (i.e. the generalization argument) can show why this is so. Lying can be said to be wrong because of what would happen if everyone lied. It would be nothing short of disastrous if everyone were to lie whenever they wished, if lying were to be the rule rather than the exception. And here we might deploy the principle of impartiality. For suppose that I claimed the right to lie on the ground that I wanted to, then everyone in a similar position, that is, everyone who wished to lie, would do so by right; that is to say, everyone would have the right to lie whenever he wanted to, the consequence would be disastrous. For if everyone lied whenever they wanted to it would be impossible to tell when anyone was not lying, and eventually no one could speak at all for the use of language would be defeated. The use of language

presupposes that even though people are often mistaken in what they say, and often use words in order to deceive, it is not always so for the most part. So because the disastrous consequences of lying would be so great, not everyone would have the right to lie, and for anyone to claim to have this right would be to claim to be an exception to the rule, and to be an exception on a ground that would make every similar person (that is, of course, everyone else) an exception. And this would be self-contradictory. So even if society did not disapprove of lying, to break the rule that we ought not to lie would lead to a paradox.

It would be seen from this analysis that although three types of moral rule can be distinguished, they are connected by the fact that they are all justified through the application of the generalization argument, even though they vary in the way this argument is applied.

But the generalization argument does more than justify (and sometimes establish) moral rules; it sometimes settles the conflicts between them, for, as we know, it is characteristic of moral rules to conflict. Since the generalization principle provides that an action would be right in the particular instance if it would be right for everyone in similar circumstances, it follows that when there are conflicting claims or obligations between moral rules, they can be settled by appeal to the generalization principle; that is to say, the generalization argument provides the criterion for deciding or mediating between them. Let us take an example. As we have already noted, when two rules conflict one is to be broken in order that moral action may be possible, since moral rules only apply generally. Suppose, as we had in an earlier example, the rule that you ought to keep your promises conflicts with the rule that we ought to save life. And suppose also, as in a common example, I had borrowed a rifle from

a friend and promised to return it whenever he demanded it, and he happened to do so when he was engaged in a bitter quarrel with his wife, and was in a fury, I shall be constrained to break my promise and not give him back the rifle on the principle that if everyone kept their promises in similar circumstances the disaster would be great. Here I am applying the generalization principle in my act of promise-breaking, and arguing that if everyone broke their promises in similar circumstances the consequences would be better than if they had kept them. Thus to show of a certain act that it is not wrong, one must show that the consequences of everyone's acting in that way in similar circumstances would not be wrong.

It is, however, not being claimed in these arguments that when there are conflicting aims or obligations, or in the justification of an action generally, the generalization principle is, in fact, or must always be, involved or explicitly appealed to. It need not be always or even regularly invoked and, on this score, the claim that we attributed to Dorothy Mitchell at the opening of this Chapter that we can and do take moral decisions without really taking recourse to moral principles, is, in some sense, justified. But nevertheless the principle is appealed to implicitly or tacitly. From the fact that we do not mention a particular principle when we make a moral judgement it does not follow that it is not used or presupposed. The generalization principle is rarely explicitly appealed to except in cases where rules conflict, where there are conflicting considerations, or where there seems to be no ordinary moral rule that is applicable. For it is very often sufficient when making moral judgements to invoke a rule or point out the existence of a right. Thus if someone wants to know why it would be wrong for him to act in a certain way, it is often sufficient to point out that it would be a case of stealing (or lying, etc.) and that stealing (or lying, etc.) is wrong. Yet even though

the generalization argument is not explicitly mentioned here, it is necessarily invoked; for it is implicit in the explanation of why stealing is wrong, and why we ought not to steal.

It is also not being argued that the generalization principle must be explicitly invoked in explaining why a certain kind of action is wrong. In many cases it suffices to appeal to the principle of consequences by pointing out the sort of consequences actions of the kind in question may reasonably be expected to have. Such acts as lying, stealing, being cruel to others, generally have mischievous consequences in the particular case. Someone may reasonably be expected to suffer as a consequence of such an action. Thus there would appear to be a significant difference between acts such as lying or stealing - the fundamental moral acts - and acts like refusing to pay taxes or avoiding military service, or generally failing to do one's part in a community enterprise the success of which depends on the co-operation of everyone or nearly everyone concerned. For the mischievous effects of dishonesty are much more evident than the mischievous effects of failure to pay taxes or failure to vote of just one person or a few persons. To tell a lie one must intend to deceive; to steal one must intend to deprive; so each of lying or stealing is wrong in itself; but not voting is not.

It is in fact to actions like not voting or not paying taxes that the generalization principle seems most often explicitly applied in practice. The reason why we ought not to lie lies more readily apparent than the reason we ought not to evade taxes. Thus the principle of generalization is in practice in general desirable but not necessary for the justification of fundamental moral rules. The direct consequences of failing to pay one's taxes are obscure or seem trifling, so it is in such acts that the principle of generalization is most effective in bringing the faults to the fore.

Nevertheless if someone does not see why lying is wrong, or why it is wrong for him to lie, then it is necessary to make an explicit appeal to the generalization principle. It is wrong for him to lie because it is wrong for others to lie to him. Though one can very well lie to others while not liking them to lie to him, no one can sensibly claim that it would be wrong for others to lie to him but not wrong for him to lie to them; in other words, that the rule that he ought to lie is felicitous while the rule that others should lie to him is infelicitous.

These considerations indicate that there is a difference between the types of action and thus the types of justification involved in fundamental moral rules and those in the other kinds of moral rules. In the case of lying or stealing or cruelty, which is fundamental, there is a definitely assignable individual or group of individuals whose rights would be violated; but in the case of attempting to avoid one's obligations to one's government there is no assignable individual or group of individuals whose rights would be violated. Hence the need to appeal to the principle of justification is greater. Suppose one does not pay taxes through the method of making a false statement to the Tax Authorities, he lies and therefore violates the fundamental rule that he ought not to lie. Failing to pay his taxes is, in this context, an effect of the violation of the fundamental rule (though in law he may be punished for both). This points the way to an argument we shall put up later to show that local rules and neutral norms do eventually collapse into fundamental rules.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose from this analysis that fundamental moral rules are to be distinguished from the others on the ground that the latter are generally justified by the principle of generalization, whereas the former are governed solely by the principle of consequences (that is, that the consequences would

be undesirable on individuals). It is true that the generalization principle has a more immediate or apparent application to rules that, described generally, require one to play his part in a common enterprise the success of which depends on everyone concerned doing his part. It is true also that the fundamental rules are governed by the principle of consequences, so that the generalization principle is not the only principle relevant to them. Yet the principle of consequences is itself involved in the principle of generalization (which is really a generalization from it. The principle of generalization can be re-formulated as "If the consequences of everyone's doing X would be undesirable, then no one has the right to do X").

Furthermore when the consequences of the violation of a moral rule in a particular case would not be desirable, as in failing to take part in a communal labour, the principle of consequences would not apply whereas the generalization principle very well might. If, as in the example given above, the circumstances of the violation of the case are such that the consequences would be undesirable, then the act is wrong, and it is irrelevant that the consequences of one person's acting in that way in those circumstances would not be desirable. And though this sort of use is not governed by the principle of consequences, it is governed by the rules themselves. For one is not justified in violating a moral rule simply because the consequences of his particular violation would not be undesirable.

Finally it is not claimed that the principle of generalization and its related principles of consequences and impartiality are easy to apply to moral rules. In many cases it may be very difficult especially with the problems of determining what the consequences are likely to be, and then of evaluating them, and of determining what circumstances may count as 'similar circumstances'. But when they can

be applied they justify and establish moral rules in the way we have tried to show.

## 3.

In Chapter I we showed that common usage and our moral attitudes suggest that our moral judgements make truth-claims. But it must be admitted that this truth-claim which we attribute to our moral judgements is not as obvious as is sometimes claimed. Professor G.J. Warnock<sup>8</sup>, for example, argues that some things are morally wrong can be shown "as incontestably as it can be shown to be true that... snow is white" (OM p.124). Such a claim cannot be upheld without some reservation, for moral truths cannot be 'seen' or empirically testified as we can see and testify that snow is white. They are not empirical truths, nor can they be obtained by merely 'unpacking' concepts; they are of a non-linguistic, though necessary, character.

We have shown from our sample of moral rules and principles that the former are justified by the latter. This substantiates the claim we made in Section I of this chapter. In our discussion of moral rules and principles we saw that for an adequate understanding of a moral rule one must know the principles on which it is based, and the reasons for which it is established; that is to say, one should know how it coheres within a system of rules and principles. This is more so for the kind of moral rules we called neutral norms and local rules. For the neutral norms what actually gives the rule a relevance is that it has been made and adopted within the community and it is in terms of this that the generalization principle and its related principles justify it. A local rule would not be a rule at all if the condition under which it was made had ceased to be, and indeed would not be a moral rule if the principle of generalization did not make it so. These classes of rules therefore derive their

'truth' from the conditions prevailing in the communities where they obtain, and what the principle of generalization does to them is to uphold this fact as one which has moral relevance. Thus the moral acts such as paying taxes or driving at the 'right' side of the road which some rules justify owe their 'truth' to a coherent system; that is to say, they are valid because they lie within a nexus of rules and principles of which they form part. For fundamental rules, however, the story is different. Those rules are not justified merely by coherence with the conditions prevailing in the communities where they obtain: we ought not to lie because lying, we said, is wrong in itself; not voting is not, so the rule that we ought to vote is not right in itself. So the rule 'you ought not to lie', although it can be shown to be justified by coherence, as the other moral rules, depends for its justification on truths that lie beyond a coherent system. Thus 'You ought not to lie' can be justified even without social approval, but 'You ought to pay your taxes' would be justified only if society has ruled that everyone ought to pay taxes or that some should pay, and 'you' happen to be one. Fundamental moral rules look for their justification to the ultimate moral principles for, as we have already shown, they claim truths that do not lie within a coherence system.

This last point makes it necessary for us to clear up a matter about our use of language in relation to moral rules, principles and judgements. We talk both of particular moral acts being justified by moral rules as we talk of their being justified by moral principles, including the ultimate moral principles. This is because our principles justify the moral rules which in their turn justify the particular moral acts, so they justify the particular moral acts ex hypothesi. And since the ultimate principles justify the principles

of the lower order, it is quite consistent to talk, in the way we do, of particular moral acts, of moral rules and principles - indeed of all moral judgement - being justified by ultimate moral principles. But since all moral judgements make truth-claims all moral justifying is based on truth.

We can now investigate how truth justifies our moral judgements, that is to say, how the truth-claims they make may be justified. In considering judgements such as

You ought to pay your taxes

or It is right to drive on the 'right' side of the road

and You ought not to defraud

we note two different types of truth-claim -

(a) truth-claims made in judgements on acts based in local rules and neutral norms, and

(b) truth-claims made in judgements on acts based in the fundamental moral rules.

Let us, for the sake of analysis, call them (a) judgements of the lower level, and (b) judgements of the higher level. Justification at the lower level goes on within a coherent system, so the truth which is claimed by judgements of the lower level is truth of a coherence system.

In order to see what this kind of justification involves, we shall need to survey, if very briefly, and in a rather simplified form, the Coherence Theory of Truth.

According to the Coherence Theory of Truth to say that what is said (or a judgement or a proposition or belief) is true or false is to say that it coheres or fails to cohere with a system whose elements are related to each other by ties of logical implication as the elements in a system of pure mathematics are related. Many proponents of this theory hold, indeed, that each member of the

system implies every other member, and to test whether what is said is true or not is to test it for coherence with this system. Its Logical Positivist supporters hold that the system with which all true statements must cohere is that accepted by the scientists of contemporary culture. The metaphysical supporters on the other hand insist that nothing can be purely called true until it is known to cohere with every other element of the system.

The Coherence Theory enjoins that a common practical test of the truth or falsity of an ordinary person's assertions, e.g. that he saw a ghost, is that they do, or do not cohere with, that is, are or are not compatible with, other common sense or scientific views which are held to be true. The logical test for the truth or acceptability, of any proposition in pure mathematics is whether it coheres with, that is, is logically deducible from, and internally related to, some other propositions, and ultimately the axioms of its system.

One principle of this theory is the principle of internal relations, which is alleged to hold for every element, whether in thought or in reality. For instance, it is agreed that we would not understand, much less know, the truth or falsity of a statement about something like blue if blue were divorced in our thought from all other colours in the spectrum to which it is related by likeness and difference. Further, not only would we not know the meaning or truth of such a statement, it also cannot be purely said to have its meaning or truth-value independently of its relations to other elements. Thus the statement "Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 B.C." is said to owe its meaning to the critical political situation within which it took place.

A corollary of this principle of internal relations and of the Coherence Theory in general is the doctrine of degrees of truth. If the truth of any given statement is bound up with, and can only be

seen with, the truth of all the statements of the system, and therefore with the whole system, it follows that individual statements as such can only be partly true - and therefore partly false - while only the whole system is wholly true.

It is not the purpose here to criticize this theory. But its critics may, among other things, argue that coherence of one empirical statement with another can be accepted as practical test of truth only because we have already accepted the second judgement as prima facie true, unless we shall be involved in infinite regress. Our concern here, however, is to show that this theory of truth, as it is formulated, can justify the type of truth which our moral judgements of the lower level claim.

Moral judgements of the higher level, on the other hand, claim truths of a correspondence system. This is because since these judgements are not bound within a coherent system, they can only be justified if we can stretch to truths beyond such systems. To justify ultimately is to establish judgement of a type which needs no further justification, and such a judgement cannot be effectively made if we limit our criteria within the very system which is being justified. To take a commonplace example, suppose we were to judge the efficiency of our local football team, we would expect this team to match itself not just against the teams within its own locality, but against teams outside it. It is only if it can compare favourably with external teams, that is, if its artistry can match theirs, that we can be justified in describing it as efficient on the ultimate scale. So we resort to the Correspondence Theory of Truth for ultimate justification and, to do this, we shall need to review that theory.

According to the Correspondence Theory of Truth, to say that something is true is to say that there is a correspondence between it and a fact. The theory rests on its identification with the principle

that p is true if and only if p, and its insistence that there must be something other than what is said which makes what is said true. If p is what is said, then there must be something other than p which makes p true. In other words what is said is true if and only if something is said. The obvious, and perhaps the only candidate to play the part of this other item, is a fact - the fact that p; that is to say, the fact that something is said.

It is sometimes wrongly held either that what it is that is true has a separate existence or that it has a grammatical object such as a sentence. But none of these will do. It is what is said which is true or false, and what is said is sometimes embodied in what is uttered (i.e. the words used in saying it). Moreover one need not make the assumption that only separately existing objects can correspond. A correspondence can hold between numbers, times, influences, beliefs, and a host of other things.

Many correspondence theorists have tended to think of the second item of the correspondence, that is, that which is related to what is truly said, as a separately existing object of some sort. Sometimes this was because they held that the second item is an event, situation or state of affairs; sometimes it was because, though agreeing that it is a fact rather than an event, situation or state of affairs, they thought of a fact itself as some sort of separately existing object. But a fact does not apply to items in the world, nor to any objects; it applies to what the world is like, how things are. For instance, it may appear plausible that where the first item in the correspondence is the true statement 'The Battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815' then the second item is either the actual battle or the occurrence of the battle at that place and date. But this view is mistaken, and its mistakenness may be shown in the fact that when we consider the true negative statement 'The Battle of

Waterloo was not fought in 1817', we see that it contains a fact too - the fact that the battle was not fought in 1817. For it is as much a fact that the Battle of Waterloo was not fought in 1817 as it is that it was fought in 1815. The fact to which what is said corresponds must not be confused with the object, situation, event, etc, with what is truly said is said about. What a true statement is about may be an object, a situation, an event, or a possibility; but what it states is a fact.

The items therefore between which a correspondence must hold are

- (a) what is truly said, e.g. that p
- and (b) a fact, e.g. the fact that p.

There are two ways in which we can talk of a correspondence. To say that A and B correspond or that there is a correspondence between A and B, we can either mean that A corresponds with B, that is, agrees with, fits or squares with B; or corresponds to B, which means correlates to, equal in value or equivalent to B. Thus the two sides of an orange or a jig-saw correspond with each other, while a rank in the army may correspond to one in the navy. The correspondence which holds between what is truly said and a fact is a correspondence of correlation, a correspondence to, not a fitting or squaring or corresponding with. What the statement 'that p' corresponds with is not what it corresponds to: it corresponds with the facts x, y, z, e.g. that a man who claimed an alibi for a crime committed in Glasgow at 2 p.m. on January 29 was seen in London at the same time and on the same date; it corresponds to the fact that p, e.g. the fact that he is an alibi.

By interpreting the correspondence between the statement that p and the fact that p as a correspondence of what is said to what is a fact, that is, as a mere one to one correlation between these items - without any hint that one resembles the other or fits or is structured like the other - the Correspondence Theory remains faithful

to the basic and indisputable principle that p is true if and only if p. If things are as I say they are, then I have stated a fact and what I have said is true; so to state what is true is to state a fact, and vice versa.

A given or a particular statement says that this is how things are - that is, it says that this is a fact - and what is said is true if and only if this is how things are. Whatever is truly said therefore has its corresponding facts indicated by the same words, or words which say the same, as those which express what is truly said. Conversely for every fact something corresponding would be, though it need not actually be, truly said. The fact corresponding to the true statement that p is the fact that p, and the true statement corresponding to the fact that p is the statement that p.

Where what is said is not explicitly formulated as in "What St. Paul said about Jesus is true", no indication is given as to what is the corresponding fact, but only that there is one - the fact that St. Paul said something about Jesus.

It follows from our foregoing analysis that to say that what is said is true is to say that what is said corresponds to a fact; to discover whether what is said is true is to discover whether there is a fact corresponding to it.

Our position with truth and justification is therefore this: that in moral justification we accept both the Coherence Theory of Truth and the Correspondence Theory of Truth but apply them at different levels of justification. But a moment's reflection reveals that a distinction within moral justification into a lower and a higher level creates a problem, for it does suggest that there are certain - and indeed a large group of - moral judgements which are not justified ultimately, and this is contrary to our earlier claim that all moral judgements are justified by ultimate moral principles. How then can

it be that some moral judgements - those of the lower level - are not justified ultimately? How can we resolve this seeming impasse? How can judgements of the lower order be ultimately justified?

This problem can be resolved; indeed it comes not to be a problem after all, when we consider what is involved. It is true that while judgements of the lower level remain within the coherent system they cannot be taken as ultimate, but they do ultimately dissolve into the higher level. Take, for example, 'Everyone ought to vote' which is a judgement of the lower level by our classification. It is justified by the generalization principle, and the principle of impartiality, for P ought to vote because he ought not to treat himself as an exception, without a reason. If he does, then everyone in a similar position (that is, as we understand it, everyone else who has no reason to claim an exemption) has the right to be an exception, and since not everyone can be an exception in this way, P ought to vote; if he fails, he cheats. So the rule that everyone ought to vote or that no one ought to abstain from voting, without a reason, now dissolves into 'No one ought to cheat', which is a fundamental moral rule, and can be justified ultimately. Indeed every local rule or neutral norm dissolves into one fundamental moral rule or another in order to become a moral rule - into such fundamental rules as those of fairness, not defrauding, not cheating, and so on.

Having seen how it is that our moral judgements are justified by truths claimed in the ultimate principles, we can now face the question how the ultimate principle can itself be justified. The question whether ultimate moral principles are themselves justifiable was raised in Section 1, and then we answered that they can be. Because, as they do not, by their nature, belong within a coherence system, ultimate moral principles are justified by correspondence: the truths which they state correspond to moral facts, and these moral

facts justify them.

We have seen in our exposition of the Correspondence Theory of Truth that it is what is said which is true or false, and that a correspondence must have a second term, that is to say, there must be something other than itself to make what is said true or false. That something is a fact, and when what is said corresponds to this fact, it is true. This fact need not have a separate existence, so need not be an object, or event or situation which what is truly said is said about.

Now let us go back to our putative ultimate moral principle: 'We ought to be kind'. For this proposition to be true, what is said (i.e. that we ought to be kind) must correspond to a fact, and in this case the fact is "(the fact) that we ought to be kind". As we have seen, to say that something is a fact is to say that that is how things are independent of us; so to talk of "that we ought to be kind" being a fact is to say that it is truly how things are independent of us. Thus "that we ought to be kind" is a fact whether indeed we are kind or not, or whether we will or will not be kind. Because this fact is determined by our use of the term 'ought' in a way which conceptualizes the moral life in claims and demands, it is a moral fact. Thus our ultimate moral principle - 'We ought to be kind' - corresponds to the moral fact that we ought to be kind, and is therefore justified by that fact.

But it might legitimately be asked what the facts are which make moral facts true - what justifies the moral facts, that is. This is a vast and important question: indeed it is the ultimate question which this thesis will seek to answer, and will be taken up in Part Two. Briefly it might be said here that to accept objectivism in ethics is to accept a realm of universal conceptual values or moral facts which are non-empirical (or non-naturalistic), but which are grounds of

specific moral demands made upon moral agents.

In this Chapter an attempt has been made to explain how it is that moral judgements make truth-claims. In order to meet this objective we have had to show how moral principles justify the moral rules which in their turn justify our particular moral actions. All moral judgements are ultimately justified by ultimate moral principles which, themselves, correspond to, and are justified (in our 'weak' sense of justification, i.e. being shown to be right) by, the moral facts. This is how, we think, it is that our particular moral judgements are made on the basis of truth. Since moral principles are central in this hierarchy of justification, we have found it necessary to begin our argument by showing that these principles are really necessary in moral justification, and this prepares the ground for their application in Section 2. Section 3 sums up by showing how moral justification, in the way we have explicated it, finds its ultimate explanation in moral truth. In this analysis we have chosen some principles for illustration, mainly because of their kinship to one another and their feasibility for our purpose. It is not intended to prescribe a morality of teleology in any way, or to suggest that those principles are the only ones that can and do justify moral rules; nevertheless we think they are inevitable to the business of moral justifying. By the same argument, no attempt has been made to establish any principle as ultimate<sup>9</sup>. But we have tried to show that our moral judgements are ultimately justifiable. That moral judgements can be ultimately justified suggests that there is a correct view towards which our moral acts are directed, and that this correct view cannot just be what is right within one system. In saying this we strengthen our position in our claim that morality is objective, and at the same time point ahead against such ethical theories as Prescriptivism and Relativism in particular which, as we shall see in

subsequent chapters, tend to limit morality within a coherent system.

Notes and References

1. Dorothy Mitchell : 'Are Moral Principles Really Necessary?'  
Australasian Journal of Philosophy Vol 41 (1963) pp 163ff.
2. R.M. Hare : 'Principles'. Proceedings of Aristotelian Society 1972-3 p.1. (PAS).
- 2a. It may be that some intuition may eventually find a place in our moral thinking. As A.C. Ewing points out, to know intuitively is to say that one knows it 'otherwise than by simple observation and mediate reasoning' (Ethics p.137), and some intuition seems to be called up whenever we know by simple inference. This claim will be examined in Chapter V.
3. The Nicomachean Ethics : Translated by J.A.K. Thomson. Penguin (1953) p. 25.
4. R.S. Peters : Ethics and Education Allen & Unwin (1966) p.114f.
5. This, it seems to me, is the sense in which we talk of procedural moral principles and ultimate moral principles "needing" justification. Justifying them is an attempt to show that they are right, not that they violate any rules.
6. I owe this term to Marcus B. Singer.
7. Marcus B. Singer : 'Moral Rules and Principles' in Essays in Moral Philosophy ed. A.I. Melden. Univ. of Washington Press (1958).
8. G.J. Warnock : Object of Morality (OM). Methuen (1971).
9. Some philosophers have done this: e.g. R.S. Downie & E. Telfer in Respect for Persons or A.P. Griffiths in his paper 'Justifying Moral Principles' (PAS 1957-58)

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### CHAPTER III

#### REJECTION OF MORAL OBJECTIVITY : THE SUBJECTIVE THEORIES

In this chapter it is proposed to consider three theories - Logical Positivism, Emotivism and Prescriptivism. Of these, only the last two are, in common usage, ethical theories. Logical Positivism, essentially a non-ethical theory, comes into our discussion through the Verifiability Principle which is its machinery for attack on ethics. Its claim that ethical statements are meaningless, if upheld, implies that all argument about ethics generally, and ethical objectivity in particular, will be equally pointless. It is therefore important that such a virulent opponent is got out of the way. The meta-ethical theories of Emotivism and Prescriptivism seek to explain the function of moral expressions, not in terms of definitions setting out their meanings, but in terms of their performing non-fact-stating functions. Logical Positivism shares this feature with them, hence all three are non-cognitive theories and agree in their rejection of moral objectivity. We have, therefore, for simplicity, grouped them together as subjective theories. They are also connected through a chain-relation which links Logical Positivism and Emotivism on one side, and then Emotivism and Prescriptivism on the other. It will be argued that all the three theories fail in their claims, and although they do this in some of the details of their claims, it will be seen that they do this more significantly in their general position with regard to moral judgements. The logical positivist sees moral judgements as meaningless, the emotivist as meaningful, but in what may seem to us a misleading sense, while the prescriptivist sees analogies between imperatives and moral judgements, and, as a result, over-assimilates the two types of discourse. What is significant about the two meta-ethical theories in the group is their stress on the practical

nature of morality, and many of the problems posed by their theses come as a result of this insistence.

### 1. Logical Positivism and Ethics

Moritz Schlick (1882-1936) has claimed that when we ask about the meaning of a sentence what we want to know is a description of the conditions under which the sentence will be found to be a true or a false proposition. "The meaning of a sentence", he asserts, "is the method of its verification"<sup>1</sup>. In doing this he puts up verificationism as a theory of meaning.

The Verification Theory of Meaning depends on the Principle of Verification, which states that for a sentence to be meaningful it must be empirically verifiable. Schlick again states:

No sentence has meaning unless we are able to  
indicate a way of testing its truth or falsity. (p.103)

This assertion identifies the truth-value of a sentence with its meaning. But such insistence on verification as an index to meaning would rule out and count as meaningless many sentences we know and take as meaningful. Commands and questions, to mention a few of the significant ones, would come under this category although we know them to be perfectly meaningful in our ordinary sense of the term 'meaning'. So that if the assertion has to stand it may need to be amended and re-phrased in what may be a more explanatory although a more unwieldy way, thus:

any non-analytic, non-performative sentence,  
which is also neither a command nor a question,  
must be empirically verifiable in order to be  
meaningful.

Such a formulation has been suggested by D.E. Cooper<sup>2</sup> in criticism;

its unwieldiness, as we have already observed, and its attempt to remove all the obstacles that may stand in the way of its application, make it uninspiring as a principle, and expose the kind of problems that the Verification Principle may raise with regard to meaning.

It must be said in favour of the principle, however, that for language to be meaningful it must in some way relate to the observable world, and that the principle of verification, so far as it goes, offers a simple answer to how it can do this. But in doing this it has exposed itself to a number of problems, particularly the metaphysical one of taking the structure of language as a faithful rather than a short-hand representation of the structure of what is described, thereby trying to extract from the features of language information about the world, begging the question of experiential knowledge by narrowing down the meaning of 'experience'.

It is not within our scope now to go into these problems. We are rather more interested in seeing how the claims of the principle affect ethics, and this brings us into examining the claims of Professor A.J. Ayer. But before we do this let us digress a little, and raise what might become a vital issue. In questioning whether observation is the only way we can refer to statements meaningfully, it is sometimes questioned whether the statement of the Verification Principle is itself verifiable; for if it is not, then the claim would seem to be self-defeating.

How, for instance, can we verify the statement "A sentence is meaningful only if we can describe the observations which would verify it"? Or this: "For any sentence to be meaningful it must be empirically verifiable"? Yet we would hesitate to suggest that these sentences do not refer to the world or that they are not meaningful. But if they are meaningful and refer to the world and, following

the conditions supplied by Verificationism, it must be either that they are analytic; that is, that their meaning is defined by the words in which the statements are expressed, or that they are empirically verifiable. The first cannot be true because the verification claim is an experiential claim: it is not intended to be valid only analytically; moreover, its exponents would wish to be understood to be expressing what experience has taught them. The statement of the theory is therefore synthetic and can only be verified empirically. But how can this be done? Experience does not suggest to us how it can be. So it is either that the statement of the Verification Principle is non-verifiable, and meaningless, or there must be some kind of meaningfulness which is independent of Verificationism. Some groups of statements must have meaning though not empirically verifiable, even though they are also not analytic. Such statements can be taken as universal, and cannot be conclusively established by experience even if we attempted. They are such that their predicates are not contained in their subjects (i.e. they are not analytic), and yet they are logically independent of all judgements describing sense-experiences. If the verification statements are meaningful in this way, it stands to reason to suggest that they may not be alone in this, and that they open a new channel to meaningfulness through which other statements with the same characteristics cannot reasonably be denied access. So metaphysical statements, theological statements and ethical statements may belong in this category - a category with characteristics which Kant described as synthetic - a priori. In saying this we are not claiming to have proved that statements of these classes are meaningful in this way; we are only pointing out that the Verification Principle is not a panacea to the problem of meaningfulness, its suggestions are acceptable but far from being exhaustive on the matter.

Following from this last argument it would be possible that there are entities which exist independent of their exemplifications in the empirical world and, if there are such, there would be no reason to expect them to manifest themselves in the details of our sense experience. What perhaps is in question then is not whether statements about such entities are verifiable, but whether there are such entities in the first place; not, for instance, whether ethical statements are empirically verifiable, but whether there are ethical statements at all.

This is the problem which Professor A.J. Ayer<sup>3</sup> has undertaken to solve. Ayer does not deny that there are ethical judgements, but he denies that they have any content; and, if this is so, on the positivist model, we cannot accept them as statements expressing properties which exist independently of their exemplifications (if there are any such) since in ethics no such properties can be seen in fact to exist.

Ayer divides the "ethical contents" of moral philosophy into four: (1) propositions which express definitions of ethical terms or judgements about the legitimacy of certain definitions.

(2) Propositions describing the phenomena of moral experience.

(3) Exhortations of moral virtue.

(4) Ethical judgements.

He claims that it is only the first - the definition of ethical terms - which can be said to constitute ethical philosophy; that the propositions which determine the phenomena of moral experience and their causes must be assigned to psychology or sociology; exhortations of moral virtue are not propositions at all but "mere ejaculations or commands assigned to provoke action of some sort" (p.137) - they are neither philosophy nor science. About ethical judgements he says, "we have not yet decided how they should be classified" (ibid.); but

since they are "certainly neither definitions nor comments upon definitions, nor quotations", they do not belong to ethical philosophy.

By this classification, Ayer does, at least, two things, in particular: (1) he waives anything we might call 'moral experience'. To him what has been taken as moral experience is either psychological or sociological experience. (2) He denies that ethical judgements can be put as propositions, since only the first and second groups may legitimately be described as propositions. And since it is only propositions that assert anything, ethical judgements do not assert anything.

Professor Ayer therefore brings into the context of ethics the logical positivist claim that a statement is "held to be literally meaningful if and only if it is either analytic or empirically verifiable" (p.7). Verifiable statements are either to be "directly" or "indirectly" verifiable, and, from the conditions he carefully laid down about directly and indirectly verifiable statements (p.17), we may deduce that if ethical statements are to be taken as meaningful utterances, they have to be either analytic or reducible to observation statements. He does not seriously examine the possibility of ethical judgements being true by definition (i.e. analytically), but again it can be inferred from his argument that they cannot be so regarded. If, therefore, ethical judgements are neither true analytically nor by empirical verification - and those are the only criteria which Positivism sets down for meaningfulness - then they are literally meaningless.

In arguing about ethical judgements, Ayer rejects both what he calls the "orthodox subjectivist theory" and utilitarianism (with other branches of naturalism) for the reason that they tend, by their interpretation of ethical judgements, to reduce them to psycho-

logical propositions or indeed empirical propositions of any kind" (p.139). Emotivism, pure and simple, which derives from orthodox subjectivism by reducing ethical judgements to feelings, suggests that they may be true or false; so he rejects that brand of emotivism as well. His own subjectivist theory is such that -

If I say 'Stealing is wrong' I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning - that is, expresses no proposition which can be true or false (p.142)

To Ayer, the Verification Principle is, in fact, another way of talking about "a means of determining when an indicative sentence expressed a proposition" (p.11). A sentence which is verifiable is proved to be a proposition ex hypothesi, so any theory which credited ethical statements with being propositions was making them verifiable and thereby crediting them with truth-value. Such a theory should be rejected. His argument seems to be that since propositions, and only propositions, can be true or false, ethical statements are no propositions, so bear no truth-value - they "do not come under the category of truth and falsehood" (p.144). And because the question of truth-value does not arise with ethical judgements, it is impossible to find a criterion for determining their validity. So they have 'no objective validity whatsoever' (ibid.). Following from this also contradictions cannot arise from them, because there will be nothing to contradict. Ethical disagreements are therefore only apparent, and lack genuine existence for, as Ayer's argument still runs, ethical disagreements can themselves only be factual disagreements and where there are no facts there cannot be factual disagreements. When we seem ethically to disagree, we do so

... in the hope that we have only to get

our opponent to agree with us about the nature of empirical facts for him to adopt the same moral attitude towards them as we do.

(p.147)

So there are no moral facts, but empirical facts; nor are there moral arguments since there are no moral disagreements. Moral argument, he contends, is possible "only if some system of values is presupposed", but as there is no such system we cannot argue about the validity of moral principles except in the light of our own feelings. What appear to be moral arguments only dissolve into factual or logical ones. As ethical arguments are "mere expressions of feeling", there is "no sense in asking whether any such ... is true" (p.148). Ethics therefore does not constitute knowledge, and can only increase our knowledge by "providing data for our psychological and sociological generalizations" (p.151), and such knowledge cannot be equated to ethical 'knowledge'. (Similar argument was levied against theology - p.158).

Professor Ayer ends his critique of ethics (and theology) by emphasizing that his theory does not place any bounds on people from claiming to arrive at truths through experience by any methods they may choose, such as intuition, or by the rational method of induction. But he insists that such experiences, if they have to assert truths that may be called cognitive, their truths must be ultimately asserted in synthetic propositions. All such propositions are of course "to be incorporated in the system of empirical propositions which constitute science" (p.158).

To say that such a claim is dogmatic is perhaps to describe it in very harsh terms. But it is easy to see at once that it places ethics (and theology) in a Procrustean bed. The Verification

Principle, by Ayer's own interpretation of it, is describing a methodology designed for the sciences, which, by some imperial rule of thumb, he prescribes for ethics and theology. Not only is this an attempt to establish an "essence" of knowledge, it also takes scientific knowledge as the model for all non-logical knowledge, including perhaps knowledge of the Verification Principle itself, since this knowledge, as we have shown, can only be a priori.

We shall try to rebut Logical Positivism on two related grounds -

- (1) that its conclusions about ethics are based on what we think is invalid logic;
- (2) that it denies ethical judgements truth and falsity on the ground that they are not meaningful statements. In this we shall need to ask what it is that makes some sentences meaningless, and then see whether ethical sentences can be classed with such.

Ayer's whole argument looks like a dialectic with one central theme: ethics is not science. For he seems to be saying:

- (1) the claims of science are capable of empirical verification,
  - (2) ethical claims are not capable of empirical verification,
- therefore
- (3) ethics is not science.

Perhaps we need not dispute this conclusion, but there is an important corollary to it which may run thus:

- since (1) science has (scientific) knowledge  
and (2) ethics is not science  
so (3) ethics has no (ethical) knowledge.

We cannot accept this conclusion, for it sounds like bad logic. It is like saying (1) a deer has long horns

- (2) a bull is not a deer  
therefore (3) a bull has no horns.

And this would still be bad logic even if we substituted 'bull' with 'bird' or 'man' or any other creature or object that has no horns; for the problem is not in the bull but in the logical leap from long horns to no horns.

From this simple syllogism which we have distilled from Ayer's argument, we can deduce that the claim that ethics has no content (because it is not empirically verifiable), and therefore cannot be objective, is invalid. We therefore reject Logical Positivism first on logical grounds. But this is not to ignore what appears to be a vital issue which Logical Positivism and Verificationism in general raise with ethics, namely, that ethical problems cannot just be reduced to factual ones; for it is on this ground that we shall reject the naturalistic theories. But we deny that as a result of this ethical judgements are meaningless, and this brings us to our second point of rejection of the Positivist thesis in ethics.

It may be true to say that meaningfulness is inextricably bound with truth or falsity, but a lot will depend on how we analyze meaningfulness. To Ayer a sentence has to be a proposition in order to have a meaning at all; so being a proposition is a necessary signal for meaningfulness, and meaningfulness a condition for being true or false. Hence when he concludes that ethical judgements are no propositions, he proceeds from this to argue both that they are meaningless and that they lack the quality of truth or falsity.

When, in fact, may we say that a sentence is meaningless? I shall take a meaningful sentence to be one which states what we understand, and this implies stating a proposition if it is an indicative sentence or a question, if it is an interrogative sentence, and so on. So rather than put the thesis in the way Ayer did it, it would perhaps be more reasonable to say that a meaningful statement is

one that expresses a proposition, but that a proposition may be true or false, its truth or falsity having little to do with the sentence which expresses it. For example, the proposition that the earth is spherical is true even if we may state that the earth is flat. This implies that whatever indicative sentence is meaningful (that is any which states what we understand) expresses a proposition, for how could it be meaningful if the words did not express a proposition (taking a proposition, as I do, as that which a meaningful sentence expresses). Thus a meaningful sentence may express a false proposition<sup>4</sup>, but this does not mean that it has no truth-value, for, having a truth-value, as I understand it, is being capable of stating either a true or a false proposition.

Our problem then is: are there any meaningless sentences, and, if there are, are ethical judgements any such? For if they are not, then they are propositions, and being propositions, have a truth-value.

Some expressions can be properly described as meaningless, but whether these have any philosophical significance is another matter since we may hardly assign the grammatical term 'sentence' to them. A classic case of a meaningless expression may be one which includes some word or words which do not stand for anything for which we have any idea. Perhaps the best illustration of this that we can think of is Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky":

'Twas brillig and the stithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe

...'etc.

Humpty Dumpty tried to explicate this to Alice but with little effect, for, although the syntax is perfect, the words brillig, stithy, etc. make the whole sentence nonsensical. "Jabberwocky" may afford a

useful exercise in logic but it is not relevant to us now since no one has ever thought of a relevant philosophical sentence which has words for which we have no idea. They are usually familiar words.

On the other hand, it is quite possible for an expression to consist of words all of which have a meaning and yet be itself meaningless because the words are combined in a way contrary to the rules of syntax, e.g. 'The is closed library University'. Once again such an expression is rare in philosophy or in any discourse, for that matter.

Two other cases of what may popularly be taken as meaningless sentences are disputable, but these, I think are philosophically significant: (1) When a sentence ascribes to something a relatively determinate value of a determinable which does not qualify it, it is generally taken as meaningless whether the determinable value is asserted or denied of it. Here we borrow Dr. Ewing's example<sup>5</sup>: "Quadratic Equations go to race meetings". It is generally held that since race meetings do not qualify quadratic equations, such a sentence is meaningless, not false. It is also held that its contradictory: "Quadratic Equations do not go to race meetings" is true but meaningless. But these positions are disputable.

It is in this example that the issue arises between meaningfulness and truth-values, for, here lies a problem. No one has ever seen quadratic equations at race-meetings, so the proposition that quadratic equations do not go to race-meetings seems so obviously true although it does not seem to belong as a meaningful utterance in any context. We could not think of a situation in which we can use it and, considering this, the proposition does not seem to be one involving meaningfulness but one that involves being true but misleading rather than one that is true but meaningless as it is originally

taken to be. A child, for instance, who did not know what quadratic equations were would understand us but think that quadratic equations had legs and could move in time and space. As Dr. Ewing argues, the proposition "quadratic equations do not go to race meetings" entails the proposition that quadratic equations do not go, say, to the Newmarket horse-races, and is entailed by the proposition that quadratic equations do not move in time and space. If therefore it is capable of entailing and being entailed, then it must be meaningful and not a mere meaningless set of words. It also follows that the proposition must have a truth-value for there would not be anything to know if the proposition did not mean anything. Ewing goes further to suggest that 'Quadratic Equations go to race meetings' is in fact self-contradictory, but that even self-contradictory statements have a truth-value.

Let us examine his argument here, and this brings us to the second of the popularly-held but disputable meaningless sentences - (2) the self-contradictory sentence, e.g. "An equilateral triangle is sometimes not equiangular". The characteristic here is that we find that we cannot combine the subject and the predicate in thought, and it is this, I think, which makes Ewing consider that quadratic equations go to race meetings is self-contradictory, for we cannot think what it would be like for them to do so. And if we accept this postulate we shall have little problem in seeing that since the proposition "quadratic equations do not go to race-meetings' has not this characteristic, it is not self-contradictory but states what truly does not happen. We cannot think the meaning of a self-contradictory statement as a whole, though we may know the meanings of the separate words. We, for example, cannot think of a round square although we know the meanings of the separate words 'round' and 'square'; indeed it is paradoxically

because we know their separate meanings that we are unable to combine them in thought. Similarly although we know the separate meanings of 'quadratic equations' and 'attend race-meetings' we cannot combine the two expressions in our thought because attendance at race-meetings does not qualify quadratic equations in our thought.

From the foregoing argument we can draw the following conclusions:

- 1) That sentences that have unacceptable grammatical constructions can be meaningless, but that such sentences - if they can be so denoted - are very rare, and where they are, have no philosophical significance.
- 2) That sentences which ascribe a relatively determinate value to a determinable which does not qualify it may be termed meaningless on the ground that we cannot combine the expressions used in them in our thoughts; although they are really meaningful-but-misleading.
- 3) That even self-contradictory sentences are meaningful, though they are false.
- 4) That all meaningful sentences have a truth-value.

Ethical sentences, qua ethical, are neither self-contradictory nor can we say they attribute a determinate value to a determinable which does not qualify it - for these are the nearest examples of what may sometimes be mistaken as meaningless. Since ethical sentences do not belong to any of these categories, we conclude that they are not meaningless. And since meaningfulness is the logical positivist claim against their having a truth-value, then they have a truth-value. Again, since having a truth-value is the positivist charge against ethical judgements for ever existing, then they exist. (We are arguing on the assumption that ethical statements do not belong in the a priori class in which the verification statement seems to be. But this may well be.)

Professor Ayer's argument may be summarized thus: ethical judgements are no propositions (and it is only propositions that are meaningful); and because they are no propositions, they have no truth-value; and because they have no truth-value, they have no objective validity, and as a result ethical disagreements and arguments are not possible or are mere feelings. But our argument has shown that ethical judgements are meaningful, and therefore, have a truth-value. It follows that, contrary to the positivist model, ethical judgements have objective validity, and contradictions can arise out of them; so ethical disagreements and arguments are valid.

## 2. Emotivism

As we have already seen, the logical positivist theory of meaning insists that a sentence is meaningful only if it is analytic or empirically verifiable, and on that ground rejects all ethical judgements. However, aware that this claim does not sincerely cater for many forms of discourse such as poetic or moral discourse - to mention a few - whose meaningfulness they themselves ultimately found it hard to dispute, the positivists took to the manoeuvre of distinguishing two dimensions of meaning - the cognitive and the emotive. A verifiable sentence such as "Homicide is rampant in big cities" would have 'cognitive' meaning while "Homicide is bad" or such other utterances as the poetic ones, though lacking in cognitive meaning, would nevertheless have emotive meaning, serving to express and influence feelings. An ethical sentence such as "Homicide is bad" would therefore be regularly used to condemn homicide and to raise in

in the hearer a corresponding attitude toward the act. It is in his illustration of this non-cognitive (i.e. emotive) character of ethical statements that Ayer says that 'stealing is wrong' is not making any factual claim, but is rather 'merely expressing moral sentiments' (LTL p.142) - reminding us of Hume. And then if one who says that stealing is wrong happens to be contradicted, his contradictory too is expressing his own moral sentiments, and none of them can be right or wrong for neither is creating a genuine proposition, and what they are saying will be comparable, as Ayer claims, to 'hurrah' or 'boo'. Thus Emotivism as a theory of meaning has developed from Logical Positivism as a device meant to take care of value-utterances, particularly the ethical.

Like the logical positivist, the emotivist claims that an expression such as 'x is good' is not a statement at all, whether about the speaker or anything else. It is neither true nor false, but an expression of the emotion, best compared to laughing at a joke. Such reactions may be appropriate or inappropriate, they may be genuine or fraudulent, but they cannot be literally false or true.

The propensity to treat evaluative judgements as emotive originates with Hume, who asserted that

The rules of morality ... are not conclusions of our reason ... It is evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such (reasoned) agreement or disagreement.<sup>6</sup>

Hume's ethical concerns were in fact psychological. It was his view that there was a separate class of 'moral sentiments' and that man's reason was motivationally 'inert and can never prevent or produce any action or affection' (ibid.). He was convinced that a logically correct choice of values was unattainable for the human mind, since

emotions cannot be true or false, so was interested in the ways and means of influencing behaviour.

Although Ayer is reminiscent of Hume when he asserts that in saying that an action is wrong he is merely expressing certain moral sentiments, most 20th Century emotivists do not uphold Hume's theory of moral sentiments. They rather retain his psychological leaning and develop a theory of 'emotive meaning' which is supposed to mark out evaluative statements, and also form a link between them and expressions of emotion.

To Professor C.L. Stevenson<sup>7</sup> - perhaps the most sophisticated of contemporary emotivists - all moral utterances are attempts to persuade others to share one's own 'feelings' or 'attitudes'. In saying, for instance, that stealing is wrong, we not only express our hostility to stealing, but try to make others share that hostility. So to him, if arguments arise in morality they are mere attempts to persuade the other party to share our attitudes. His emphasis on the persuasive element in moral arguments arises from his starting-point - the nature of moral disagreements. He then draws the conclusion that the essence of moral discussion is to reach agreement through persuasion. In this section we shall examine Emotivism mainly through the claims of C.L. Stevenson. But Stevenson grounds his moral arguments and conclusions on the principles of the emotive theory of meaning and, because of this, we shall first examine this theory and its assumptions.

Most of those who have postulated the existence of the emotive theory of meaning have regarded meaning as a function of the responses which utterances produce. Stevenson himself defines emotive meaning as

... a meaning in which the response (from the hearer's point of view) or the stimulus (from

the speaker's point of view) is a range of emotions. (EL p.59)

This definition presupposes a causal theory of meaning. The causal or psychological (or behaviourist) theory of meaning operates on the stimulus-response principle, in which the stimulus "means" something to the hearer, who therefore gives a response. This principle has its origin in the experiments of Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936). The main points are: a hungry dog will (by a 'reflex action') salivate when he is shown some food. Suppose now the sight of food is constantly accompanied in the laboratory by the sound of a buzzer, in the course of time, the sound of the buzzer by itself will be found to induce salivation in the dog. The sound of the buzzer is the stimulus, the salivation of the dog, the response; or, in other words, the sound of the buzzer will "mean" 'food' to the dog.

In its 'cognitive' or 'referential' or 'descriptive' aspects an utterance is supposed to cause a suitably trained hearer a range of beliefs; while in its "emotive" aspects it likewise causes a range of feelings or attitudes regarded by emotivists as a disposition to have the corresponding feelings. Following from this, Stevenson has described meaning as the "immediate aura of feeling that hovers around a word"<sup>8</sup>.

Much as it may be erroneous to hold that meaning is a function of responses to words, it would be blind to overlook the fact that not all words are meaningful in the same way. The words 'quadrangle' and 'dog', for instance, are not meaningful in the way words like 'food' or 'courageous' or 'pleasant' are. Words of the latter group may be said to have 'pro-attitudes'<sup>9</sup>, that is, that they have favourable attitudes associated with our references to them; the former group may be taken as 'neutral', while such words as 'bad',

'nasty', 'boo' or 'wicked' have 'con-attitudes'.

It would perhaps be short-sighted to also deny that words and utterances do have emotive force, or that they can be used to express and influence feelings. If, instead of saying 'He is driving in in his old car', I say 'He is staggering in in his everlasting bone-shaker', I am surely saying more in my second utterance than in the first. We have carefully used the word force not meaning in this context, and it is intended to show that words do have emotive force. But the question is whether this emotive force which words may carry should count as their meaning - or even as part of their meaning - as Stevenson claims:

Because of the persistence of such affective tendencies ... it becomes feasible to classify them as 'meanings'.

(ibid.)

In short, our question is, should the emotive force of words count as their 'meaning'?<sup>10</sup> This question suggests that we examine, if briefly, how we use the word 'meaning'.

The ways in which we use the word 'meaning' are numerous. We shall outline at least four of these.

First, there are uses of 'meaning' and its cognates in which it is not expressions which are said to have meaning, but people, facts, events or things. Those senses belong here in which we can say 'He means to go to the cinema' (i.e. he intends to....), or 'Rashes on the face means small-pox' (i.e. provide a sound basis for prediction of); or 'Schweitzer's life is full of meaning (i.e. full of purpose). It seems that these senses of 'meaning' have little relevance to us. This is not to suggest that they have no significance, for, it would be quite true to say that the intentions

of a word-user constitute an important function of the meaning of a word. But this hardly accounts for what we would like to call the 'central' use of meaning, which we shall take to exclude all senses of 'mean' in which it is something other than linguistic expressions which mean.

Our second sense of 'mean', is that in which it is only apparent that it is the words which mean, and in which the words do not in reality mean. Suppose a certain Mr. Daniel sees it written in the snow all over his garden: 'Mr. Daniel looks like a spaniel'<sup>‡</sup>, and asks what all this means. He might as well have asked what the action of writing these words all over his garden means, or the purpose, for it is clear that his question is not on the meaning of the words individually or even of their combination in a sentence, but on the explanation of the motive of the sentence. In such a context it is neither the words nor the sentence, but the action of writing them that has meaning.

There is also a sense of meaning in which it could be replaced by 'refer'. Suppose I say 'The Queen went to Canada', I shall be understood (at least within the British world) to be saying that Elizabeth II went to Canada, although there is no mention of her name in the dictionary meaning of 'queen' nor would there be any if we were to translate it into another language. 'Means' in the sentence "'Queen' means Elizabeth II" just means 'refers to'.

Perhaps the most popularly applied, and the most controversial for our present purpose, is the sense of meaning in which any psychological association a word has for a person is said to be part of its meaning for them. If, for instance, I say, 'the letter K means a lot to me' simply because the name of a person I esteem highly or

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<sup>‡</sup>Reminiscent of Dylan Thomas's "A Child's Christmas in Wales", though it was never written.

hold in some particular way has that initial letter, then I am using 'meaning' in a psychological way to evoke some emotion or feelings that I have. This is the sense of meaning which relates to the experiments of Pavlov and which the emotivist is applying when he says "'X is good' meaning 'I approve of X'". Following from this, if, for instance, I think of war whenever an aeroplane flies over my head or whenever the word 'aeroplane' is mentioned, and you do not, it would follow that the word has a different meaning for each of us. But what the situation described really implies is that the word 'aeroplane' evokes some feelings in me which it does not in you. And in such a case it would be better to use the word 'connotation' rather than 'meaning', and to say that the word 'aeroplane' connotes the terribleness of war to me while it does not do so to you.

None of these senses of 'meaning' we have outlined serves to illustrate the central sense. But suppose I say:

1. 'Kitten' means 'young cat'

or 2. 'Flower' is a meaningful word in English,

I am using the term 'meaning' in such a way that it can hardly be replaced by any word - neither intuition, nor purpose, nor even a connotation or a reference in the way that 'Queen' refers to Elizabeth II. The difference is that none of these senses of 'meaning' can help us decide which properties are entailed by the use of the word as opposed to those which just happen to belong to whatever it is the word refers to. But in saying "'Kitten means 'young cat'" I am expressing a relationship between the word 'kitten' and a young cat. I am, as it were, saying that the word is used to talk about young cats.

This central sense of 'meaning' does not qualify it in any other way, such as in saying what 'X' means to him. In this sense of meaning if we say that X has several meanings we mean that X can be

used to talk about distinctive kinds of things in a way that Y cannot. We do not mean that X refers to lots of different things, <sup>as</sup> as does just any other word. Moreover it is generally the case that a word can only mean in the sense of 'refer' and 'connote' if it already 'means' in the central sense. For example, unless I can relate 'queen' to its central meaning - a female monarch - I shall be unable to apply it to refer to Elizabeth II. It is therefore a general pre-condition of words having a referring role or the ability to call up certain psychological associations or dispositions, that their meanings be understood first in this central or fundamental sense of 'meaning'.

It can now be seen that there seems to be a gulf of difference between meaning in terms of relationship and meaning in terms of feelings and dispositions. In the light of this we can now re-state our original question and ask whether the emotive force of words or utterances can constitute their central meaning as the emotivist leads us to believe. To illustrate what I mean, if, as in our earlier example, in talking about 'old car' we talk about 'everlasting bone-shaker', are we giving the meaning of 'old car'?

Our answer here is no, we are not. For we observe at once that in talking about his 'everlasting bone-shaker' rather than his 'old car', we are merely calling up feelings associated with the old car in question, and that it would be difficult for either of 'bone-shaker' or 'everlasting' to arouse those feelings or transmit any information had we not had the referrent 'old car' at the background of our thoughts. If I stood in the centre of a group of people and began talking to them about his 'everlasting bone-shaker', I would surely, and quite legitimately, be asked what I was talking about. Perhaps I would need to say something like "I mean (i.e. am 'referring to') his old car", and it would be then and only then that my listeners

would be able to understand me. 'Everlasting bone-shaker' does not mean 'old car'. It can mean a number of other things we may not care to enumerate; it only refers to the old car on this material occasion, and, in fact, only does this by calling up feelings associated with it.

If, on the other hand, I had said to my group, 'Kitten', I would, I think, be understood to be talking about a young cat. My listeners may, nevertheless, ask for some clarification, but that would likely be in the form of asking what kitten I was talking about, as different from what I was asked when I talked about the everlasting bone-shaker, for, they did not ask me which old car I was talking about but what I meant. 'Kitten' relates to 'young cat' in a way 'everlasting bone-shaker' does not relate to 'old car'. 'Everlasting bone-shaker' is a psychological association called up by 'old car', and is not property of 'old car' as 'young cat' is property of 'kitten'.

Meanings, therefore, need not be taken to be identical with called-up feelings or emotions, and it seems that when we do this we leave a residuum, just as we do if we identify meaning with verification. For if emotions are identified with meanings, we still leave behind us the word or utterance whose meaning we still have not given, whose property is yet to be explained. When Stevenson talks of classifying 'affective tendencies' as meanings, he surely cannot be talking about central meaning. When he says, "'X is good' means 'I approve of X'" he can only be talking about the associations which are called up by 'good', that is, its emotive force, and not anything which we use 'good' to talk about in the way we, for instance, use 'dog' to talk about dogs.

One reason why the emotive force of words and other utterances should not be taken as their meaning is that the emotive force varies with circumstances and contexts, while properties do not.

Let us illustrate with a typical empirically-verifiable utterance: "The mail has arrived". Generally no paraphrase of this sentence would include reference to one's feelings, and to many of us, it takes nothing other than going to the letter box to check our pigeon-holes for letters. But to students expecting their examination results by post, it may not only create some emotion but this emotion may vary with the different students. To some it may be just fear or anxiety; to others repulsion, and so on, depending upon that type of news they expect and how temperamentally stable they are to accommodate exciting situations. It is also possible that such feelings as the utterance may arouse would simply die off as soon as the incident is over.

The main fact therefore that a given utterance on some occasion produces an emotive force upon a person is no reason for introducing reference to that effect into the meaning of the utterance. Such a procedure would make utterances have only 'private meaning', since the effect produced on various people in our example above has less to do with the emotive force of the utterance than with the fact that excited students are expressing themselves over a certain matter. Moreover since emotions may be short-lived and shifty, meaning (as emotion) would flicker off in the same way. The result of this is that utterances will no longer be established since no one would ever know of all the possible effects utterances may have upon various people. Utterances and sentences would be amazingly ambiguous on this model since they are capable of producing the most diverse effects upon people depending upon the context and circumstances.

But an emotivist may dispute this. He may argue that, after all, the sentence 'The mail has arrived' although it may have given rise to some emotion, cannot be taken as one with typically-associated

emotions. There are utterances, he would say, which are typically associated and when once we get at these there is no problem about the emotion being there or not, nor can there be any possibility of the emotion being short-lived. 'Bad', for example, is such a word, he may argue, and there is no condition in which the sentence 'Prostitution is bad', for instance, will fail to carry the con-attitudes.

This argument from typically-associated emotions or con-attitudes will not hold for two reasons. First, as our mail-example has shown, utterances may produce emotions whether they are typically associated with emotions or not, once people are placed in the circumstances in which their psychological associations are called up. And if sentences which are not typically-associated are as good in calling up associations or emotions as those which are, then it is unnecessary to think that the so-called typically-associated ones alone do so. Secondly, although in some sense some utterances may generally be said to have certain emotions associated with them - that is, that in some sense the notions of pro- and con-attitudes may be said truly to hold - the so-called typically-associated words and utterances may themselves fail to exhibit the emotive characteristics associated with them. 'Bad' may produce pro-attitudes if uttered in the appropriate circumstances.<sup>‡</sup> So it may be quite safe to conclude that the so-called emotive meaning is controlled largely by circumstances, and that generally, psychological associations cannot be taken as meanings.

Let us now draw some conclusions from this brief exposition of the emotive theory of meaning. From our arguments it may be concluded that the emotivist's problem is centred around a certain misconception of the notion of meaning. A meaning is not just a suggestion. An emotive utterance makes suggestions to the hearer and

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<sup>‡</sup>e.g. The singer Eartha Kitt was popularly referred to as "Bad Eartha Kitt" by her admirers.

does not mean anything to him, in the way we have looked at the notion of meaning. The same utterance can suggest something else to someone else while its meaning remains unaltered. This is why we have suggested that the term connotation and such others as function or effect may be more appropriate for describing these suggestions than using the term 'meaning'. For those who fear cats, for example, the function of the word 'cat' or the sentence "That is a cat" is that of instilling horror, but the word or the sentence may suggest admiration to cat-lovers, or be practically neutral to still some other people. If we accept this conclusion, then we might say that philosophers and linguists who insist on 'emotive meaning' are using 'meaning' misleadingly, and that the term 'meaning' in 'emotive meaning' is a misnomer.

The emotive theory of meaning makes some other misconceptions. First, it is possible that it confuses a meaning and a use. The alternative term which Stevenson chooses for his emotive theory of meaning is "pragmatic aspects of meaning" or "meaning in the pragmatic sense" (an idea which he said he got from Charles E. Morris). It is probably this pragmatic influence which has caused the theory to confuse meaning and use since pragmatism is characterised with emphasis on practical application. But a meaning is not a use, and when we talk of the meaning and use of a word we wish to be understood to be talking about different things, and not using different terms to express one single idea.

Secondly, the emotive theory of meaning seems to fail to distinguish between what a person means (i.e. what he intends) when he uses certain expressions, and what these expressions mean (i.e. what they stand for, or are used to talk about). If, for instance, I say 'It is too late to be out at 2 a.m.', people will be surprised to see me out at that time most nights or to see me do things which encourage

others to do so. It is therefore quite natural that when I say 'It is late to be out at 2 a.m.' I intend not only not to be out myself at that time but also not to encourage people to do so. This is intended by my use of those words but it is not what those words mean. I am, for instance, not saying something identical if I say 'I do not like to be out at 2am.' although the intention may be similar. So the meaning of a sentence and the intentions of the author in using those words are not identical. We therefore need to distinguish between the emotive effects intended by a person in using certain words, and the meaning of those words.

This is not to ignore the connection between meaning and intending, which seems to be this, that the basic point of employing meaningful expressions (i.e. expressions which the hearer of the language will understand) is to communicate with others. For a person to do this, it is typically required that he at least intends to produce a certain effect in the hearer, and also intends that the hearer recognizes this intention. So it seems that there are at least two ways in which intentions and meanings are tied up; first, we possess and employ expressions which our hearers will understand in order primarily to carry out our intention to communicate; secondly we can only succeed in communicating by employing meaningful expressions by which the hearer will recognize our intention. But this relationship is not one of identity. The question 'What do you mean' (by using these words)? is not the same as the question 'What do those words (or sentences) mean?' In fact, the former question can be appropriately asked even when the subject has not used any words at all and has just acted in certain ways. It must be granted that the second question is more a semantical one than one demanding mere information about what the subject is doing or intends to do, and it may be because of the

difficulty of reaching the answer that we find it easier to assimilate the two questions; yet what a person means by using some words and what those words mean are not identical. Thus when emotivists talk of emotive meaning they seem to be doing this: to be assimilating the intentions of the speaker to the meaning of the utterance. Hence Stevenson analyses 'X is good' as 'I approve of X: do so as well'.

Finally there is the aspect of meaning of which we have made only passing mention but which may contribute enormously to the logical problems which we have seen emotivism in. Some properties belong to a thing in virtue of the meaning of the word used to refer to it. We cannot deny that the thing has those properties without contradicting ourselves. On the other hand where there are no such properties, to attribute them is to force a meaning which is non-existent.

To illustrate this let us take the already over-worked example - 'triangle'. 'Triangle' means having three sides, or being trilateral; so being trilateral is an essential property or characteristic of a triangle and essential to the meaning of 'triangle'. But if we have a green triangle, the greenness is not at all an essential property of the triangle, so 'greenness' is not essential to the meaning of 'triangle'. So if in talking about a green triangle we use the following utterances:

(a) This is a triangle, but it is not trilateral  
and (b) This is a triangle, but it is not green,  
in (a) we contradict ourselves while in (b) we might only be misleading our listeners or being false or deceitful, but surely not contradicting ourselves.

But let us take another example - a value example - especially as the word 'triangle' seems to have derived from the properties of its referent. If I say

(a) Mr. Brickstall is an Englishman but he is not of any nationality,

and (b) Mr. Brickstall is an Englishman but he is naughty.

Let us go further and add

(c) Mr. Brickstall is a naughty Englishman, but I like him.

I contradict myself in (a) (unless I do not accept the political unit called England as a 'nation' - which is a different matter; but I do not contradict myself in (b), because being naughty is not at all an essential characteristic of an Englishman while having a nationality is. And Mr. Brickstall may be naughty and yet I like him, without contradicting myself, again because the connection between his being naughty and my having some attitudes towards him such as liking or not liking him is not at all like the connection between his being an Englishman and having a nationality. (It is rather like that between greenness and being a triangle.) The former relation is not logical, but the latter is, for being an Englishman entails having a nationality. Being naughty is compatible with being liked, while having no nationality is incompatible with belonging to the English nation. Being naughty is just a character which Mr. Brickstall bears as the green triangle bears greenness, and my attitude towards him on that score can only be comparable to my disliking a green triangle because it is green. But suppose I dislike the English national Brickstall because he has a nationality, my dislike of him would be logically-based, just as if I would reject a triangle because it is trilateral.

There is therefore no necessary connection between emotions and attitudes (such as liking or disliking or being naughty), on the one hand, and properties (such as being trilateral or having a nationality) on the other; while there is a necessary connection between meanings and properties. What is there between emotions and properties is only

a psychological (i.e. a contingent) connection.

But we can go further than that. We have just argued that 'Mr. Brickstall is naughty' and 'I like Mr. Brickstall' are not logically related since they can be held together without contradiction. In the same way 'Mr. Brickstall is good' and 'I like Mr. Brickstall' are not logically related. The first is a statement about Mr. Brickstall, while the second is a statement about myself. Our emotive utterances are utterances about ourselves, and not about other people, not even those whose circumstances, as it were, prompt us to make the utterances. Thus to say 'X is a good man' and 'I approve of X' is not to say the same thing: the one is a statement about X and the other a statement about myself. By identifying both statements and making one follow the other as if in logical sequence, we may at best solve the problem of their verification for a psychologist who has a dispositional definition of liking or approving. But for a philosopher the difference is manifest between the two utterances, for, the class of good people is ordinarily distinguished from the class of people liked or approved of. The class of those liked may be broader since we need not regard them all as good. It is only reasonable that if X is good, I may like or approve of X (i.e. choosing between liking and not liking X), but there is no logical necessity. For although some people may be inclined that the statement 'X is good' necessarily implies that I like X, hardly would anyone conclude that my statement 'I like X' necessarily implies that I consider X good. If these statements were identical, this inconsistency would not arise. This is, I think, a case in which we may say 'If A then B' is true, but that 'A therefore B' is not valid inference.

But the emotive theory is asking us to accept that it is. In values and ethics emotivists ask us to accept that 'I dislike Mr.

'Brickstall' should not only follow from 'Mr. Brickstall is naughty' because my emotion of dislike follows necessarily from his being naughty (or worse), but also that it should be a stimulus to the hearer who should take his cue and dislike Mr. Brickstall as well. Our foregoing analysis of meanings and emotions has shown that this is an illogical step to take, for emotive effects need not to be shared while meanings, per se, are generally shared.

Our contention is that to claim that x means y is to make a logical claim. It is, as it were, to say that y is property of x just as having a nationality is property of being an Englishman. The emotivist claim that 'X is good' means 'I approve of X' cannot be using the notion of meaning in the same sense although it makes it seem as if it is. On the emotivist scale our moral judgements are only utterances about ourselves, our own feelings. But moral judgements if they are to be taken seriously, must go beyond our own feelings or attitudes to include those shared by others.

Our arguments imply that a moral judge on the emotivist scale can at best express only his own feelings over a moral issue, and cannot claim to pass a moral judgement on it. But an emotivist can dispute this; he can argue that approval implies appraisal necessarily and, if this is so, it would follow that our contention is untenable, that, in fact, he has been morally judging all the time he has been approving. We can only reply by investigating the question whether appraisal is really logically bound up with approval, and we might perhaps settle this by merely calling the attention of our objector to the fact that we have already argued that approvals are statements about ourselves while appraisals are statements independent of ourselves, and that the two cannot be assimilated. But we may need to go further to point out to the objector how his position errs on the

criterion of rightness, and leads to a paradox. Let us examine these two claims.

In considering the statements 'Mr. Brickstall is good' and 'I like Mr. Brickstall' we found out that liking (or approving) and appraising are not one and the same thing. Because they are not, they cannot be expressed in the same value-statement. We also saw that statements expressing emotions do sometimes, but not always, function as value-principles; that is to say, they do sometimes supply us ground for appraisal, for it is more likely for us to approve what we appraise than what we do not. What we reject is that this is ground strong enough to identify the two. For to equate emotive utterances to ethical judgements is tantamount to saying that such a thing as 'I believe (or I feel) that London is the capital of England' is another way of saying 'London is the capital of England'. To say 'A is right' is as much to meet some criterion of rightness as it is to say 'London is the capital of England'; but to say 'I approve of A' is like saying 'I believe (or I feel)... or 'It is my opinion') that London is the capital of England', and both utterances are ways of saying something about one's mind or expressing one's positive attitude towards the object. To equate this attitude to a criterion of rightness is to mistake on the criterion of rightness; the connection between the two is not established by the mere utterance of the words.

If we translate 'This is good' as Stevenson does in his 'first pattern of analysis'<sup>11</sup> as 'I approve of this, do so as well' (EL pp96-7), we surely will come to some difficulty if we attempt to explain a situation like the one which arises in our example 'Mr. Brickstall is naughty, but I like him', or a non-ethical value judgement: 'I know Dr. Zhivago is a great novel, but it bores me stiff', for in each case we shall land on a paradox. In the first case we land on a disapproval

which does not disapprove, and in the second on an approval which does not approve, thus making the value-judgements self-contradictory.

But we know none of these judgements is self-contradictory: their quasi-paradoxical nature is contracted by the attempt to identify an appraisal with an approval.

We cannot identify approval with appraisal for at least two related reasons. First, we do sometimes pass judgement on situations for which we have hardly any feelings. This happens often when we judge from distances in space and time. We could, for example, judge the massacre of missionaries in Rhodesia as 'ghastly' or 'wicked', the Ganges Flood Disaster as 'sad', or the persecution of First Century Christians as 'callous', when we hardly feel any emotions towards them, at any rate not as much as we would feel if a neighbour's dog was run over by a car on our street. If approval (or disapproval) and appraisal were one and the same thing, then such judgements would be difficult to explain. It is perhas in an attempt to create the feelings that would go with those judgements that photographs, or the TV are sometimes called in. But most people do not wait for these visual aids to pass their judgements, and the most that may be said about feeling in such cases is that people 'project the feelings' they had on other occasions - the massacre of the missionaries in Rhodesia was ghastly because we know such incidents to be ghastly. But be that as it may, it would still be right to say that pronouncing a moral judgement does not have to be bound up with feeling any particular emotion towards a person or situation.

Secondly, it is possible, though somewhat complex, to appraise without approving even situations that are not separated from us in time and space; at least Stephen Dedalus did. In James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Dedalus knows that he is

breaking the rules of Catholic morality to which he subscribes intellectually, but at the same time he feels powerfully attracted to forbidden kinds of behaviour; which means that he appraises or judges, but does not approve. I would not take Dedalus' case as one of akrasia. In weakness of will the agent judges and approves; that is, he says, as it were, 'I know this is wrong, and I will not do it', yet he goes on doing it. His will, as it were, fails him. Dedalus' will does not fail; he might in fact be said not to have willed at all. His is a case in which an appraisal is made, but an approval fails to take place.

From the foregoing sketches it might be right to conclude that the connection between human emotions and ethical judgements is rather loose, or may just be accidental, or at least they are not as intimately bound as is claimed by emotivists. As accidentals they would exhibit such characteristics as an intense emotion which is not accompanied by an extreme judgement would do; or the same judgement may appear in various emotional situations; or similar states may accompany different judgements, and so on.

But an emotivist would object to this. Emotions, he would contend, have long been associated with ethical judgements, and now that we have shown that the relationship is not as close as it is claimed to be, he would challenge us to say how moral judgements come about if emotions have little influence on them. In answer to this we would suggest that it is reason, rather than emotion, which gives rise to ethical judgements. (We shall come back to this.)

Although we have made several references to Stevenson's opinions on the emotive theory of meaning (as it is perhaps tactically difficult to illustrate the theory fully without such references), we shall at this stage review his point of view on the emotive theory in ethics, and we shall do this through his viewpoint on ethical disagree-

ments for these are vital to the emotive theory of ethics, as Stevenson himself asserts: "My methodological conclusions centre less on my conception of meaning than on my conceptions of agreement and disagreement."<sup>12</sup>

Stevenson uses his thesis that ethical statements have emotive meaning to explain the important distinction which he draws between ethical and non-ethical disagreements, and has based his argument against ethical objectivity on this distinction. He sharply contrasts ethical disagreements and disagreements in belief. Cases of the latter type, he says, "require only brief attention" (EL p.2). They are disagreements that occur in science, history, biography and their counterparts in everyday life, he argues. In such cases one man believes that p is the answer, and another that not-p, or some proposition incompatible with p is the answer; and in the course of discussion each tries to give some manner of proof for his view, or revise it in the light of further information. A disagreement in belief differs from an ethical disagreement in that "the former is concerned with how matters are truthfully to be described and explained; the latter is concerned with how they are to be favoured or disfavoured, and hence with how they are to be shaped by human efforts" (p4). When two people disagree in their judgements of value (have an 'ethical' disagreement), they disagree in their attitudes towards the object they are evaluating, "one approving of it, for instance, and the other disapproving of it" (p3). "It is disagreement in attitude... that chiefly distinguishes ethical issues from those of pure science" (p13).

About ethical disagreements themselves, Stevenson also distinguishes two types - those that can be resolved through resolving the factual disagreements (or disagreements in belief which they involve) - disagreements which would not have arisen if there was

convergence in factual beliefs - and those disagreements which stick on even when there is agreement on the factual level. Whichever type it is, however, Stevenson mentions that an ethical disagreement involves disagreement in attitudes.

The role of attitudes in ethical disagreements is reflected in the meaning of ethical statements, which differ from scientific statements in that they "have a meaning that is approximately, and in part, imperative" (p26). They are "concerned with recommending something for approval or disapproval" (p13), and "they are used merely for encouraging, altering, or redirecting people's aims and conduct than for simply describing them" (p21). Accordingly "any definition which seeks to identify the meaning of ethical terms with that of scientific ones, and does so without further explanation or qualification, is extremely likely to be misleading" (p20).

To preserve the quasi-imperative or emotive, meaning which, to him, is an essential feature of ethical terms, Stevenson submits two patterns of analysis for determining what ethical terms mean as used by various people in various contexts. On the first pattern of analysis a statement of the form "X is good" strictly designates "I approve of X" and suggests 'Do so as well'. On the second pattern of analysis, it strictly designates "X has qualities or relations P, Q, R", and suggests "I approve of X"; "do so as well" (p81, et passim).

The fact that ethical statements have emotive meaning is advanced by Stevenson to explain an important difference between disagreements in belief and ethical disagreements, namely, that whereas the question which (if either) of two conflicting beliefs is correct can be settled by rational methods, whatever reasons are advanced to support or attack value judgements are "related to them psychologically rather than logically" (p.115). The reasons one gives to justify value

judgements "represent efforts to change attitudes, or to strengthen them, by means of altering beliefs. And although these reasons may be of empirical character and verifiable, they are simply of a sort that may lead one person or another to have altered attitudes in consequence of altered beliefs, and so, thereafter to make different ethical judgements" (p118). This distinction, like Ayer's is based on methods of verification and is, in other words, a distinction between disagreement over facts and disagreement over values, and a further ground for Stevenson's insistence that there is a fundamental kinship between ethical judgements and emotive utterances.

However, dividing disagreements into 'disagreement in belief' and 'disagreement in attitude' looks a little misleading. 'Belief' is a term applied to psychological dispositions and signifies readiness to certain kinds of specific mental and physical behaviour. 'Attitude', also a dispositional term, does not signify a concrete tendency or readiness or capability; but may apply to any set of psychical dispositions, which may include a consistency between beliefs and behaviour. Besides, the contents of a belief may be true or false, while an attitude may be rational (i.e. based on intellectual beliefs), or irrational (i.e. based on habit, mood or emotion).

Following from this, if we understand 'attitude' broadly, it would appear that no agreement in belief would be possible without an initial agreement in attitudes. Stevenson himself supports this view when he says:

Agreement in attitude will always be consequent upon complete agreement in belief ..... (FV p.7).

No two persons, for instance, may hold the same belief that p (i.e. agree in belief) unless they hold the same attitudes, rational or irrational, towards p. If one holds rational attitudes, that is, if

his attitudes are intellectually-based towards p, and the other holds irrationally, they cannot agree in belief that p. Disagreement in attitude will therefore result in disagreement in belief, and vice versa. This is why we say that no agreement in belief is possible without an initial agreement in attitude.

What all this implies is that disagreement in belief and disagreement in attitude cannot be compartmentalized. They are not sub-classes of 'disagreement' - as Stevenson makes them - but rather are types of behaviour, distinguished in either case by means of different criteria. A classification which opts to put them into compartments is therefore, as far as our argument goes, misleading, and any conclusions arrived at as a consequence of such a classification are by the same logic untenable<sup>13</sup>. We therefore contend the criteria on which Professor Stevenson makes his distinction between disagreements, and aver that a methodological system which identifies or baulks together ethical judgements and emotive utterances, and bases the rationale for this exercise on a distinction between disagreements in attitude and disagreements in belief, does not help us explicate ethical issues or analyse ethical judgements.

For one thing, such a classification tends to gloss over the conceptual difference between what we might call a mere cause of belief and a reason for belief. When two people A and B disagree in opinion over an issue, and seek to eliminate their disagreement, there are various ways A may make B agree with him (or vice versa) - by hypnotizing, by drugs, force, eloquence, etc. - but none of these methods is a rational one, because in none of them is the cause of B's belief, a reason for his belief. For by each of these methods, B is caused to believe what A says, not on the strength of any reasons, but by being induced, or influenced to believe.

But we do not think that the distinction between causes of and reasons for belief should be glossed, for the former results in irrational behaviour while the latter results in rationality. Corollarily there is a distinction between mere causes of attitudes and reasons for attitudes.

The emotive theory of values ignores these distinctions. In many cases of ethical disagreement which Stevenson discusses, for example, the disputants never attempt to find whose attitude, if either's, is correct, so that their disagreement can be settled on the forum that both parties are to share as an attitude they judge to be correct. On Stevenson's model an ethical disagreement is 'settled' when and if the disputants come to agree in attitudes, and there is no consideration whatever given to the possibility that their attitudes may nevertheless be incorrect. It is therefore an attempt to change or, to use Stevenson's own word, to 'alter' the attitude of the other party, not to rectify it: in other words, an attempt to persuade or influence the other party to alter its attitudes, but no attempt is made to see that the new attitude is based on reason.

What Stevenson seems to imply by his theory is therefore that attitudes are never, even in the simplest sense, incorrect. Looked at in this way it may be said that the effect of his analysis is to dissolve the distinction between rational and irrational attitudes. A closer look at his first pattern of analysis makes this claim against him clear. On this pattern, at  $t_1$ , A asserts:

"I (now) approve of X"

and at a later time,  $t_2$ , he asserts

"No I (now) disapprove of X"

after undergoing a change in attitude which comes after a discussion.

And Stevenson claims that the judgement made at  $t_2$  does not contradict

the one made at  $t_1$ . In saying this he indirectly supports Ayer's claim that the statement 'stealing is not wrong' does not contradict the statement that stealing is wrong. To him the judgement at  $t_2$  is just a 'different' judgement. But it seems clear from the case that A has not just altered his judgement; he has 'rectified' it, and this claim is testified by the fact that he has found the judgement made at  $t_2$  a statement of what at this time he takes as the correct judgement. It is a judgement of what he has considered 'better'; in fact, the judgement at  $t_1$  might be said to be mistaken, while the one at  $t_2$  is its correction. The relationship which the judgement made at  $t_2$  bears to that at  $t_1$  is therefore one of contradiction; and if it is a contradiction, then it is a logical relationship, not a psychological one.

Having agreed that both as a theory of meaning and as a method of examining ethical disagreements, emotivism seems unsatisfactory, we may now summarize the emotivist case against ethical objectivity. We shall give this in the form of six issues raised in the claims of Stevenson, and his answers to them. The rest of our argument will be an attempt to rebut these answers, and we shall in doing this imply that a case can still be made for ethical objectivity in spite of the claims of the emotive theory of ethics.

1. When one speaker says 'This is good' and another says 'No, it is bad', their utterances seem to be incompatible. But if ethical utterances express and evoke emotion rather than state facts, then these two statements cannot be logically inconsistent, since each would be evoking a different kind of emotion and none can be right or wrong. How then can one explain this appearance of inconsistency in the statements given?

Stevenson answers this question by challenging the assumption that all disagreements, in fact, require logical incompat-

ibility. He argues, as we already know, that disagreements can better be seen as disagreements in belief and disagreements in attitude. When two people disagree in belief, their disagreement involves an opposition of facts, both of which cannot, in the long run, be true. When they disagree in attitude the position is different. Their opposition results from the fact that their attitudes to the subject in question cannot both be satisfied because the one person is calling to question the attitude of the other. Stevenson's conclusion is thus that although the two statements 'This is good' and 'No, it is bad' are logically inconsistent, their incompatibility lies in the fact that they express a disagreement in attitude; not that they are expressing conflicting facts.

But if ethical disagreements are disagreements in attitude, and, as matters of taste, need not be disputed over, why then do ethical disputes persist?

It would be naive to waive this question by merely suggesting, as some might do, that ethical disputes persist because the disputants may not have known that the origin of their difference is in attitudes, and that if they did they would also know the futility of their encounter. Stevenson rightly does not take to this line of thought. He rather goes on to argue that we dispute about ethical issues because ethical argument is both practically necessary and psychologically effective. The need for concerted social action requires that disagreements in attitude be resolved not in the rather simplistic way that ordinary disputes in taste, such as wine-tasting are. (EL pp111-12).

2. Ethical statements are normally stated in the declarative mood, rather than the exclamatory or imperative. And in ordinary language we frequently speak of such sentences as true or false. But since attitudes cannot be true or false in anything like the sense in which

beliefs can, it would seem that the sentences which express and evoke attitudes must necessarily be lacking in truth-value. This, as we know, is Ayer's line of argument, and Stevenson argues rather differently. Originally he maintained that ethical sentences have descriptive as well as emotive meaning, and that although the descriptive component is true or false, the emotive component cannot be so qualified. But in a later publication, he admits that his earlier contention had been misleading, and now holds that we can speak of ethical sentences in their entirety as true or false, without any linguistic impropriety - (FV pp.214-17) -

Now an attention to our ethical discourse - and indeed, to any sort of evaluative discourse... shows that it allows us to introduce 'true' or 'false' with full linguistic propriety and without any trace, in practice, of making our judgements obscure (p.215).

But Stevenson goes further to argue that any declarative sentence may be said to be true or false whether it states a fact or no, since the function of 'true' is simply to repeat with emphasis the sentence to which it is applied. So it does not follow from the fact that ethical sentences are 'true' or 'false' that they necessarily state facts. The use of 'true' and 'false' is just a syntactical rule and does not show the function of the sentence.

3. Next Stevenson had to face the problem of the occurrence of ethical questions. In addition to statements the language of ethics includes questions. What a question really does is to express some doubt about reality and is a request for information. How can ethical utterances include questions and yet not doubt anything in reality?

Stevenson explains that ethical questions express personal uncertainty in attitude. He claims that this uncertainty arises from

a conflict of attitudes within the individual, and poses the problem of inner conflict - (FV pp.56-58) -

Suppose that a man is making a personal decision about an ethical issue, what he is trying to do is to make up his mind whether to approve or disapprove of something. (p.56).

He goes on to argue that an ethical question expresses the speaker's uncertainty in attitude, refers to the hearer's attitudes, and is a request for influence. (EL pp.92-3). Hence an ethical question like 'Is it good?' means roughly 'Do you approve of it, and shall I?' It is just a remark that prompts an ethical judgement from the hearer and is comparable to requests in commands, such as, 'Shall I take the left turn or the right?'

4. There is also the related question of ethical doubts. A speaker may wonder if he is mistaken in some ethical statement even when his conviction remains unshaken. Since there can be no falsehood where there is no truth or real objectivity, how can we explain it that an individual does have ethical doubts?

Stevenson answers that

... a given attitude is strengthened or held in check by the force of many other attitudes...

Just as we can acknowledge, without half-heartedness, and without caprice, a fallibility in science, bearing

in mind that our conclusions may have to be revised

in the light of further reasons for believing or

disbelieving, so we can acknowledge, without half-

heartedness, and without caprice, a fallibility in

ethics, bearing in mind that our conclusions may

have to be revised in the light of further reasons

for approving or disapproving.<sup>14</sup>

His argument here is that a person who wonders whether some firm attitude of his may be mistaken is really in doubt about the stability of his attitude. Any reasonable man recognizes that even his strongest attitudes may have to be revised in the light of additional inquiry or discussion. Such readiness to reconsider in the future, he adds, is quite consistent with sincerity in one's present attitude.

5. In relation to logic and ethics, Stevenson holds that canons of formal logic can be directly applied to some ethical statements because of the descriptive meaning they incorporate. It is only insofar as ethical sentences go beyond descriptive meaning and evoke attitudes that logic loses its hold on them.

6. Related to this too is the problem of ethical reasoning. Since attitudes are lacking in truth-value, how is it always possible to defend an ethical position by giving reasons for it? Does the defence not, as it were, draw from some reserve of ethical knowledge?

Stevenson's answer is that ethical conclusions sometimes follow logically from a set of premisses, once again by virtue of the descriptive meaning of the statements involved. In such cases however at least one of the premisses must itself be an ethical statement. (EL p.236). In these cases where ethical conclusions are inferred from purely factual premisses, the premisses are related to the conclusions psychologically rather than logically. (EL pp.112-13). But these facts do not prove the attitude true, they only reinforce it (FV p.83). Therefore it is always possible to defend an ethical statement by giving reasons for it. In fact, an ethical statement, so he argues, "feels naked, so to speak, when the reasons are not given" (FV p.67).

Now let us examine this further. Reason can, and must be

given for ethical judgements, but we do reject some of them as irrelevant, and thus distinguish between relevant and irrelevant reasons. To defend the statement 'P is honest', for example, we would be ready to accept 'because he has not defrauded his employers' as a relevant reason, and 'because he is very bald' is irrelevant. If moral judgements are just expressions of attitudes, how can our distinction between relevant and irrelevant be a logical one?

Stevenson explains this in terms of psychological effectiveness. Any judgement about any matter of fact which any speaker considers likely to alter attitudes, he says, may be adduced as a reason for or against an ethical judgement. But "whether this reason will in fact support or oppose the judgement will depend on whether the hearer believes it, and upon whether, if he does, it will eventually make a difference to his attitudes" (EL p.114-15). Thus relevance becomes a matter of attitudes and reasons which are not likely to be effective in modifying the attitude of the hearer are irrelevant. -

To be relevant, any belief that is introduced into the argument must be one that is likely to have a different attitude... (FV p.4).

Let us now proceed to see how effective Stevenson's answers are: for if they really are tenable, it means that any characteristic of objectivity which ethics has is, as Mackie has claimed, only apparent.

In a sense it might of course be said that the mere existence of these appearances within the thesis of the emotive theory of ethics may itself suggest a prima facie case against emotivism, and if we find emotivist explanations of them unsatisfactory, then a case - though not a conclusive one - will have been made in favour of moral objectivity.

All of Stevenson's answers to the questions raised by his philosophical position may be explained in his insistence on the emotive explanation of moral utterances. It is this that raises problems with (a) his application of formal logic to ethics, and (b) his use of epistemic terms. So we shall try to rebut his position by examining some of his explanations on these related lines.

Stevenson has asserted that "in general ethical statements like all others that have at least some descriptive meaning, are amenable to the usual explications of formal logic" (EL p.116). It is this descriptive component, he says, which makes it logical. Let us now consider some simple syllogism extracted from his own example:

Nothing that weakens people's sense of independence is good.

A dole weakens people's sense of independence.

Therefore, a dole is not good.

Stevenson maintains that this argument which B uses to attack A's position, is formally valid, and suggests that it is to be treated in accordance with the first pattern of analysis. But how can it be logical when the major premiss and the conclusion are ethical statements which, by the emotive theory, are completely lacking in truth-value? Stevenson's reply, as given above, is that these ethical statements also have descriptive meaning and that it is insofar as they do so (i.e. express beliefs) that the ordinary canons of formal logic apply to them.

Let us see how tenable this argument is by using the first pattern of analysis<sup>‡</sup> as suggested, and considering only the descriptive meaning: then we have -

I disapprove of anything that weakens people's sense of independence.

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<sup>‡</sup>'X is good' strictly designates 'I approve of X', and suggests 'Do so as well'.

A dole weakens people's sense of independence.

Therefore, I disapprove of the dole.

Analyzed in this way the argument is formally valid; but it falls short of an ethical argument - in fact, is no longer one - for it does nothing to establish the attitude expressed in the ethical conclusion "a dole is not good". What it does is to establish a factual statement about the speaker's own attitude (towards the dole). And as Stevenson himself insists, the whole point of ethical reasoning is to establish or call to question the attitudes, not the descriptive meanings expressed in ethical conclusions. Yet this is the sense in which Stevenson suggests that formal logic should apply to an ethical argument - a sense in which the validity of the argument does nothing to establish the ethical import of the conclusion in question.

How then can this impasse be removed? Possibly it can only be done by deleting the descriptive meaning from the first pattern of analysis and thereby denying that formal logic applies to ethical statements only to the extent that they have descriptive meaning. And if this is done all ethical reasoning would fall into the second pattern of analysis. This brings us to considering the second pattern of analysis<sup>‡</sup>. Stevenson suggests (EL p.231) that second pattern arguments like the following are logically valid:

"Good" means "is conducive to social harmony"

His act was conducive to social harmony

Therefore, his act was good.

In keeping with the principle that formal logic is only applicable to ethical arguments insofar as they have descriptive meaning, we see that the major premiss simply establishes the descriptive meaning of the word "good", and the conclusion applies this word in its purely descriptive meaning only. On this interpretation the definition enables

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<sup>‡</sup>"X is good" designates strictly "X has aulities or relations P,Q,R", and suggests I approve of X"; do so as well".

us to infer the conclusion ('His act was good') from the minor premiss ('his act was conducive to social harmony') because it assures us that the conclusion merely repeats the factual premiss (i.e. the major premiss) in other words. This explains the validity of the argument well enough, but once again, it denudes the conclusion of any ethical import, since the conclusion simply echoes the major premiss which itself is only descriptive.

Following from these analyses Stevenson has not explained how formal logic can apply to ethical arguments as ethical at all. Neither the first nor the second pattern of analysis does this; in fact, the second pattern, in spite of its introduction of descriptive meaning through persuasive definitions, does nothing to explain how any genuinely ethical conclusion follows logically from any set of premisses, whether ethical, factual, or both.

Apparently this way of looking at the argument may be criticized for missing the point of a persuasive definition, for a persuasive definition is not purely descriptive; its force lies in the combined use of both emotive and descriptive meanings. But even granting this, does the ethical import, so-called, of the definition, get transferred to the conclusion of the argument? Or, put differently, is there any contradiction in accepting the attitude expressed in the persuasive definition, that 'good' means being conducive to social harmony and rejecting the one expressed in the conclusion, that his action was good? We suggest that there does not seem to be any since what the conclusion does is simply to reiterate the major premiss. How then can we conceive of a logical argument in which the conclusion has no connection with the major premiss except that it merely reiterates it?

The only answer is perhaps to infer that so long as Stevenson

clings tacitly to tying logical validity to descriptive meaning, he cannot appeal to persuasiveness or emotive meaning of a description to explain why ethical arguments (in the second pattern) are sometimes valid. His position in the explication of the application of formal logic to ethical arguments is therefore this: either it is accepted that logic is completely inapplicable to ethical arguments as ethical, or that it is implausible to deny that it is applicable to them, simply because they are ethical. Perhaps it might be plausible to claim that simple syllogisms are as valid when their predicates are ethical terms as they are when they are descriptive terms. It is the form of the argument and the meaning of the logical words, such as 'all', 'some', 'not', 'or', 'is', etc. that makes the argument valid and not the nature and function of the component statements. It is, indeed, because this is so that we can use symbols in arguments.

Now, leaving the problem of the use of formal logic in ethics, let us examine Stevenson's use of epistemic terms. Here again his explanations are faulty because of his emotivist leaning.

In Ethics and Language (p.154) Stevenson suggests that although the descriptive meanings of ethical sentences could be true or false in the usual sense, the emotive meaning is completely without truth-value. Therefore it is misleading, he concludes, to call an ethical statement, as a whole, true or false. Under "Retrospective Comments" in Facts and Values, however, he revises this opinion and, as we have seen, admits that we can introduce the terms "true" and "false" into ethical discussions. It is idle then, he says, "to say that ethical judgement can be neither true nor false" in deference to our language (FV p.216), and he affirms that his analysis "does not cause the terms 'true' and 'false' as commonly used in connection with the judgements to become unintelligible or obscure" (p.219).

It is needless to say that this affirmation places Stevenson in an awkward position for it throws out his argument that validity is tied to truth and that truth is inapplicable to ethical conclusions (EL Chapter 7). And this is where he bases his assumptions that ethical reasoning cannot be valid, and where his case against objectivity is squarely grounded. But let us concede his change of view and judge him on his new claim. It would follow that if ethical statements are true or false in the sense that factual statements are, then they would have as good a claim to objectivity as factual statements do. But, as we have seen, Stevenson denies this too on the ground that we cannot infer something about the function, meaning or objectivity of an utterance from the fact that it can be spoken of as 'true' or 'false', because the applicability of these terms is "purely syntactical", that is, determined solely by grammatical structure, and grammatical structure "requires nothing more ... than that the sentence be in the declarative tense" (FV p.216) to assign truth or falsity.

But this is doubtful since we do use declarative sentences in utterances such as giving instructions - 'You should cover the table with clean linen' - or promises - 'I promise to pay you five pounds' - and in each of these cases it would be odd to answer 'that is true' or 'that is false'. What is being said is that we cannot assign truth or falsity to such statements even though they are declarative. So the claim that any declarative sentence may be said to be true or false whether it states a fact or no is not tenable since here we have declarative sentences to which we cannot assign truth or falsity. So it seems that we need something more than mere grammatical structure in applying the epistemic terms 'true' or 'false' to sentences. They cannot be assigned just to any declarative sentences.

This 'something more' we would suggest, is a claim to rationality. To call an utterance 'true' is to claim that the reasons for it outweigh the considerations which would be brought against it. If P says, 'This picture is hanging on the wall' and Q answers 'that is true', it means that Q has more reason to support the proposition than he may have against it. In the same way, if P says 'John ought not to have lied', and Q says 'It is false', it means that Q has more reason against the proposition than he has to support it. So our application of the terms 'true' and 'false' to sentences follows from our weighting of reasons for or against propositions, and not from their grammatical structure. If we accept this argument then it would be incongruous to hold both that ethical statements have truth-value and at the same time that they are emotionally-rather than rationally-based. And if truth and falsity in ethics are rationally-based, then ethical questions and ethical doubts which are based on these truths are themselves rationally-rather than emotionally-based, and can only be explained in reason, not in change in attitudes.

On validity also Stevenson has maintained that in most ethical arguments the premisses are related to the conclusion psychologically rather than logically. This of course makes it invalid to use such epistemic terms as 'valid' or 'invalid' in ethical arguments; for, how can we apply the term 'validity' in an argument whose premisses are not logically related to the conclusion? Stevenson's answer relates relevance or irrelevance of a consideration, and thus the validity or invalidity of the argument, simply to psychological effectiveness in modifying the attitude of the hearer (FV p.4. Referred to on p. ). This suggests that 'valid' is a purely descriptive term meaning roughly 'effective in persuading the hearer', and a valid

argument would simply be one which influences the hearer. But if the validity of an ethical argument solely rests upon what influences the hearer it need be asked why Professor Stevenson asserts that any judgement of the validity of an ethical judgement is itself a normative judgement -

... when we claim that the factual reason, R, if true, would justify or help to justify the evaluative conclusion, E, we are in effect making another judgement, E<sup>1</sup>, of our own - the latter serving to evaluate the situation that we shall have if the facts of the case include those that P purports to describe. (FV p.89)

How can the ethical judgement be "normative" if its character is to be dictated by the attitude of the hearer? For to accept a judgement as normative is to accept that the reasons on which it is based are valid, to the extent of being taken as established. Such a position would be averted if 'valid' was given an emotive interpretation such that what was valid was anything a speaker would build into his argument in order to affect some attitudes in the hearer. Such a use of the term 'valid' would be infelicitous, for, how could it be known what the speaker would not build into his argument? And if we engage to interpret logical terms such as 'valid' and 'invalid' emotively, we should be compelled by our own logic to interpret other logical terms such as 'true', or 'reasonable', or 'correct' emotively too, and by so doing to jeopardize what may be called objective truth not only in ethics but also in factual matters. But if the emotivist does not do this it would then be necessary for him to state the criteria by which he has distinguished two species of epistemic terms - the emotive such as 'valid' and 'invalid', and the rest, the non-emotive. Meanwhile,

on the emotive theory, valid argument seems to be not the rational one, but the approved one. But our argument shows that what is a valid argument is the rational argument.

And if by the emotive theory the valid argument is the approved rather than the rational one, it means that by that theory rational methods have no privileged place in ethics. In fact, Stevenson does not think that they have. Merely persuasive methods may prove more useful on certain occasions, he would say, while rational methods may prove useful on others (EL pp.156-57). He however insists that rational methods do have priority in ethical discussion, but this merely for pragmatic reasons -

- If people's attitudes are formed in ignorance of the facts, their action is likely to be disorganized and blundering; and there is a considerable value in building up the habit of inquiry in people (ibid.)
- Rational methods give a more permanent agreement and a more stable personal conviction than "rhapsody and exhortation" (FV pp. 7-8).
- In the individual case it is better to consider both sides of the case to avoid disastrous consequences when the resulting attitude is put into practice.

(FV p. 196).

Reason therefore has no intrinsic value in emotivist ethics. This bias results from the fact that the emotivist view of ethical issues is simply that they are persuasive. Generally speaking, we would say that any method is a method of doing something, and it is our knowledge of what we are trying to do that helps us choose our method. If we are simply trying to persuade people, then we do indeed have a choice

between rational and non-rational methods. If ethical judgements are just a psychological matter of creating and re-inforcing attitudes, then our choice between rational and non-rational methods will depend on what attitudes we opt to create or reinforce. But if ethical arguing is looked at as an attempt to establish the truth of an ethical situation, then the choice of non-rational methods does not arise, for truth cannot be arrived at through irrational methods.

It is because the emotivist does not think that reason has intrinsic value in ethics that he considers ethical disagreements as disagreements in attitudes. It is true, as Stevenson maintains, that when two people disagree ethically their utterances express opposed attitudes. What we dispute is his claim that this opposition is not a logical one, but a psychological one. For if A says 'This is good' and B, in contradiction, says, 'No, it is bad', A is, as it were, claiming that favour is the right (or rational) attitude to take towards the object, and B is claiming that disfavour is the rational attitude to take. To say that these claims are not rational claims is, in other words, to say that none of A or B is claiming that he is right; and if this is true, then there is no disagreement. But of course there is some disagreement, so it can only be claimed in the rationality of the claims, in the fact that each party is claiming to be rational. It is only if the opposition were merely a psychological one that both claims would be correct, because there would be no criterion for making one attitude superior to the other; but serious disputants do not accept that the other party is as right as they themselves are.

It can be seen from our arguments that Professor Stevenson's answers to the demands made by ethical objectivism on the claims of the emotive theory do not dismiss those demands. His answers are characterized by his insistence on the emotive explanation of ethical issues,

and our exposition shows that this creates him problems both in his application of formal logic to ethics and in his use of epistemic terms. The emotive theorist seems to have only one option since he admits arguments in ethics, namely, that ethical judgements are sometimes valid, and that when they are valid they are so simply because they are ethical and not because of any descriptive meaning that may be imputed to them. Our arguments further suggest that the use of epistemic terms such as 'true' or 'false', 'valid' or 'invalid' and of value-terms, such as 'normative' can only be appropriate if based on reason, not on attitude. It is our opinion that if truth and falsity in ethics are, as we have argued, rationally-based, then ethical questions, doubts and arguments, because they are based on these truths, cannot but be explained in terms of reason - that is, logically - and not in attitudes.

But it must be said, in favour of the emotive theory of ethics that it is an attempt to give ethics a practical dimension - as indeed exemplified in the last phrase of Stevenson's patterns of analysis: 'Do so as well'. Its greatest fault is in its exclusion of rationality from this scheme, and it is on the fertile ground produced by this weakness that prescriptivism has germinated.

### 3. Prescriptivism

The attempt to give morality a practical dimension is most outstanding in Hare's ethical theory. Professor R.M. Hare reproaches most moral philosophers for having denied either one or the other side of moral thought. The naturalists deny our freedom in moral questions in their search for rationality in morals "because freedom appeared incompatible with rationality"<sup>15</sup>; while the subjectivists (the emotivists) disregard the rationality of morals, because they "have

thought it to be so important to preserve our freedom in moral matters" (ibid.). He then opts to look for a way of reconciling these apparently incompatible positions, hence of "resolving the antinomy between freedom and reason" (ibid.). Thus Hare repudiates both the naturalist and the emotivist. "Emotivity", he contends, "is not the essence of moral language, but only a symptom of ... an evaluative use of words"<sup>16</sup>. What makes moral language emotive is that we so often "feel deeply" about the situations in which it is used.

Hare believes that there is an answer to ethical questions. We do not feel, when forming our opinions on moral matters, that "the answering of moral questions is a quite arbitrary business ..." (FR p.2). We rather feel that "it matters very much the answer we give, and the finding of an answer is a task that should engage our rational powers to the limit of their capacity" (ibid.). But in spite of all this, we still find Hare a subjectivist.

The main characteristic of moral language, according to Hare, is that it is a sort of prescriptive language. In saying to you, for example, 'You ought to train that child', I am not merely stating a fact, nor am I primarily seeking to get you to do something. I am essentially telling you what to do. You have, as it were - so Hare puts it - raised the question 'What should I do?', and I have answered it. It is of course a different matter getting you to do what I tell you, and that should be distinguished from my telling you what to do. Commands, he says, "consist in telling someone something, not in seeking to influence him" (LM p.15). Moral discourse consists of commands, and is therefore action-guiding or 'prescriptive'.

Hare takes prescriptive discourse as that species of discourse in which practical questions are answered - much as, one might say, information discourse is that species of discourse which

answers questions for information. If you put to me the information-question 'Where do you come from?', my answer ('I come from N') is a specimen of information discourse; and if you put to me the practical question 'What ought I to do?', my answer will be a specimen of prescriptive discourse. This is the principle on which Hare develops his theory.

The simplest form of prescriptive discourse, and, in Hare's view, the basic form, is the plain imperative, such as 'Go away'. But, in his view, we cannot say that moral judgements are, grammatically, disguised imperatives, for, moral judgements have essential features which simple imperatives may lack. But moral judgements, he holds, do have in common with imperatives the crucial feature that they are both prescriptive, and this, in his view, means that a moral judgement entails an imperative (since an imperative is a form of prescriptive discourse). Just as if a proposition p entails another proposition q, I cannot (consistently) assert or accept p and reject or deny q, so, I cannot (consistently) assert or accept the moral judgement, say, 'You ought to train the child', and deny or reject the imperative 'Train the child'. The only way, he argues, in which such an imperative can be 'rejected', once we have accepted its entailed moral judgement, is simply not to act on it. Thus the thesis that moral judgements are prescriptive implies that one who accepts the moral judgement that he ought to do p is logically committed to doing p; conversely, that one who does not do p is logically debarred from accepting or affirming the judgement that he ought to do p. Once, therefore, we accept a moral judgement, we are bound by the logic of our acceptance to act according to it. My moral judgement that you ought to do p, therefore, 'guides' your action, not in the sense that it necessarily moves you to do p, but in that your acceptance of my judgement commits you to doing p, and your not doing p implies your rejection of my judgement.

Moral judgements, then, are supposed to resemble imperatives in being 'prescriptive', and, to be so, indeed, in virtue of an intimate logical relation to imperatives. But they have, Hare holds, a further important feature which distinguishes them from imperatives: imperatives are not necessarily universalizable while moral judgements are. I may, on a whim of the moment, command you to go away from me, on the particular occasion, but that does not logically bind me to say the same, or anything at all, to you on another occasion. I may even say, 'Don't go away', on another occasion, without any logical contradiction. For moral judgements it is not so. It is true that the moral judgements that I make on another occasion are founded on, or made in virtue of certain features of that occasion; but I must, in consistency, be prepared to make the same judgement in any situation which shares these features (and does not differ in any relevant respect). Thus, in Hare's view, a moral judgement is universalizable; that is, if I commit myself to it in one particular case, I thereby commit myself in all similar circumstances, including those involving myself, unless I can show the other case to be different in some relevant respect. To take Hare's example, we could make "No smoking in this compartment" into a moral rule if we universalized it into "No smoking by anyone in any railway compartment anywhere, please" (LM p.177). Thus, unlike other imperatives, moral judgements cannot be purely and completely singular - they are universal. In judging case  $x$ , we implicitly judge case  $x^1$ ....  $x^n$  insofar as they are of the same kind.

So Hare defines two theses for moral judgements: they are "a kind of prescriptive judgements, and they are distinguished from other judgements by being universalizable." (LM p.4).

In examining Hare's moral theory, first we ask whether moral judgements are essentially prescriptive.

Prescriptivism may be looked at in two ways. First it is a thesis which restricts moral discourse to one single speech-act, namely, that of prescribing. It claims that there is a class of words, which includes those which occur characteristically in moral discourse, whose meaning is to be explained (at least in part) in terms of prescribing; that is to say, whenever such words are used the speaker is necessarily 'telling someone what to do'. How tenable is this claim that moral judgements are prescriptions?

If I say to X 'You ought to pay the money', surely I may be prescribing to him, but I may also be reproofing him or exhorting him, depending on the circumstances. When a headmaster, for instance, tells a group of parents 'You ought to see your children to school before 8 a.m.' he may be imploring or advising them, although he may also be prescribing to them. Many parents may take to his words and do as he has advised them, but only few parents will understand him to be giving them a rule which they must follow. Many would understand him to be imploring them to co-operate in keeping a high standard of discipline in the school. What we are saying is not that a moral judgement, taken as an imperative, may not tell people what to do, but that it does not essentially do so, as the prescriptivist wants it to be understood. Moral utterances can be used for advising, exhorting, imploring, commending, condemning, and so on, and they can also be used for prescribing. If I observe that a group of people do not seem to have sympathy for one another, I may tell them 'Man should not be a wolf to man'; but in doing this I am not prescribing to them but condemning their attitude to one another. Moral judgements cannot therefore be restricted to one single speech-act, namely that in which the speaker addresses another upon some course of action to be undertaken by that person; contexts in which A asks B 'What shall I do?', and B answers

his question. 'The study of imperatives' may thus be one approach to ethics, but it may not be, as Hare claims, 'The best introduction to ethics' (LM p.2), if by that he wants us to understand that moral judgements are essentially prescriptions.

This tendency to restrict moral utterances to a particular speech-act was also there in emotivism; for the context in which one "creates an influence" is that in which one talks to another with an eye to his present or future behaviour. But our argument shows that it is not always the case that the issue of a moral discourse must tell someone what to do.

A second way of interpreting the prescriptive thesis, and perhaps Hare's more plausible claim is that which arises from the fact that words and deeds are logically connected, and implies that moral judgements entail prescriptions.

Let us once again look at the comparison with imperatives. Supposing that (citing Much Ado About Nothing) when Beatrice asks Benedict 'Kill Claudio', Benedict's acceptance of the order given by Beatrice would consist in his killing Claudio, that is, in doing what she says. Generally then, we may say that an imperative discourse is such that acceptance of what is said in that mode consists in appropriate action on the part of those to whom it is addressed, and it will not be taken that what is said has been accepted if the action is not carried out. It is in this respect that Hare draws the analogy which leads him to conclude that moral discourse is also prescriptive.

Moral utterances do indeed lead to deeds. It must be granted that for any proposition in morals, whatever the speaker may be doing in issuing it, acceptance of it consists in acting in a certain way. Moreover (since moral judgements, unlike imperatives, are universalizable, and 'apply' to the speaker himself no less than to other persons) any moral

proposition also commits the speaker to acting in a certain way. And since in prescriptive discourse actions confirm or refute words, in acting we accept or reject them (as Professor Hare rightly observes), it might be said that in that sense moral discourse is prescriptive. And, as far as this argument goes, we might agree with Professor Hare that a man's action is a pointer to his moral principles (LM p.1).

Now granting that for general purposes there is this close connection or interdependence between words and deeds, it does not follow from this that moral utterances entail prescriptions, for the hypothesis is not the same. For elucidation let us go back to the prescriptive model. It is indeed true to say that to accept the imperative 'Kill Claudio' is just to kill Claudio, and that accordingly we have a case of a very intimate relation between words and deeds. But the relation in this case is of relatively simple explanation. The deed or non-deed of killing Claudio is thus so intimately related to the words in question that the words may be said to prescribe the course of action; and any other course of action would constitute their rejection. The prescriptivist thesis would be making a plausible remark that in moral discourse there obtains a comparatively intimate relation between words and deeds, but it goes beyond this to say that the relation holds in moral discourse for the same reason it does for the imperative discourse. That is to say, that the words used in moral discourse prescribe, and the deeds are consonant or dissonant with them insofar as they do or do not follow from the prescription given. The claim is that to issue a moral judgement is itself actually to prescribe, not just comparable to it, but that it entails it, and that it is in virtue of that entailment that a relation exists between words and deeds, and that moral discourse can be said in general to be action-guiding.

Suppose that rather than say 'Kill Claudio' Beatrice had said 'You ought to kill Claudio', we would regard this latter as a moral judgement. But we would hardly say that Beatrice had made a statement identical to the one she made at first, or that what she said entailed giving an order to Benedict for the murder of Claudio, such that if indeed Benedict had proceeded to kill Claudio on the strength of the moral judgement alone Beatrice would be held responsible for ordering the killing. Surely Beatrice would deny it, and we think she would be right, for the words 'You ought to kill Claudio' need not yield the killing of Claudio as 'Kill Claudio' does. Moreover the latter statement ('You ought to...') suggests that some considerations have been put together while the former statement ('Kill Claudio') may be made without such considerations. It therefore cannot be that 'Kill Claudio' is entailed by 'You ought to kill Claudio'.

Such an entailment cannot hold also because words can and do express differently from deeds. I may preach racial harmony while in deed I am a racist. Deeds do not follow from words by any form of logical relationship. Thus from the fact, if it be a fact, that a man's moral principles are revealed most expressively in his behaviour, it does not follow that those principles have to be conceived as, or as implying, prescriptions of such behaviour. Principles might equally be expressed as wishes, or resolutions or beliefs, and so on, with the same effect.

Hare seems to argue from the fact that one who issues an imperative is by that token telling someone to do something to the fact that one who utters a moral discourse is doing the same. If our argument is plausible it follows that he is making a category mistake, for two different questions are involved - the question 'In what way does imperative discourse relate to conduct?', and the question 'In

what way does moral discourse relate to conduct?' The former question can be answered by saying that in virtue of what imperatives are, to use them is to tell someone what to do; but the latter question cannot be answered in the same way unless one begs the question of just taking moral discourses as imperatives, which seems to be what prescriptivism is doing. Not only can the second question not be answered in the same way, it cannot be answered at all. For whereas an imperative expression is a grammatical class whose members (roughly) are standardly employed for one particular purpose - to prescribe - moral utterances are of utmost grammatical diversity, may occur in widely varied types of situations, and may be employed in doing many quite different things. Thus, while the relation between imperatives to action can be characterized in only one way, we cannot do the same for moral discourse. This is not to say that moral utterances never lead to conduct; it is rather to say that although this may occur it is one of the various things that may occur since the actual relations are quite diverse and cannot be summed up in any one single formula whatsoever.

We find therefore that each of the two ways in which prescriptivism may be interpreted - that moral utterances are prescriptions and that they entail prescriptions - errs<sup>‡</sup> - the one in its limiting of moral discourse to only one particular speech-act, namely, that of prescribing, and the other in the suggestion that what is said in moral discourse is so intimately related to what is done. The two ways commit the same error of taking a monistic approach to the explanation of the relationship of moral judgement to human conduct. That moral discourse is related to conduct in one way is no more true than that one who engages in moral discourse is always doing one thing.

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<sup>‡</sup>We shall later in this Chapter show how the entailment claim makes it difficult for the prescriptivist to explain moral failure.

This is not to suggest that there is no truth in Prescriptivism as a moral theory. By insisting that moral utterance bears on conduct, the theory, as it were, lifts (more than Emotivism has tried to do) moral discourse from being apparently purely theoretically informative. But insofar as the theory does not just state this platitude that words and deeds are connected, and goes on to explain it, it appears to be completely mistaken, for there is no logical connection between moral words and deeds.

The second question which is raised by the theory of prescriptivism is in the thesis of universalizability. In our analysis of the prescriptive theory we pointed out that the feature of universalizability is one which Professor Hare takes as a mark of distinction between imperatives such as 'Go away' and moral judgements. In his account of moral reasoning, very great importance is attached to this feature. "When we are trying, in a concrete case to decide what to do", he says,

...what we are looking for ... is an action to which we can commit ourselves (prescriptivity) but which we are at the same time prepared to accept as exemplifying a principle of action to be prescribed for others in like circumstances (universalizability). If, when we consider some proposed action, we find that, when universalized, it yields prescriptions which we cannot accept, we reject this action as a solution to our moral problem - if we cannot universalize the prescription, it cannot become an 'ought'. (FR p.89/90)

Thus it is universalizability which gives a backing to prescriptivism. And closely related to universalizability is what he calls the faculty

'imagination', by which people will be able to 'imagine what it is like to be in the situation in which another is placed' (FR p.92ff).

It is, Hare seems to say, solely in virtue of this feature of universalizability that moral argument, properly so-called, is possible. He holds that he does full justice to the rationality of morality by this principle. He maintains that reasons must be given for particular decisions, in terms of the factors on which the moral judgement is founded, and that these reasons require the same moral judgement in all cases where they obtain. Thus to say that a proposition is universalizable is to say that one who affirms or accepts it is thereby committed - as a matter of logic - to a certain view of any cases of a certain kind. Therefore for me to assert that you ought not to do p in situation q commits me to the general 'principle' that no one should do things like p in situations like q - 'like' here meaning 'not relevantly distinguishable from'. In other words, when I say 'x is right', I am commanding the performance of x, and doing so on the criterion that the action and its content can be appropriately described in a specific way, and whenever that description is applicable the performance of x is, ipso facto, being commanded. That is, that as a matter of logic, whenever I prescribe a specific action I am prescribing all and any acts which fall under that description.

Generality of the kind Hare is suggesting is implicit in moral justifying: in fact, his view is, in some respects, similar to that of Kant. Kant rejected that any theory of morality is based upon moral sense or emotions, or that truths could be intuited. The test of universalizability for the Kantian ethic is simply a consequence of the fact that morality must be legislated a priori by practical reason (as different from theoretical reason or the realm of experience). Hare's theory differs from Kant's because it is linguistically -, rather

than metaphysically-, based. For Kant the principle of universalizability is justified by a sort of transcendental deduction - that ought-statements can be categorically binding only if they are a priori, and consequently universalizable. In general the universalizability principle seeks to maintain consistency in moral justifying, and, by so doing, at least, clamps down on prejudice, bigotry or thoughtlessness which may show itself in the judgement of similar moral situations.

But it does not seem to achieve much more than this consistency. For one thing it does not seem to be based on the notions of right and wrong. To appeal in discussion of some moral judgement that I make, to the feature of universalizability is not to raise the question whether my judgement of the case before me is right, but only on the question whether it is the same as, or compatible with, the judgements I make or would make of similar cases. So that, suppose that all my judgements and standards of morality seem objectionable to you, there seems hardly anything you can achieve in arguing with me against them so long as I apply them consistently in all my judgements of similar situations. You will be arguing against me on the category of right and wrong, while I am defending myself on the category of consistency in the judgements that I pass. Consistency is not a criterion for rightness.

It may be contended here that this argument is treating the matter all too theoretically, and that in practice not many highly objectionable arguments will pass the test of consistency. One might think that this would probably be so if we apply the faculty of 'imagination', as Professor Hare suggests; that is, apply the generalization argument that few would make really objectionable moral judgements if they were to put themselves in the shoes of those they judge, and that once this is done only the most irrational of men would

want their own interests frustrated by others when placed in their circumstances.

But there is an important equivocation in this argument. We say so because there seems to be a confusion here between what judgements people pass and what likes or interests they may have. It is true - perhaps necessarily true - that no rational man wants the frustration of his interests, or likes it when this happens. But the point at issue is not what a man wants or would like, but what he would normally approve or find morally objectionable; they may of course coincide but it does not necessarily follow that they do. If I commend or adopt as right some course of action which grossly damages the interest of another, you may point out to me, and quite correctly too, that I would not like it if my own interests were damaged in that way. But there is no inconsistency in my admitting this and yet maintaining that, if our positions were reversed, then the other person would be right to damage my interest in exactly the way I propose to damage his. Hare, rightly I think, treats such a case as one of apathy, yet it does not show inconsistency in one's judgement that one is apathetic: apathy is consistent with moral consistency.

In order, that is, consistently, to defend as unobjectionable my neglect of another's interests, I do not have to want my own interests frustrated or neglected. Consistency does not demand that this should be so: all that is required to maintain consistency is that I should concede that neglect of my own interests by others would be unobjectionable. And there is nothing unbalanced or strained in such a concession. A man cannot, in effect, by the argument from universalizability be constrained to attach much weight, if any, to the interests of others; for he may be ready to concede that others are not morally required to attach much weight, if any, to his own, even if he comes out to be the loser.

So Hare's second main thesis - the thesis of universalizability - though acceptable in principle, raises one big problem, namely that it does not provide for the rightness and wrongness of acts in our judgement. As a result of this it can be maintained even while we may wish to justify morally wrong acts.

Universalizability raises yet another and related problem. It is assumed that it is based on 'a matter of logic'; that is, that as a matter of logic, whenever I prescribe a specific action, I prescribe all and any acts which fall under that description. We shall contend this claim. It is logically possible for a person to prescribe an action to himself, and refuse it to others. An egoist could, for instance, prescribe 'Always seek your own happiness' to himself, and would not like the prescription to apply universally. And in doing this, he is, as it were, saying not simply 'X is right' but 'X is right for me'. It is doubtful whether there is anything logically odd with the procedure, or about prescriptions directed to particular individuals: most commands, particularly in the Army, are such prescriptions. If, as Hare argues, moral prescriptions can only be made universally, then there must be something peculiar about them which makes them so. The only argument that may be raised is that moral rules are based on social contract (as we saw in Chapter Two) and that as a result the word 'right' does not require to be qualified by 'for me', and therefore implicitly suggests the inclusion of everyone.

The egoist may agree with this, yet choose to restrict the scope of moral rules by claiming exemption from them. Again this would not be logically odd; nor is there anything logically odd in his going further to accept only some moral laws as being universally binding, but only a very minimal and easily-kept level, such as that involving killing. In doing this he commits himself to two sets of

moral principles - a minimal universally acceptable set, and a set of egoistic, individually-applicable ones which do not take other agents into account. He would, by so doing, be using the word 'right' in two senses - a 'private' and a 'public' one, the former including as right only what he thinks he ought to do himself but there is no commitment to the belief that everyone should do it. It may be that what we may term the 'ordinary use' of 'right' may be the public use, yet there does not seem to be anything extraordinary or logically odd in the use of the two senses of 'right'. We can only say that the egoist's principles are not universally applicable because of the principle that moral principles ought to be universal in scope. But this is not an analytic truth about when moral principles ought to be called 'moral'; it is only a substantive claim that I should be prepared to ascribe to others equally the principles which I ascribe to myself. But logic does not tell us why this is so; the only way perhaps logic comes into it is that logic applies this same principle in its manipulation of symbols.

What is being impressed in these arguments is that the universalizability of principles is not logically-based, as Hare claims, but a substantive moral claim to the principle of equality: it rests more on this principle than on any laws of logic. Following from this it would look as if the fundamental principle of Hare's ethics is in reality the principle 'Treat other people impartially and equally'. But this is just one possible prescription among many and cannot be inflated into a criterion of morality.

Our foregoing arguments against the principle of universalizability show, first, that while maintaining consistency, the principle sets no limit to the practical judgements which can consistently be made by some moral agents; and secondly, that it does not follow from

moral judgements as a matter of logic. It however does not discount it as a principle of morality, but rather shows how untenable it is to establish it as the only criterion for moral justifying.

Prescriptivism, unlike emotivism, has the prima facie advantage of not presenting moral discourse and debate as fundamentally non-rational. To guide, unlike to influence, is a rational activity essentially, for it is essential that you should understand what you are being guided to do, and perhaps be able to raise questions about it; while to influence, you need not necessarily be understood, nor even yourself be intelligible. What you say will be right, for the simple purpose and sole condition that it works. But this advantage which prescriptivism has over emotivism is only illusory: prescriptivism too cannot find much place for moral argument, for it too has no place for moral 'reasons'.

If asked to give reasons for some moral view I have expressed - that is, on this view, some 'prescription' I have issued - I may do one or both of two things: I may adduce certain facts about the case under consideration, or some principle or principles of which any presently-expressed view is an instance or application. But my principles are, on this view, themselves 'prescriptions' of mine, and such facts as I may adduce about the present case constitute reasons for my expressed view of it in so far as I have adopted, i.e. 'prescribed' some principle in accordance with which that view is derivable from the facts. Thus, my giving of 'reasons' for my expressed views consists, in this model, essentially of my referring to and relying on further prescriptions of my own. And what are reasons for me are only so because they are coherent with my system, and are for you not only not necessarily good reasons, but possibly no reasons at all.

It follows that when we speak of arguments on the prescrip-

tivist scale we mean that each of the parties articulates its own prescriptions, and for you to say that my view is wrong is to say that your position excludes that view; and for me to argue that my view is right is to show only that my position includes it. And there is nothing else that argument can do on the prescriptive scale since there is no reason that either party can appeal to independently of, and so genuinely in support of, its own prescriptions. Moral argument is thus reduced to a competitive game in which each competitor was making up his own rules as the game progressed.

The result of this is that on the prescriptive theory moral argument is not possible since reasons cannot be shared, and in the long run there cannot be a principle that all men ought to accept. What all men possess is their freedom to prescribe, and such a fact cannot justify the assertion that all men ought to do p, whether or not they prescribe p. So in prescriptivism moral principles belong to those who 'prescribe' them and in effect Hare's theory answers only the case of freedom, but not that of reason in moral judgement, since what constitutes reasons is reduced to mere subjective prescriptions. This is why we consider that prescriptivism is in the long run a subjective theory, for it is not only that rightly, the individual is to decide what his moral opinions are, in prescriptivism he is also to decide what to take as grounds (or reasons) for or against any moral options, since those grounds refer only to his own prescriptions.

And once again we are reminded of the weaknesses of emotivism. For since reason cannot be called into moral judgement prescriptivism can only lead us to change or alter our moral positions, but not to rectify them: so it fails like emotivism to explain the phenomena of moral argument and/or moral mistakes. For how can I understand my view to be mistaken if no other view can make me correct it?

By vesting decisions of principle on the individual, prescriptivism makes the individual moral so long as he makes the self-committing universal prescription and obeys it. But this also means that he cannot be immoral if he does not make those prescriptions, for then there are no real principles for him to default on. Ultimately being moral and being immoral lose their meaning in prescriptivism.

It is not only that prescriptive analysis makes the terms moral and immoral ineffective, it also makes the notion of moral failure difficult to explain.

Hare has contended that moral judgements are answers to the question "What shall I do?". But clearly there is a great deal of difference between the statements 'I shall do x' and 'I ought to do x', and, as was pointed out in Chapter One, moral judgements are answers to the question "What ought I to do?", not "What shall I do?". It is Hare's assimilation of these two questions, in other words, his claim (which we discussed earlier) that moral judgements entail imperatives, which brought him to problems in explaining moral struggle and the phenomenon of moral failure.

Hare's analysis implies that since 'I know what I ought to do' is assimilable to 'I know what I shall do', then one who says 'I know I ought to do x' cannot go on to say 'But I propose to do y'. It is therefore not possible on that analysis for anyone who is using 'ought' accurately and sincerely to say 'I know I ought to do x, but I propose to do y'; so it would be self-contradictory to choose a selfish course of conduct contrary to duty<sup>17</sup>.

Hare's point seems to be that unless with studied hypocrites who deceive themselves, moral failure for most of us is due to psychological impossibility. In other words, he defines all moral failure as due to the 'powerlessness' of the agent. That is to say, no one

who sincerely accepts a moral principle can (logically) act contrary to it. Hare cites the helplessness or powerlessness of Medea (in Ovid's Metamorphoses) in trying to resist the onset of love for Jason and that of St. Paul who, in the Epistle to the Romans, talks of his always doing the wrong when he is determined to do the right action. Their respective failures in acting on imperatives they had assented to, are due to psychological impossibility -

It is not in Medea's or St. Paul's psychological power to act on the imperatives that are entailed by the moral judgements which they are making.

(FR p.79).

Which means that it was psychologically impossible for them not to act the way they did. Now, how valid is this claim?

The expression 'psychological impossibility' may be understood in two senses. First, it may be understood in the sense that a test of whether it is psychologically impossible for P to do x is that he does not do x. It may also be looked at in a way such that we should say of the drug addict or alcoholic that it is psychologically impossible for him to resist his addiction, even though he may sincerely say that he ought to do so. The first sense sounds question-begging, and seems to be the one adopted by Hare. But as we do not wish to dismiss the issue as a question-begging one, let us assume, rightly or wrongly, that Hare may be using the expression in the second sense. So interpreted, Hare's intention is that <sup>in</sup>typical cases of moral failure, where the sincere and honest moral agent succumbs to moral temptation, it is really the case that he is like the drug addict in respect of his addiction. He is no more able to resist choosing the course he believes he ought to choose than the addict in taking the drug he believes he ought not to take. Even then it is possible to refute

this interpretation of the concept by examining some cases of moral temptation and failure.

Let us borrow an example from McCloskey<sup>18</sup> in this context. It is the case of the Roman Catholic student who, as a result of being seduced, finds herself pregnant. She has no doubt whatsoever that it would be wrong for her to have an abortion, but is sorely tempted to arrange one, as her career would be in jeopardy, and as she wishes to avoid the shame and disgrace discovery of her condition would entail. Once such a conflict arises it is clear that either course of action would take strength of character to see through - the immoral course (in the eyes of the agent involved) more so than the moral course. It would take considerable firmness of purpose for the girl to arrange an illegal abortion, and to see it through; yet if she did so, and were a genuine sincere Roman Catholic, we must, according to the prescriptivist analysis, conclude that it was psychologically impossible for her to do otherwise.

But what evidence is there to suppose that such a girl who ultimately chose to have abortion is, in respect of not having an abortion, psychologically as unfree as the drug addict is in respect of his drug? We do not seem to have any positive evidence for this view; but we do have some against it. For the drug addict is possibly not free to refrain from his drug, he is psychologically bound to take it even though he knows he ought not to; but this girl is not psychologically bound to undertake abortion: she is free to choose between abortion and no abortion, but she freely chooses abortion. The girl would clearly believe herself that she was free not<sup>to</sup> have gone on with the abortion and, unlike the drug addict, she would have had to exert an effort of will to stick to her decision.

It is useful here to compare the RC-girl with another girl who does not regard it unusual to have an abortion, but who fears such an operation, and who has to exert an effort of will to go through with it. We should not hesitate to describe her act as free (by contrast with that of the drug addict); yet it shares with that of the RC girl the marks which lead us to describe it as a free act - namely effort of will.

So it seems wrong to explain all cases of moral failure as cases of psychological impossibility or powerlessness of the agent to act contrary to the way he did. And yet Hare's position leaves him with no option but that. For since he regards moral judgements as entailing imperatives, and to accept an imperative is to do what it says, it is inconceivable to accept a moral principle and not do what it says. So if (as we shall argue in Chapter Seven) the ascription of autonomy to an agent is one in which it is possible to distinguish what he chooses to do from what he is compelled to, it means that Hare's argument denies autonomy in all cases of moral failure. Our argument shows that there are no reasons for supposing that sincere people who do what they know they ought not to do are unfree in a way in which the drug addict is unfree, and there are good reasons for believing that it is psychologically possible for them<sup>not</sup> to do what they believe they ought.

This conclusion does not deny that there are cases of apparently sincere people being insincere about their duty, of people unknowingly deceiving themselves, of others thinking that it was psychologically possible for them to do what it was not psychologically possible to do. All that is argued is that typical cases of immoral behaviour do not fall into such categories, as prescriptivism suggests.

Let us now try to sum up our arguments on Prescriptivism. In his analysis of moral judgements Professor Hare has made two very important claims: (1) that moral judgements are prescriptive; and (2) that the judgements so prescribed are universalizable.

In answer to the first claim we have argued that while a person may show acceptance of a moral principle or moral judgement by acting on it, moral judgements and principles neither are just prescriptions nor do they entail prescriptions. To the second claim we contend that while consistency which is the basic notion of universalizability is generally acceptable to morality and moral justifying, it seems to take little cognizance of the notion of rightness which is vital to all moral justifying, with the result that any moral view can be upheld so long as we do so consistently. Universalizability is not a logical claim, and will at best serve as a substantive claim emphasizing the application of the principle of equality in moral justifying. This is vital but it does not make the principle stand as the criterion for the 'moral'. We suggest that the diverse nature of moral judgements, as different from that of mere imperatives, makes the question: 'In what way does moral discourse relate to conduct?' an almost impossible one, and that it cannot be answered merely by taking moral judgements as imperatives and considering them solely on that scale. Like Emotivism, Prescriptivism makes the commendable effort to give morality a practical explanation, and it attempts even more by going beyond Emotivism to include that moral judgements are based on reason. But this effort fails because of the theory's insistence on its prescriptive thesis. On this model reason cannot be effectively appealed to in moral disagreements and judgements since what each party can offer as reason to support its own point of view can only be its own prescriptions, and what may be called 'reason' is therefore a series

of compartmentalized and self-dependent prescriptions. There is therefore no independent reason or principle to which conflicting parties can appeal. So the claim to rationality is illusory. Prescriptivism uses its second thesis - universalizability - as its practical machinery, but since this seems to ignore the notion of truth or correctness, no limits can be set to the practical judgements which a responsible agent can make. Since prescriptivism only makes room for moral agents to prescribe their own principles, and as these cannot constitute 'reasons' that can be shared independently and used in moral justifying, Hare's theory is subjectivist. For reasons we have given it seems to answer to the cause of freedom in morality, but not that of reason. Insofar as this is so, it fails to resolve the antimony between freedom and reason in ethics which it set out to do. But even this freedom seems jeopardized by the attempt in the theory to explain all moral failure in terms of psychological impossibility.

Professor Ayer's positivist argument denies ethical judgements a truth-value, and with it, of objective validity and the possibility of contradictions and arguments. In our rebuttal of these claims we have tried to show that ethical judgements are meaningful and therefore have a truth-value: and, following from this, that arguments and contradictions are possible in ethics. Logical Positivism, aware of its error in the classification of sentences as meaningful and meaningless, makes up for the deficiency by introducing the theory of emotive meaning, and Professor Stevenson has developed this theory in ethics. We have shown that this theory is itself faulty, and in our examination of Stevenson's applications of it to the analysis of ethical language, we revealed a number of weaknesses originating in his basic methodology of dividing disagreements into disagreements in beliefs and disagreements in attitude, and classifying ethical disagreements under the latter.

The result is that whatever reasons are given to justify ethical judgements are related to them psychologically rather than logically (i.e. rationally). Stevenson's insistence on arguing from what seems to us a faulty theory of meaning, has led him to this distinction. Once again truth and falsity are denied to ethics, and ethical judgements, although not denied complete existence as is done in Positivism, are rendered invalid since they are only attempts to persuade or influence people to change their attitudes rather than rectify their moral convictions. Thus as a reason of his bias with the emotive theory of meaning, the emotivist denies ethics of rationality and diverts the meaning of ethical judgements into mere statements of emotion. On this model, notions of right and wrong, of correctness and incorrectness in moral issues which can be shared are virtually inexistent. Moral truth therefore depends on what people feel about it, and morality is as a result subjective. In our arguments we have shown that the classification of disagreements into disagreements in belief and disagreements in attitude is logically misleading and, as a result, decisions of principle arrived at through that distinction are themselves untenable. We have also shown, from Stevenson's own examples, that ethical judgements are not mere emotions, but statements based on reason, and therefore that ethical disagreements, doubts and questions can be raised and settled rationally rather than psychologically. Epistemic terms such as 'true' or 'false', 'valid' or 'invalid' etc. can be shared because they are based on reason. We nevertheless appreciate the great merit of Emotivism in attempting to make ethics practical, but as it tries to do this at the cost of rationality to ethics, it fails, because of this lopsidedness. Professor Hare believes that there is an answer to ethical questions, so in theory he has some objectivist leaning. He takes up the vital problem of making

moral discourse relate to conduct, within the context of reason. But he fails, because in Prescriptivism, the giving of reasons in support of ethical positions collapses into the mere giving of one's own prescriptions. So once again the question of right and wrong becomes subjective, such that in the long run there cannot be a principle which all the parties can accept. We do not proscribe Prescriptivism for failing to make ethical discourse relate to conduct, for indeed, taking them on its own terms, as imperatives, ethical judgements do relate to conduct. But to take them simply as imperatives is, it seems to us, a category-mistake made in order to resolve what looks like a difficult, if not impossible, question. Moral statements do not relate to conduct simply in the way words relate to deeds, or commands to action. The relationship is, at least, not logical, as the Prescriptivist seems to think. The three subjective theories we have examined in this chapter do not, therefore, as far as our arguments go, succeed in establishing their claims. Moral utterances have a truth-value, disagreements over them are rational disagreements, not emotional ones, and therefore can be settled by appeal to criteria of right and wrong, correctness and incorrectness, which are independent of the persons involved. These are, we think, some of the essential characteristics of objectivism; so our arguments against moral subjectivism are, by implication arguments for moral objectivity.

#### Notes and References

1. Moritz Schlick : 'Meaning & Verification' in Theory of Meaning.  
A.K. Lehrer (ed) Prentice-Hall 1970. p.100.
2. D.E. Cooper : Philosophy and the Nature of Language p.46.
3. A.J. Ayer : Language Truth and Logic - Pelican Edition (1971).

4. The terms 'proposition' and sometimes 'sentence' and 'statement' have created problems with philosophers. To Ayer a proposition is what is expressed by sentences which are meaningful, and therefore, he considers the expression 'the meaning of a sentence' absurd. A.C. Ewing does not discriminate between a 'statement' and a 'sentence', but holds as Ayer does that a proposition cannot be identified with any verbal entity. D.E. Cooper argues very strongly (Chapter 7 of his book cited) that truth-values are not expressed in propositions, but in sentences. Alfred Sidgwick, apparently distressed with the contention on where to locate the proposition, has opted to abandon the word completely, and to use the term 'assertion' in its place, because, he contends, it is 'ambiguous'. W.V. Quine distinguishes between statements and sentences like Ayer does, but unlike Ayer, reserves the former term ('statement') for "those sentences which have a truth-value", thus implying that 'proposition' and 'sentence' are interchangeable. One thing is clear: philosophers are disagreed over the terms 'sentence', 'statement' and 'proposition', but the consensus identifies 'proposition' with the truth-value of an utterance. Because propositions are not necessarily asserted, sentences may express them but they cannot be identified with them. For our own convenience, we shall use the terms 'sentence', 'statement' and 'proposition' interchangeably. This is not to imply that any of 'sentence' and 'statement' is identified with 'proposition', but it is to observe that sentences or statements express propositions. But they should not be identified because (1) different sentences may express the same proposition, e.g. 'P is older than Q' and 'Q is younger than P', where 'P' and 'Q' have the same referent in each case; (2) the same sentence (or statement) may

express different propositions, e.g. 'P is mad' expresses a different proposition on different occasions if P has different referents on those occasions.

5. Dr. A.C. Ewing : 'Meaninglessness' in Mind 46. 1937.
6. Hume : A Treatise of Human Nature : p.167.
7. C.L. Stevenson : Ethics and Language (EL)
8. " " : Facts and Values (FV) p.22.
9. Notions of 'pro-' and 'con-attitudes' were first used by P. Nowell Smith in Ethics. Penguin 1954. p112f.
10. Stevenson was himself uncomfortable in his choice of this word, "meaning", and said he chose it as 'the lesser evil'.  
FV p.163.
11. By the first pattern of analysis "X is good" strictly designates "I approve of X; do so as well".
12. C.L. Stevenson : "Meaning : Descriptive and Emotive" in The Philosophical Review Vol. LVII, No. 2 (1948) p.142.
13. Stevenson first treats his division as a methodological rather than a factual one, in order to facilitate interpretation of evaluative behaviour, and suggests that he does not intend to leave them in compartments (EL p.5). But his subsequent analysis defeats this proposal, and treats beliefs and attitudes as empirically distinct and isolable facts.
14. C.L. Stevenson : "Ethical Fallibility" in Ethics and Society ed. R. de George. Macmillan. 1968 p.215.
15. R.M. Hare : Freedom and Reason (FR) p.3.
16. " " : The Language of Morals (LM) p.144.
17. It is to tackle this claim that Hare devotes Chapter 5 : "Back-sliding" of FR.
18. H.J. McCloskey : Meta-Ethics and Normative Ethics. p.92.

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17. Sidgwick, A. : 'Verification and Meaning' : Mind (NS) 45 (1936).
18. Stevenson, C.L. : Facts and Values. Yale Univ. Press (1963).
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## CHAPTER IV

### ACCEPTANCE OF OBJECTIVISM : QUASI-OBJECTIVE THEORIES (A) -

#### Ethical Naturalism and Ethical Relativism

##### Preamble

In this chapter we shall explore what Ethical Naturalism and Ethical Relativism can offer us as objectivist theories. We shall argue that both theories are only seemingly objectivist. We shall show

1. that although the naturalists we shall discuss differ in their view of the naturalist thesis, they nevertheless all agree in their claim that our moral principles derive from natural facts - facts of the human situation -
2. that as a result of this, naturalism is guilty of the 'is/ought' offence -
3. That in rejecting the naturalist thesis and upholding an 'independence'-thesis, we postulate non-natural objectivity and

the autonomy of ethics -

4. that ethical relativism uses culture or the social environment in much the same way as ethical naturalism uses the human situation, and explains morality in terms of it, but -
5. that ethical values are absolute values, rather than relative ones.

1.

In order to investigate ethical naturalism we shall need to examine the main issues arising from the opinions of some of its major exponents in contemporary moral philosophy. For purposes of kinship and sometimes of contrast, and for bringing out the distinguishing marks of what we shall call the various 'brands' of ethical naturalism, we shall consider the opinions of Mrs. Philippa Foot, Professor G.J. Warnock, Professor D.Z. Phillips, Mr. H.O. Mounce and R.W. Beardsmore, Professors A.C. Danto and R.S. Downie. Also in order to emphasize our point of disagreement with the theory, we shall refer to the anti-naturalist view of its classic opponent - G.E. Moore - and to those arguments of Hume which can be considered anti-naturalist. But these philosophers (Moore and Hume) will not feature in our arguments.

In her papers of the late fifties and early sixties<sup>1</sup>, Mrs. Foot examines value concepts and argues that they are conceptually tied to non-moral descriptive notions. She then develops an argument towards the conclusion that moral concepts must be similarly tied. In 'Moral Arguments' (MA) she points out that the usual criterion for applying the concept of 'rude' is roughly that offence was given by behaviour showing disrespect to someone, and that it would be word-abuse to use this concept unless one wished to retain this criterion. She therefore claims that moral judgement is always entailed by the facts.

Phillips and Mounce<sup>2</sup> disagree with Mrs. Foot. They contend that the judgement 'that is rude' is not always entailed by the facts, and they illustrate their contention by citing Norman Malcolm's memoir of Wittgenstein in which Moore objected to Wittgenstein's 'rudeness' when the latter lost his temper by interrupting him during a philosophical discussion. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, objected that Moore's view on the matter under discussion was absurd and, as he claimed, philosophy is so serious a business and so important that it would justify a loss of temper; and so that the application of the term 'rude' in the context was inappropriate. It is not clear, however, whether Wittgenstein's point was that the interruption was not rude, or that it was rude but that rudeness is not always wrong; but the authors seem to understand him to mean the latter since they argue that action which could cause offence generally may not do so in certain circumstances, and that the circumstances would vary with the group and the occasion. But this contention is mistaken for it overlooks the fact that no one need actually be offended for some behaviour to be termed rude. Giving cause for offence (whether the offence was actually expressed or not) by showing disrespect might nevertheless be the criterion for 'rude'.

So, as far as this argument goes, Mrs. Foot's claim is still plausible; it is not that rudeness is vis-a-vis a moral offence. Her argument, as I understand it, is from analogy, that if the facts as we know them sum up to the value-judgement called rudeness, facts can also sum up to moral judgements. It is perhaps this argument that we ought to dispute, that is, that such a judgement from facts to values is tenable in ethics.

Mrs. Foot claims that a somewhat similar situation applies when we use words like 'ought', 'wrong', 'right', etc. Just as we cannot avoid the non-value criteria when we discuss matters of etiquette, in the same way, we cannot avoid the non-value criteria when we discuss points of morality since these non-value concepts are standard for the respective value-concepts. So, she concludes, we cannot decide for ourselves which principles of morality we will accept, if we are to use the language of morality correctly. And this is a plausible objectivist opinion.

This last point is very central in Mrs. Foot's argument, namely, that individualism has little space in moral decisions. She reiterates this point, as we shall see, from the theme of goodness and choice. It is this emphasis which makes naturalism incompatible with autonomy - at least so it appears to be. Mrs. Foot maintains that saying that it was someone's duty to do x surely involves the idea that it matters to do x, or it would be harmful if x were not done. Thus, as Jeremy Bentham, she bases her exploration of the relationship of natural facts with moral facts on human good and harm; in other words, on general utility. We shall come back to this.

In 'Moral Beliefs' (MB), Mrs. Foot takes a different line of argument but maintains her theme of the validity of arguing from premisses of natural facts to moral conclusions. She takes the

cardinal virtues and attempts to fix them to notions of personal benefit. The truth or falsity of statements of fact is shown by means of evidence, and what counts as evidence is laid down in the meaning of the expressions occurring in the statement of fact. So it is not easy to deny the factual conclusions without also rejecting the evidence on which they are based. An evaluation is not so arranged; that is, nothing is laid down in the conclusion which connects it with the evidence. As a result of this, the 'moral eccentric' may make a snatch in the air for his evidence of evaluative conclusions. He may even claim, and may be justified in doing so, that clasping and unclasping of hands constitute moral goodness. But such hypothesis will not do. 'Good', she asserts, cannot be ascribed unless the object is fixed, for

... without just laying hands on the proper object of such things as evaluation, we shall catch in our net either something quite different ... or else nothing at all. (MB, p.198).

The moral notion must have some internal relation with its object; and only when this is done can we claim to have fixed the relevant background for judgement.

In this paper Mrs. Foot arrays her defence of her position as answers to two assumptions which can be set out in questions in this way:

1. Can an individual, without logical error, base his beliefs about moral matters of value entirely upon premisses which no one else but himself would recognize as giving any evidence at all?  
i.e. Can we have a 'true-for-me' morality?
2. Can an individual refuse to accept the conclusion of an argument

about values because what counted as evidence for other people did not count for him? Can we, in other words, establish morality on a 'true-for-them' basis?

Put briefly her answer to the first question is that moral virtues cannot logically be expressed without the internal relation to human good and harm, and that it is quite impossible to call anything you like "human good and harm". So the moral eccentric, she would say, cannot have a "true-for-me" morality even if he chooses to base his moral conclusions on random premisses.

For the second question, she argues, and I think, plausibly too, that philosophers who can claim like Thrasymachus that injustice is more profitable than justice but refuse to come to his conclusion that justice is evil are illogical. They must either accept the conclusion to which Thrasymachus's premisses necessarily bring him to or show that justice is better than injustice. And the only way to do this would be to connect justice with human good and harm. "The need", Mrs. Foot argues, "a man has for justice in dealing with other men depends on the fact that they are men not inanimate objects or animals" (p213).

Mrs. Foot's argument from justice, though plausible, fails, we think, to establish the claim she makes, for she fails to give reasons for justice other than that Nemesis, as it were, would punish the unjust, thus begging the question of justice. It may be that she means that we take justice as better than injustice, not because it brings us benefits to do so, but because it gives those to whom we are just benefits which injustice would not give them. But perhaps her argument here could be looked at from a different perspective, since she is not actually discussing justice as such, but using a paradigm. She has argued that justice, if it is to be accepted as a moral concept,

should be based on reason. It is not like pleasure, for instance, where the question 'Why do that?' perhaps does not make sense, but is one of such in which it makes sense. And that question is a demand for reasons. When reasons are given for an act (which is just), if we accept those reasons, we cannot fail to pass the judgement that necessarily follows, without being inconsistent.

It is precisely this last argument which we are questioning, for there seems to be some ambiguity here in talking about 'reasons given for an act which is just!'. Such reasons for an act which is just can be (a) reasons which make an act x a just act, or

(b) reasons which make someone just for performing an act x.

Set of reasons (a) describe the concept of justice, and are said to be criteria for the concept; while reasons (b) describe what makes a person's act (on a given occasion) be described as a just act. So while set (a) are reasons for the act of justice, (b) are reasons for the act of being just. For an illustration, what makes the judge at the Trial of Shylock just is that he allows Shylock to have what his bond states - a pound of flesh, no more, no less. But this does not state the criterion for justice, or what makes an act a just act. The criterion for justice would be the test or measure used to decide that any act is just, it is not the same as what makes us say that the agent who has performed it is just. So they cannot be the same.

Let us take another example. Suppose an aircraft captain flies into an enemy zone in the teeth of battle and strafes their bases, we would call the act so described courageous. But this reason does not set out the criteria for courage which may be something like achieving something under very difficult and restricting conditions.

In each of these examples we see that the criteria (or measure we use for knowing) for x - which of course are themselves

reasons - and the reasons for judging that someone or some act is  $x$  (when  $x$  is a virtue) are different.

Mrs. Foot has argued that if we cannot give reasons why it is better to be unjust, then justice is not a virtue and injustice not a vice. Plausible as this argument may sound, it falters on the condition we have been describing, for it seems to confuse the criteria for a virtue and the reasons for judging a particular act as an instantiation of that virtue. The latter (which are also reasons for acting in a virtuous way) vary with individual situations, but the former do not. It is not clear from Mrs. Foot's argument (i.e. that if we cannot give 'reasons' why it is better to be just than to be unjust ... and so on) whether she means reasons as criteria or reasons for judging. She seems however to mean the latter, but it is the former, the criteria, which should be needed to establish the concept of justice and not the reasons for particular acts. The judge at the Shylock Trial, for instance, can be described as having been just, but we cannot say he has established the concept of justice by his act. Reasons-for-acting are related to, but are not identical with criteria for virtue.

It is true that some of the virtues do have fixed descriptions (that is, their reasons-for-acting and their criteria seem to be the same) as some non-virtue acts such as rudeness do. A temperate person, for example, will have certain characteristics and not others, and so will a chaste or a physically courageous person. But a complication arises in the fact that we can reject some of the descriptive reasons given for some of the laudatory concepts (perhaps all, except justice) without rejecting morality or refusing to engage in moral discourse. That is to say, we reject the reasons for the claim that a person or an act is  $x$  while retaining the criteria for  $x$  as a moral

concept. A pacifist may, for instance, do either of these two things to the concept of courage: he may reject the description of courage while retaining it as a moral virtue (i.e. accepting its criteria). Or he may retain the description but contend that the act in question is misguided. He may accept that achieving victory over a foe when under heavy attack is courageous but that soldiers who in the event of this cause the death of other human beings have misdirected their courage. In doing this he rejects a particular sampling of courage, but not the criteria. This may lead him to say that courage is not always morally good. In the same way one could reject the description given to, say, chastity, without violating any rules of moral discourse; it is only if one rejects the criteria that one cannot get into moral discourse.

We could assign praising terms on the basis of very different description without abusing language, but we could not do so on the basis of very different criteria. We could not, for example, assign to chastity the criterion of a lack of self control in sexual matters without abusing language, although we could say that a man who ran off with his sixteen-year old step-daughter was chaste, without abusing language. We could reject the value-concept, chastity, on the basis of the description given to it. We could say, for instance, that if so-and-so was what you meant by chaste, we would rather not be chaste. In this it is not chastity (i.e. application of self-control in sexual matters) that is being rejected; what is being rejected is the description. For although we cannot cite the case of a man who ran off with his step-daughter as a case of chastity, it does not mean that the expression 'lack of chastity' or 'promiscuity' was fixed by the example of running off with a step-daughter. What is being stressed here is that no one description can be fixed for a moral concept, although its criteria are fixed.

But we may go further. The pacifist in arguing that the virtue of courage is wrongly attributed to the soldier may even say that if that is what we choose to call courage, then he will reject the term and choose any other form of expression for what to him is courage, even if that will be tantamount to an 'inverted comma' sense of the concept. A naturalist may object to this. He may argue that just as there is nothing like 'true for p' in the use of moral concepts there is nothing like applying our own terminology to moral criteria; we must use terms which others of our level of moral reasoning can understand, and these terms are conveniently the ones already in use if we wish to be able to communicate with others. Moreover if the pacifist carried out his wishes he would indeed be threatening the criteria which he had wanted to defend; so he cannot have what 'for him' is 'courage'.

Our earlier argument shows that we can concede this objection: and indeed it must be granted that it sounds trivial, if not absurd, to talk of an individual choosing any form of expression for what to him is a moral term. But the absurdity may only be apparent, as Hare points out (FR, p.188). The absurdity may have arisen because such concepts as courage or chastity which we have chosen as our examples, encapsulate attitudes which are disposed to commend - pro-attitudes<sup>2a</sup>. But there are other value-concepts which encapsulate attitudes which we would abhor, and Hare illustrates with one of these. "Nigger", he says, is a term of contempt and anyone who holds that contempt may associate the term with the full description of Negroes. If one knows P to have dark skin etc, one cannot but despise him. But a non-racist, finding that the racist is led along his path by the use of the term 'Nigger', could abandon the term, and by so doing would no longer be committed to the attitude which it provokes, and he may

choose the neutral term 'Negro' which is purely descriptive because, while retaining the criteria of "dark-skinned race",<sup>it</sup> does not commit its user to the same attitude. In the same way, he argues, even the terms 'courage' and 'chastity' can be rejected on the ground that they encapsulate attitudes to which we do not subscribe.

The objection, and perhaps the only one, which the naturalist can make at this stage would be that we do not always have substitute terms for all such commendatory and derogatory moral concepts as we have for 'Nigger' and 'Negro'. But this may only account for a cheap and rather apologetic defence, and renders what is a logical matter to a purely verbal one involving merely one's wealth of vocabulary. For it would seem that once you were able to land the right word, the trouble would be over. Why we think it is a weak line of resistance is that though we may not have the words, we could have them; or alternately use the tone of voice or quotation marks to show that we are using the conventional term in a purely descriptive and non-commendatory way, not in 'our own way' as such.

In principle therefore it would seem as if we could reject or at least commute many commonly accepted moral principles or standards by which such and such non-moral descriptive concepts are constituted the criteria of such and such morally evaluative concepts without in the least abandoning morality or moral discourse. If this is so, then it might be said that Mrs. Foot's analysis of naturalism exposes her to moral conventionalism: that is, to the claim that there is only one conventional way of defining or describing moral terms and that whoever fails to describe or define them in that way is merely being eccentric. This is perhaps much more than the orthodox moral objectivist would demand. His is what we described as 'moral seriousness' - that is, holding to a moral principle which he considers to be

right, not being ready to accept any other in its place, and being ready to defend it by argument. (Refer Chapter I). He does not consider our position absurd if we do not share his, but wrong.

But the naturalist can meet this objection, as indeed Mrs. Foot does in her claim that the "point" of morality is in human good and harm. She assimilates the most general moral concepts such as wrong, right, morally desirable etc., into human good and harm, so that no one can set up just any sort of behaviour as virtue without involving himself in word-abuse, unless such behaviour is shown to be based in human good and harm. It is this quasi-utilitarian claim that she describes as the 'internal relation' of a moral concept to actual behaviour, and it is this that gives the concept a background<sup>3</sup>.

In her paper 'Goodness and Choice' (GC) Mrs. Foot affirms this claim. She tackles the question raised by Hare's Prescriptivism whether the choice which the speaker makes constitutes a sufficient or even a necessary condition for the use of the word "good" morally. Mrs. Foot argues that neither of these conditions is established by the mere notion of choice. She insists that no one can stipulate his own use of moral terms without logical error. Just as we cannot talk of 'a good knife' unless the knife performed its function (which is cutting) well, we cannot choose how to use the expression 'a good A' when 'A' is a moral action or an agent. Mere choice is never a sufficient condition for the correct use of the word 'good' although there is very close connection between choosing something and calling it good. It is not, she insists, that what we choose we call good, as Hare believes, but rather that the thought of good is involved in the central problem of choice. Readiness to choose is not even a necessary condition for calling what we choose good for the chooser may have non-standard interests, and also there are other things which

we can appropriately describe as good although hardly think of them in terms of choosing. What constitutes a necessary condition for the application of the term 'good' to, say, an activity is that it should have a point (or purpose), and the chances are that we shall choose what we call good, not just because we have called it 'good', but because there is something in its nature which makes us choose it and also makes us describe it as good. We do not first choose something and then call it good because we have chosen it; rather we call something good because of certain of its features and it is those features which make us choose it. Thus we can call something good though we have no intention to choose it.

Mrs. Foot is arguing against those who are individualists in matters of value (and ethics). Such people are bound to deny that facts can commit one to value judgement. Thus she claims:

If a man who calls A a good A has reason,  
other things being equal, to prefer it to other A's,  
this is because of the kind of thing an A is,  
and its connection with his wants and needs.

(GC p.60).

So if Mrs. Foot were to reply to the charge of moral conventionalism, she would probably say that the relationship between moral statements and non-moral descriptive statements is open to criticism, but that this must necessarily be in terms of the 'fundamental tie' between the moral concepts and human good and harm. Thus, that once we accept that there is a fundamental tie, we are bound to accept that moral conclusions necessarily follow from non-moral descriptive statements.

We shall not dispute that there is a fundamental tie, but do moral conclusions have to be deducible from non-moral premisses for this fundamental tie to be? This is the claim that Mrs. Foot is

making - and indeed most naturalists are making - and there lies the crux of the naturalist thesis. To put it in the stock-expression, it is a claim that morally ought-conclusions can be deduced from is - (i.e. non-moral) premisses. This claim will engage us later in this chapter, but meanwhile let us consider the opinion of another naturalist.

The naturalist thinking of Professor G.J. Warnock is very much akin to Mrs. Foot's, although his has a slightly different accent to begin with. To him ameliorating the human situation is what defines a moral rule.

In Contemporary Moral Philosophy<sup>4</sup> (CMP) he has said of the 'welfare of human beings' setting the limit for our moral choice 'because of what "moral" means' (p.67). In saying this he defines 'moral' in terms of the welfare of human beings, thereby making the connection between the human situation and moral rules and principles an analytic one. This view is extended in The Object of Morality (OM) where he argues that

... the general object of morality, appreciation of which may enable us to understand the basis of moral evaluation, is to contribute to betterment - or non-deterioration - of the human predicament....

(p.26).

Before we analyse the possible implications of this claim, let us see at least one way in which Warnock qualifies it. In CMP he argues that although we may not be logically bound to engage in moral discourse in the first instance, once we do so we are logically bound to accept 'certain standards ... if the claim to be evaluating is to be seriously made' (p.68). Warnock admits that his claim probably leads to the conclusion that morality is by and large demonstrable, and he does not see that this is impossible. He concedes that the notion of 'human

welfare' has 'an extensive penumbral fringe of vagueness' which, in addition to the related reasons, makes it difficult for arguments from human welfare to be resolved. He describes a situation where, according to him, demonstration will be possible: its being wrong for him to induce his children to be addicted to heroin. He then concludes that anyone who does not see the same conclusion (that is, that it is wrong for him to do so follows logically from the fact of the harm that addiction to heroin does) 'shows either that he has not really followed the argument, or that he does not know what "morally wrong" means'. (CMP p.70). This means that for Warnock to accept the facts of the human situation entails that one cannot act contrary to those facts.

But the question is: is there a logical absurdity, such as Warnock envisages, in disagreeing with his conclusion here even though we may agree with him that heroin is harmful? Let us admit that heroin is harmful because of the harmful hygenic effects it has on people. From this fact Warnock seems to distil two moral propositions (or rules): first, that heroin ought not to be taken, and secondly, that a father ought to stop his children from taking heroin.

There are two prongs to this argument, each pointing out the logical assumptions which Warnock is making by his assertion -

- (1) that something is harmful to health it does not follow that it is morally wrong to do it (this argument will be developed later when we consider the case of the smoker), or that we should (i.e. ought to) stop people from doing it;
- (2) on the other hand, that we want to, or indeed succeed in stopping someone from doing something it does not follow that it is morally wrong for him to have done it; we might be thinking it just imprudent for him to continue his practice.

These two prongs are not the same, but it seems from Warnock's argument that he assimilates them and from this argues that anyone in his situation who does not do the same either does not understand the logical implications of his error or does not know what 'morally wrong' is. But we contend that his action does not follow logically from the behaviour of his children, and that it would not have been morally wrong for him not to do what he did. Moral rules can and do take off from non-moral conditions, but they do not do this as a logical necessity. One can know that something is harmful to one's children's health without being morally (or, as Warnock sees it, also logically) bound to stop them doing it; and, if one does, it is not necessarily a moral act that one has done so.

Two related senses can be read into Warnock's claim that the point of morality is to better the human situation - (a) a weaker sense which enjoins that before a rule is called moral, those who adopt it must believe that its implementation will ameliorate the human situation; and (b) a stronger sense which enjoins that the implementation of a rule must, in fact, ameliorate the human situation before the rule is accepted as a moral rule. In other words that moral rules by definition better the human situation. This weaker sense implies that a rule is neutral until it is seen to ameliorate the human state, and then it can become 'moral'; so it is its function rather than its content which makes and perhaps unmakes a rule moral. This suggests that a rule which was moral could cease from being moral as a consequence of changes in the human situation - a conception which carries a heavy relativist force.

But the burden of Warnock's analysis of morality seems to lie in the stronger sense, for from it we see that the general consequence of his view of morality is that morality is restricted to a given

area - the human situation - and in that to a still more restricted area - its amelioration. And this is to him the distinguishing mark of morality, what makes it distinct from, though not above, everything else. By this distinction, the scientific and the artistic, for example, are divorced from the moral. His illustration with the distinguished composer (OM p.158) who cannot sacrifice the interest of his family and parents to his composition shows that he (Warnock) wants a clear line drawn between the aesthetic and the moral. But such a line would ignore the fact that the sphere of the moral is not one that can be so easily delineated, and much less so when one engages to identify it with the amelioration of the human condition.

The attempt to delineate the moral creates a further problem: it makes it difficult to solve conflicts involving the moral<sup>5</sup>. If, for example, there is a conflict of practical consideration (e.g. between the moral and the scientific) it would be impossible to solve it. For one thing, since Warnock defined the moral in the human situation, and has also distinguished the moral from the scientific, the scientific and the human situation would therefore be left in compartments, so that the moral cannot supply any overriding principle or ultimate 'ought' which would solve the conflict. This situation is aggravated by the fact that he has already discountenanced that moral principles be used in any way as overriding:

I do not see how to hold that a rational being could not suppose that, while moral reasons certainly were reasons, there might sometimes be other reasons by which they were outweighed.

(OM p.159).

Moral reasons therefore cannot be overriding, and Warnock does not see why such things as beauty or art could not override moral principles

- if overriding principles were allowed. So if he allowed overriding principles they need not always be the moral ones. But then if, as he suggests, beauty or creativity was taken as providing the ultimate 'ought', such a principle should be subject to the same problem of justification to which the moral principles were and for which he would not take them as overriding. Thus the moralist following Warnock's analysis may find himself in a vicious circle.

Warnock's distinction presents linguistic problems too. Were we to take the point of morality the way he does, that is, to define it analytically in terms of the amelioration of the human situation, such a statement as 'One ought to ameliorate the human situation' becomes either 'One ought to do what one ought to do', which is tautologous and therefore uninformative, or 'One ought to be moral' which, I would take, as in itself, not a moral rule. In effect the proposition 'One ought to ameliorate the human situation' which we would take as a moral rule is rendered by this interpretation either a tautology or a non-moral rule. This appears to be a travesty of common usage. Again (and particularly in the stronger sense where what is thought to be moral is what is seen in fact to ameliorate the human situation) the sentence 'People ought to destroy the human race' is at once rendered a non-moral rule since it states what does not ameliorate the human situation. We would rather take this as a moral rule though the act which it enjoins is an immoral one; but no one who takes what is moral as what ameliorates the human situation can do this; for if he does, he contradicts himself.

In the strong sense of this analytic-connection thesis of Warnock's rules are either morally good, i.e. seen in fact to ameliorate the human condition, or non-moral, i.e. seen in fact not to do so. But some of this latter class is what we would call 'immoral' (e.g. the example

given above: 'People ought to destroy the human race'). Following from this it would seem as if Warnock's definition conflates the 'immoral' and the 'non-moral', and if this is so, that the well-known term 'immoral' which we use in moral discourse is lost. Thus by this interpretation if a man adopts a moral rule which he knows does not ameliorate the human situation, he is necessarily being non-moral, not immoral, as we would think. So a person who adopts the moral principle of exterminating the human race is, by this definition, not being immoral at all, but would rather be doing something comparable to, say, basking in the sun or watching a football game. It is difficult to reconcile this meta-ethic with common usage.

We have already noted that Mrs. Foot's argument blurs the distinction between the criteria for a moral virtue and the reasons for acting or judging an act that is taken to be a case of such virtue. Professor Warnock runs into such a problem too. His analytic-connection thesis - that is, his defining the moral in such a way that the human situation and any moral rules, principles or standards are inextricably bound up - makes it difficult for him to distinguish between the consequences of implementing a moral rule and the criteria for its being a moral rule. We can, for example, distinguish between the criteria of the rule 'thou shalt not steal' - i.e. what makes it a moral rule - from its consequences - such as, that it makes people retain their rights (which is a way of ameliorating the human situation). Ameliorating the human situation can only be a consequence, not a criterion, of a moral rule: and what makes a moral rule is a moral fact: we have attached 'shalt not' (or 'ought not') to the notion of stealing thus creating a moral fact (the fact that we ought not to...) out of the notion of stealing.

It is evident from our foregoing analysis of Warnock's analytic-connection thesis that it raises a number of problems, and why

it does so is, we would think, because it fails to recognize that even granting that the implementation of moral rules results in amelioration of the human situation, it does still not follow from this that this is what makes the rules 'moral'.

Two features can be distilled from naturalism so far as we have seen it (that is, from the arguments of Mrs. Foot and Professor Warnock). One of these is a strong tendency for it to generalize on the logical dependence of moral rules on facts. Let us illustrate. Although it may be true to say that some moral rules depend on facts of the human situation for their establishment, e.g. the rule that people should (or ought) not (to) steal presupposes that property is owned, not all moral rules contain concepts which are dependent on facts in the same way. Take the rule for promise-keeping, for example. When we say that people ought to keep their promises, we cannot mean that the concept of promise-keeping depends on the human situation in the way that the concept of stealing may. For it may be difficult to say what conditions must be fulfilled in the human situation before a promise is kept, just as we can say that the condition relating to ownership of property must be fulfilled before the rule against stealing can be established. So the concept of promise-keeping does not seem to presuppose anything in the human situation as the concept of stealing does. Nor does a concept such as justice. The claim that moral rules arise logically from the human situation does not seem to take cognizance of this caveat. If all moral rules arise logically from the facts of the human situation, what natural facts do such rules as those of justice and promise-keeping arise from? It will be seen that such rules do not arise from natural facts as such but in the fact that people use language the way they do; that is, when they say, for instance, 'I promise', they understand each other.

A second feature lies in the failure of naturalism to consider that rules require the concept of 'ought' to make them rules and that to claim that rules are derived from the human situation is tantamount to claiming that 'ought' can be derived from the human situation. This is, in fact, what is disclaimed in the dispute that 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is'. We say 'you ought not to steal' and the rule presupposes that property is owned although there is nothing in the property that is owned to make it logically necessary that a rule should be made to safeguard it. We put in the 'ought' to make our concepts into moral rules. That is, in fact, why it can be said that moral rules are in a sense 'imposed' upon the world. It is not impossible to have a community that owns property but has no rules against stealing. To such a community the rule that we ought not to steal would be unintelligible; but this does not mean that it would be 'right for them' to steal. It only means that the question of its being 'right' or 'wrong' for them does not arise since they do not know the rule; in other words, they cannot (logically) steal.

So it seems true to say that naturalism, as so far examined, is weakened by at least two features, first, that it generalizes on the logical dependence of moral rules on natural facts (or the human situation) since not all moral rules can be said to depend on those facts; secondly, that even when such dependence can be presupposed, it does not carry with it the presupposition too that 'ought', which is an essential ingredient for moral rules can be logically derived from the human situation.

There is, however, another brand of naturalism which is opposed to Mrs. Foot's. Her insistence on human good and harm as the 'point' of morality offers a negative springboard for D.Z. Phillips, H.O. Mounce and R.W. Beardsmore to establish their own brand of

naturalism, which we might call Forms-of-Life Naturalism, because of its connections with Wittgenstein's 'forms-of-life' thesis. If their remarks about Mrs. Foot's 'rude' paradigm are untenable, as we have shown, their criticism of her concern with human good and harm is not. In general they do not succeed to establish, on the rubbles they left of Mrs. Foot's, a more plausible thesis of naturalism which would validly support the claim that morality is objective, if there will be any such.

In their paper 'On Morality's Having a Point', Phillips and Mounce argue, and we would think, rightly, that what is good or harmful to someone can depend on what his moral beliefs are, but that it is not always the other way round. That is, that what a man's moral beliefs are does not depend on what is good or harmful to him. By means of this argument they seem to suggest that the sort of logical relationship which Mrs. Foot upholds does not exist. You cannot prove to the orthodox Roman Catholic housewife, they argue, that she ought not to have a large family (citing, as you may, the harmfulness of such a course of conduct as judged on philosophical and economic criteria of harm) when she believes that having many children is a great honour to herself and good in itself, well worth the risks. What she morally believes overrides what may be said to be good or harmful to her. So that even if morally evaluative notions are securely and exclusively tied to notions of good and harm, it still seems that the latter notions are not securely and exclusively descriptive (i.e. non-evaluative) in the way that Mrs. Foot wishes to maintain.

If Phillips and Mounce imply by their argument that, given the Roman Catholic housewife, 'human good and harm' are not exclusively descriptive merely on the ground that she could not be convinced by the reasons adduced, they would be mistaken. For, as G.J. Warnock points out, what makes us not see the point of an argument may be as

much, or even more our own unreasonableness than the ineffectiveness of the argument. "An argument", he says, "offers reasons to people, but people are not always reasonable". (CMP p.72). The housewife's failure to take the argument could well be more owing to her own unreasonableness (her inability, as it were, to see the harm she is doing herself) than to the ineffectiveness of the description of her harm offered to lead her to a moral conviction. But we think the two philosophers nevertheless make their point still because, even assuming that 'human good and harm' does refer to a notion that may be purely descriptive and non-evaluative in the last analysis, it still is not clear that maximizing human good and minimizing human harm does seem to have a monopoly of 'the' point of morality. Any overriding principles may be set up - as indeed does the R.C. housewife - without logical offence. There is no logical offence because the purely descriptive reasons do not form sufficient premisses for the moral conclusion - 'therefore you ought not to have many children'. She could only be unreasonable; that is, the reasons can only succeed in making her unreasonable if she persisted in her practice, but not irrational.

Beardsmore, Phillips and Mounce, though sharply critical of Mrs. Foot are as incredulous as she is that just any reason or any statement of fact can count as a moral reason. 'Deadlock in ethics' contend Phillips and Mounce,

... does not entail liberty to argue as one chooses. The rationalist, the housewife, the pacifist or the moralist, cannot say what they like.

(MHP p.239).

What they seem to reject is not descriptivism itself, but the pattern of it referred to in this chapter as Mrs. Foot's, and others' who

argue the way she does on the issue. They seem to be opposing the proposition that facts determine the moral viewpoints which lead to moral decisions, and the proposition they seem to hold is that moral viewpoints determine the facts for reaching moral decisions. Then how do people get at their moral viewpoints?

Their answer to this question brings out their main thought, which is that various descriptive concepts have moral import from their origin in moral practices and 'forms-of-life' in which we learn them, rather than by being purely non-evaluative notions to which we later attach moral significance through the adoption of principles. As we saw in Chapter I their slant of naturalism is based on language and draws from the Wittgensteinian statement that "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreements not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements" (Phil. Inv. I:242; Beardsmore : Moral Reasoning p.121; Phillips & Mounce - paper cited p.62). One of the presuppositions of the linguistic or ordinary-language approach is that the meaning of a word is in its use in the language; thus to grasp the use of a word we must know everything about the situation in which it is used and how the word functions in that situation. And if we wish to resolve our philosophical problems about the nature of ethical language, we describe the way it is actually used.

Wittgenstein has said -

What has to be accepted, the given, is -

so one could say - forms of life.

(Phil. Inv. 226<sup>e</sup>).

and has illustrated his claim by reference to colour. He argues that if, for instance, people did not agree in judgements of colour, it would be impossible to say that they meant the same thing by such words

as 'red' or 'blue'; nor would we have any rights to call these people's words 'red' and 'blue' our own colour-words. As we saw in Chapter I, what Wittgenstein was driving towards was, rightly, that there must be a certain agreement in judgements before people could share a concept. Agreement about the meaning of a word, he might have said, involves a general agreement about correct and incorrect uses of the word. When such agreement exists, the people share the same language and, Wittgenstein says, "to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life". Perhaps this must be what he meant when he said "If a lion could talk, we would not understand him" (ibid. 223<sup>e</sup>). The lion's speech reflects his form of life, and since we do not share his form of life, we cannot understand his language. People who share the same language share a 'form of life'; in other words, as Roger Trigg<sup>6</sup> defines it, 'a form-of-life' is "a community of those sharing the same concepts, and basic conceptual disagreement would demonstrate a difference in forms of life" (p.64).

Following Wittgenstein the forms-of-life philosophers argue that we also could not communicate in moral terms unless, having been reared in a common form of life (or in sufficiently similar forms), our moral attitudes and judgements were similar, and we had learned to use the word 'wrong', for example, about much the same things. Thus we learn to disapprove of lying, hurting others, or cheating etc. and to use these as criteria for applying the word 'wrong'.

It follows that while other naturalists claim that morality is founded on non-moral facts about human good and harm, the forms-of-life naturalists accept factual relevance in morality but make it parasitic to moral beliefs. They claim that while other naturalists are unable to account for moral disagreements and would rather argue that these disagreements need not occur since moral reasons are built

on facts, by their own approach, 'deadlock in ethics' or moral disagreements, can be seen to follow necessarily from different forms of life which people hold. So they claim that their own slant offers an explanation to the common occurrence of moral disagreements.

Although they are reluctant to acknowledge it, their meta-ethics leaves these philosophers with a "relativistic" account of moral judgement and reasoning. They recognize that people from morally dissimilar societies will not share certain practices, so that some moral reasons for one group may not be moral reasons for another group, and that there must be some practices in common if there is to be any moral discussion between members of the two groups. They also cover the familiar point that practices do conflict, so that two people can very well disagree over which practice takes precedence and yields the stronger reason. They also observe the problem of moral dilemmas, that a person may be torn between two or more practices and may be unable to resolve the dilemma himself. They rightly point out that our individual practices do not provide us criteria for solving such problems; yet they reject that there is any larger system or method which can help us do this in any case. By doing this, they reject ultimate moral principles and with it criticize even the view held by some philosophers (e.g. A.I. Melden) that overriding principles may be derived from within the naturalistic circle itself by appeal to certain institutions such as the family or the whole 'moral community' itself for the solutions of moral disagreements.

But forms-of-life morality is founded upon one fundamental uncertainty - what does the expression 'form of life' stand for? Philosophers who employ the idea do not seem to give us much clue, and yet it would be important to identify a form of life if we have to use it as a criterion for distinguishing moral types. S.E. Toulmin<sup>7</sup>, for

instance, takes it as a 'way of life' when, in considering the problem of justification in ethics, he says,

There is no magic word which will turn the English social system into a Muslim one overnight: the only practical use for the question 'which way of life is better?' is in the service of a personal decision ... (p.153).

Even then what counts as a 'way of life' is not spelled out by this. Roger Trigg (op.cit. p.100) refers to D.M. High who, in specifically dealing with Wittgenstein's concept of a form of life, talks of what he calls the human form of life in 'Western Culture', but maintains that animal life is a form of life that is different from that of human life. High also considers that this is the basic of Wittgenstein's remark about the lion. Suppose High were to be right in his claim, it would still leave the concept open-ended for we would still presumably expect a lion's form of life to be different from a tiger's, or a Polar bear's etc., so that animal life is not as such 'a form of life' just as man's is not.

In arguing that the criteria of logic is not applicable to modes of social life, Peter Winch<sup>8</sup> considers science to be one mode of social life, and religion another. This is probably Winch's way of talking about a form of life, and if it is, then to him a form of life is a disciplinary type. Philosophers all over the world would then perhaps be sharing a form of life which excludes historians or scientists, irrespective of their perhaps being brought up in the same society.

These few illustrations strongly suggest that there is something nebulous about the concept of a form-of-life: it seems capable of many interpretations - possibly as a way of life, a mode of life, as the living characteristics even of animals, and so on. But one note

nevertheless runs through all the variants, and that is, the postulated self-contained nature of forms-of-life. Whatever they are, it is usually implied that they have their own criteria of intelligibility, which can only be understood from within. Following from this, to dub something a form-of-life is to secure it from criticism.

If, as implied, a form-of-life can be understood only from within, and since a failure to understand may lead to disagreement, a danger results that all serious disagreements, especially those in religion and ethics, or even in science, could be explained to different forms-of-life. It could become a matter of definition that whenever there was a basic disagreement a difference in forms of life could be found; thus a moral disagreement would, in other words, define, and be an index for, a form of life in morality. But this would not do. It would make the concept a trivial one, and any theories based on it, like any meaning-by-definition theory, would be trivial and not at all illuminating. For, anyone who took a stand in an argument which was different from other people's, could invoke the forms-of-life theory and claim, apparently rightly, that the disagreement was in principle insoluble, and that neither he nor the rest could be wrong.

So unless there is some independent criterion for identifying forms of life apart from moral disagreement itself, the concept is useless in explaining disagreement. For it would be circular, and unimpressive to be told that a certain moral disagreement can only be explained by the difference in the forms of life from which those in disagreement come, and then to find that the disagreement is itself the only criterion for identifying the two forms of life. Looked at in this way it would follow that the forms-of-life theory, rather than solve moral disagreements as its proponents claim, intensifies the 'deadlock in ethics'.

This is probably the state in which we find Phillips, Mounce and Beardsmore in their insistence on forms-of-life as the better answer to questions of moral justification than Mrs. Foot's 'Good and harm'. Let us illustrate. In Moral Reasoning<sup>8a</sup>, Beardsmore applies Wittgenstein's conception of a form of life to ethics and maintains that what does and what does not count as a moral consideration 'is determined by the way of life to which an individual belongs' (p.130). He further claims that a man must commit himself to a way of life before any judgement he makes can be intelligible, since, he argues, reasons for action, qua reasons for action, cannot but be grounded in a particular moral system. Thus, from action n, performed by two persons, their reasons for performing n cannot be the same unless they come from the same form-of-life. This is where Beardsmore specifically bases his explanation of moral disagreements. He accepts Wittgenstein's point that there must be an agreement in judgements as a precondition in the sharing of concepts, and then claims that this agreement is to be found within the particular moral code. He maintains that for this reason it may be impossible to settle a disagreement between moral codes.

To take an example given by Beardsmore himself (p.106ff), he considers a disagreement between a scientist and an anti-vivisectionist over whether vivisection should be carried out. He argues that the disagreement arose in the first place because "the scientist has been brought up in an environment where great importance is attached to the scientific way of life", where "terms like 'unscientific' express disapproval"; while the anti-vivisectionist "has been influenced by contact with those who oppose suffering..." (p.108). Then, he concludes, since their standards of reference are in conflict, "it does not make sense to say that there must be a solution to the dispute" (p.109).

We agree with Beardsmore that to appeal to the facts of the situation can settle their disagreement; but it is also true that there is no mutual incomprehension either. Both the scientist and the anti-vivisectionist understand what the other is saying. The scientist knows what is involved when we say that animals suffer during and through vivisection, and the anti-vivisectionist understands what is involved in the notion of scientific research; they probably both agree that the infliction of suffering is a bad thing. Their disagreement is over the weighting of the suffering - their 'standards of reference' - whether the suffering is bad enough to outweigh the advantages of scientific research. The point of their disagreement seems clear enough and comprehensible to both parties even though the author presents them as coming from different forms of life.

Beardsmore probably knew this dimension of the implications of his argument and does not talk of mutual incomprehension here. But we contend that he should be doing so since he chooses to take the path of Wittgenstein. He should maintain not just that certain moral disagreements arising between different moralities are insoluble, but that such cases are cases of moral incomprehension. For if agreement is a pre-condition of language it follows that those who basically and consistently disagree are ipso facto using different moral languages, and should be mutually incomprehensible. Beardsmore does not say this, so he probably concedes mutual comprehensibility between the scientist and the anti-vivisectionist. He rather emphasizes the difference in importance given to the same fact - the infliction of suffering - and we agree with him. But Beardsmore goes on to aver that neither the way of life of the scientist nor that of the anti-vivisectionist can be legitimately criticized. But this is inconsistent, for it means that he goes back to imply that they speak different languages as a result

of which their disagreement must remain, while he has inadvertently conceded that they understand each other, and people who understand each other as they do, we know, cannot, by forms-of-life standards, come from different forms of life, and must speak the same language.

Thus Beardsmore maintains both that the two disputants understand each other, and that they speak different languages and therefore do not understand each other. He further asserts that the only way to account for the dispute is to consider the varied ways of life of the two.

One may need to ask how Beardsmore comes to know that the scientist and the anti-vivisectionist belong to different forms of life. The answer as far as we can see is simply because they disagree. If they had agreed then they would come from the same form-of-life even though it may have been known that the anti-vivisectionist is not a scientist. So it is in fact the disagreement which seems to constitute the different ways of life, and not the other way round.

But then what happens to Beardsmore's argument if we have a devoted scientist who is also opposed to vivisection? There could be such a person, and if there is, the distinction between the two ways of life would break down, since the two ways of life would collapse into the same personality. For what happens when such a person is faced with a scientific experiment involving vivisection is that he will be in a moral dilemma. He will be asking himself, 'Shall I vivisect or shall I not?', and will not be able to answer his own question either way. He cannot do this because the answer to such a question can only come if the moral agent can draw from outside his own principles. But according to forms-of-life naturalism moral dilemmas are not solved by resort to external principles; they are solved from within: they are, in fact, unsolvable, for 'forms-of-life' is so defined that it is

absurd to think of an agent stretching beyond his form-of-life to draw his principles. The Roman Catholic housewife (of our earlier example) was able to draw from her own principles which she took as overriding those of the scientific rationalist, but the scientist/anti-vivisectionist cannot do this for, whichever way he goes, he contradicts himself.

We have used Beardsmore's own example to illustrate how trivial and absurd a theory can become when it is employed to explain a notion which defines it. As it is, forms-of-life have no existence at all except as sources of disagreement, so they lose all explanatory power for, what can they explain except perhaps themselves, since they lack any other form of existence? At best, Beardsmore's presentation of moral disagreement is a causal explanation. It can answer the question, 'Why do some individuals think as they do?', and the answer will be that they do this because of their upbringing. But the question 'Why is one of them right and the other wrong?', and 'Why are both wrong?' - which are vital questions of moral justification - are not answered at all.

If however Beardsmore wants to maintain that the moral concepts of these two agents are rooted in their ways of life, and as their ways of life vary, their moral concepts vary, again that argument does not explain the moral disagreement between them. At best it can show that they cannot understand each other since each seems to be outside the comprehension range of the other. But we know that this is not so. We know that they, as it were, agree on the facts (including the fact that vivisection brings suffering) and only disagree on the value to give to those facts. They also know what they mean by evil - in this case, the giving of pain to animals and, as we have already seen, are only seeking to answer the question 'does the evil (we know) outweigh the good (we know)?' and 'Should the evil be an overriding

consideration or not?'. So we do not see any grounds on which these men can be said to be mutually unintelligible, which is the major premiss of the forms-of-life argument. Perhaps it may be felt that Beardsmore's example is an unfortunate one which fails to streamline the forms-of-life case, so let us consider the related claims of Phillips and Mounce.

In their paper (MHP) to which we have already referred, Phillips and Mounce are also faced with the problem of deadlock in ethics which occurs when two people agree on the facts but disagree over what ought to be done. They instance a pacifist who argues with a militarist over the conduct of soldiers and argue that although the R.C. housewife, the pacifist and the militarist cannot say just what they like, that is because "their arguments are rooted in different moral traditions within which there are rules for what can and cannot be said" (MHP p.239). So once again we come upon the argument that different things would be important for each tradition, that each tradition is self-contained, that there are disagreements for which there is no common solution, that a reconciliation is impossible and that moral standards must stem from a prior commitment to a 'tradition' (i.e. form-of-life).

Let us assume that fundamental moral disagreement indicates that each person in the dispute has a different conceptual framework. Let us also, for the sake of argument, accept that the rationalist who was trying to convince the R.C. housewife has a different conceptual framework from hers. We do not doubt that such an institution as the Roman Catholic Church has an apparently unified body of traditions which may differ from those of non-Roman Catholics and, as far as this goes, it can be said to represent a moral tradition or form-of-life or way of life. But we shall not sustain these beliefs for so long before

it becomes necessary to subdivide this form of life, since Roman Catholics, too, do disagree with each other over moral questions. And since every moral disagreement, as looked at by these philosophers, is a signal to identify a form of life, a moral disagreement between Roman Catholics would represent different forms of life within the Roman Catholic form of life. So a form of life would be susceptible to innumerable nuclei of forms of life, each representing some moral disagreement between its numbers. This at once suggests that to posit every fundamental moral disagreement as an identification sign for different moral traditions or forms of life is to reduce the notion of a form-of-life itself to absurdity.

This absurdity reminds us of a similar one we saw in the case of Beardsmore's anti-vivisectionist standing for two forms of life in the same single moral disagreement. So it seems as if whichever way we may look at it the forms-of-life theory raises acute problems over the issue of moral disagreements by its insistence on the forms-of-life argument as the only way to explain these agreements while at the same time implying that these agreements are the only criteria for identifying forms of life.

A forms-of-life theorist may easily dispute this. He may raise the issue of loyalty and argue that a Roman Catholic who disagrees with the Roman Catholic tradition is disloyal and is therefore distinguishable from a loyal Roman Catholic on that very count. But in doing this the philosopher is putting forward a different though related theory. He is now using disagreement over moral issues, not only as a signal for identifying a form of life, but also as a signal for identifying loyalty within a given form of life.

Beardsmore actually does this. He maintains that within the Roman Catholic morality the question 'Is suicide wrong?' is

redundant (op.cit. pp.102-3). If the question arises for a special Catholic, he says, the considerations which give sense to the question are not Catholic considerations; 'the doubt', he maintains, comes from outside the Catholic morality. According to this view, membership of a particular morality may involve blind obedience to the traditional standards of that morality. However once it is accepted that members of one morality can be influenced by the considerations that are given importance in another morality; that doubts, that is, can arise from external sources, it means that the barriers to cross-ethical understanding have been broken, and the notion of self-contained forms-of-life is destroyed.

But even without this paradox we still reject the argument from loyalty, for we do know that many otherwise loyal Roman Catholics seriously question or actually condemn the traditional attitude. And suppose we have a Roman Catholic who questions birth-control but accepts a number of other tenets of the moral tradition, would he be classed loyal or disloyal? So we reject the argument from loyalty and maintain that forms-of-life are trivially divisible and therefore cannot offer a convincing explanation to moral disagreements.

Certainly those putting forth the forms-of-life view would agree that even where there is an agreement in language, particular disagreement on special occasions is still possible. It would therefore be more reasonable to view moral disagreements as representing competing moral views than self-contained and incompatible ones.

Perhaps the only force which the doctrine about forms-of-life might still exert is that in the last resort one cannot justify the adoption of one moral position rather than another. But this is just the kind of position adopted by Hare, and is very far from the Wittgensteinian view of forms-of-life which is linked with his explanation of

the nature of concepts. As it is, neither Wittgenstein nor those influenced by him have given us any clear indication of how a form of life is to be identified, and as such we do not find it illuminating as a view which explains why people who accept the same non-moral facts disagree in their moral conclusions.

To sum up it could be said that in addition to the fact that forms-of-life are ill-defined, the claim that they are self-contained which leads to their being defined in terms of moral disagreements renders them incapable of solving these disagreements. At best they may explain them. But this too they cannot do because they are trivially divisible and are therefore not self-contained as claimed. And since forms-of-life morality only reveals itself in moral disagreements, and by it these disagreements are not even explained, forms-of-life theorists neither give us any clear account of their thesis nor of morality itself.

In examining the naturalist arguments of Mrs. Foot we have found in them a general tendency for her to insist that we come to moral conclusions from non-moral (i.e. descriptive) premisses. The arguments of Professor Warnock intensify this through his claim that those non-moral premisses do in fact define the moral. The forms-of-life moralists, though not explicit on this issue support the same naturalist cause through the forms-of-life argument. We have argued against naturalists on the ground that this is an illogical procedure, that they have, as it were, committed the 'is/ought' offence, although we have not yet tried to show how this is so. We shall at this point explore the "is/ought" problem to justify our claim that the naturalist procedure is an illogical one<sup>9</sup>.

In ordinary language we do separate what is from what ought to be, and do regard anyone who supposes that what is ought ipso facto

to be as very conservative, while one who is unable to separate what ought to be from what is is rather naive and a victim of wishful thinking. So in a sense, that is is not derivable from ought is prima facie true.

Hume foresaw the distinction when he declared that the relation expressed by 'ought' is entirely different from that expressed by 'is' and cannot be deduced from it. He described the change from 'is' to 'ought' as 'a new relation' which is both incompatible and inconceivable -

This change is incompatible.... For what seems inconceivable is how far this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it ....

(Treatise III.1.1)

Hume went further to remark that such change from is and is not to ought and ought not results in "vulgar systems of morality", and recommends that the distinction of vice and virtue is not found "merely on the relations of objects".

Now, with full awareness, but some disregard, of the controversy which philosophers have raised over what Hume implied, let us examine it just as it stands. Let us illustrate with a somewhat familiar example. The assertion that someone ought to stop smoking is said to relate to the assertion that smoking is injurious to his health, and the relation is taken as a logical one.

It is common to give the assertion that one thing is as a reason for the assertion that another thing ought to be; in other words, that one thing ought to be because another thing is. But the key-term 'because' can have both necessary (i.e. following from) and contingent or causal (i.e. caused by) implications, as in 'He died

because of injuries he received' (causal), and we say he is a parent because (following from the fact that) here are his children. And a contingent 'because' does not yield a necessary one.

Also features which constitute reasons why one thing ought to be can be features either of its circumstances, or of its requirements or of its chosen alternative. The features of why he ought to give up smoking, for example, can be features of the circumstances of his health, e.g. that it is good for him to keep in good health. This would involve such circumstances as smoking affecting the heart and also causing lung cancer, then lung cancer being an injury to health, such that his giving up smoking becomes owing in the situation of his health, and is thus expressed as 'he ought to give up smoking'. To argue then that he ought to give up smoking because smoking injures his health is to furnish an elliptical argument - an argument which assumes that certain circumstances are true and bases its conclusion on these pre-suppositions<sup>11</sup>. Such an argument will have no force without its implicit assumption of this set of circumstances and a certain requirement viewed under a certain aspect. So if we say that he ought to give up smoking because smoking injures his health, we do not mean that injury to his health follows necessarily from smoking but that circumstances point to the fact that his ill-health is caused by smoking. 'Because' here is therefore not one of logical necessity but a causal one. That smoking injures his health is empirically testable, and whether what is ought to be will depend on the result of such a test.

Furthermore, suppose that there was some misapprehension about the assumed circumstances, e.g. suppose that it was not true that lung cancer was caused by smoking, or at least there was some doubt or disagreement among experts on the matter, such that some people believed

it did and some that it did not, then there would arise also a disagreement over the relationship of what ought to be and what is, some believing that 'he ought to give up smoking' implies that smoking is injuring his health, and others not. And sometimes when there are no misapprehensions there may arise practical problems. Suppose that my friend with rather slim resources ought to give up smoking, is it his health or his economy that is at stake? In such a case doubt over the description of the situation spreads over what ought to be, and the question 'Why ought he to stop smoking?' becomes more difficult than was thought. We cannot always pin down on the facts of why people ought or ought not to do certain things.

The problem of the relation between is and ought is, as we see it, the logical problem of the assertion that a particular set of circumstances or a particular requirement that such-and-such is a feature is logically related to the assertion that so-and-so ought to be, and we see that this is far from guaranteed. No assertion that one thing ought to be cannot be implied logically from the assertion that something else is, for, from our example at least it is not necessarily true that if smoking causes lung cancer, then one ought, even from the medical point of view, to give it up. For there is nothing illogical (or irrational) in smoking even when one knows that it causes lung cancer, although there could be something unreasonable in doing so. But reason in this context is contingent, not necessary. Likewise it is not true on logical grounds that if someone set off half-an-hour ago on what is normally a ten-minute walk, then he ought to have arrived by now, although it may contingently be true that he ought to have done so. Thus that something follows contingently does not guarantee its following necessarily, and statements of the form 'P ought to q' made out of observations of factual situations do necessarily have a logical relation with such situations.

But to deny a situation of logical necessity does not imply that such a situation cannot be certainly true, or that it cannot be proved to be true, or that it cannot be necessary in any other way whatsoever. For a contingent connection can be as certain and as easily proved as a logically necessary one, the difference being that while one demands evidence of a contingent nature to establish it, the other demands evidence of a logically necessary nature; so the difference is in the method of proof. It is certainly true, for example, that oil floats on water, and that they do not mix. This has been proved to be contingently true, just as it is contingently true that all men are mortal; but neither is necessarily true in the logical sense, for they are both empirical generalizations - records of our experience - and could have been otherwise. Similarly there can be no doubt that a host of hypotheticals of the form 'If x is so, then y ought to be so' - and a corresponding collection of consequences of the form 'y ought to be so' are certainly true, contingently though not necessarily. It is certainly true, for example, and has been proved true, that if one is tired, one ought to take a rest, and that if one takes a rest one ought to be refreshed; but 'ought' in such cases is the 'ought' of contingency, not that of necessity.

As we saw in Chapter II some moral rules come into being in this way. They follow contingently, that is, from standards set up by men because, following their experience, they think they need them so. This of course does not justify the rules ultimately, so does not establish their objectivity; nevertheless we do have them, hence it is sometimes said that something ought to be done as a matter of courtesy, in all conscience, in all honesty, and so on. The suggestion is that such rules as those of courtesy, honesty, conscience, act to make so-and-so what is owing or appropriate in such-and-such circumstances; but here again the owingness does not follow logically.

Following from our arguments it is therefore implausible to argue that because a set of circumstances has such-and-such natural features, therefore it is the one which ought necessarily to be in the circumstances. Our arguments show that an 'ought' of contingency is the more likely to occur. But it must be added that what has been said so far about the use of 'ought' is perhaps very much simplified for general purposes. For the concept expressed by 'ought' may be said to be one of such which are related neither purely contingently nor strictly necessarily, but in relation to the acceptance of certain rules and principles by which the criteria of their application are decided. ('Good' and 'right' are some others of such concepts.)

In her arguments Mrs. Foot has insisted that there must be some similarity between moral and non-moral evaluation. We have argued, not that such a connection is well-nigh impossible, but that as a logical formula, it is not possible since what it implies - namely, that an ought of necessity can be deduced from an is is, following from our arguments, a fallacy<sup>12</sup>. But, on the other hand, it may be argued from 'hypothetical imperatives', that it is possible to derive 'oughts' from 'is'-statements. Here Kant may even be cited, who states (in Groundwork) that if you will the end, you will the known indispensable means; thus the force of the 'ought' may be said to depend on the truth of the premisses. As we have seen from the example we took of being tired and needing to rest, such an 'ought' can only be causal or contingent. If I am tired then I ought to rest, so rest is caused or necessitated for me by my condition; I am not morally bound to rest. For, following Kant once again, the 'hypothetical' imperative does not yield a moral situation; only the 'categorical' imperative does. What best a hypothetical situation can yield is a prudential situation: I do p if my condition demands it.

It might well be, as Mrs. Foot argues, that any action which is more harmful than beneficial in its effects is wrong insofar as this is so, and it would surely be language-abuse to say 'This harmful thing is good'; but our contention is that the fact that an action or practice is harmful or beneficial does not guarantee its rightness or wrongness, that is, as a matter of logical necessity. But the naturalist wants us to do this and to define rightness and wrongness in terms of beneficence and harmfulness to man. As we have already shown, other moral concepts such as justice and promise-keeping show that moral justification goes beyond human good and harm. An act may be 'just' even though it does not do anyone any good as such. It is, for example, just to spare the life of the street beggar even though people are more likely to lose than to gain by his continued living. This is why the notion of justice has been a problem to Utilitarians.

Having found both Mrs. Foot's brand of naturalism and the forms-of-life thesis faulty in their claims, we are being led to conclude that naturalism is unsatisfactory for our purposes; for although it is in principle objectivist, our arguments tend to show that it fails to supply us convincing grounds for establishing objectivity in ethics. So objectivism of the type we are looking for is non-naturalist. It rejects the main thesis of naturalism, and rather accepts views that are in that sense anti-naturalist. But this position needs to be clarified. First we need to consider what it is that the objectivist, qua non-naturalist, is really up against in naturalism. This will bring us into seeing what we may still retain, and how the relationship of that and morality may be interpreted.

Earlier in this chapter we pointed out that the naturalist claim is, in other words, a claim that natural facts can sum up to values (or moral judgements). It is therefore a claim related to the

fact/value dichotomy, and perhaps if we reviewed this dichotomy we would be able to see where the anti-naturalist contention lies.

The fact/value dichotomy makes two claims - that ethical terms are non-natural, and that non-natural qualities are not definable in terms of natural ones. Let us take some examples. There is - and I think that all philosophers would agree at least in principle - a distinction between these two sentences

1. The field is green

and 2. The field is super for racing.

We do distinguish between (1) a descriptive sentence and (2) an evaluative one, and it does not seem as if the distinctions are made on the basis of vocabulary. It is probably true to say that any expression which comes in the context of evaluation of something may also occur in the description, and vice versa; in deed when I say 'the field is super for racing', by way of evaluating the field, it could also be said that I am describing it, for it seems as if its being super for racing includes its being grassed in the proper way for that purpose. But surely this does not include that the grass is green, unless we assume that grass is a priori green, and this may seem plausible, only that it may also mean that the expression 'green grass' will be tautologous; but we know it is not. Nevertheless it can be maintained that there is some distinction between describing and evaluating; between saying, for instance, 'That man is crossing our lawn' and 'It is wrong for him to cross our lawn'; between saying that X was a Prime Minister and that X was a good Prime Minister. For although it may not be easy to know at what point precisely we go from a description to an evaluation in such cases, we do know at least that such terms as wrong, and good (in most cases) are used not just to describe.

But granting that this is true, that we can, be it with the utmost difficulty, draw a bold line between descriptions and evaluations, is this what philosophers have been labouring to do and quarrelling over - just to establish a speciously ambitious truism? Perhaps there must be something more serious than just that.

What the non-naturalist seems to be contending is not that evaluating and describing are not one and the same thing, but that they are mutually independent in an important sense; that is to say, that no description, of whatever sort, commits us to any particular evaluation purported to have arisen from it; that any description might be accepted, and any evaluation rejected, without logical inconsistency. Looked at in this way it means that the anti-naturalist thesis implies that it might not be possible so to state the facts of a case that its evaluation would follow as a matter of logical necessity. That though any description of the character of C is so apt, that description cannot commit us to make an evaluation of C's character, and anyone could accept the description with or without accepting my evaluations which might be thought to follow it, without any logical offence.

To put it more succinctly, we may say that the anti-naturalist accepts that

- (1) evaluation involves accepting a set of standards or principles, rules or criteria for judgement;
  - (2) description, by naming facts, suggests such a standard, but that
  - (3) no one is logically bound to accept the suggested standard;
- So (4) arguments from facts to values are not logically binding; that is, that what the facts state cannot logically lead us to evaluate, though we might accept them.

This may well be an over-simplification of the thesis, and may itself reinstate the question of how we know that the facts we accept are themselves value-free, which forms part of the forms-of-life contention. But such questions do not affect the general implications of the thesis, so do not concern us here.

The central claim of the anti-naturalist that describing and evaluating are mutually independent - what Professor Warnock calls the 'independence' - thesis - then tantamounts to a claim that our reasons for moral choice do not depend 'logically' on the 'natural' features of the object of our choice, or, in other words, that our moral choices do not logically depend upon the facts of our environment.

Warnock in Contemporary Moral Philosophy has suggested that our wants and our choices are bound up with the features of the things we choose. To want something, he argues, is to adopt some feature of it as a criterion of merit (or choice) appropriate to the context in question; to adopt that feature as a criterion of choice is to prefer what possesses that feature, and to prefer what has that feature is to prefer it because it has that feature. We think this argument is plausible, for when we adopt a feature as a criterion of merit we are most likely to adopt what has that feature. If, for example, I adopt fawn as my favourite colour, if I want to buy a car, and there is a fawn car among the rest, I am most likely to buy the fawn car.

This is an empirical fact. It is therefore not just an accident that something is wanted. And because our wants are not mere accidents, there are limits to what a person may be said understandably to want, and this limit is set by our knowledge of why he wants it. That is to say, if he wants p, the limits are set by our knowledge of what he wants p for, what appeal p has for him. When we have no notion of this we generally say that we do not see what he

wants p for. This does not mean that he may not want p for anything that may please him, but it means that whatever it is that he wants p for is not intelligible to us.

Thus although we can say that any feature of his environment may be regarded by someone as a criterion of merit or desirability, this is not to say that we could always understand its being so regarded unless we understand what he wants it for. The forms-of-life naturalist may want to amend this by suggesting that we cannot understand him unless we share his form of life; but we have already tried to expose the vacuousness of attempting to understand from within.

Again, although from the anti-naturalist point of view it can be said that no-one is logically bound to accept any standard as a criterion of merit, there is nevertheless a limit to what anyone can choose, and here we may once again incorporate Mrs. Foot's argument that we cannot choose to call something a pen or a knife, unless it writes or cuts well. If human choice is going to be an intelligent one, it must be understood by us. So for feature p to function as an intelligent criterion of desirability or merit, it must surely be such that we could at least understand someone's having p as having something, and it is not true that just any feature meets that requirement. To a considerable extent, therefore, our evaluations are regulated by the features of the things we evaluate: we want p because xyz.

The purpose of this argument is, we should think, to show that the field of choice of the moral agent is limited. He cannot just choose anything as his criterion of merit. Then if what he chooses is such that we can all understand, it means then that we all share common reasons or premisses for our moral conclusions. Following from this, it means that the anti-naturalist cannot argue to the extent that we can choose our standards at random simply because we are not

logically bound to adopt or choose the standards of evaluation suggested by the descriptive features xyz.

But while all this is true, there is a strong suggestion of determinism running through it. To accept that our choices are regulated by the features of the things we choose does not mean we accept that we are determined by those features, and this is what the naturalist wants us to do. In the same way, that our evaluations are regulated by the features of the things we evaluate is not to say that they are determined by them. For we do sometimes say, without any absurdity, 'although p has features xyz and I like features xyz, I will not choose p'. Thus the fact that we want something does not determine us to choose it. This is where the anti-naturalist disagrees with the naturalist on the question of choice, and this is why the 'independence' - thesis still stands; it stands in the sense that natural features regulate but do not compel us to choose. If we were so compelled we would lose our autonomy; and, as we saw in Chapter III, this is the fault in naturalism which Hare set out to correct.

It follows thus that what we contend is not just that evaluations are not descriptions - which is too trite to involve philosophical dispute - but that evaluations are independent of descriptions, and it is on this score that we reject naturalism. But every moral theory has at least something to commend it so it is not all that naturalism consists in that can be rejected. We hold that moral ought cannot be deduced from is logically, but naturalism's connection with the human situation cannot be entirely discounted without risking the whole of morality. So it must be said that Mrs. Foot and other naturalists of her type must be right in insisting that not just any thing can be a moral reason and not just any principle can be a moral principle. We cannot make a snatch in the air for moral principles:

they must have a reasoned background, and not just anything can form this background. This thesis is vital to moral objectivity. So naturalism is in this sense acceptable for what best it can offer, namely, that moral principles are not just random statements of feelings but statements related to, and that have connection with, the human situation. It is not this connection that we reject, but the hard-line logical way in which these naturalists explicate its nature.

Our position is therefore this: we accept that there is some connection between the human condition (or natural facts) and our moral rules and principles - that is to say, our moral views are not held just in a vacuum. But we insist that this connection is not of the logical nature maintained by the naturalists we have discussed. For both Mrs. Foot's brand of naturalism and the forms-of-life hold on to a logical connection, only differing in the sense that while for Mrs. Foot the natural facts directly determine our moral viewpoints, for the forms-of-life naturalists our forms of life determine, as it were, the facts which determine our moral viewpoints. But in each case our moral decisions are determined by the facts of our lives.

But not all naturalists see the connection in this hard-line way. Professor Danto<sup>13</sup> has suggested that the human condition provides the 'application conditions' for moral rules. Let us illustrate what we think he may mean. The Hebrew Decalogue, for instance, would not have had any point if it did not mirror the life of the people. 'Thou shalt have no other gods' or 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image' can only apply to people who hold a syncretic form of religion, just as our stock-example, 'You ought not to steal' can apply only to people who own property. These application conditions suggest that 'the moral' cannot apply where 'the factual' does not hold, and that such morally-charged terms as honesty, chastity, courage, and so on,

may have their factual dimensions, and that analysis of moral rules and moral terms should involve such factual considerations.

We do not dispute this claim. For one thing it does not seem to raise the sort of logical problems which the logical-connection claim does; but still it does raise problems of a different calibre, which must be tackled.

This thesis has important consequences for moral rules. First, it follows that to understand a moral rule or term is to understand at least the conditions under which it may be applied. This means that where the application conditions do not exist, a moral rule may have no point, and is therefore inapplicable. This suggests some flexibility in the application of moral rules - a flexibility which is geographically-based - however fundamental or categorical the rules may claim to be. This can be understood in the case of the rules we called 'local rules' and 'neutral norms' (Chap. II); but when such a consideration is so generalized as to include even the fundamental moral rules, its validity would demand further scrutiny.

Let us pause a little over this question of application conditions. Supposing that there is a community where, say, aged parents are by custom uncared for and encouraged to die (as it was believed to be among some Eskimo tribes), could this be a condition where the moral rule about care for aged parents would be said not to apply? We would not think so. The rule here is that aged parents should be uncared for, and our question is whether this means that the rule that aged parents should be cared for does not apply. We cannot say that this latter rule is not known, for, a community which knows that aged parents will die if left uncared for knows, ex hypothesi, that they will live if cared for. So the situation here is not that of ignorance as in the case of the hypothetical community where stealing

is not known because property is not owned, and where in fact people cannot (logically) be said to steal. People here know the rule that parents should be cared for, and that is, in fact, why it makes sense to talk of 'application conditions' in the first place, because talk about application conditions for a rule applying or not applying can only make sense where the rule is at least known. The condition in this community is in effect that two rules regarding conduct towards aged parents are known - one, that they should not be cared for and left to die; the other, that they should be cared for so that they may live, and the former rule is made to override the latter.

Now, that rule A is made to override rule B does not mean that rule B does not apply; it does apply, only that it is being suppressed. So the rule that aged parents should be cared for applies in this community, and therefore its application conditions exist. Indeed where the rule that aged parents should be cared for can be said not to exist must be one in which it is entirely unknown, and not when it is overridden. And a community where this rule is unknown can only be one in which aged parenthood does not exist - and experience does not tell us that there may be such a community.

We might even extend this argument to include that although we had postulated a community where stealing can be said to be unknown, such a community would be very rare indeed, for even where communism is practised, some property is still owned, if by the commune, and the individuals would at least own their own limbs and would want to retain them.

The assertion that moral rules cannot hold where their application conditions do not exist or are unknown could be cashed on by relativist philosophers as a reason why they think the same moral rules cannot apply to everyone; but I think this brief exposition will

have made it clear that such places where the conditions do not exist for the application of any fundamental rules are very rare indeed. Following from this it would not be easy to name a moral rule which can be said not to apply really anywhere there is a human society simply because its application conditions do not exist there. But this is not surprising, for, as Professor Downie points out in his analysis of the human situation (Refer Chapter 1), the basic facts of the human nature are held in common by all human beings by virtue of their being human, and social and moral rules are also commonly made to safeguard these. Although these may vary in detail between communities, and may be said to apply generally rather than always, the basis is the same - human.

So when we talk about where the application conditions do not exist, we do not literally mean where, owing to custom or level of moral development they are not known or are apparently inexistent. We mean when it is logically impossible for them to exist, and so far we have not found any satisfactory example of this for the simple reason that all human beings share the same nature.

Perhaps what is more appropriate is to talk not of 'application conditions' as Danto does, but of 'conditions for intelligibility' of a rule, meaning by this the conditions in which such-and-such a rule can be understood. And we would consider a rule not intelligible to people who do not know the conditions which make it a rule. But that something is not intelligible to me, does not at all imply that it does not apply to me. If I drive a car in Iceland, the Icelandic traffic rules will apply to me even though the words in which they are stated may sound unintelligible to me because I do not know Icelandic.

This fact that the application conditions for moral rules

are hardly inexistent anywhere there is a human community also accounts for the weakness of the forms-of-life argument and any such relativist leaning in morality. The forms-of-life philosophers, as we have seen, explain moral diversity in semantical terms: various forms of life, they agree, are expressed in various moral languages which are not mutually comprehensible. But our arguments have shown that all human beings speak one basic moral language in their desire for the good. What differences there are in the way this is thought to be achieved are therefore 'dialectal' and, like all dialects, are only variations on a basic and central theme. Thus although we can say that differences in factual understanding inevitably affect the conditions for intelligibility of the moral rules, we must maintain that ignorance of what ought to be in morals does not bring about moral exemption.

All this having been said, we may now agree with Danto when he says -

... whatever may be the logical conditions between factual and moral propositions - and we assume that they are not the desired ones of entailment and reducibility - there is enough of a tie between them, so that when we reckon in the application conditions of our moral beliefs, we have some basis for rational criticism and rational debate in the moral sphere. (p.25).

It might then be that whatever kind this connection or 'tie' is, it is such that we can hardly enjoin toleration of the moral beliefs of a community without tolerating their factual beliefs (although, as we shall show, the converse does not hold: we can tolerate their factual beliefs without tolerating their moral beliefs). And corollarily any attempt made at imposing an alien form of morality (that is, one

which is not known by the people) can only be feasible if the appropriate factual beliefs are altered. If, for example, we would teach a community that child-sacrifice is morally wrong we shall need to make them believe that the same things they think they achieve by sacrificing their children may be achieved by sacrificing their goats and rams. In short, any transformation of either of moral or factual beliefs would demand a transformation of the other.

It follows from this that one - and we emphasize one - way of resolving moral disagreements is through the resolving of factual ones, and that we may refute a moral rule by demonstrating its inapplicability in factual situations.

But it must be made clear what has been said so far. We have said that experience shows that there is some connection between factual beliefs and moral rules, since the former seem to offer some basis for criticizing the latter. This only develops what we have said before. Of what nature then is this connection?

Our line of argument all through suggests that the relationship of natural facts and moral rules can only be an asymmetrical one; for while factual beliefs offer us some means of criticizing moral rules, they do not in the same way offer us a basis for establishing any moral rules, or for deciding between two systems of moral rules. What this implies is that supposing it to be possible that we all hold the same factual beliefs, it still does not follow that we shall all hold the same moral beliefs or evolve the same moral rules as a consequence. So while moral differences may reflect factual ones, agreement in factual beliefs does not necessarily result in moral agreement. And although if we know the moral rules of a group we are almost certain to find traits of their factual beliefs which are connected with those moral rules, we could not, given the factual

beliefs, guess what the moral rules would be. In other words, if a group has a moral rule against adultery, for example, we can almost certainly claim that they have a legalized marriage system; but we cannot, on the other hand, given a group with a legalized marriage system, claim that they would necessarily have rules against adultery. For it is possible to have a community with a legalized marriage system which condoned adultery. We can, through the removal of factual beliefs render moral rules unintelligible. We can (using the last example) make the rule against adultery unintelligible (not inapplicable) by removing legalized marriage laws so that affairs between people which would otherwise have been intelligible when described as adulterous would no longer be. But we cannot, on the other hand, justify the applicability of the rule against adultery by merely putting in factual beliefs, such as a legalized marriage system since, as we have shown, it is logically possible to have a legalized-marriage-community which condoned adultery.

Natural facts are therefore a necessary but not a sufficient condition for establishing moral rules. If moral rules are thus only connected with, but not deducible from, natural facts, it means that in some sense a system of moral rules is the imposition of a certain structure upon the world, a structure which is only negatively controlled by the facts (i.e. we can know the facts through them but cannot know them through the facts).

If the relationship between the human situation and the moral rules is, as we have argued it, asymmetrical, then it means that it lacks the balance which an analytic connection ought to have; so, rather than describe the connection as analytic as Professor Warnock has done, it would be better to be described as synthetic (or causal).

The view that the connection between morality and the human situation is synthetic might be stated in general terms if we said that granted that human beings and their situation are as they are, then people causally must accept a set of rules with certain features - the features being that they contain at least an indirect reference to the human situation. This is the view taken by Professor R.S. Downie<sup>14</sup> in his exposition of man in a state of nature. He refers to accounts of man in a state of nature as accounts whose function is that of making

... clear what is the real point in having  
a system of morality, or of politics....,

and which made us know

... how from the raw material of human capacities  
and the natural environment a system of moral or  
political regulations can be constructed. (p.25).

He therefore sees a close but causal connection between the kind of nature we have and the kind of morality we have.

As may be imagined this view may very well be taken as meaning that morality can be deduced from the facts of the human situation; but unlike the hard-line naturalist views (e.g. Foot's and Warnock's), it denies this seeming deduction-thesis by insisting that what is implied is that we

accept the kind of morality we do

because of the kind of people we are. (p.26),

and stressing that 'because' here is causal not logical. One merit of this insistence on the causal rather than logical 'because' is that men can refuse to accept the kind of morality which their situation suggests without contradiction or logical absurdity. This view is strengthened by the suggestion in the thesis of a leaning or tendency: men will, it continues,

... tend to accept certain forms  
of social organization. (p.27)

So on this view men are not so much determined by their environment as they would be on the analytic view, but have a tendency or leaning towards it, because they are so limited in their skills and physical powers and are so self-insufficient that it is only by such a tendency that they can exist in their sort of environment. It is possible that a tendency could bring us to hold similar beliefs and take the same moral decisions as a determinism does, but a tendency does not rob us of our freewill as a determinism would, for with a determinism we are not autonomous moral agents - while with a tendency we retain our autonomy although still directed by the facts of our situation.

But there is a strong flavour of prudence in this view - we are, as it were, doing the wise thing, what we had better do, although not so determined by forces outside ourselves. However, one feature and, we think, the most important feature of the synthetic-connection view, is that although it sees morality as explained in the facts of the human situation, it does not seek to define it in terms of these facts. And it is because it does not do this that it makes room for contrary claims in morality, whereas with the analytic-connection view any such claims would be self-contradictory.

As a result of this feature we can accept this view and yet ask the question 'Why should I be moral?' intelligibly. For there does not seem to be anything frivolous in saying 'I know that everything in my environment is suggesting that I should be moral, but I do not want to go by that suggestion, and do not see why I should not go on in my own way'. With the analytic view such a question is unintelligible either because by it, having seen the facts means accepting the morality which they are believed to carry, or by defining 'moral' itself in these

facts. But if morality depends on the human situation synthetically, i.e. neither by deduction from nor by definition in, the natural facts, there is no logical absurdity in accepting the facts and rejecting the morality. This is enjoined both by our upholding the 'independence'-thesis and by our explanation of the relationship as an asymmetrical one. And it seems that it is only by seeing the connection between the natural facts and our moral judgements in this synthetic way that ethical naturalism can make room for moral autonomy.

Yet the synthetic-connection view is nevertheless a naturalist view; it still explains moral objectivity in terms of natural facts, so does not supply us with the non-natural element of the human situation, which we need to establish objectivity. Moreover, because of its asymmetrical character by which it helps us use natural facts only as a means of criticizing moral rules and judgements but not as a means of establishing them, nor for deciding disagreements between them, it makes natural facts too weak and invalid to establish objectivity on. For while the analytic view makes the connection between natural facts and morality too rigid and deterministic, the synthetic view makes it too loose and too contingent. Furthermore although it makes the question 'Why should I be moral?' more meaningful, it does not follow this up by providing a satisfactory answer of it. For it does not constitute a moral reason for acting that a man accepts standards of conduct for prudential reasons - because he needs such acceptance for his survival. It seems that if this question is to be answered satisfactorily we need to go beyond even the synthetic explanation of objectivity in morality to something still related to the human situation but not in terms of natural facts - to human nature itself.

We have tried to explore what ethical naturalism, as a

doctrine that identifies natural facts with moral facts, can offer us as a theory of ethical objectivism. We have shown that although it is prima facie an objectivist theory, it seems to miss the point of moral objectivity either by taking the hard-line of making the connection between the natural facts (or the human situation) and morality so logical (or analytic) that morality is emptied of all freedom, or by leaving it as a purely contingent (or causal or synthetic) matter, thereby making morality seem non-committal. While there is an asymmetrical relationship between the natural facts and our moral rules which can best be explained synthetically, the question 'Why should I be moral?' is still not answered even by accepting a synthetic connection. So we reject all brands of ethical naturalism, although this does not mean that we also reject the thesis that the human situation is an important element in the objectivist claim; it only suggests that we have to look for it outside the limits of the natural facts.

## 2.

It might sound far-fetched but we think it may be true to say that almost what the hard-line naturalists do with 'the human situation', relativists do with the social environment. In each case what is is taken as what ought (morally) to be: morality is seen to derive from what is observed in the human environment. The crux of the relativist argument is that people believe what they think is right for them to believe, and practise what they think is right for them to practise; so what they ought to do (i.e. their morality) derives from, or at least, is part of, what they believe and what they practise, and no one should interfere.' In short, what is for peoples is what ought to be for them.

Cultural relativism, the parent theory of ethical relativism, maintains that there is an irreducible diversity among cultures because each culture is a unique whole with parts so intertwined that none of them can be understood or evaluated without reference to the other parts and to the cultural whole, or, in other words, to the pattern of culture. Corollarily cultures cannot be evaluated outside their own context.

John Beattie<sup>15</sup> describes and discountenances what he calls the 'Victorian approach' to the study of culture in which anthropologists took their own systems as standard and sought to understand other cultures in that context. Modern social anthropologists therefore seek to understand these beliefs in the context of the cultures in which they are set and of which they are part. To them different cultures have different concepts and no single culture can claim that its own understanding of the world is the correct one. This point of view is expressed both in the realm of facts and in the realm of values.

Let us, for purposes of analysis, draw a rather vague distinction between two types of relativism - relativism about fact and relativism about value. The relativist about fact, or, conceptual relativist, as we may call him, maintains that there is no such thing as objective knowledge of realities independent of the knower. He interprets the relativist situation as one in which peoples do not just see the same world but interpret it differently - that is, they see the same facts or have the same perception of reality and then interpret them differently - but one in which they see different facts and receive different conceptual truths even though they may be said to be looking at the same physical world - a thesis with a strong Berkleyan world-view. To them there are, in fact, different 'worlds' or 'realities', not one 'world' or 'reality'. Reality, on this model, is in conceptual compartments and as a result knowledge cannot

be shared since communication is impossible between the various conceptual frameworks. We shall not be concerned with conceptual relativism now but we note that forms-of-life morality is an attempt to introduce it into ethics and, as we tried to show, not with much success.

The ethical relativist, or, the relativist about value, does not repudiate the existence of objective standards; in fact, he accepts them in principle. But, once again, they are locked within, and belong to the various culture-groups; there are therefore no universal standards of good and bad, right and wrong (with emphasis on universal). The pattern of culture constitutes the different 'world' of the society, and ethics is derived from this pattern or, at least, is a phase or part of it. As a result of this it cannot be separated from, nor can it be understood or evaluated outside the 'world' of the given society. So moral rightness and wrongness vary from society to society, and there are no universal moral truths binding on all men at all times. Accordingly ethical relativism holds that whether it is right or wrong for an individual to act in a certain way depends on, or is related to, the society to which he belongs. Then it argues: if men are not to condone the practices of other people which, by their own standards, would be morally repugnant, what moral justification have they to impose their own standards?

Perhaps the ethical relativist's position finds its most classic expression in Soren Kierkegaard's remark that the ethical expression of Abraham's action is that he wishes to murder Isaac; but that the religious expression is that he wishes to sacrifice him<sup>16</sup>. Here it seems that two types of killing are being distinguished - ordinary killing (which is here taken as an ethical act), and killing for religious reasons. Religion is probably to be understood here to have created the particular considerations that make the distinction

valid, and the ethical relativist's argument seems to boil down to this, that we need not condemn human killing unless we know its circumstances (cultural, of course, not legal).

Two theses bind together to give ethical relativism its character:

1. a dependency thesis which asserts that moral rules, beliefs and practices of a society are necessarily and invariably dependent upon their validity on the facets of its culture - for example, its institutions, its economy, its language or, in short, its general cultural pattern. (This thesis can also show itself in some non-cultural ways, such as in the claim that morality is a function of conditions such as biological heritage, emotions, and so on.) It can at once be seen that if the dependency thesis is driven far enough, it may result in some form of ethical determinism - the moral agent determined in his action by circumstances beyond his control.

2. a diversity thesis which asserts that throughout the world and throughout history there has been an incredible diversity of cultural patterns, as well as a diversity of moral beliefs, rules and practices, and that these have shown in their nature a remarkable absence of universals; but rather there has been a lot of variability from one society to the other. There is therefore nothing common to all cultures.

Putting these two theses together we can present the ethical relativist argument as

- (a) Morality is essentially dependent upon factors which constitute the pattern of culture; (let us call them n-Factor)
- (b) n-Factor is relative (i.e. varies from society to society, class to class);

therefore

- (c) Morality is relative.

What is implied here is that each society's moral system is to be judged exclusively on its own merits - a kind of internalism. But if we accept this argument we can only speak of 'moralities', not of 'morality' nor of 'systems of morality', for if each moral system is self-sufficient it would almost be tantamount to word-abuse to talk as if there was only one morality with various systems. We can retort here that a queer system of justification is being suggested and that judgement, as we understand it, involves a comparison, and its validity rests on the fact that what is judged is appraised against some other standard external to itself. This argument from queerness is, however, not effective, not only because there is nothing illogical with judging by one's own standards except that it makes one queer, and there is nothing illogical in being queer, but more because if it is true that morality is essentially dependent upon culture and, as culture is truly relative, it must follow that morality is relative, and we cannot dispute this. So what we need to dispute is the claim made in premiss (a), the major premiss, that morality is essentially dependent upon n-Factor (i.e. the factors which constitute the pattern of culture). We shall come back to this.

By definition ethical relativism is a claim that there are no absolute moral standards. Such a claim entails a kind of levelling down of moral standards, either as equally non-valid or as equally valid; thus the theory can have both a negative and a positive dimension with regard to moral standards.

The negative dimension implies that nothing is wrong or right in itself, right or wrong depending on what people think - a view with a subjectivist leaning. If pursued consistently, this view would finally lead to ethical scepticism, or even to nihilism; either to a state in which nothing is good enough or to one in which anything is either as good or as bad as any other.

Such a state of neutralism is however not likely to arise. What is more likely perhaps is a total destruction or breakdown of moral standards and the creation in their place of a new concept of action. Indeed this is what most negativists are striving for. But granting that such a situation did arise, where could it be said that such a new moral standard came from since by definition it does not represent the moral beliefs of the people but is rather a new crop of standards shooting out upon the debris of disused beliefs? The only explanation is to suppose that such standards must have been there all the time, although ignored, and that they therefore represent an objective system which is meant to apply to all members alike irrespective of what their individual beliefs may be. And such a system will be absolute since it is meant not to be questioned. When ethical relativism has come this far, then the wheel has, as it were, turned full circle, and the theory of relative standards has substituted itself with one of universally-accepted absolute standards.

The positive dimension of ethical relativism operates in exactly the opposite manner but with the same ultimate effect. Affirming the equal validity of all moral principles that are accepted by any society entails that the principle, p, can be taken as wrong with the same enthusiasm (or maybe apathy) with which it is taken as right or even as neutral. And if just any principle is acceptable, then every principle is acceptable; and thus we are once again face to face with a situation in which nothing matters, any principle being as good or as bad, and any practice being as right or as wrong as any other. And 'right' and 'wrong' will have lost their meaning since rightness and wrongness have a meaning only through their exclusion of alternatives: we cannot say, for instance, that p is right in a situation and alternatively q is also right in that situation, or that

x is wrong and alternatively y is equally wrong in that situation. This positive version of ethical relativism therefore only succeeds in destroying the principle of validity which it has been seeking to preserve, and setting up in its place a principle of acceptability - a criterion for moral judgement in which everything is morally acceptable.

It looks then as if both versions of ethical relativism are inherently absurd. For it looks as though to accept ethical relativism would mean either accepting everything as morally viable or accepting nothing as morally viable. But it is also possible that this is so because we have examined only what may be termed 'polar' or extremist dimensions of the theory. Perhaps what the theory enjoins is neither an equal-validity thesis nor an equal-non-validity one, but rather a thesis that moral principles have a limited validity, being valid only to a particular group. That is to say, that in judging other peoples morally we bear in mind that they have their own principles and in consequence of this apply an attitude of tolerance, respect and understanding. It is most likely that this was what such proponents of cultural relativism as Ruth Benedict and Melville Herskovits meant and why contemporary social anthropologists such as John Beattie are opposed to ethnocentrism.

Supposing this to be so, let us then examine this moderate and seemingly more comfortable relativist position. To say that one ought to do t with 'tolerance' is to give a moral rule. It is to have examined the situation t and judged it as one to which the principle of tolerance ought to apply. In other words it is to say that the attitude of tolerance is the right attitude to apply to the situation, and in doing so one is applying the notions of right and wrong. What all this implies is that the relativist is not only taking off from an already defined moral position on his trip to establish a theory of

moral judgement, he is also expecting that this position be maintained universally and at all times, without question and without respect to cultural boundaries. This therefore is the relativist paradox; it seeks to establish itself on an absolutist pedestal, and so is inconsistent.

This same inconsistency can be seen from yet another perspective, for ethical relativism may be argued from three other propositions:

(1) that 'right' means (i.e. can only be coherently understood as 'right for a given society',

(2) that 'right for a given society' is to be understood in a functionalist sense (that is, in terms of the uses that which is right fulfils to the given society);

and (3) that, therefore, it is wrong for people in one society to condemn, interfere with etc. the values of another society.

Following this argument closely we see that relativism makes a claim in its third proposition, about what is right and wrong in one's dealings with other societies, which uses a non-relative sense of 'right' not allowed for in the first proposition. For if 'right' means 'right for a given society', 'wrong' also means 'wrong for a given society'. But to say, as in proposition (3) above, that it is wrong for people in one society to condemn etc. the values of another society is to use a concept of rightness (or wrongness) which is general or universal, and not just limited to a given society. "x is 'right for' p" (when p is a given society), which is enjoined in the first proposition, is not the same as "Among p 'x is right'" which is enjoined in the third. To say, for example, 'Human sacrifice is right for the Bakis' is not the same as saying 'Human sacrifice is right among the Bakis'. The latter is employing a universal sense of right which is not enjoined in

the former. What is being argued is that in saying 'Human sacrifice is right for the Bakis' for instance, the relativist is saying what is right in relation to the Bakis. He is saying, as it were, that the Bakis enjoy human sacrifice, or that it does them good to sacrifice or be sacrificed, and so on. But when he says 'Human sacrifice is right among the Bakis, he is saying that human sacrifice is right when practised in the midst of the Bakis, or in Bakiland. And these are not one and the same thing. So when the relativist says 'Human sacrifice is right among the Bakis' to mean that human sacrifice is right for them, he is trying to establish a relative sense of right by employing 'right' with non-relative sense. And this is what he does in proposition (3) of his argument: he is employing a non-relative morality of tolerance and non-interference to establish a view of morality as relative.

From these analyses we can conclude that both in what we described as the extremist views of the ethical relativist thesis and what seems to be the moderate view problems arise which strongly suggest that there may be something conceptually wrong with the relativist thesis itself.

In trying to find out what this might be let us go back to the two theses on which we say the theory is established. The 'diversity' thesis, to refresh our memory, asserts that throughout the world and throughout history there has been an incredible diversity of cultural patterns as well as a diversity of rules and practices, with a remarkable absence of universals. We do not wish to dispute this since it is clearly an empirical truth (although our argument earlier in this chapter shows that in spite of all this diversity men share common basic 'human' nature which tends to make them desire the same values). Customs do indeed vary between countries and communities and

it is obvious that there is no one sort of universally accepted valid custom. Customs are therefore neither universal nor absolute, but rather all customs are equally valid in the sense that one custom is valid to the people that possess it while another is valid to another group. The validity of customs is binding on persons within a specific cultural group and this need not apply cross-culturally. It may therefore be reasonable to feel that cross-cultural comparisons and evaluations of customs are both absurd and improper. So the principle of limited validity may be properly said to apply at the category of cultures and customs of peoples. But the question still remains whether it follows necessarily that this principle will apply 'ipso facto' in ethical considerations.

It is here that we take up an issue with ethical relativism, for what the relativist wants us to do seems to be to lift the principle of limited validity bodily from the category of culture on to that of ethics. It is doubtful whether such a procedure would not involve a serious category-shift, and if it does then we can claim to have pinned down on what is wrong with the relativist thesis. But such a suspicion cannot be valid if, as the 'dependency' thesis claims, moral values are only just a phase of, or derivable from, the pattern of culture. For if they are, there will be no point in insisting that a principle which applied to the whole should not apply to one of its phases or its derivative. So now we come back to our original question: Is morality necessarily a part of culture? Or, in other words, Does morality derive from culture?

There is no doubt that this is a vast question which would demand detailed investigation and appraisal of the relationship between social anthropology and ethics, and that such a demand cannot be satisfactorily met in this thesis. But still we can make a few

observations, namely those arising from our foregoing argument, and we hope that they will help us establish the charge of a category-mistake as a valid and substantive one.

First we observe a similarity between the claims of the 'dependency' thesis and the logical-connection thesis of those we had depicted hard-line naturalists, and we postulate an answer to the present question which is similar to the one given to the logical-connection claim. But we shall come back to this.

In granting that the principle of limited validity is applicable in the consideration of culture, we observed that the validity of customs is binding on persons within a given culture-area: indeed customs are no customs unless they are binding on people. But when we say they are binding we cannot mean anything other than that they are morally binding; for any culture will faze out unless persons within it feel obligated to it, that is, morally bound to preserve it. And this reminds us of our argument from the generalization principle (Chapter II); for unless there is a feeling among the individual members of a culture-group that the consequences would be disastrous if everyone broke the rules they would not think they were themselves bound not to break them. So customs - and, in general, the so-called pattern of culture - are maintained through our acceptance of moral principles. This is perhaps why it was not logically possible for the ethical relativist to establish his position without recourse to the moral principles of toleration, respect and understanding, and to the notion of 'right', all on the absolutist scale. Such principles as tolerance, respect for persons and understanding cannot just be taken as customs for, if they are, their validity can not be cross-cultural; but as it is, they are meaningless, even to the relativist, if their applicability and validity are not cross-cultural.

If, as we have argued, culture considerations need the moral notion of bindingness for their even being sustained, it would follow that morality, or moral values, can neither be derived from, nor be part of, culture; for, in either case it would be absurd to think so. It is, in fact, because morality has such a notion as that of bindingness that customs, qua elements of culture, are valid; if there is no morality, there would of course be no moral notions.

It may be recalled that the only condition we had for questioning the charge of a category-shift against ethical relativism was that the relativist claims that morality is, after all, either derived from or a part of culture, so cannot claim differential treatment with regard to the applicability of the principle of limited validity. Now, if our foregoing arguments are valid and morality is neither a part of nor a derivative of culture, then we maintain that it is a logical error to apply a principle to ethical considerations merely on the grounds that they also apply to cultural considerations.

We had postulated that the relativist claim that morality derives from culture is similar to the logical-connection claim of the naturalists. But in answering the relativist question our arguments have led us to go beyond the mere suggestion that morality does not derive from culture to the further claim that the reverse is, in fact, the more likely, that is, that our attitudes to culture are determined by morality. In addition to what we have said about bindingness, we have already seen that ethical relativists need moral principles - particularly those of tolerance, respect for persons and understanding - to make their case tenable. These principles enjoin us, ceteris paribus, to respect and tolerate the customs and moral beliefs of others. We also observe a further way our attitudes to culture are determined by morality: morality sets the limits to culture by criticizing

and repudiating on moral grounds, certain customs, such as human sacrifice, racial discrimination etc. which are sometimes absorbed into the culture. So morality serves as a kind of control-factor to culture. Thus the claim to n-Factor made by the relativist in premiss (a) of his thesis is invalid.

To say that the principle of limited validity does not apply to moral conditions is, in fact, another way of saying that moral values or truths are not relative, since that principle, as we have seen, can, by definition, only apply where validity is relative. So it follows that our arguments so far have led us to the further important conclusion that moral truths, unlike cultural truths are non-relative.

But why did the relativist not know this? We suggest that this was because all the time he had not recognized that moral rules behaved differently from moral principles. In his 'diversity' thesis he had pointed out - and we did concede it as an empirical truth - that moral rules and practices are diverse and do not apply universally. We also saw that in his attempt to establish this in a theory of moral justification he had to resort to moral principles, and that for those principles to be valid for his purposes, he could not but have them apply universally rather than relatively. This state of affairs reveals a characteristic of moral rules and principles which we pointed out in Chapter II, namely, that moral rules and practices apply only generally and therefore may change with times and circumstances while moral principles apply always and are not affected by times and circumstances, including geographical and cultural barriers. This point should be fairly clear with respect to local rules (as we defined them in Chapter II) since varying at different times and places is in fact their defining feature. With fundamental rules however, it may not be

so obvious. Yet, the fact, for instance, that in some societies it may not be wrong to lie, or at least is not thought so, is not inconsistent with the rule that we ought not to lie - which implies that lying is only generally wrong. For the rule does not say it is always wrong to lie, but that under some circumstances (which may prevail in certain societies) the presumption of the rule may be inoperative.

Ethical relativism does not seem to recognize this distinction, for although moral rules and practices may be said to be 'relative' to a considerable extent, moral principles are not; that is why, although the relativist was quick to point out that rules and practices are relative, he found it impossible to apply moral principles without making them non-relative. Moral principles are therefore non-relative and, since it is they which carry the moral truths which are disseminated by the moral rules, it would be mistaken to take them as relative.

But even then we still think the relativist stakes too much on the fact that some moral rules and practices may be described as 'relative'. He builds on the question-begging assumption that if a certain practice prevails in a certain place, then it is necessarily right in that place, and that if a rule is not recognized by the members of a certain culture-group, then it does not apply to them. We had discussed the second part of this assumption earlier in this chapter when we tried to amend Professor Danto's 'application conditions' to 'Conditions of intelligibility', and argued that even though a moral rule may not be intelligible to us it still applies to us. We do not need to go through that argument here. For the first part of the assumption, namely, that whatever practice prevails in a place is right in that place, we should say that that assumption is self-contradictory. For on it one could justify oneself in doing anything whatsoever merely by refusing to recognize any rule against it or by inculcating

a taste for it. But doing this would make nonsense of the notion of justification on whose pretext the action was performed. And once again we are reminded of the excesses of the positive dimension of ethical relativism and its destruction of the principle of validity. It is therefore one thing to record a practice and another to determine its moral standing. The mere existence of a belief does not make the belief true, for every truth-claim must of necessity be a dualism; that is to say, it must provide for the possibility of error. So the chances of a belief being false can always be entertained; and in the same way, the chances of a practice being wrong can always be entertained.

Having shown that ethical truths are non-relative, we may now go a step further to show that they are indeed absolute. Beliefs are expressed in propositions, which may be true or false. Thus when I say 'There are two universities in the city of Glasgow' or 'The Equator is colder than the Arctic', I express in each case a belief, which may be true or false. Indeed where there are no beliefs, there would neither be truth nor falsity; so truth and falsity may be said to be bound up with beliefs.

Although truth and falsity are bound up with beliefs, it is observed that they always depend upon something else, some fact, which lies outside the belief itself, for their validity. If I believe that there are two universities in Glasgow, I believe truly; but this truth is not established by merely explaining the belief, but by a geographical fact - the fact that there are two universities in Glasgow - which is unconnected with the belief, unconnected in the sense that it is true whether I believe it or not. In the same way, I believe falsely that the Equator is colder than the Arctic, and this falsity is established

by the fact that the Equator is colder than the Arctic whether I believe it or not. (In these examples truth and falsity are established empirically.)

Truth and falsity are therefore not intrinsic qualities of beliefs; they are rather extrinsic to them. Thus although they are properties of beliefs, they are properties depending upon the relations of the belief to other factors - including perhaps other beliefs - not upon the internal quality of the belief itself, nor upon the circumstances in which it is held. Thus that a moral belief is held within certain contexts and circumstances, e.g. certain cultures, does not make that belief depend upon those cultures for its truth or falsity. It depends on some fact extrinsic to the belief itself and the circumstances in which it is held: it depends on some moral fact. If a society believes that human sacrifice is wrong, for instance, the truth of this belief neither depends on the fact that they believe it, nor on the circumstances in which they do so, but on the fact that human sacrifice is wrong (or right) whether they hold the belief or not<sup>17</sup>.

Beliefs by their nature can only be held by people, but we see that although that a belief is held necessarily depends upon the mind which holds it, whether it is true or false does not depend on that mind, nor on any other. Truth and falsity are in this sense therefore absolute, being not at all affected by the mind which holds them and having little to do with the circumstances in which they are held. Moral truths are therefore absolute truths and although culture may provide the environment in which they are held, it cannot control their validity. And this also explains why they can be cross-cultural.

In conclusion we see that the ethical relativist is making one great demand of us: he is asking us to apply the principle of limited validity in moral judgements because, he argues, moral truths

are relatively valid. But in spite of the question-begging character of this demand on the notion of tolerance, we find that this principle, which is no doubt applicable in the judgement of customs of peoples, is hardly applicable to ethics. This is because we think that people's ethics are neither the same as, nor are derived from, their customs. So we reject the principle especially as its adoption is most likely to involve us in some category-mistake. Moreover the relationship of morality and culture seems a vast one and should be studied more closely before one takes such a prescription. But meanwhile our arguments show that culture is much more likely to depend for its establishment and validity on morality than the other way round, that moral principles are non-relative, and that moral truths (or moral values) are absolute rather than relative.

Let us now sum up what has been argued in this chapter. It has been shown how two 'objective' theories have failed in their attempt to achieve objectivism.

As an objectivist theory, ethical naturalism seeks to establish objectivity in natural facts. If morality is explained in terms of natural facts, the question of what the connection may be between these facts and morality (or our moral judgements) would naturally arise, and it is this vital question that ethical naturalists have sought to answer. Naturalist philosophers differ here. Philosophers such as Foot and Warnock see a logical connection while Danto and Downie posit a synthetic one. The logical connection does not make room for autonomy, neither of morality itself nor of the moral agent, and does not explain the problem of moral disagreements, for, by it, disagreements either do not need to arise at all, since our moral judgements are based on facts which can be empirically verifiable, or, if they arise, they are self-contradictory since we cannot accept the

factual premisses without accepting the moral conclusions that arise from them. The synthetic-connection view is more liberal in this, for by it moral judgements have only asymmetrical relationship with natural facts, and are therefore not defined by them. Moral disputes are therefore possible and the moral individual is not as determined by the natural facts as in the logical-connection view. But, by its contingent leaning, this view makes natural facts too weak to form a basis for objectivity. Forms-of-life naturalism is not engaged in solving the problem of a connection; indeed it is opposed to the thesis that morality can be defined in or deduced from human good and harm. It rather engages in solving the question of moral disagreements. Moral disagreements, according to it, can be explained in the belief that those who are involved in them must come from different forms of life. But the notion of forms-of-life is rather nebulous to begin with, and cannot be identified even by its proponents unless, as we see, through moral disagreements, which is the opposite of what they set out to do. We reject all the forms of naturalism discussed - both the ones answering the question of a connection and the one answering that of disagreements, for none of these questions is satisfactorily answered by the theory. Morality, as we see it, cannot be explained in terms of natural facts, either by taking moral decisions as deduced from facts of human good and harm, or by defining morality in the amelioration of the human condition. We accept the invaluable naturalist opinion that moral judgements are not random, nor are they mere expressions of emotion, but rather that they have a background and are based on reason, and that people cannot just make up their own reasons. We accept that there is a connection between the human nature or situation and morality, but we think that this is going to be a metaphysical one, for even the synthetic-connection thesis tends

therefore  
to be prudential and fails to give us a satisfactory reason for being moral. So the objectivity we are looking for will be non-naturalist.

In relation to ethical relativism, we reject also that morality is part of, or can be deduced from, culture, and that we can establish moral objectivity by arguing from culture. We therefore reject the claim that morality is relative. Moral truths or values are absolute - absolute in the sense that they are not conditioned by our social environment: they are cross-cultural.

So we reject both ethical naturalism and ethical relativism because we think they are theories whose entire objectivist viewpoints do not <sup>clearly</sup> point to the way to objectivity in morality.

#### Notes and References

1. (a) "Moral Arguments" (MA) Mind 67, 1958. Culled from The Definition of Morality ed., Wallace, G. and Walker, A.D. Methuen 1970. pp.174-187. Page-references refer to this volume.  
(b) "Moral Beliefs" (MB) : Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (PAS) 59, 1958-59. Culled from The Is/Ought Question ed. Hudson, W.D. Macmillan 1969. pp.196ff to which page-references refer.  
(c) "Goodness and Choice" (GC) : PAS 35, 1961. pp. 45ff. Symposium with A. Montefiore.
2. 'On Morality's Having a Point' (MHP): Phillips, D.Z. and Mounce, H.O. Page-reference are to pagination in The Is/Ought Question. p.228ff.
- 2a. Hare, as we saw in Chapter III shares the emotivist belief that words have 'pro-attitudes' and 'con-attitudes'. The weaknesses of this position have been discussed in that chapter.
3. It is an objectivist claim that no one can set up just any sort of behaviour as virtue, and any objectivist would agree with that.

But some objectivists would not accept the doctrine of 'internal relation' which makes it word-abuse not to accept that moral concepts are inextricably bound up with human good and harm. The doctrine of 'internal relation' is one of the main doctrines of the coherence theory of truth. By holding to this doctrine the naturalist sees moral truth as truth only within a coherent system. This, as we saw in Chapter II, implies that he does not employ ultimate principles in moral justification.

4. G.J. Warnock: Contemporary Moral Philosophy. op.cit.
5. E. Loudfoot describes this as the 'decision-situation-problem' in "Morality and the Human Condition": Ratio XVII No.1. June 1975. p.113.
6. Roger Trigg: Reason and Commitment: Cambridge (1973).
7. S.E. Toulmin: The Place of Reason in Ethics. Cambridge (1950).
8. P. Winch: The Idea of a Social Science (1958/1976) RKP.
- 8a. R.W. Beardsmore: Moral Reasoning RKP.
9. The 'Is/Ought' problem is a key problem in Moral Philosophy and a lot of controversy has gone into it, as can be seen in the volume edited by W.D. Hudson, already referred to. We do not think it necessary to wade into this controversy so the arguments we use here are independent considerations (not drawn from any of the parties in conflict) which are put forward to help us develop a critical survey of ethical naturalism.

11. We referred to this argument earlier when we were trying to explain that 'You ought not to take heroin' does not follow logically from 'heroin injures your health'. 'He ought to give up smoking because it injures his health' = 'He ought to give up smoking because it injures the heart, and injury to the heart affects the lungs, and lungs so affected are subject to cancer', and so on.
12. It follows from this that we accept the Naturalistic Fallacy, at least, that slant of Moore's Theory which claims that there is a mistake in offering the definition of a non-natural quality in terms of natural qualities. We do not think it necessary to discuss Moore here, not only because of the well-known logical problems in his analysis which make his ethical position so controversial, but because that part of it which is relevant to us is already covered by the Humean thesis to which we have already referred.
13. A.C. Danto : Mysticism and Morality. Pelican. 1976. Chapter 1.
14. R.S. Downie : Roles and Values. op.cit. Chap. 2.
15. John Beattie : Other Cultures. RKP 1964. p.67.
16. S. Kierkegaard : Fear and Trembling. OUP 1939. p.34.
17. This is why we argued in Chapter II that local rules which are justified by coherence, are only ultimately justified when they are seen as ultimately based in the fundamental moral rules, which do not depend for their justification on local conditions.

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PAS XXVIII. 1954 (Symposium with J.Harrison).
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- 7a. Harman, G.: The Nature of Morality. Oxford. 1977.
8. Hudson, W.D.(ed.): The Is/Ought Question. Macmillan. 1973.
9. Hume : A Treatise of Human Nature Part III. Sec.1.
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- 10a. Loudfoot, E.: 'Morality and the Human Condition'. Ratio,  
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11. Montefiore, A.: 'Goodness and Choice' - PAS XXXV, 1961.  
(Symposium with Foot).
12. Moore, G.E.: Principia Ethica. Cambridge 1903 (1976).
- 12a. Perry, T.D.: Moral Reasoning and Truth. Oxford Clarendon 1975.
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16. Singer, M.: 'Moral Rules and Principles' op.cit.
- 16a. Swinburne, R.G.: 'The Objectivity of Morality'. Philosophy 51, 1976.
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Methuen 1970.
19. Warnock, G.J.: Contemporary Moral Philosophy. op.cit.
20. " " : The Object of Morality. Methuen, 1971.
21. White, A.R.: Modal Thinking. Blackwell. 1975.
22. Williams, B.O. : Morality. op.cit.

## CHAPTER V

### QUASI-OBJECTIVE THEORIES (B) : THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL THEORIES - ETHICAL RELATIVISM, MORAL SENSE, ETHICAL INTUITIONISM

#### 1.

The first question to be considered in this chapter is whether moral judgements could be regarded as analytic propositions. If they could, then our answer to such a question as 'How do we know what things are right and wrong?' would be a simple one. We would know that certain things were right because, if we were to say that they were not, we could be contradicting ourselves. Thus no more than just logical insight, or a capacity to recognize logical contradictions when we come across them, would be necessary in order to know what things were right and what things were wrong. And if we say that something can be proved to be true when we can show that to deny it is contradictory, we would, if this view were correct, be able to prove moral judgements for, if they were analytic, to deny them would result in contradictions. A view of the kind we are describing appears to have been held by Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-74), John Locke (1632-1704), and Ralph Cudworth (1617-88)<sup>1</sup>. In other words, what is involved in Ethical Rationalism is that true ethical judgements are true because they cannot be denied without contradiction. Its central theme is therefore that ethical generalizations (i.e. principles and judgements) are true by definition.

Perhaps when Hume summarily dismissed reason in morals, and preferred passion, he was opposing the claims of this theory. Hume had contended that 'the mind can never exert itself in action which we may not comprehend under the term of perception', and that

Morals excite passion, and produce or prevent actions.

Reason of itself is utterly important in this particular. The rules of morality are therefore not conclusions of our reason.

(Treatise : BK III pp.508 and 509).

Hume furthermore argued that if moral distinctions were derivable from reason (i.e. by logical reasoning or rational deduction), then to reject any moral claim would be absurdly to reject reason. Moreover in order to know the truth of the fundamental principles of morals all we would need to do would be to develop a capacity to reason logically.

I think we can develop Hume's argument further by suggesting that if ethical rationalism in his sense is true, thus moral judgements become trivial. For although such a theory has the advantage of making moral generalizations logically unimpeachable, it also exposes them to the practical danger arising from a 'meaning-by-definition' theory. If it is true by definition, for instance, that murder is wrong, then the generalization itself that murder is wrong would no longer guide us in practical decision. This is because it would then depend on the individual or society to take any type of killing as a murder or a not-murder; for since they know and accept that murder is wrong, they may not like the term 'murder' to be ascribed to any type of killing they would not like to be taken as wrong. On the other hand, any type of killing they would like to be taken as wrong would then be termed a murder by them.

In effect then it is the group (and sometimes the individual) which decides or dictates what a wrong action is. Thus the extermination of the neighbouring village could be described in any other terms but wicked if it was desired; and child sacrifice if it was prescribed by

custom, would not be murder while the execution of the Yorkshire Ripper would be a murder if it was thought he was doing a good job. On this model, could Lady Chatterley have committed adultery with Mellors, considering the conditions in her home and of Sir Clifford? The answer here would be yes or no depending on how the individual feels about it, if ethical rationalism is true, that is. Lawyers sometimes take advantage of the 'meaning-by-definition' theory in order to incriminate or exculpate litigants depending, as Hume rightly observed, on their capacity to reason logically.

At this stage it would perhaps not be an over-statement to say that the wheel of moral justification has turned full circle and we are right at the brinks of subjectivism; for 'what is right' would then depend on individual decision and moral principles would be a matter of taste and feeling.

It may be true that the statement 'murder is wrong' or 'fornication is wrong' is unimpeachable, that is, it cannot indeed be denied without contradiction. Perhaps this may be because the words 'murder' and 'fornication', and such other words, have acquired emotive effect through usage such that 'murder is right' sounds somehow absurd. But certainly 'human killing is wrong' can be denied (and so can 'promise-breaking is wrong', as we shall see when we discuss Intuitionism), hence it is easy to switch back and forth at will between murder and human killing, if we hold on to this theory. Moral judgements and principles lose their effect if we can play around with them in this way.

There is a further problem. If one tries to make a proposition like 'fornication is wrong' logically unassailable by defining fornication in such a way that what is not wrong is not fornication,

one in fact fails to guarantee the truth of what was originally meant to be asserted by the sentence that fornication is wrong. The proposition that is true now, namely, that what is not wrong is not fornication, does not make the same assertion as the original proposition, just as it is not the same to say 'come here' as to say 'do not go elsewhere,' although the intention may be the same.

The situation in which the theory of ethical rationalism has left us in is one in which we either reject it as a theory that may help us establish morality objectively, or we reject such moral principles as 'murder is wrong', 'fornication is wrong', 'stealing is wrong', and so on, which lend themselves to meaning-by-definition, and become trivial in the process. No moral principles can be both guaranteed by logic and be of practical significance. It may be possible that the feeling that there are such principles is due to an unconscious conflation of two propositions - as in the present one, the proposition 'fornication is wrong', which is not trivial but is also not logically unassailable, and the proposition 'what is wrong is not fornication' which is trivial but is logically unassailable.

We conclude this discussion of ethical rationalism not just with the negative point that ethical rationalism cannot be accepted because moral judgements cannot be analytic, insofar as they are substantial and action-guiding or practical. We can also draw the positive conclusion that moral judgements must be synthetic, insofar as the categories of 'analytic' and 'synthetic' exhaust the logical possibilities here. To draw this positive conclusion, however, still leaves us with the problem of how synthetic moral judgements can communicate the necessity of a moral demand. We have simply denied that this necessity is logical and will later take up the question of

whether there can be a moral necessity, as unique in its own way as logical necessity is in its way. In short our discussion of ethical rationalism has uncovered the problem of whether there can be synthetic judgements which are also a priori. We shall pursue this later (Part Two, Section 5), but in the meantime let us turn to a theory which tries to construe moral judgement on the model not of logical deduction but of perception.

## 2.

Unlike Ethical Rationalism, Moral Sense theory is based on perception. Frances Hutcheson (1694-1746), one of its greatest exponents, appealed to introspection in order to bring<sup>out</sup> the claim of the theory. He argued that "when men consult their own breasts, they find that they are affected in a distinctive way by what is morally good or evil"<sup>2</sup>. If, for instance, he argued, men are helped by generous friends or see others so helped, they 'sense' such actions quite differently from actions motivated by self-interest or good fortune. He defined the moral sense as the power to receive perceptions other than those of advantage -

We must ... certainly have other perceptions of moral actions than those of advantage: and that power of receiving these perceptions may be called a moral sense ... (ibid).

The moral sense philosophers believed that the moral faculty must be a sense because their presuppositions were those of Locke's empiricist epistemology. Locke had taught that the ultimate irreducible materials of thinking are simple ideas supplied by sensation or reflection. External objects are apprehended by sensations, the

operations of our minds, by reflection. Moral ideas seemed to Hutcheson to be 'simple ideas', in Locke's sense, and moral perceptions immediate as those of taste or colour. The moral sense is like other senses in that it cannot be masked by self-interest. Motives of self-interest may give cause to a moral act, but these motives "have no more influence upon us to make us approve it than a physician's advice has to make a nauseous potion pleasant to the taste...".

Moral sense theorists claim that we can perceive good and bad, right and wrong, much as one can perceive, say, dirt in his dirty handkerchief, or as one perceives a red thing or a blue one.

It is quite easy to object to this claim merely on the ground that there is no sense organ connected with perceiving moral qualities, but that would not be enough to dismiss the claim for, as even Hutcheson himself observed, the presence of physical sense organs such as ears and eyes in our ordinary sense-perception does not eliminate the epistemological problems posed by the perceptual processes, so even if we had organs for moral sense perception, we would still be facing the same problems of perception which give rise to questions of reality and appearance. Moreover it must also be conceded that it is only contingent that we perceive by means of sense organs; indeed it would be possible to perceive without them if the relevant areas of the brain are appropriately stimulated, unless of course we include the brain among the sense organs.

Conceding that we do not necessarily have to use a moral sense organ to obtain moral perception, yet a moral sense theory is beset with problems. For, normally when we perceive that anything possesses some property it is because we perceive that thing: we perceive that that

book is red because we perceive that book. Redness does not exist outside the book, so the moral sense theorist needs in the first place to explain how he perceives moral properties the way colours are perceived when he does not perceive morality as we perceive a coloured object. He could not argue like Berkeley that we can perceive properties of physical objects without perceiving the objects, because, as we shall see, it is not the same thing to say that a book is red as it is to say that an act is wrong: the former is a report of an experience while the latter is a report of a judgement. The same argument therefore which may make us perceive the properties of physical objects without perceiving the objects themselves cannot be used to explain that we perceive moral properties without perceiving morality itself. But the theorist can claim that he perceives moral situations, and that when he perceives a moral situation, say, a man taking possession of what does not belong to him, he will perceive that stealing is wrong. This claim can be answered (as we did in Chapter III on the discussion of Prescriptivism by the fact that it is not always so, since we can and do pass moral judgements on people or situations we do not and never really see, if we have sufficient information about them.

But a moral sense theorist may contend this. He may argue that just as I can see T without hearing him, or touch T without seeing him, so I can perceive T with my moral sense even though I cannot perceive him with any other of my senses. Alternatively he may argue that we may know that unperceived men are good just as we know that unperceived swans are white or unperceived gold is yellow. This argument would show that in order to know whether some act is

right or wrong I would need at some time to have perceived someone perform it, for, as Hutcheson points out in the definition we cited, moral sense is set off when we perceive some performing, say, of generosity or wickedness. But this would be question-begging, for, how could we know a good or a bad action if we saw someone perform it unless we had had prima facie knowledge of what a good or a bad action was like? Yet this knowledge of what a good or a bad action was like is what the theory is claiming to establish. So our contention holds still: we do pass moral judgements without actually 'perceiving' the moral situation which we judge.

This leads us to what might seem to be the main problem of the moral sense theory - the problem of the distinction between our knowledge of ethical properties and our knowledge of physical properties.

There is an important difference between a situation's being good or bad, right or wrong, and its having physical (or perceptual) properties. Ethical properties such as 'good' or 'right' depend on certain qualities of a person or a situation, while physical properties do not. What we refer to as 'certain qualities' on which ethical properties depend are the moral claims of the agent, or the nature of a moral situation. Thus if I have information about Jones's moral character, I can decide for myself whether Jones is a good man or not, or whether what he has done is right or wrong. But no amount of information about Jones's physical properties would enable me decide for myself the colour of his hair, or his height. I cannot say, for instance, 'Jones is tall and slim, has a round face and brown eyes; therefore Jones has red hair'. Some people may be able to do this, probably, by some inductive generalization which would, in any case,

be possible only if they had had some previous experience of the rest of the physical properties of men of Jones's description; but even then that would be by mere speculation and guesswork. But I can say 'Jones is always beating his wife and children at the ~~fast~~ provocation; he must be a wicked man'.

What we are saying is that moral properties are not part of what we can perceive in a moral subject or situation; they do not 'reside' in it as dirt may be said to 'reside' in a dirty handkerchief. We cannot 'see' 'good' in a good act. Moral properties such as 'good' or 'right' come about only when we judge a situation.

Because our moral judgements do not depend on, and are not mere reports of perceptual experience, I can say 'this is an act of wanton malice, therefore, it is wrong'. For, just as in the case of Jones's hair (above) I cannot make such a remark about my perceptual experience. I cannot say, for instance, 'this cricket ball is hard and made of leather, therefore, it is grey'; for grey too has to be observed before we can say that the ball is grey; it does not 'follow from' any of the properties of the cricket ball as 'wrong' follows from the moral property of malice. Neither 'malice' nor 'wrong' is perceived in the act as we perceive the properties of the cricket ball, and it is because the properties of the cricket ball are perceptual that we can depend on perception for any report we make about the cricket ball.

Also I can see a cricket ball in front of me, and yet not know nor be able to tell whether it is hard or soft, or made of leather (unless of course we infer from its being a cricket ball that it must be hard and made of leather but we cannot make such inference for balls

in general). For just as the other properties of the cricket ball cannot make us infer its colour, its colour cannot make us infer its other properties. Thus while I can say that I know nothing more about the cricket ball except that it is grey, I cannot say that I know nothing more about the moral subject X, or the situation t, except that X is a bad man or that t is wrong. Physical properties enjoy an independence which moral properties do not. I can say about the ball because I can perceive its greyness independent of any other thing about it (except perhaps its shape which is already given in the fact that it is a ball). I cannot say about the moral situation t or moral subject X because I cannot 'perceive' badness or wrongness independent of other reasons which constitute the evidence for any judgement that X is a bad man or that situation t is a morally wrong one.

We have seen that ethical properties such as good or right are not known, and do not behave, like perceptual properties such as colours, sizes, and so on. The reason for this may lie in the fact that although judgements involve experience, they are not mere reports of experience. They express a logical relation. Let us explain.

Now suppose <sup>that</sup> what I thought to be a grey cricket ball came to be a red one after all, I would at once proceed to alter my report to read my new (and, as I think) correct perception, without creating any logical problem. But I would be creating one if I altered my judgement of a moral situation (e.g. a man's conduct) in the same way. This is because my ascription of 'grey' to the cricket ball was not dependent upon other grounds outside my own immediate perception of the ball: what looked grey to me is really a red thing, that is all. If I find that I am grossly mistaken about my judgement of X, say, I

now discover that he has been a good man after all, I shall pass a new judgement on him, but this practice will surely not be of the same character as in the case of the cricket ball. My new judgement is not a change in my immediate perception of X, but a change brought about by a rational judgemental process - a logical procedure. It would not be just that I now find<sup>3</sup> X to be good, but that I now judge him good, for the evidence that I have for judging X good cannot be the same as I had for judging him bad; indeed I would not just be altering my judgement, but would be rectifying it<sup>4</sup>.

A change from bad to good in the judgement of a moral situation is not like a change from grey to red: it is a logical process, and it is because the process of a moral judgement is a logical one that we cannot alter our moral judgements at random. They are conclusions we arrive at through premisses and we cannot alter our conclusions without altering the premisses from which we arrive at them. This is not to say that we can alter our perceptual reports at random - we cannot just decide, for example, that the grey cricket ball is now red unless there is evidence that our perception had deceived us at first. What is meant is that we can alter a perceptual report without committing any logical offence because our report was in the first place not based on logical reasoning but on immediate perception of objects.

It follows from what has been said that if X is good and Y resembles X (i.e. if all Y's actions are similar to X's) in every respect, then Y must be also good. If action c is right, then also action a which precisely resembles c is also right. But this need not be so in the case of perceptual properties. We can perceive that cricket

ball a and cricket ball b are similar in all respects except that one is hard and the other soft.

Good and bad, right and wrong are only applied as a consequence of some other characteristics- this is why we do not consider them independent properties. These characteristics are the premisses in the judgement and, as one of these premisses, at least, must be a moral one, if the judgement is to be a moral one, we cannot 'perceive' their premisses without begging the question of how we come to know a moral property. So the main problem of moral sense theory remains - it confuses physical perception with moral judgement, what is perceptible with what is not.

Shaftesbury and Hutcheson believed that moral judgements were clear-cut and indispensable, and what they were trying to do was to account for the faculty which discerned them. And since our most reliable guides to the notion of objective reality are the elemental data of our senses, they thought, the moral faculty must be a sense. In our arguments we have tried to show that it is not.

### 3.

Another set of philosophers<sup>5</sup> of the same period however thought differently from the moral sense philosophers: they were more sceptical. They contended that the deliverances of the moral faculty were more certain than the moral sense view could allow. It is conceivable that our senses should have been other than they are and that the reality which we experience through them should be other than it seems to us to be. So if moral intuitions are attributed to a sense, they thought, it becomes conceivable that they also could have been

other than they are, or could mislead us, since our senses sometimes do mislead us. This is what these philosophers could not have; to them it would have meant conceding, not only that promise-breaking, for instance, might have seemed to us to be right, but that it could conceivably have been right. This latter, they said, is as inconceivable as that two and two should not make four, or the whole not be greater than one of its parts:

... 'tis as absurd and blameworthy to mistake negligently plain right and wrong ... as it would be absurd and ridiculous for a man in arithmetical matters ignorantly to believe that twice two is not equal to four or wilfully and obstinately to contend, against his own clear knowledge, that the whole is not equal to all its parts.<sup>5a</sup>

To what then shall we attribute the givenness or objective reality of morality if not to a sense? Cartesian intuitionism gave them the answer. According to this philosophy the ultimate logical constituents of reasoning are clear and distinct ideas which cannot conceivably be other than they are. These are apprehended by reason, or understanding, in its intuitive function just as axioms in Euclidean mathematics.

Intuitionism can be seen in another perspective. By investigating ethical rationalism we have seen that logic alone cannot guarantee the truth of any of our moral premisses unless it is analytic; and that, if it is analytic, no practically useful conclusion can be deduced from it. Intuitionists have held that there are certain moral

judgements which, though they are synthetic (i.e. not analytic), can just be seen to be true without the need of embarking upon the infinite regress which apparently arises from trying to establish ultimate principles from yet other judgements from which they may be deduced. These philosophers have held that although moral judgements, such as, 'lying is wrong', 'promise-keeping is right', and so on, are synthetic, we can nevertheless, if we reflect upon them, apprehend that they are necessarily true, without our having to produce any reasons for them. Since our knowledge of such propositions, according to this theory, is a question of insight, rather than of collecting empirical evidence which supports them, our moral knowledge, if this theory is true, will be a priori. Since what we have insight into, according to this theory, is that promise-breaking, lying or stealing cannot be right, moral judgements if the theory is correct, will also be necessarily true. So in intuitionism we have a theory which seeks to establish moral judgements by claiming that they are synthetic/a priori propositions.

The 18th century philosopher, Richard Price (1723-91) observes that when we consider "the two angles made by one right line standing in any direction on another", we perceive "agreement between them and two right angles"<sup>6</sup>. This agreement, he says, is equality. What Price means is that when we perceive two lines meeting in such a way as to give two adjacent angles, we 'intuit' a new simple 'idea' - the idea of equality - between what we perceive and two right angles, although equality is not shown in the linear diagram that we perceive. This new idea is clear and distinct and, according to Price, "shines by its own light": it is self-evident.

This thought led to two conclusions:

(1) that just as geometrical proof is constituted by appeals to what is axiomatic, moral reasoning, where valid, breaks down into

intuitions, such as, that it is right to keep a promise.

(2) That in such self-evident moral ideas we necessarily apprehend the nature or essence of things, for we cannot logically have any grounds for doubting that what self-evidently appears to be the case is really the case. Thus moral judgements are immediately certain, and cannot be doubted.

In the present century the intuitionist position has been held by G.E. Moore, H.A. Prichard and W.D. Ross, and later, by A.C. Ewing, among others. In Principia Ethica, Moore has taken up the question "What is the property for which 'good' stands?", which he takes as the principal question of ethics. "If I am asked 'what is good?'," he asserts, "my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it" (p.6). Although Moore did not like to be called an "Intuitionist" his claim that 'good' is simple, non-natural and unanalysable is basically intuitionist. His view about 'right' and 'duty' and 'obligation' (and he does not distinguish between them) is however, more demonstrative.

Moore thinks that rightness is definable. It is definable in terms of goodness; for in any situation the right course of action for any agent to adopt is, by definition, that course of action which will, as a matter of fact, produce the greatest amount of good possible in the circumstances. It is clear that on this view of Moore's, there is a vast difference of principle between questions about what is right, and about what is good. In the latter case there is no reasoning to be done, no investigation to be carried out. All

we can do is attend very carefully to that about which the question 'Is it good?' is asked, mentally isolating it from other things so far as is possible, and carefully discriminating its several properties one from another. Then we shall simply 'see' (not of course literally 'see') that it has the property of goodness, or alternately, that it has not. With the question 'Is this action right?', on the other hand, the case is very different. Our approach should be teleological - we shall look for what will be the most favourable surplus of good over bad.

So Moore's intuitionist position comes out. He implies that questions of what is good should be handed over, without any reference to reasons, experience, authority, or even thought, to the personal intuition of each individual. All moral problems, on this view, have ultimately to do with the possession and non-possession of just one quality - goodness. We are to intuit its presence or absence in each moral situation, and indeed Moore holds that to the discriminatingly intuitive eye its presence or absence is simply self-evident.

In his paper "Does Morality Rest on a Mistake?" (Mind 1912) Prichard argues that it does rest on a mistake, and gives his reasons for his contention.

He argues that we are always inclined to ask a question which indeed is the origin of moral philosophy - namely, whether something we think to be our duty or are told is our duty really is our duty. Or we ask why we should do it. Prichard answers very much the same as Moore, that there is no reason why some action which is my duty is my duty, except precisely that it is my duty; similarly,

there is no reason, except that it is my duty, why I ought to do it. Consequently he repudiates any talk about its being conducive to happiness, thereby disagreeing with Moore, and sounding Kantian: for even if the action is productive of happiness, he argues, that is not why it is my duty. So if the inquirer asks 'Is p my duty?', what we need do is to make him consider, as clearly and as carefully as he can, what the action is, then he will 'see', that the action is his duty, or alternately, is not. There is no need to look for arguments which constitute answers to the inquirer's question. In order to free ourselves from the insidious and misguided inclination to look for arguments, Prichard says we must realize the self-evidence of our obligations, i.e. the immediacy of our apprehension of them (p.27). Or, to put the matter generally, if we doubt whether there is really an obligation to originate A in situation B, the remedy lies, not in any process of general thinking, but in getting face to face with a particular instance of situation B, and then directly appreciating the obligation to originate A in that situation (p.28; and also Moral Obligation (1949) pp.16-17).

In later writings Prichard thinks that obligatoriness is not a character of actions: it is sui generis, that is, unique. So there seems to be no room, on his view, even for the kind of reasoning which Moore had envisaged; for whereas Moore had held that the rightness of an action consisted in its producing the greatest possible good, Prichard holds that rightness is sui generis exactly as goodness is, and like goodness on Moore's view, is simply evident to the discriminating intuitive eye.

So with Prichard we seem to have come to the zenith of

intuitionist thinking: morality is sui generis, both goodness and rightness are self-evident, and their presence in certain actions can be discerned by the intuitive eye<sup>6a</sup>.

If Prichard had been more dogmatic than Moore, Ross had been less. In his writing (The Right and the Good, 1930 (RG); Foundations of Ethics, 1939 (FE)), Ross had seemed to deviate both from Moore and from Prichard. In the first place he did not take Prichard's doctrine of the "self-evidence of our obligations" without some qualification. Perhaps he found it implausible to contend that the answer to the question 'What is it our duty to do?' must always be self-evident, for he thinks that it is only so in actions of certain kinds whose rightness is 'immediately apprehended'; such actions as promise-keeping or paying of debts. There seems to be no kind of action of which we can say without qualification that, whenever it is open to me to perform a particular action of that kind, it is my duty to do so; for, for any two kinds of action both thus asserted to be my duty, circumstances may arise, or may at any rate be imagined, in which I could perform an action of the other kind. I may be confronted with 'a conflict of duties', and in such a case, since I can perform only one of those actions, it cannot be held that it is my duty to do both, nor that, as Prichard seems to have supposed, will it be immediately obvious which is my duty to do. Hence we can only hold that actions are self-evidently 'prima facie duties' - that is, they are intuited as being such that it is a duty to perform unless that obligation conflicts with, and is overborne by, some other (RG. Chap 2; FE pp.83-4).

Secondly Ross was aware of a very strange, though unstressed

implication in Moore's doctrine and, to some degree, also in Prichard's. If it is intuited that goodness and rightness are simple, sui generis, directly intuited properties, then it would seem that the question whether something is good or right is, purely and simply, the question of whether it possesses one or the other of those properties: and it may seem that any consideration of its other properties would be simply morally irrelevant. But this is surely non-acceptable. Let us agree that the goodness of a thing is not to be identified with any of its other properties (since 'good' is undefinable), and that the rightness of an action does not simply consist in its being an action of a certain describable kind. Must it not be allowed nevertheless that the goodness of a thing somehow depends on its possession of certain other properties, that there are some other features of the action which make it a right action? Goodness and rightness, then, according to Ross, though intuitable, must be regarded as dependent or 'consequential' properties; they are not, as it were, stuck into objects and actions, nor are the other properties quite irrelevant to goodness and rightness.

With Ross's amendments then, all that is self-evident is that some action is my duty prima facie; there is room for uncertainty, and therefore for argument and disagreement, and there is uncertainty also as to whether what I am asked to do is really my duty or not. And even if the goodness of something is self-evident, directly intuited, it may still be made a question what its goodness depends upon. But the basic thesis of intuitionism - that fundamental moral truths are immediately obvious - however remains unscathed. For Ross says: "If we now turn to ask how we come to know these fundamental moral

principles, the answer seems to be that it is in the same way in which we come to know the axioms of mathematics. Both alike seem to be both synthetic and a priori .... And as in mathematics it is by intuitive induction that we grasp the general truths" (FE p.320). Moreover it seems Ross had little time to develop the theory on his new line, and to show how his new characteristics cohabit with the basic theory.

Let us now try to evaluate the intuitionist position. The claim that moral truths are known by intuition is a claim in moral epistemology, and as this claim stands unscathed even after Ross's amendments, it stands to reason that a critical examination of intuitionism begins by asking the question whether it makes sense in the first place to speak of knowing by intuition. The word 'know' usually differs in meaning from 'believe'. To know X is not simply to believe, i.e. to be convinced or feel sure, of X. Admittedly 'know' is sometimes used with some such meaning. People do sometimes say that they know when they only mean that they feel sure (i.e. believe); but this feeling may turn out to have been mistaken, which is absurd to think of if we say we 'know'. It is intelligible, therefore, in any context, to insist on a distinction between knowing and believing (or feeling sure or convinced).

When 'know' is used in accordance with this distinction between knowing and merely believing firmly, there are three conditions which must be fulfilled. I am entitled to say 'I know X' if:

- (1) X is true. I cannot, for example, know that Kenya is in Nigeria, because it is not true that it is.
- (2) I believe X. It does not make sense, for example, to say 'I know that Kenya is in East Africa, but I do not believe it.'

Thus 'to know' entails 'to believe' but is not entailed by it.

(3) I have a satisfactory answer to the question 'How do you know X?'. By 'satisfactory answer' here is meant an answer which gives me right to be sure of X. And it is this third condition by which we approach our original question 'Does it make sense to speak of knowing by intuition?'.  
 intuition?'

Now suppose I say 'I know that promise-keeping is right, and then asked 'how do you know it?', is the answer, 'by intuition' or 'it is immediately obvious to me' a satisfactory one? That is to say, does it give me the right, or put me in a position, to be sure that promise-keeping is right?

To some extent the answer to this question will depend on how we define intuition for if, as Dr. A.C. Ewing, we look at it as a process which must be called up whenever we make a claim to knowledge, then if I say that I know that promise-keeping is right by intuition I cannot be mistaken, since it follows that I include in that claim that something has been intuited. But as we are yet to investigate the impact of this definition, we shall meanwhile ignore it; and having done that, we see that the answer 'by intuition' assimilates the third condition of knowledge given above to the second. That is to say, it takes 'I believe that promise-keeping is right' as a satisfactory answer to the question 'How do you know that promise-keeping is right?'. It therefore simply re-affirms that one feels sure, not that one knows; so is not a satisfactory answer.

If this line of reasoning is correct, it then follows that as an epistemological claim intuition is unsatisfactory since it seems to leave us only within the level of believing or feeling sure which is a lower epistemic level than that of knowing.

Intuitionists sometimes claim that failure to intuit certain moral judgements is due to moral blindness or moral stupidity. We shall examine these claims separately.

Now can failure to intuit such moral 'truths' as that promise-breaking is wrong be attributed to a sort of moral blindness? There is, of course, an implied analogy in this remark with physical blindness, so let us see how we can make sense of it. If a group of people, looking at a lawn, all saw a tree standing on it, except one, Smith, then given obvious conditions (e.g. that no one was obstructing Smith's line of vision), we should conclude that his vision was in some way defective. Similarly intuitionists argue that if Smith does not 'see' the wrongness of promise-breaking we are entitled to say that he is morally blind.

The most obvious objection to this view is of course that there are no agreed tests for deciding whether or not a man is morally blind as there are tests for deciding whether or not his eyesight is defective. But this contention may be disputed. For suppose Smith does not 'see' that promise-breaking is wrong, and it is seen that he rejects most other moral principles which most men accept, and that his behaviour is generally deeply wayward, would not these discoveries constitute evidence of moral blindness? To say the least, this situation of Smith being a consistent moral deviant, though possible, is highly improbable. But the problem with the contention is that even if the opposite had been the case, that is, if Smith's moral standards were the same with those of other men in all respects but in this single one of promise-breaking, the intuitionist, qua intuitionist, would still be committed to explaining Smith's failure to 'see'

the wrongness of promise-breaking as due to moral blindness, or defect of intuition. So the appeal to evidence is, in fact, ineffective; and as such there is a possibility of the intuitionist's charge being a vacuous tautology; that is to say, that Smith does not see it simply because he is morally blind.

Now could the intuitionist mean anything more in this charge of moral blindness than that he (Smith) 'does not see it because he does not see it'?. Let us recall the case of the tree on the lawn. To say Smith does not see the tree because his eyesight is defective explains why he does not see it, because there is more to having defective eyesight than simply not seeing the tree on the lawn. If Smith failed every eyesight test known to specialists, and did not see the tree on the lawn, it would tell us nothing to say that Smith did not see the tree on the lawn because his eyesight was defective, since we did already know this when we were told simply that he did not see the tree on the lawn which the others saw. In the same way it does not tell us anything when the intuitionist says that Smith does not see the wrongness of promise-keeping because something is wrong with his capacity for moral intuition, where there is no further evidence of moral 'blindness'. Therefore all that the intuitionist is saying is that Smith does not 'see' it because he does not 'see' it, which is not informative.

The charge of moral stupidity is a charge against the intellect, but with the same effect. Suppose it was argued that failure to see that promise-breaking is wrong was due to intellectual stupidity rather than moral blindness, would this make the intuitionist tell us, less vacuously, why Smith did not know that promise-breaking was wrong? What is being said here is that Smith does not 'see' that

promise-breaking is wrong just as an intellectually stupid person may not be able to know that two and two should be four. If Smith's moral judgement on an act in a particular situation differs from that of other men, then this could be, as just explained, because he lacks intelligence to see how a moral principle, or certain moral principles, apply in such situations. His 'stupidity' would then be comparable to that of a man who could not see how certain axioms can be used to solve a mathematical problem. But suppose Smith simply says that he cannot 'see' the wrongness of promise-breaking, this is not a matter of unravelling the moral aspects of a complicated situation, but of 'seeing' a simple principle which intuitionists say that all men who are not morally stupid should 'see'.

Can Smith's failure to see it be plausibly a kind of stupidity? A case of stupidity would involve lack of understanding of what expressions mean. The intuitionist does not charge Smith with not understanding what the sentence means but with being unable to 'see' the moral truth which the sentence expresses. But does this make sense, even on the intuitionist's own scale? He compares principles such as 'Promise-breaking is wrong' with a Euclidean axiom such as 'Things equal to the same thing are equal to one another' - a proposition which the agent is to accept, and not to justify, if he is to do Euclidean geometry. But he may of course refuse to accept it, and that could only mean that he cannot do Euclidean geometry, and this is not the kind of act we know as stupid. For if this refusal is called stupidity, then to say that anyone refused to accept the axiom because he was stupid would be tantamount to saying that he refused to accept it because he refused to accept it. Similarly if moral principles are

comparable to mathematical axioms, to say that Smith does not see that promise-breaking is wrong because he is stupid is vacuous. All it means is that Smith does not accept this principle because he does not accept it. So, like in the case of moral blindness, the intuitionist has failed to establish his charge.

The implication of this is that the intuitionist is trying to combine in one form of judgement two assets - objectivity and relative incorrigibility. As an objectivist he wants to maintain that if something is right it should be universally accepted, but in claiming that one who does not see things as he himself does is either stupid or blind, he makes his position too certain to admit of correction. But corrigibility is a characteristic of objectivism, and the objective-subjective contrast loses its point if objective judgements are made relatively incorrigible. This was the view we criticized in connection with the analytic-connection thesis of naturalism. As we have shown in Chapter I, when the objectivist holds a point of view as correct, he is not prepared to exchange it for another. But he does not imply by this that he is infallible or that anyone who does not hold the same view as himself is stupid or blind; to him such a person is just wrong.

In outlining the intuitionist position we pointed out that these philosophers base their theory on, or at least compare it to, mathematics and go on to claim that some moral judgements are true a priori; they then maintain for these judgements the immediate certainty and self-evidence which we can attribute to mathematical axioms. As we have seen, such a claim insulates ethical judgements from doubt and also suggests that intuitionists lose sight of the distinction between the various ways in which we might employ the notion of self-evidence.

A priori truths are self-evident and necessary truths, but self-evidence can be used in various senses. We can employ the notion in the sense which describes the nature of logical propositions. The laws of logic must be a priori, or not at all, since the function of logic is to give us conclusions which we have not discovered by experience. Similarly, we can talk about the self-evidence of mathematical axioms.

One characteristic of propositions of logic, and of mathematics, is that they are not deniable since their denial would be self-contradictory. If equals are taken from equals, for instance, we know a priori that the remainders will be equals, and we know this because it is guaranteed by the definition of 'equal(s)'. If we deny it we should, in effect, be denying that the entities are equals or, in other words, denying the meaning of 'equal(s)'.

For ethical propositions this matter is different. Objectivists claim that moral propositions are deniable; for although our denial of the mathematical axiom given above is in other words the denial of the meaning of 'equal(s)', it is by no means clear that to answer the question 'Ought one to keep a promise?' in the negative sense is tantamount to saying that a promise is not a promise.

The sense of the self-evident employed in mathematics (and logic) is therefore different from that employed to describe ethical truths. And this is not strange for the notion can be applied in some other senses such as when we say that the same surface cannot have two different colours all over at the same time, or that thought cannot have a shape. In none of these is the sense similar to that which we employ in mathematics or logic; in each case the source of necessity (or the self-evident) is different.

When therefore intuitionists talk of the self-evidence of ethical truths we agree with them; but when they compare this to the self-evidence of mathematical axioms it seems evident that they are confusing the various senses of the self-evident, since ethical propositions do not share the self-contradictory character of mathematical axioms. And we reject their employment of that notion to ethics on that score. This is not to deny ethical truths self-evidence or necessity of every kind whatsoever, but only to say that since they are deniable it would be mistaken to treat them as if they were not.

Intuitionism can further be seen in another direction - in its being, as a moral theory both an over-statement and an under-statement.

Looking at it first as an over-statement, we must admit that there is at least one vital truth which all intuitionists grasp, namely, that moral judgements are in some important way sui generis; that is, it is different from other forms of discourse, e.g. commands, aesthetic judgements, expressions of taste, and so on. Moral judgements cannot be identified with, or reduced to, any of these.

It appears however that the intuitionist philosophers assume that adjectives in general, and the adjectives 'good' and 'right' in particular, designate a property, a quality or character. Thus from the fact that goodness was not felt to be identifiable with any ordinarily discernible property of things that are good, Moore concluded that 'good' must designate some 'other' property. Prichard, finding that 'obligatory' did not mean the same as 'expedient' or 'desirable' or 'productive of good', inferred that 'obligatory' must

stand for some other character - a character which can only be seen by the intuitive eye. On this view what distinguishes moral judgements from other things is simply that such judgements ascribe to things different properties, characters which are sui generis to moral judgement. This difference is simply a difference of subject-matter: moral judgements attribute moral qualities, and that is all that there is to it.

It is here that we think intuitionism may have overstated its case. This sui generis quality can be said to exaggerate the difference between moral judgements and other things. On Moore's showing the fact that something is morally good appears to be, not only merely different from any other fact about it, but quite unconnected with it: it is independent of any other fact. For all that he says, the simple sui generis quality of goodness might well be detected as attaching to anything whatever, alighting, so to speak, inexplicitly, and at random upon anything, of whatever kind, just as we fix a label on anything that we wish. For Prichard there is no reason why what is right is right, just as for Moore there is no reason why what is good is good - that it is good is only a distinguishable, but a totally isolated fact about it, not just different from, but unrelated to anything else. If so, then it seems that morality is not only not reducible to, or identifiable with, any other features of the world, or of human beings, it also seems to stand in absolutely no relation to any such features, and to be, in the strictest sense, entirely inexplicable. The picture as it appears is then that of a realm of moral qualities sui generis and undefinable, floating, as it were, quite free of anything else whatever, yet cropping up here and there,

quite contingently, and apparently for no reason.

Ross seemed certainly to have been aware of this deficiency, for, while not denying that moral rightness and goodness were distinct 'characters' of right and good things, he asserted that these characters 'depended on' other characters, that there were features of things which made them good or right. But he did not do more than assert that this was so.

But if intuitionism in its account of the uniqueness of moral judgements over-states its case, it understates it in the fact - which we have already analysed - that it leaves us at the level of believing rather than of knowing the moral truths; since it does not include an explanation of how the truths it claims that we know can be established. An objectivist claim that there are moral truths cannot be taken as substantive unless it includes an explanation of how the truths (or facts) we 'know' are established. So as far as this is concerned, the theory fails to solve the problem of epistemology which it set out to solve.

What this implies is that if intuitionism is true, then it would be a truism. For if the only thing that entitles a man to claim knowledge of a moral truth is that he just intuits it, then there is no possible way of distinguishing truth from error, the veridical intuition from the illusory. So we are not helped towards knowledge of what ought to be as distinct from what ought not. And it may well be said that in such a situation there is not even sense in talking of correct or incorrect, knowing or mistakenly believing; for no one knows what a mistaken intuition would be like or how it could be detected.

This fact that by intuitionism what entitles a man to claim knowledge is that he intuits it, with the result that every individual, so to speak, intuits his own moral truths, raises at least two other problems.

First, there is the problem of deciding between conflicting moral intuitions. Ross had tried to solve this problem by taking moral principles to refer to 'tendencies' which certain actions have (RG p.28). On this reading moral principles would have the form 'All p have a tendency to be q' (when p represents acts of a particular kind, e.g. promise-keeping, and q, obligation). Such a principle would be self-evident and there would be no exceptions to it; it would be universal and would be comparable to the mathematical axiom 'Things equal to the same thing are equal to one another', for instance.

But this way of stating moral principles presents problems. In order to explain this let us borrow an illustration from Strawson<sup>7</sup>. When we say that swans tend to be white, we are not ascribing a certain quality, namely, 'tending-to-be white' to each individual swan. We are only saying that the number of swans which are white excels the number of those which are not; that if anything is a swan, the chances are that it would be white. When we say, for instance, that Welshmen tend to be good singers, we mean that most Welshmen sing well; and when we say, of an individual Welshman, that he tends to sing well, we mean that he sings well more often than not. In all such cases we are taking a class of things or occasions or events, and saying not that all members of the class have the property of tending-to-have a certain characteristic, but that most members of the class have that characteristic.

What is being argued here is that putting such a principle as 'We ought to keep our promises' in the form 'All acts of promise-keeping have a tendency to be obligatory', and making it self-evident by that is simply saying that most, but not all, of the class of actions which fulfil promises are obligatory. So the argument from tendencies only succeeds in removing the characteristic bindingness of obligations, and does not help us sort between the conflicting obligations which different people may intuit.

Some intuitionists answer differently. Price, for example, answers that when obligations conflict they should be weighed against each other. Let us see what this can mean. The given situation calling for obligations may either be a familiar one or a novel one. If it is familiar, 'weighing' will mean comparing the obligations with what we have done in similar circumstances in the past. But if this is done, no new intuition has taken place: we intuit nothing; we are only calling back memories of past actions. If, on the other hand, the situation is novel the problem of knowing how we weigh the obligations would then arise. Surely the obligation which will be taken to weigh more will naturally be the one that the agent has decided to do. Failing this he would be reverting to a mere morality of consequences and would be facing the problems that beset that morality.

It just then means that the answer to the question 'How does one decide between conflicting obligations?' is 'Choose the one you feel like choosing', or 'Decide by deciding'.

A second problem which arises from the fact that every individual intuits his own moral truths involves differences in moral standards. Since men claim to have various moral standards, how can

it be affirmed that all men who have the intuitive eye can intuit the same moral truths in given moral situations? There are likely to be various prima facie obligations for any one given situation. The intuitionist admits that there are various standards and that men may intuit differently according to their environments and circumstances, but he believes that there are certain duties which the majority of men in all ages and cultures have recognized. We would think that he is right, qua objectivist, to believe this. But the question arises, if those duties - say, gratitude or veracity, are so evidently universal that all men who have the intuitive eye can intuit them, would it still take some intuition to say that they are? Surely if some duties are so universally acknowledged, we would need a good memory, not intuition, to recognize them.

These latest arguments suggest very strongly that intuitionism tends towards subjectivism. And since there is no acknowledged way we can distinguish correct from incorrect intuition, intuitionism does not help us resolve ethical disagreements. Parties can only agree if they intuit the same truths, but this is not guaranteed. So however convinced one party may be that it is right, it is still open to the other party to deny the genuineness of its intuition, only on the penalty that it may be accused of being morally blind or stupid. The passage we cited earlier from Samuel Clarke reflects this.

We have tried to show among other things, how unsatisfactory intuitionism seems to be as an epistemological theory, particularly in the claim that moral truths are immediately obvious. We have also shown that as a moral theory it tends to over-stress the sui generis character of morality. But an intuitionist may concede most, if not

all, of these objections and yet maintain that intuitionism is indispensable to moral epistemology. He may argue that although intuitionism may have defects, as indeed every moral theory has, it is still true that every knowledge claim we make, including ethical knowledge, the process of intuition is nevertheless presupposed.

Dr. A.C. Ewing<sup>8</sup> argues exactly in this way. He has asserted that propositions, particularly in ethics, but also in other fields of thought, sometimes present themselves to a person in such a way that without having in his own opinion established them by empirical observation, or by argument, he seems to himself to see them directly and clearly to be true. This is often expressed by saying that he has some intuition of their truth. It might be expressed without using the word 'intuition' by saying simply that he knows or rationally believes them to be true without having reasons.

Ethical facts, he continues, are not the sort of thing that can be discovered by sense-perception, and we can know no ethical truths by argument unless we know the ethical premisses to be true. This, in the eyes of some people, casts doubt and suspicion over the objective nature of ethics, but these doubts will be lessened when it is realized that the need for admitting intuition is by no means peculiar to ethics. Some intuition, he argues, is necessarily presupposed in all reasoning. Suppose I argue  $A, \therefore B, \therefore C$ . This argument is invalid unless  $B$  does really follow from  $A$ , but how can I know that it does so? I may be able to interpolate an intermediate proposition,  $A_1$ , which follows from  $A$  and from which  $B$  follows, but this will not advance our knowledge but would rather throw it a step back; for I must know that  $A_1$  follows from  $A$ , and though I may interpolate another intermediate,  $A_2$ ,

so that I have A, A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub> .... ad infinitum before I can establish B. In order to obviate this, I must sooner or later infer the next term between A and B which I can see to hold without being able to prove this by further argument. We may take it then that if we are able to have any knowledge by inference, intuitive knowledge must occur at some point, nor can we have any judgement unless we intuit some justified belief. It follows from this that every inference presupposes intuition.

Ethical intuitions, Ewing concedes, are indeed not intuitions of logical connections, but the present argument shows that, if we are able to have inference in any sphere, the possibility of intuition cannot be rejected on principle. To say that someone knows by intuition is only to say that he knows it otherwise than by simple or mediate reasoning.

Ewing further argues that when we examine the nature of our ethical thought on its own merits, we do find that it presupposes certain ethical truths, which we seem to know by intuition, or not at all. For example, we object to a man doing something because, we say, it is unkind, meaning that it will cause unnecessary pain to others. But why should he not cause unnecessary pain to others, if he so desires? Our objection that he ought not to do so presupposes that pain is evil, and that we ought not necessarily to inflict evil on other men. Those are truths, but it is not easy to see how they can be proved. According to Ewing, this is the point at which the intuitionist steps in to say that if these things are true but cannot be proved, it means that they are known without proof, that is, intuitively. And it may be true, he continues, that it is difficult to see how we can know anything to be

intrinsically good or bad except by intuition; and ethics is "at a complete standstill" without intrinsic goodness and badness.

Explaining how intuition comes about, Ewing says:

... we saw the evil of a particular pain  
before we generalized and said that pain was evil,  
but once we have made the generalization, we can,  
without having to prove it, see it to be true... (p.138).

Furthermore, he argues that "in the final stages of the process of an ethical judgement" (ibid.), we also intuit, for we have to balance the good and evil consequences against each other.

Dr. Ewing's argument is given in some detail here because we think he maintains a rather strong position for intuitionism. He mellows down, more succinctly than even Ross, the stringent claims of such others as Price and Prichard. But while we also agree with him that to know by intuition (if it can be established) is to know otherwise than by mediate reasoning, we would still make a few observations.

First, he seems to over-stretch the problems of logical reasoning in his attempt to locate intuition in the epistemic process. If we argue A, ∴ B, ∴ C, we would take C to have been inferred from B immediately, or from A ultimately. If we say 'A ∴ B', the very use of the logical term 'therefore' shows that reasoning has been involved, and that B is what it is because of the conditions prevailing in A. In my opinion, we do not need to give any further reason for B, and it sounds incorrect to say that B was not arrived at through reasoning but rather through intuition. It would therefore seem true to say that to multiply intermediate entities between A and B, or between

B and C, in order to plug on the term 'intuition' is a procedure guilty of Ockham's Razor. When we say 'B follows from A' or 'A therefore B' we imply reasoning.

Secondly if, as Ewing argues, there is a point in the knowing process at which knowing by reasoning becomes impossible and intuition takes over, one wonders how we can explain intuition itself except by saying that it is a psychological process. This is not to suggest that it is whimsical or that anybody can intuit correctly in a given situation, for it may be that 'correct' intuition (whatever it may be) can only come through experienced rational thought. But we can at once see the problem here - and it is one that we have already talked about. For on what grounds can we use the term 'correct' or 'incorrect' to describe an intuition or to say that one has or has not intuited 'correctly' since reason is no longer in operation, and it is reason which suggests our criteria for the use of such terms? It seems therefore that in the final analysis intuition can only be based in psychology, and is a subjective process on that score. We may either accept this or hold it plausible that at whatever stage of our knowing process we claim to intuit, there may still be need for some kind of reasoning if what we intuit is to be described as correct.

Next, if Ewing is right that the intuitive process follows from such a case as 'seeing' the evil in a particular pain and generalizing from there, intuitionism would seem to be little more than a refined form of naturalism. Ewing has however suggested that we do not "pay attention to the factual aspects", but that natural facts "put us in a position in which we have more chance of seeing whether it is right or wrong" (p.139). Yet his argument there seems to suggest

that the process begins from naturalism and ends up at a form of generalizing called intuitionism. If so, what intuitionists tell us is only that naturalism can be projected beyond the bounds of reason and argument. If this point of view is tenable, then intuitionism is throwing us further back from moral objectivity than even naturalism did.

So while we accept Dr. Ewing's moderate views about intuitionism, we still maintain our position, because his argument in general does not seem to persuade us enough to abandon it.

Let us now sum this up. An intuitionist in ethics will say that when he says an act is right he means, perhaps, that it (or the principle under which it can be subsumed) possesses an actual but non-natural quality of 'rightness'. What this quality is is very difficult to determine, but it is generally agreed that it does not depend for its existence upon its apprehension by any human mind, and that it is, in this sense, objective. The intuitionist, as far as this goes, is a non-natural objectivist. But for him, the answer to the question 'Why accept these principles as right?' is simply that they possess the property of 'rightness', just as if the answer to the analogous epistemological question 'Why accept this proposition as true?' is simply that it is true. Such an answer, if given, would be unsatisfactory and would of course lead to the further question 'How do you know it is true?'. And because this answer given to the analogous epistemological question is unsatisfactory, the answer to the ethical question (the question of rightness) is also unsatisfactory.

The claim by intuitionists that we know moral truths through the 'inner eye' or 'intuitive eye' does not seem to have any reasons to back it up except that we see them that way and anyone who fails

to do the same is either morally blind or morally stupid. Intuitionism smacks of subjectivism in that such an 'eye' can only be a psychological instrument, and as a result what it can 'see' will vary between the 'seeing' individuals and the 'seen' circumstances. Thus the 'inner eye' is, as we see it, a subjective notion.

We observe, however, that the intuitionists we have discussed may once again be placed roughly in two categories - the 'hard-liners', such as Price, Moore, Prichard; and the 'soft-liners', such as Ross and, as we later saw, Ewing, who may be said to be less dogmatic in their claims. But for all intuitionists, qua intuitionists, the claim that we have immediate awareness and certainty of moral truths through the inner eye of intuition remains unscathed.

The claim of the theory that moral truths are self-evident is in a sense true but its tendency to compare this self-evidence with that of mathematics is mistaken since mathematical truths tend to be analytic and therefore undeniable, while ethical truths are deniable, are not analytic, and are supported by reason and argument.

The sui generis thesis is a merit of intuitionism, for with it moral judgements cannot be deduced from statements of natural facts, and this was what we were after when we rejected naturalism. We accept this quality but reject the attempt made in the theory to overdo it by exaggerating the difference between moral judgements and other things to the extent of making the moral quality of goodness seem a supervenient one - a tendency which may see moral life out of context with human life.

By analyzing goodness (or rightness) in such a way, intuitionism regards it just as a quality synthetically a priori related to

situations or acts of a certain type. It does not locate it in the nature of the human being itself, a nature defined not only by its present being, but by a final end or goal implicit in it. We do not reject the synthetic a priori thesis in ethics, but we shall locate it differently. This point of view will be taken up in Part Two.

The three theories examined in this chapter - Ethical Rationalism, Moral Sense and Ethical Intuitionism - have two things in common: they are all cognitivist and are about moral epistemology. Their general aim is to establish moral objectivity through rational argument. Ethical Rationalism seeks to achieve this through the claim that moral judgements are analytically true, and thereby defines some moral notions in such a way that we cannot be moral without accepting those definitions - a process comparable to, but different from Warnock's definition of 'the moral' in terms of amelioration of the human situation. Moral Sense theory argues that if we can perceive yellow, say, in a yellow orange, using our sense of sight, we can in the same way perceive wrongness in murder, for instance, using our moral sense.

In reply to these claims we have shown that if, as the ethical rationalist holds, moral judgements are analytic propositions, any judgements which can be so described then become trivial and can no longer be of practical use in moral decisions. No moral principles, as far as we can see, can be guaranteed by logic and at the same time be of practical significance. In connection with the claims of the moral sense theorist, we have shown that the moral properties which we use in our judgements are such that cannot be perceived as we do colours or shapes, and that moral judgements, as judgements, are conclusions

which we arrive at through a process of logical reasoning, the premisses of which we cannot say we perceive without begging the question of moral knowledge itself.

Related to Moral Sense, and in contrast to ethical rationalism, ethical intuitionism seeks to establish objectivity in the claim that moral truths are synthetic (i.e. not analytic) and also a priori (i.e. necessarily true or self-evident). But it claims also that moral truths cannot be perceived by any sense, rather that they are known intuitively.

Against ethical intuitionism we argue that moral truths are not intuited if by that is meant that we have unmediated certainty of them or that they are immediately obvious to us in such a way that we do not have to give reasons for the truths we claim to know. And this, it seems to us, is the view maintained by most of the intuitionist philosophers we discussed. It seems also that when the intuitionist employs the notion of the self-evident (i.e. the a priori or necessity) to ethics, he compares it with the self-evidence of mathematical axioms. This seems to us to be a confusion of categories, and for this confusion we reject the intuitionist use of that notion while we still retain the notion that ethical truths are a priori (i.e. self-evident or necessary). So while we agree with the intuitionist that morality is objective, that this objectivity is non-natural and that moral truths are synthetic/a priori, we still disagree with him over epistemology and the location of the a priori. For while it is our view that moral truths can be shown to be self-evident, we aver that we do not know them through the intuitive eye, since this smacks of subjectivism; we need reason and argument to establish them. As for the a priori, for us it is located in an awareness of an Ideal (God) which is identified with,

but 'prior' to moral experience. (This theme will be developed in Part Two.)

If it seems paradoxical to claim that moral truths are self-evident, yet not immediately obvious, we need to consider that in other spheres of epistemology, such as in mathematics, there are logically necessary propositions which are not obvious even to mathematicians. It is not implied in the notion of necessity that what is necessary must be immediately obvious. A fortiori, then, there can be moral truths which are self-evident but we need argument to unfold them.

#### Notes and References

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 Locke : An Essay on Human Understanding. Bk. IV. Chapter III.  
 Cudworth: A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality.  
 (All are culled from W.D. Hudson: Ethical Intuitionism. See Bibliography).
2. This and other citations of Hutcheson are from An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil, and culled from W.D. Hudson's.
3. It is possible that the use of such empirical terms as 'found', 'discovered', 'saw' etc. (which are commonly used in reporting perceptual experience) in moral judgements such as 'We found him a good man' helps to make moral sense theorists think that the process of moral judgement is comparable to that of sense-perception.
4. We have already disagreed with Prescriptivism - and also particularly with Emotivism - for reducing a change in moral position to a mere change of attitudes. (Chap. III).
5. Joseph Butler (1692-1752), Richard Price (1723-91), and a few others.
- 5a. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729): On Natural Religion. From Selby-Bigge British Moralists Vol.II, pp.6 and 13.

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- 6a. 'Does Morality Rest on a Mistake?' is believed to be the intuitionist manifesto.
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## CHAPTER VI

### QUASI-OBJECTIVE THEORIES (C):

#### THE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT

##### Preamble

While ethical naturalism and ethical relativism are taken (by us) as quasi-objective theories in the sense that they accept that morality makes objective claims but distort this fact in their location of this objectivity and analyses of its contents, the theory of Transcendental Arguments (or Transcendental Justification) is quasi-objective in its distortion of the justification of moral principles. As a theory of moral justification it claims that a moral principle can be objectively justified without appeal to factors outside itself, if it can be shown that the form of discourse of which the principle is an example is impossible if the principle is not presupposed. It thereby makes the presuppositions we make in moral discourse the basis of moral justification. In this chapter we shall examine this claim. First we shall give a rather simplified exposition of the epistemological situation which the transcendental argument is trying to avoid, and then we shall consider the application of the argument - and the problems that follow its trail - to ethics. We shall all the time be evaluating the arguments used, but finally we shall try to assess the theory in its claim to establish moral objectivity through presuppositions in moral justification.

##### 1.

Suppose we have a proof that the truth of a certain proposition S is a necessary condition of there being any meaningful language, or of anything's making sense to anyone, for brevity we might

say that the truth of S is a necessary condition of there being some language. If we had such a proof we would know that S cannot be denied truly for it cannot be denied truly that there is some language. The existence of a language is a necessary condition of anyone's ever asserting or denying anything at all, and so if anyone denies in particular the proposition that there is some language, then it follows that it is true, by virtue of that very denial, that there is some language. Corollarily it would be impossible to assert truly that there is no language. This fact suggests that there is a genuine class of propositions each member of which must be true for there to be any language, and which consequently cannot be denied by anyone, and whose negations cannot be asserted truly by anyone. This undeniable class of propositions are, as it were, in a privileged class; they can, in fact, be said to have a self-guaranteeing character.

To elucidate what we say about the status of these propositions, let us, in contradistinction, consider a few other propositions.

There are propositions which it is impossible for one particular person to assert truly. For example, Descartes cannot assert truly that Descartes does not exist - his asserting it guarantees that it is false. Also there are some propositions which it is impossible for a particular person to assert truly in a certain way, or in particular language. I can never truly say (aloud) 'I am not speaking now', but everyone else can sometimes say this of me without falsity. President Tito cannot say truly 'President Tito cannot construct an English sentence', but everyone else can truly say this of Tito, and he himself can truly say it in Slavonic that he cannot construct an English sentence. Furthermore there are some propositions which it is impossible, not just for a person but for any member of a particular group to assert truly. A Spartan, for example, cannot assert truly that every statement

made by a Spartan is false - if he does it, it must be false - but of course any non-Spartan can assert this without guaranteeing its falsity.

The self-guaranteeing character of the members of a privileged class of propositions is of course more general than any of these. There is no one, whoever he might be, whatever language he might speak, or whatever class of people he might belong to, who could truly deny any of the members of a privileged class of propositions.

This analysis is perhaps an over-simplification, yet we think it is a fair and workable impression of the theory which Kant put as 'Transcendental Arguments'.

In his Critical Philosophy Kant recognized two distinct questions<sup>1</sup> which can be answered about concepts - the "question of fact" and the "question of right". The question of fact asks how we come to have a concept, and what is involved in our having it. But even if we know what experiences or mental operations have been acquired in order for us to have the concepts we do, the question of right would still have to be answered. This question makes demands for what would help us establish our right to, or our justification for, the possession and employment of these concepts; for although the concepts can be derived from experience by various means, they might still lack "objective validity". Kant denounced it as 'a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general' that 'the existence of things outside us ... must be accepted merely on faith' (ibid.B.xl). He contended that there must be a satisfactory way we can prove to someone the existence of things outside us, and transcendental arguments are meant to provide this. They exhibit the necessary presuppositions without which something we say, or want to be able to say, cannot be said at all; thus they seek to establish what we must be assuming in order for certain sorts of judgements to be possible. They then claim that

concepts so presupposed are justified by the mere fact that we presuppose them.

Transcendental arguments are supposed to demonstrate the impossibility or illegitimacy of scepticism. The epistemological sceptic holds, for instance, that although we have a public objective world of material objects in space and time, which can help us answer particular questions about how we know that such-and-such is the case, that there is such a world of material objects is still a matter of contingent fact. He then challenges us to show how we know it. So, since, according to him, any justification for our belief can only come from within experience, no adequate justification can ever be given since it is the status of experience itself that is being questioned. What the transcendental argument purports to do then is to prove that certain concepts are necessary and indispensable for experience or thought, it then tries to establish such concepts. A sound transcendental argument should therefore show that it is wrong to think that the only possible justification of our ways of thinking is "pragmatic" or "practical", and equally wrong to think (with the sceptic) that if empirical justification (as he sees it) fails, then there is no justification at all.

Kant thought that his transcendental proofs performed this task in a unique way because their conclusions were synthetic and could be known a priori. They are shown to have this status by a transcendental argument which proves that the truth of its conclusion is a necessary condition for there being any experience or thought at all. If the conclusion were not true, there would be no experience to falsify it. For Kant proofs that such-and-such is a necessary condition of thought or experience in general, therefore, have a special feature which is not shared by other proofs that one thing is a necessary condition of another,

and because they have this feature they can answer the question of 'justification'.

The sort of necessary condition of thought or experience which Kant talks about is the type expressed in our self-guaranteeing propositions, without them certain things which we would wish to say cannot be said. But one thing must be said. Being a necessary condition of something, or having a self-guaranteeing character, does not itself guarantee necessary truth.

Now, since no true proposition could be denied truly by anyone, it could be said that all necessary truths belong to the privileged class of propositions. But the reverse does not necessarily hold. From the fact that a proposition is a member of the privileged class it does not follow that it is a necessary truth. This means that there are some propositions, such as, 'There is some language', the truth of which is necessary for anyone's ever asserting or denying anything, but which are themselves not necessary truths. The proposition that there is some language, for instance, is a contingent truth, because it could have been, and undoubtedly was, the case at one time that there was no language, and it probably will be again. Although it could not be truly denied that there is some language, still it might have been, and might yet become, false. Self-guaranteeing propositions are of this type: their truth is guaranteed by virtue of their being necessary conditions of some thought or experience, and they could be, but are not, ipso facto, necessary truths.

Yet the existence of a privileged class of propositions is obviously important. For these propositions represent, not just the notion of x being a necessary condition for y, just as, say, food is a necessary condition for nutrition such that I have to have food to be nourished; but a necessary condition in such a way that it will be

absurd to think of food without thinking of nourishment or to say 'food is not nourishing'. Thus, while in general, giving an answer to the question 'What are the necessary conditions of y?' does not tell us one way or the other about the answer to the question 'Do these conditions obtain?', in the special case of asking for the necessary conditions of there being some thought or experience (e.g. some language), giving an answer to the first question (i.e. saying what the necessary conditions are) implies an affirmative answer to the second question. For one's asserting the truth of S, as a necessary condition for there being some language, implies that S is true<sup>2</sup>.

It seems, therefore, as far as this exposition goes, that there is no further question about the truth value of S which can still be demanded, and anyone who denied that we know S and still demanded any further evidence for its truth would have failed to understand, or perhaps be convinced by, the argument, and would only need to have the argument rehearsed to him. The sceptic is therefore maintaining an absurd position.

But is this really so? Could one not accept the truth of S and still have a legitimate question of justification to raise? Indeed it would really be so and no legitimate question of justification can be raised if members of the self-guaranteeing class were necessarily true by virtue of their belongingness: but we have seen that they are not. For any candidate S, proposed as a member of the privileged class, the sceptic can always very plausibly insist that it is enough to make language possible if we believe that S is true, but that S need not actually be true. Our having the belief that S is true would enable us give sense to what we say, but some additional justification would still have to be given for our claim to know that S is true, or, in other words, to know that S is justified<sup>3</sup>.

So transcendental arguments, as far as this argument goes, may establish necessary conditions for thought or experience, but still raise questions of justification.

## 2.

In ethics transcendental arguments, as I understand them, seek to establish moral objectivity through the justification of moral principles. If we can prove that certain principles are logically presupposed when we use moral language, then those principles are objectively justified by virtue of the fact that we use moral language since those presuppositions constitute necessary conditions for our use of moral language. The purpose of the argument is to show that a moral principle can be objectively true without appealing to factors outside itself, if it can be shown that the form of discourse of which the principle is an example is impossible without presupposing the principle. Moralists who use transcendental arguments seek to prove that ultimate moral principles belong, within moral discourse, to the class of propositions we have described as self-guaranteeing. Such moralists are objectivists and their thesis is that ultimate moral principles are self-justifying.

As we have already seen in Chapter II, in the process of moral justification we generally come to the point at which we are puzzled whether any justification - or, to be more precise, any ultimate justification - is possible; whether we are faced, on the one hand, with the necessity of arbitrarily choosing a starting-point, like a mathematical axiom, by reference to which other things can be justified; or, on the other hand, with an infinite regress of justificatory demands, an endless succession of principles or claims which themselves stand in need of justification. It is at this point that some ethicists attempt

to stop the potential infinite regress of justifying reasons in a non-arbitrary manner. Thus Kant distinguished only two general kinds of approach to justification - dogmatic and transcendental or critical. The former into which he implicitly gathers all the "classical" theories of justification, are dogmatic - their presuppositions have not been examined or justified; they are 'the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, without previous criticism of its own powers' (C.Pu.R. B xxxv). The latter, on the other hand, are meant to provide a non-question-begging 'critique of the organ, that is, of pure reason itself' (ibid.).

Professor R.S. Peters<sup>4</sup> takes this Kantian line of renouncing the so-called classical theories of justification and opting for a 'positive' method of justification through transcendental arguments. Peters' arguments are concerned with the conditions for the successful employment of moral discourse. He uses a form of the transcendental argument to try to defend his view that intellectual pursuits, those into which education initiates people, are good in themselves, and goes further to apply the arguments for justifying principles such as justice or equality. As it seems to us that few other contemporary philosophers have adopted transcendental arguments in moral justification up to the dimension that Peters has, we shall examine some of his arguments to enable us assess the extent to which transcendental arguments may be said to help us establish moral principles objectively. First let us consider his argument for intellectual pursuits.

Peters begins by arguing that

if certain principles are necessary for a form of  
discourse to have meaning, to be applied or to have  
point (p.115),

then we can justify them in the sense of showing that anyone using the form of discourse is committed to them. This is an ad hominem

justification since it seems to be addressed only to those who use the form of discourse in question. We shall come back to this.

Then Peters goes on to argue that one such 'differentiated form of discourse' (p.114) is employed when people ask 'what they ought or ought not to do, and when they judge things as good and bad' (ibid.). This form of judgement is sometimes characterized by Peters as the asking of, and the attempt to answer the question 'Why do this rather than that?' (p.154 *et passim*) - a rather ambiguous formulation which might be taken to express both a general scepticism about norms of behaviour, e.g. when we are disgusted with a state of affairs we may ask why anyone should bother doing anything at all, thereby advising a general attitude of nonchalance. Or it might more specifically question the value of some particular activity, e.g. 'Why choose to look after your mother rather than join the Resistance forces?'. Or still, to use Peters' own example 'Why do (say) poetry rather than pushpin?'. Of the two alternatives open to our understanding of Peters' questions 'Why do this rather than that?', he seems generally to have the latter meaning in mind, imagining the questioner asking what he ought to do in life and weighing up possibilities in his effort to find out.

The third stage in Peters' argument is to suggest that a person who asks seriously the question 'Why do this rather than that?' (p.161) is committed to the kinds of enquiry which are involved in education. In other words, a man who is weighing up the value of possible pursuits, including the intellectual pursuits involved in education is, by virtue of the very weighing up, committed to the latter pursuits - those of education. Thus a man who asks 'Why ought I to spend my income on my family rather than enjoy myself at the Club?' is, by the very asking, committed to spending his income at his Club. And similarly when a man asks 'Why ought I to do this rather than that?', he is committed to the good-in-itself.

As already noted transcendental arguments are concerned with obviating the problems raised by scepticism. Before we consider some problems in Peters' argument and also enquire whether a transcendental argument which bases itself in moral discourse can avoid the problems of the moral sceptic, we would need to distinguish two of the many kinds of the moral sceptic. On the one hand, there is the practical sceptic - an outsider, so to say - whose action consists in the suspension of belief in moral claims: that is to say, in the refusal to participate seriously in moral discourse. On the other hand, there is the theoretical sceptic, who contends - from "within" moral discourse as it were - that there is a chronic inadequacy in the moral grounds we generally adduce to support our moral beliefs or our participation in moral discourse. It is against the theoretical sceptic that transcendental arguments have been directed.

If we understand the moral sceptic in this way, it becomes evident that a transcendental argument directed to the presuppositions of moral discourse could constitute an adequate reply only if the employment of some discourse essential to the moral sceptic entailed moral discourse; in other words, it is only if the refusal to participate in moral discourse lands the sceptic in absurdity that transcendental arguments based on moral discourse have any power. Otherwise the very most they could do would be to demonstrate what one would be committed to if and so long as one wished to employ moral discourse seriously. But in no way could they necessitate the employment of such a discourse.

But now, it may be added, is the sceptic committed to the serious employment of moral discourse? In considering this question we shall be involved in what we would like to take as the first problem of Peters' argument - indeed a major problem of the transcendental

argument generally - namely, its ad hominem nature. If indeed we can justify certain principles in the sense that anyone using the form of discourse in which they are presupposed is committed to them, this justification can only be available to those who are committed, and those who can be committed are only those who use the form of discourse in question. If by asking 'Why do this rather than that?' one is committed to the good-in-itself, then the good-in-itself can only be accessible to those who ask the question. But it is quite easy and common to avoid asking this question in the first place.

It might, however, be objected that this is not a serious limitation in practice, on the grounds that it is quite difficult to avoid raising questions about moral duties, and that questions about moral duties presuppose questions about what is worthwhile, or good-in-itself. After all, it might still be argued, one of our duties must surely be to promote what is good-in-itself, and how can we discuss about our duties without investigating what good is? So, the objector might conclude, it is difficult not to raise questions about what is good-in-itself.

Indeed Peters himself recognizes that many people have given up the discourse of astrology, witchcraft, and even religion, and suspects that the same may happen to morality, but that that

... would entail a resolute refusal to talk or think about what ought to be done, which would constitute an abdication from a form of thought into which all in our society are initiated in varying degrees.

No adducing of reasons for the guidance of our

conduct would be permissible thereafter (pp.115-16).

Thus he considers it irrational for anyone to think of opting out of moral discourse.

Now the objection that refusal to undertake serious moral discourse is a limitation in practice seems both ill-founded and misleading. It is ill-founded because though we may grant that it is psychologically difficult for people to opt out of all discourse about moral duties - since, however amoral they want to be they are almost sure to want occasionally to say that someone morally ought to do something - though it is not psychologically impossible to opt out in this way, let alone illogical. And we may also grant that a really careful and exhaustive investigation of what one's duties are may well logically presuppose forming some notion of what is good-in-itself. But in practice people, although they discourse about their duties, often do not work things out to an extent which leads men to realize the good-in-itself. Thus they may see duty solely in terms of rules to keep and roles to fulfil, and problems about duties in terms of conflicts between rules and roles. If they have a notion beyond this, of promoting good in general, they may see this good in terms of what people want, and not raise the question whether what people want is necessarily a good thing at all. It follows then that one cannot argue from the likelihood of duty-discourse to the likelihood of discourse about what is good-in-itself. We cannot conclude that because people discourse about their duties that discourse logically presupposes the discourse of what is good-in-itself.

The Petersian change of 'abdication from a form of thought into which all in our society are initiated' seems misleading on two counts. First it seems to merge the two types of sceptic. The theoretical sceptic does not have to give up moral discourse. All he argues is that he sees no compelling reasons for participating in it. So it is only the practical sceptic who may be affected by this change. Secondly, not even the practical sceptic need be troubled. The

consequences of opting out of moral discourse are perhaps not as unrealizable as Peters suggests; for not all questions of the form 'What ought I to do?' are moral in character. It is quite possible for a person to adopt non-moral, rational, action-guiding principles in answer to that question. One suspects that this so often happens in politics and business - where moral principles may sometimes seem too soft for success - and there is nothing irrational about that.

So the position which Peters is presenting is not one of a choice between adopting moral discourse or remaining irrational - as he seems to make it - but one between accepting moral principles and non-moral principles of conduct. A priori, transcendental arguments based on moral discourse cannot help us make this choice. We then conclude that the ad hominem limitation still holds, that no argument from participating seriously in moral discourse could convince the moral sceptic, and that refusal to participate in moral discourse does not render his position absurd. It is, after all, the status of such participation, and the moral principles which it involves, that he questions.

A second problem of the transcendental argument which is revealed in Peters' use of it is in its claim to be a justification. Peters has said that the man who asks 'Why do this rather than that?' has embarked upon a difficult and almost endless quest (p.161), because the 'this' and 'that' of the question are conceived differently according to the nature and degree of one's education. Perhaps he means by this that the very little educated cannot understand the implications of their question because they do not share the sort of experiences which intellectual pursuits comprise. This may suggest that the transcendental argument yields only the principle that one cannot meaningfully ask what one ought to do in life without some

(rather unspecified) degree of education. Which may well be true but is not what Peters wants, especially as it makes the concept look like a temporal one, relating a further understanding of the implications of the question to a future time when the questioner will have been educationally mature.

Peters would probably reply that his thesis is not a temporal one, and should not be so understood; indeed such an interpretation would make the argument no longer a transcendental one. He would insist that his thesis is rather a logical one: that engaging in the activities is presupposed in the very attempt to assess the value of them; that is to say, one cannot (logically) assess their value unless one was already engaged in them. And again this may well be true.

But then if it is true, in what sense is it a justification of the activities? Does engagement or participation in an activity entail justification of that activity? We would think not. One can accept that the attempt to assess the value of some activities presupposes engaging in those activities but that fact does not justify the activities: it does not show that one ought really to engage in them; nor even does valuing something necessarily imply that what is valued is justified (i.e. ought to be valued). The activity of asking questions is, for instance, presupposed in asking the question 'Why ask questions?', and this seems to show that the question is self-answering in some way, but this fact does not show that we ought to ask questions; nor even that it is valuable to ask questions. Also the activity of using language is presupposed in the question 'Why use language?', but this presupposition does not answer the question, and it is not until the question is answered that the activity of using language can be said to be justified. Similarly if, as Peters suggests, asking and answering the question 'Why do this

rather than that?' presupposes the undertaking of some form of rational enquiry, it is a self-answering question, but this fact does not show that rational enquiry is valuable, which is what Peters wants to show.

So a presupposition that an activity is engaged in can be conceded while the question of a justification of that activity could still be plausibly raised, just as the epistemological sceptic could still plausibly raise the question of justification of any member of the class of self-guaranteeing proposition even after he accepts that its use is enough to make language possible, or to make anything make sense. As has been noted, self-guaranteeing propositions are not ipso facto necessarily true, nor are they necessarily justified: questions about their justification can still be raised plausibly by the sceptic. Similarly presupposed moral principles are not justified by being presupposed: they are therefore not self-justifying. Thus one can accept that the question 'Why do this rather than that?' entails participation or engaging in rational enquiry and yet ask for a justification of rational enquiry. The question of justification is still an open one.

Perhaps the only way open to a transcendentalist who argues the way Professor Peters does is to retreat to a weaker thesis. He would say that his aim is not to show the value of theoretical activities but simply to get people to undertake them, and that this can be achieved if he can show the questioner that because of his questioning he is already committed to performing the activities. But even the achievement of this cannot be guaranteed, for if the questioner is, in fact, a sceptic of the 'practical' type who questions the point of any kind of thinking, including moral thinking, he can choose to renounce all questioning if questioning will necessarily commit him to moral action. If, on the other hand, he is a theoretical sceptic,

not questioning morality as such but rather the status of moral principles, it is not at all clear how asking what ought one to do commits him to undertaking particular moral acts.

But even though Peters' arguments might not justify moral principles, or commit us to undertake particular moral acts, they might still show us what we are committed to insofar as we seriously ask the practical question 'What ought I to do?'. Peters looks at this question from a broader perspective as the most general and most characteristic question of all forms of practical discourse. This is perhaps borne out by how he, in another context, describes the general characterisation of his arguments. They start, he says,

... from the fact that a type of public discourse has been differentiated out in which what ought to be done, or what there are reasons for doing, is seriously discoursed. They try to show that certain principles ... are presupposed if this form of discourse is to have either meaning, or applicability to the world, or point. It is maintained that, although individuals have all sorts of private purposes in using their discourse, they must have some kind of commitment to those principles insofar as they use it seriously in the endeavour to determine by discussion what ought to be done - i.e. committed to the point.

("In Defence of Bingo : A Rejoinder" - British Journal of Educational Studies Vol XV (1967). p.188).

According to this account 'What ought I to do?' is to be understood as 'What actions are there reasons for doing?', and this is of course much broader than just 'What ought I to do?'

If Peters is understood in this way, then his general strategy will be as follows: Anybody who seriously seeks reasons for acting is ipso facto committed to certain principles. These principles are not only of practical discourse in general but also of moral discourse.

As a general strategy this seems unexceptionable, though (a) as has already been shown, it does not really provide justification, and (b) as will be shown, it does not show that the principles of moral discourse are also moral principles.

From the foregoing arguments, what must be concluded is that from Peters' arguments for rational activity in education, which we have examined, and which we have so far used as our paradigm for the application of transcendental arguments in moral justification, there is hardly any application of transcendental arguments which conclusively makes implausible the demand for a justification of the principle in question even after we accept that such principle is presupposed in moral discourse. Moreover since participation in moral discourse is not entailed by the sceptic's position, failure to participate does not reduce his position to absurdity.

### 3.

Peters has rightly suggested that educational issues give rise to ethical questions and ethical questions give rise to problems of justification (op.cit. p.91). This is why we have examined his application of the transcendental argument, qua theory of justification, to educational issues. This application, as we have argued, has not been very successful beyond merely reminding the moral agent that he is committed to certain moral principles if and when he seriously asks himself what he ought to do. But Peters has himself remarked that from an expository point of view a transcendental argument "is much clearer in its support of the principles of fairness<sup>5</sup> than in its bearing on the worthwhileness of activities ... of the curriculum"

(p.117). We understand him here to mean that the argument is more effective with relation to moral principles than to educational issues. Let us therefore briefly examine Peters' application of the argument in this new sphere.

Peters begins this argument by explaining how the principle of equality is to be understood. He notes that the principle is sometimes formulated as laying down

... that equals be treated equally and unequals unequally (where) ... the first injunction refers to treatment within a category, the second to treatment between categories. (pp.118-19).

He rightly rejects this formulation for its lack of clarity. He contends that to justify the principle of equality on this formulation tends to appeal to features which link or differentiate people, and that such features are doomed to failure because any features which are isolated (e.g. rationality) are not equally shared, or if they are (e.g. the possession of some organs) they will not be sufficient to make adequate discriminations between, say, men and animals. He then re-states the principle negatively thus:

no one shall be presumed, in advance of particular cases being considered, to have a claim to better treatment than another (p.121).

Unlike the positive formulation this seems to place the onus of proof not on defenders of the principle but on those who doubt it (sceptics) or wish to depart from it. That this is the proper procedure, Peters asserts, can be shown by establishing

that the general principle of no distinctions without differences is a presupposition of practical discourse, or that it is presupposed in any attempt to determine what ought to be done. (ibid.)

So Peters presents us with a moral principle (that of equality, or, as he might imply, justice or fairness) and a "general principle" which he says justifies it (the principle of no distinctions without differences) which must be presupposed once we talk in terms of the principle of equality.

Now, is the principle of "no distinctions without differences" sufficient to establish the formal principle of justice or equality, viz. that "no one shall be presumed, in advance of particular cases being considered, to have a claim to better treatment than another"? It would seem not. Let us illustrate. Suppose I am wondering whether to become a landscape or a portrait painter. These are alternatives before me and I am asking for reasons for adopting one rather than the other. And suppose further there are discriminable features of being a landscape painter which being a portrait painter lacks and which constitute a reason, indeed a sufficient reason, for becoming the former. Thus we may say that my answer presupposes the principle of no distinctions without differences. It would however be very strange to say that my answer to the situation was evidence of the formal principle of justice or equality. More is required to make it so.

Peters' argument then proceeds as follows:

The search for features of a situation which would justify one course of action rather than another presupposes that a reason for doing something cannot be constituted simply by the fiat of the individual. For if he is deliberating about the characteristics of A rather than B in order to choose, he must presuppose that there might be features possessed by either A or B which would make his choice correct or wise. This is

to assume that there are principles in advance which distinguish in general between what is a good and a bad reason for doing something. If therefore a person is ever going to be able to say truly that a course of action has a given feature, and that this feature is a reason for or against choosing it, then practical discourse presupposes general principles giving relevance to reasons. (p.122).

Here it is claimed that the person who asks 'What ought I to do?' must presuppose not merely the relevance of reasons but also the relevance of general principles which distinguish between good and bad reasons for doing something.

The first question which confronts us is whether this new move does advance us towards establishing the formal principle of justice or equality through presuppositions now that we are afforded a further presupposition of the question 'What ought I to do?', viz. that there are general principles which give relevance to reasons. This would bring us into asking the meta-question whether this further presupposition really follows from asking the question 'What ought I to do?'.

It is not obvious that it does. For suppose a man holds (for whatever reasons) that the supreme value in practical decision-making is spontaneity. Deliberating on, or invoking, general principles which give relevance to reasons is not what makes him make his decisions. Such processes are evidence of rationalization rather than of a serious concern about what one ought to do. The man who acts spontaneously does possess a reason for discriminating between actions which ought to be done, but any further deliberation on his part, such as is suggested by this putative additional presupposition

of the question 'What ought I to do?' would be quite out of place. This is not to suggest that spontaneity is the substantive attitude to adopt in decision-making, but it is a possible attitude and when it is adopted, deliberating for general principles is out of place. Thus it is not clear that seriously asking the question 'What ought I to do?' necessarily presupposes general principles which give relevance to reasons. It generally presupposes them, but as our example has shown, the question can be asked spontaneously without presupposing them.

But it is even doubtful whether granting this further pre-supposition would bring us any closer to demonstrating the formal principle of justice or equality. For, referring to our earlier example from landscape painting, we may suppose that there are general principles which render a decision to be a landscape painter a wise or correct one. The decision to be a landscape painter had general principles - those 'discriminable features' on the basis of which I chose to be a landscape painter - yet the decision did not demonstrate the principle of justice or equality. So a bare appeal to the pre-suppositions of the general practical question will not yield the formal principle of justice. It seems then that the principle so far disclosed in Peters' argument is simply that of rationality in practical discourse, and not that of justice. Applications of general principles before taking a decision is evidence of rationality in action, rather than of justice in decision.

The next question, then, is how the principle of no distinctions without references relates to the principle of justice or equality if it is not necessarily presupposed when we talk of justice or equality. The most natural answer here is to say that the formal principle of justice is a particular application of the principle of rationality in practical discourse, and it is only in contexts where the presupposed

general principles concern the distribution of goods or ills to people that the principle of rationality assumes the character of the formal principle of justice.

To say all this however is not to say that the question 'What ought I to do?' presupposes the formal principle of justice. For it is not a presupposition of the most general and characteristic of practical questions that there are principles relating to the distribution of goods and ills - although it is plausible to suggest that given those principles the question 'What ought I to do?' presupposes that "no one shall be presumed, in advance of particular cases being considered, to have a claim to better treatment than another." Insofar as it is possible to have principles giving relevance to reasons which are independent of the matter of the distribution of goods and ills, it will be possible for the question 'What ought I to do?' to be seriously asked and to have application and point, but without the principle of justice presupposed. It is not the presence of some rule stipulating that people ought to have something or to be treated in some way or another which, taken in conjunction with the principle of rationality in practical discourse, amounts to the principle of justice, but rather the presence of legitimate or justified rules relating to the distribution of goods or ills.

It seems then that even in their claim to support the principle of justice or equality transcendental arguments seem unsatisfactory. As a theory of moral justification therefore they seem to fail; although as arguments reminding us that we are committed to moral principles if and so long as we wish to employ moral discourse seriously, they are successful. But they do not in any way necessitate the employment of that discourse so fail to reduce the sceptic's position to absurdity or make it necessary for the non-conformist to undertake

particular moral acts. They also fail in their presumption that the presupposition of moral principles in moral discourse entails their justification. Insofar then as moral principles are essential to the claim that morality is objective, transcendental arguments contribute to the objectivist claim by making us conscious of those principles. We surely do presuppose moral principles when we use moral language or attempt to make moral judgements, but ethical objectivity cannot be established merely on presuppositions. Presuppositions, as we showed in Chapter I, provide us with necessary grounds for arguing for moral objectivity, but they are not sufficient to establish it.

#### Notes and References

1. Kant : Critique of Pure Reason (C.Pu.R.). Trans. N. Kemp-Smith (Macmillan) A 84ff.
2. This, as we shall see, is where Professor R.S. Peters bases his argument.
3. Some philosophers, e.g. Barry Stroud, follow this argument up to the point at which the only way to conclusively refute the epistemological sceptic is to prove to him that the meaning of a sentence would have to be determined by what we can know - a proof which they claim implies the Verification Principle. They then argue that Transcendental Arguments are self-defeating in that they empty themselves in Verificationism which they set out to reject. Some other philosophers, such as John Kleinig (in "R.S. Peters' Use of Transcendental Arguments" : Journal of the PESGB Vol 7, No. 2, 1973) and Eva Schaper think that the Arguments succeed or at least are potentially successful, for a considerable part of what they set out to do. But this conflict does not concern us now.

4. R.S. Peters : Ethics and Education. London. Allen & Unwin 1966.  
Chap. III.
5. In these arguments Peters makes little distinction between the principles of equality, justice, fairness or impartiality. Sometimes he distinguishes them and sometimes he does not. Although we know that these terms are not synonymous, we shall, for the purpose of our investigation, use them in the quasi-synonymous way Peters does, especially as this does not affect our argument in any significant way.

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1. Downie, R.S.; Loudfoot, E.; and Telfer, E.: Education and Personal Relationships (Methuen, 1974).
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## CHAPTER VII

### DIFFICULTIES FOR OBJECTIVISM:

#### MORAL AUTONOMY

##### Preamble

It would perhaps be necessary at this stage to review our position. In the preceding chapters we have argued

1. that our language and attitudes presuppose that moral judgements are objectively made; and that this suggests that there is a correct view towards which our moral acts are directed -
2. that these judgements are made only on the basis of moral principles, which justify them, and are ultimately justified by moral facts; so these judgements actually make truth-claims -
3. that moral judgements are neither just attempts to persuade people to change their attitudes, nor mere statements of emotion, but are statements based on shared reasons; in short that questions of rightness and wrongness, correctness and incorrectness, good and bad in morals are not subjective. So the correct view to which our moral acts are directed cannot be just what is right within the feelings of the individual -
4. that while morality is thus objective, moral truths
  - (a) are non-natural, in the sense that they are not deduced from, nor explained by, the facts of the human situation, although they have a connection with, and cannot be divorced from, the human nature or situation;
  - (b) are absolute, in the sense that they are not relative truths, and are neither part of, nor deduced from, determined, influenced, or conditioned by our customs and culture. So the correct view

to which our moral acts are directed cannot be just what is right within one system of morality;

(c) cannot be guaranteed by logic, since that would rob them of practical significance; nor are they mathematically self-evident or immediately obvious truths - since we need reasons to establish them - although they can still be seen to be necessarily true;

5. that although we presuppose moral principles in our moral discourse and attitudes, this fact does not of itself entail their justification, so does not guarantee objectivity.

It would be seen that our arguments so far have been negative generally; that is to say, we have tried to argue for moral objectivity both by arguing against some philosophical positions which are opposed to it, and critically examining others which, we think, simulate or mis-present it in some form.

But we have left until now one problem which generally threatens moral objectivity - the problem of the autonomy of the moral agent, and the judgements and decision he makes, to which we made passing mention in connection with naturalism. For if it is possible to establish moral objectivity in the way we envisage, it would perhaps still be legitimate to raise this problem. If moral objectivity is going to involve a kind of morality in which there are standards, objectively set up, which moral agents will abide by; and if morality is meant ultimately to lead to action, and it is the moral agent who acts, the question could be raised about his freedom. How, it may be asked, can his freedom be compatible with a situation in which moral judgements are valid if and only if there are certain definitive principles which bind both the judgements and the agent? It is this situation that we want to investigate in this chapter.

## 1.

(This examination of the notion of autonomy need not involve us in discussing the problem of human freedom, for if the will were not free the problem of autonomy would not arise; so autonomy as we see it presupposes the existence of the freewill.)

Often the human agent is said to be autonomous. Hare, for example, at the opening of Freedom and Reason, has referred to the "conviction that every adult has, that he is free to form his own opinions about moral questions" (p.2). Perhaps what is implied in such remarks is that human beings can plan and choose what to do, can think for themselves, and have the right to form their own opinions on moral questions. It is these claims that we shall try to investigate.

At least four theses are incorporated in the claim for human autonomy -

1. that the agent is autonomous in action
2. that he is autonomous in thought
3. that the agent can make autonomous moral judgements or hold moral position autonomously
4. that the moral individual is himself autonomous.

We shall briefly discuss each of these theses (in this order).

There are about two senses in which the agent may be said to be autonomous in action. First he may be said to be autonomous in virtue of his capacity to choose what to do: whether he will do, or refrain from doing, action t. What is required here is the possibility of distinguishing what a person chooses to do from what he is compelled or forced to do. For once this possibility exists we have a valid sense in which we may ascribe autonomy to the agent; because insofar as he can choose what to do he can be seen as in some sense independent of events, and able to exercise a choice in respect of his wants.

Secondly an agent may be said to possess autonomy of action in a certain sphere in that within it he is free from obligation, whether moral or legal. For example, a man may be held to be autonomous as regards actions which affect no one but himself. This freedom from obligation presupposes freedom of choice within that area; but it also presupposes that there is some sphere in which he has some obligation. Institutions can also be said to be autonomous in this way. An institution, e.g. a college or university which is autonomous in this way may be able to employ and pay its own staff, set up its own buildings, collect and defray its own funds, and so on; but it will still be obligated to the government or any agency which set it up.

We can therefore distinguish two kinds of autonomy of action which an agent may possess: a freedom of choice, which applies to all his actions; and a freedom from obligation, which applies to some of them, and which leaves him still obligated in some other ways.

## 2.

An agent is sometimes said to be autonomous in thought in virtue of a capacity to choose what to think. This would need some explanation, for, at the face of it it sounds incongruous, for the notion of thought looks too private to think of as being controlled at all, let alone externally. There seem to be about three aspects of thought, so, how we look at this claim, whether we allow it or not, would depend on what aspect of thought we have in mind.

First, thinking is an activity which the agent can control. The possibility of such control is seen in the facts that we can tell someone such things as 'think about it', or 'forget (i.e. 'don't think') about it'; that a person can decide to think or not to think about something, and say such things as 'I won't think about it any more'.

Sometimes we blame people for failing to think about something, or say such things to them as 'I am glad you thought of it'; and so on. But as this aspect of thinking is an activity, it does not constitute a ground for agent-autonomy which is separate from that we have already discussed under autonomy of action.

Secondly, thinking is an occurrence. Ideas occur to the agent and their occurrence can be causally explained in terms of the agent's brain-states, experience, etc. But since these thought-experiences cannot be chosen or controlled by the agent, they cannot provide a ground for attributing autonomy to him.

Thirdly, thinking is holding a belief that something is the case. This kind of thinking is not something a person may be said to do. A person cannot take up a belief position at will. It is the evidence for the case that makes him think that something is the case; hence someone else can make him think that something is the case. What is meant here is not such cases as hypnotizing or drugging, but rather a whole range of ordinary cases in which A can make B think p to be the case, e.g. by producing evidence for p. In general it seems true that if the evidence for a proposition is sufficiently strong we may come to believe it without choosing to do so. It may be objected here that we do sometimes speak of 'adopting' or 'accepting' a belief; but 'adopting' and 'accepting' in this case where evidence points to the belief might not be taken to imply that we have a real choice. We can of course choose to ignore the facts in the sense that we can choose (in virtue of our autonomy of action) to do nothing about them, but when we do not do this we do not seem to be free to choose what to think about the facts. Hence autonomy cannot be ascribed to a person in respect of an ability to choose his beliefs - for he cannot do this.

It might be objected here that we sometimes speak of people

refusing to believe some unpleasant fact, e.g. that someone they trusted so much had done some very unexpected thing. When people say they 'refuse to believe' some unpleasant fact it may be either (a) that they sincerely actually believe but do not want to entertain that belief; i.e. they do not want to allow it to occupy their mind. Or (b), they may refuse to acquire the belief by refusing to consider the evidence for it and keeping their attention fixed on the evidence against it. In both these cases the refusal really concerns thinking or an activity which the agent can control. (c) When we say 'I refuse to believe that' we may be saying that despite all the evidence we still find we do not believe that. It will be seen that none of these three possibilities really implies the ability to choose not to believe that something is the case. We therefore reject the objection that people can refuse to believe, and maintain that we cannot choose our beliefs.

The conclusion then seems to be that thought does not provide a sense of autonomy distinct from that discussed under autonomy as action: it is only when thinking is an activity that the agent can control it, and it is only when the agent can control a situation that autonomy can be ascribed to him in respect of that situation.

### 3.

We can now look at the question of autonomy of moral judgement - the thesis that the agent can make autonomous moral judgements or hold a moral position autonomously.

A person is said to be autonomous in moral matters if he has the capacity to think what he likes on moral matters, can make up his own mind on moral issues, can decide for himself what he ought to do, can choose his own moral position, and so on. What this implies is that although we have said that to a great extent the human agent has

no autonomy of thought, he does seem to have a special freedom in the area of moral thinking.

In analyzing the autonomy of moral judgement we may distinguish two claims - the psychological claim and the non-corrigibility claim. The psychological claim enjoins that we can choose our positions in the sense of being able to adopt them at will; the non-corrigibility claim (which is comparable to the equal-validity claim we discussed in connection with Ethical Relativism - Chap. IV) is the claim that any moral position may be adopted with equal legitimacy - this amounts to saying that no moral position is wrong or incorrect. Whether we allow these two claims is linked with the question of what it is to make a moral judgement or hold a moral position.

Now let us consider the psychological claim. We saw in our discussion of autonomy of thought that we cannot choose our beliefs. It follows from this that if holding a moral position is a matter of believing that something is the case, then we cannot choose our moral positions, and so do not possess psychological autonomy. Similarly if holding a moral position is a matter of adopting pro- or con- attitudes (as for Emotivism), then also (since attitudes depend on beliefs, and we cannot choose what to believe) we cannot on this view of moral judgement choose our moral positions.

About the non-corrigibility claim, we must say that it logically entails that moral judgements cannot be statements of fact; for a statement of fact is by definition something which purports to be true, and is therefore corrigible (or deniable). Various non-factual interpretations of the nature of moral judgement have therefore been suggested by those who espouse the non-corrigibility claim - in terms of emotion or attitude, and so on.

It is however possible to reject the claim that we can choose

our moral positions (at will) (that is to say, reject the psychological claims) and yet accept the claim that any moral position may be adopted with equal legitimacy (that is, accept the non-corrigibility claim). For example, it would be perfectly possible for a philosopher who analyses moral judgements in terms of pro-attitudes to hold that we cannot choose our moral positions - either on the grounds that our attitudes depend on beliefs and we cannot choose our beliefs, or on the grounds that we are too deeply indoctrinated or conditioned to have a proper choice in such matters - and at the same time maintain (the non-corrigibility view) that no moral position is, absolutely speaking, better than any other.

But not all exponents of the non-corrigibility claim of autonomy of moral thinking would be prepared to reject the psychological claim; so that it is possible to have a theory of moral judgement which makes both claims at once. Such a theory is to the effect that the individual person has the ability by his own moral legislation to create moral obligation which is valid for him, in a way analogous to that in which the laws of a political legislator are valid for the state within which his jurisdiction holds. No obligations which he has not himself so created are binding on him. In other words, there are no such things as objective obligations existing independent of his will; thus he possesses the autonomy of non-corrigibility in moral judgement. And he also possesses psychological autonomy; for the idea of creating moral legislation by one's own decisions does not make sense unless one can adopt a moral standpoint at will. The theory secures this psychological autonomy by depicting the act of moral legislation as the forming of a commitment or decision to act in a certain way, so that it becomes a case of the autonomy of action (which we have already discussed). And it seems that if the psychological claim can be

given even a prima facie plausibility, this is the view of moral judgement that we must adopt.

Thus we have come up with a theory of moral judgement which combines both the psychological claim that we can choose our moral positions and the non-corrigibility claim that any moral position can be adopted with equal legitimacy.

Let us call this theory or view moral self-legislation<sup>1</sup>.

It is clear that in the notion of moral self-legislation we have come to the climax of an antinomy which might exist between an objectivist thesis in morality and the moral agent. For if moral agents can be shown to possess this capacity, they are autonomous in the moral sphere in a very strong sense indeed, and indeed some arguments have been adduced to show that it is so.

The first argument for this view is from the autonomy of morality. It asserts that since morality is autonomous, moral judgements are not deducible from any set of facts, and we can therefore make whatever moral judgements we choose about the facts without contradiction or abuse of language. From this it is then said to follow that one moral judgement is as good as another. The assumed premiss here is that morality is autonomous. This means that moral concepts cannot be reduced to the concepts of other forms of discourse; in other words, that they are logically independent of other forms of discourse. Our arguments against naturalism (Chap. IV), and our acceptance of the sui generis thesis of ethical intuitionism (Chap. V), both show that we accept this premiss. And if we accept the premiss there seems no logical impediment to inferring from it that we can make whatever moral judgements we choose about those facts without risk of contradiction or abuse of language, for our judgements will not be logically bound by the facts.

But one assumption is being made here, for does it further follow that if there is no risk of contradiction or language-abuse, then one moral judgement will be as good as another? This conclusion would follow only on the assumption that self-contradiction and abuse of language exhaust the possibilities of error to which a moral judgement would be liable. But to assume this - in other words, to assume that moral judgements have an analytic connection with natural facts - is to beg the question against the type of analysis which asserts that the connection between natural facts and our moral judgements about them is necessary without being analytic<sup>2</sup>.

To illustrate this synthetic connection, let us consider the moral judgement 'Driving a car under the influence of alcohol is morally wrong'. In our argument against ethical rationalism (Chap. V) we have shown that in a judgement of this nature, wrongness cannot be analysed in terms of whatever it is that driving a car under the influence is a specific example of (e.g. causing harm, risking life etc.). We have also shown that some philosophers (whom we described as the synthetic-connection naturalists) would go on to argue that while the natural facts are connected necessarily with a moral judgement of them, this connection is nevertheless a synthetic or causal one, so that moral judgement is 'supervenient' or 'consequential' on the natural facts. In other words these philosophers would argue that 'Driving a car under the influence of alcohol is morally wrong' may be necessarily true, and that anyone who judged differently would be making an error, but not of a linguistic kind.

As we argued in that chapter (IV) there are some relevant questions of moral judgement which such an interpretation cannot answer, which lead to its rejection; nevertheless the difficulties are of an ethical nature and do not suggest anything logically wrong with the

procedure. Taking the interpretation at its face-value therefore it at least rebuts the assumption that self-contradiction and abuse of language are the only possible means to which a moral judgement may be liable. And if they are not, then the argument from autonomy of morality cannot be said to lead necessarily to the conclusion that one moral judgement is as good as another through a premiss which implies that self-contradiction and abuse of language are the only errors. So the attempt to establish moral self-legislation by arguing from moral autonomy cannot be made without making a logical leap.

In my case, the argument from the autonomy of morality, even if valid, would establish only that we possess the autonomy of non-corrigibility, not that we possess psychological autonomy. (To establish the thesis of moral self-legislation we need to establish both these claims.) For what the argument claims is that a man is immune from a certain form of error in the sphere of moral judgement, in that whatever he calls right or wrong he cannot be accused of contradiction or abuse of language. But immunity from error, which is the essence of non-corrigibility has no necessary connection with the psychological capacity to make judgements or reject them at will. Thus the argument from autonomy of morality to moral self-legislation, even if it were successful in establishing our freedom from the possibility of error, would still have failed to establish the other claim of the thesis of moral self-legislation, namely, that we have freedom to choose and to reject our judgements at will.

A second argument which might lead philosophers to assert that we have the power of moral self-legislation, and which would, if valid, establish that we have both non-corrigibility and psychological autonomy is based on the notion of consent: that no man can be held bound by laws to which he has not consented.

The notion of consent is usually found in law as the basis of an account of political obligation. But a similar view might be taken of moral obligation, and on such a view the individual moral agent would, as it were, ratify for himself those moral laws which are to be binding on him, or perhaps authorize a lawgiver, such as Church or conscience to make pronouncements which would be binding on him.

The argument from consent to moral self-legislation is not so much an argument for moral self-legislation as an analogy with political consent-theories. But then we have to see whether it is persuasive even as an analogy, and to do this, we need to consider why consent is thought to be an essential basis of political obligation. The argument seems to be that the claims of the government restrict man's natural right to liberty, and so cannot be valid unless men may be deemed to have relinquished some part of this right by consent. But if this is true of politics, similar considerations hardly apply in the case of the moral law. For the argument for the necessity of consent is based on the idea of natural rights; in other words, it presupposes an objective moral law. It cannot therefore be used to support an assertion of moral self-legislation, which itself is an assertion of the subjectivity of moral law. So the argument from consent to moral self-legislation is self-defeating.

A third argument for moral self-legislation, which again concerns both the psychological and the non-corrigibility aspects of the doctrine, may be called the prescriptive argument.

The prescriptivist starts from the premiss that there is a logical and not merely a contingent connection between moral judgement and action in accordance with it. He then argues that if we think of moral judgement as a species of belief we cannot do justice to this connection, on the ground that beliefs are 'inert' and do not of

themselves necessarily lead to one action rather than another. He therefore construes moral judgement not as a species of belief but as the formation of a decision or intuition to act in a certain way, and its verbal expression as entailing an imperative addressed to oneself. In this way this view of moral judgement is in terms of moral self-legislation.

Our contention here is that this argument starts on a false, or at least, a questionable premiss. We have argued (in Chapter III - under Prescriptivism) that the connection between moral judgements and human actions is not a logical one. For if the connection were a logical one it would be difficult to account for weakness-of-will. This does not mean that it is then a 'merely contingent' one either, for, again, if it is, acts would follow so arbitrarily that any act could follow from any given moral judgement. We took the question of this connection as an impossible one - impossible in the sense that it is one to which we cannot give a categorical answer. Surely the question 'What acts would follow <sup>from</sup> the following judgements?' is unanswerable; but would be answerable if we accept a logical connection. However even if we take the view as plausible, that is, that the connection is logical, the prescriptive argument would still not support the moral self-legislation theory, the weakness-of-will problem would rear up, for it is difficult on this theory to account for the fact that a man may legislate for himself that x is right, and yet not do x. It would perhaps be possible to account for weakness-of-will only if moral judgement is construed either as an attitude or as a belief, that is, as convictions.

It follows then that none of the three arguments for moral self-legislation seems plausible. The argument from the autonomy of morality fails because, first, it does not follow from that autonomy

that one moral judgement is as good as another: and secondly, if even this is so, it would only establish that we possess the autonomy of non-corrigibility but not that we possess autonomy to choose our own moral position. The argument from consent fails because it tries to establish moral self-legislation which is a subjective notion on the objective law of natural rights. And the prescriptive argument fails because first, as we say, it starts on a questionable premiss, and secondly, because even if that premiss is accepted it cannot accommodate weakness-of-will within a moral self-legislation compass, and agent-autonomy should include his freedom not to act according to the moral judgements which he himself makes.

So we reject the theory of moral self-legislation - and with it, the psychological and non-corrigibility claims - as a theory which establishes that moral judgements can be held autonomously.

But this stand may be objected to by the exponent of the psychological claim. He may argue that whatever is the case it would be impossible to have morality unless the agent can take or renounce a moral position at will. Since our arguments have shown that this is not so we might at this stage only point out to him that whatever happens psychological autonomy does not seem consistent with the phenomenology of moral judgement: it does not seem as though one has the ability to change one's moral position at will.

Earlier in this chapter we referred to Hare's remark about the freedom of the moral individual, pointing out the fact - if it is a fact - that such freedom is presupposed in morality. Our foregoing argument is not directed against Hare's remark, but it suggests that this freedom may have nothing to do with either the psychological or the non-corrigibility claims. It may be identified with one or both of the senses of the autonomy of the moral individual. And this brings us to considering this thesis of the autonomy claim.

## 4.

The notion of moral individuality is commonly expressed in the idea that the moral agent has a certain freedom in the moral sphere from the jurisdiction of others. This idea is expressed in at least three main theses - one logical and two moral ones.

The logical thesis is that a moral agent cannot hand over his entire moral thinking to any authority, be it Church, state, parents or even vague institutions, such as 'the done thing', 'what my status in life demands', etc. He is therefore autonomous to a certain extent even when he accepts a moral authority.

The moral agent does indeed accept some moral authority even though this mostly takes place implicitly, when he feels, so to speak, that he ought to do, and really does, things because a certain body has commanded them. What is implied in the claim, therefore, is that he has freely chosen his moral authority, because it is only if this is so that it can make sense to talk of his not 'handing over' his entire moral thinking. This then raises a vital question whether he can logically choose his own moral authority.

To accept an authority is to hold that one has a duty to obey certain commands; and to hold that one has a duty is to hold a moral position; therefore to accept an authority is to hold a moral position. And since, as we have seen, analysis of moral positions is in terms of attitudes or beliefs or convictions, which cannot be chosen, we cannot concede that the autonomous individual can choose his own moral authority. Now if the agent has no autonomy to choose his own moral authority, we cannot talk of his handing over his moral thinking, and it sounds almost unintelligible to talk of his retaining some of it after he has accepted some authority. What we are saying is that if he

has no freedom to choose his moral authority, then, ex hypothesi he has no freedom to choose what to hand over to a moral authority and what not. So as far as the logical thesis for the autonomy of the moral agent goes, it leaves him only with the logical necessity that his thoughts be in a minimum sense his own, and we do not dispute this.

While this logical thesis enjoins that a man logically cannot but think for himself to a minimal degree on moral matters, the second thesis, a moral one, asserts that a man has a moral right to do all his thinking on moral matters. It claims that a person has a moral right to think out for himself what he ought to do, and need not just accept what others tell him.

It may be objected that it does not make sense to speak of a man's right not to accept what others tell him. For if a man believes that some body (for example, the Catholic Church) is a valid authority on moral matters, he cannot choose to hold that he ought not to obey it (at least on the view that we cannot choose our moral position). And a man cannot be said to have a right to do what he is unable to do.

But this objection does not hold. The right to think out a moral position for oneself is a right to perform the activity of thinking with regard to moral matters, including the right to sift the claims of a body to be a moral authority. As we saw when we were discussing autonomy of thought, thinking in this sense is something which a man can choose to do or not to do. It is the result of this process which is not under the agent's control; for once he has exercised his freedom of thought and has accepted the body as an authority in moral matters, he has acquired a new belief or attitude, and can no longer choose to disobey it. But he can choose to continue thinking about its credentials - though such an activity may be considered disloyal by the authority to which he now subscribes.

The moral right to think out for oneself what one ought to do may be said to comprise both a right of action and a right of recipience. It is a right of action in that the agent who exercises the right to think out his own moral position is held not to be acting wrongly - showing undue presumption or folly, for example - in thinking for himself. It is a right of recipience in that others have a duty not to interfere with the process by undue pressure or propaganda or by showing lack of respect for the conclusions reached. So, following from this it seems a valid claim that a man has a moral right to do all his thinking on moral matters.

But it does not follow from this that the individual's moral thinking is immune from error; nor does it imply that one man's moral thinking is as good as another's. Rather what is implied is that since the individual has done his own moral thinking rather than have it done for him, convictions which arise from such thinking are more deeply held than those which are accepted without thought or questioning. So although the moral individual enjoys right of action and right of recipience through having a moral right to do his own thinking, he is still morally fallible and liable to accept the moral superiority of another.

The third thesis, a moral one too, with regard to moral individuality is that a man has a right to be judged in terms of his own moral standards rather than those of other people; that is to say, that moral agents possess a measure of judicial autonomy.

Again this doctrine does not imply that the individual is infallible, or that his standards are sui generis or have the status of ultimate standards as they stand. It rather implies that when he does what he sincerely considers to be right, he has acted dutifully and in good faith. He is still blameworthy, since he is not infallible. We

do blame people for actions which they believed to be right if their error (as we see it) is their own fault, especially when the error is due to a lack of perceptiveness or a failure to exercise the right to think for oneself; but blameworthiness within the context of judicial autonomy is limited. Yet that he is blameworthy to a certain degree even when he thinks he has acted right (i.e. out of good conscience) cannot but suggest not only that judicial autonomy does not make him completely independent of the views of others, but also that there is a standard over and above his own, by which his is, so to speak, measured. Nevertheless, it remains true that to some extent a man cannot be blamed for actions which he has sincerely performed as his duty; and so far as this is so, judicial autonomy is a strand of the moral individuality.

In conclusion we see that, practically speaking, human autonomy consists in the ability of the individual to choose to act or refrain from acting, and to choose whether to think in a certain way insofar as thinking is acting. It also consists in his freedom from obligation within certain spheres of life, and in his moral individuality. His moral individuality comprises in the logical necessity that a man's thoughts on morality be in a minimum sense his own, the moral right to think out a moral position for himself, and the moral right to be judged to some extent by his own standards. Because they lack autonomy for moral self-legislation, human beings do not possess the power to adopt whatever moral positions they wish once they have assented to relevant beliefs; rather they generally find themselves under obligations even against their own inclinations. This fact - and it seems to us a vital one - counterbalances the facts of human autonomy and suggests the limited degree to which it can be said to be effective. The mere mention of obligations which are not of the autonomous agent's

own choosing, and the fact that, even with some measure of judicial autonomy, he is still not infallible, but can be blameworthy; indeed the mere existence of some area of fallibility in his moral acting - all suggest standards of conduct which are set, or at least exist on a level beyond the agent's own, against which his own may be measured, and which at least make claims on him.

The autonomous moral agent is free to do his own moral thinking, and come to his own moral conclusions, but, our arguments show that this does not grant him a 'duty-free' moral position. And moral autonomy looked at in this way is compatible with moral objectivity.

#### Notes and References

1. I owe this term, and much of the general pattern of the argument adopted in this chapter to R.S. Downie and E. Telfer in their paper 'Autonomy' - Philosophy 46 (1971).
2. The analytic and synthetic connections are discussed in Chapter IV.

MORAL SUBJECTIVISM

Having argued in Part One for the possibility of a theory of moral objectivity, we now turn to the question of how such a theory might be subjectivized. We have seen that the only way to do this is to argue for what might be called a positive theory of moral objectivity. As we have already shown, this is going to be the naturalistic theory. We begin this Part by trying to explicate this position.

1.

The truth of an empirical statement, for example, "There is a cat" is determined by a fact - the fact that there is a cat. In contrast, by the same token, the truth of a moral judgment like "It is wrong to kill" may be false which determines that there is, in fact, no such thing as moral judgments.

PART TWO

As we have seen, a moral naturalist, like the moral objectivist, holds that the truth of moral judgments is determined by the actual existence of facts of the natural world itself. The naturalist is exemplified by Mrs. Philippa Foot, for example, who holds that the only good is human flourishing (or well-being) and that what counts as right or wrong is determined by what is necessary for human flourishing. In contrast to the moral objectivist, the naturalist holds that what counts as right or wrong is determined by what is necessary for human flourishing.

Moral subjectivists, on the other hand, like the relativist, hold that moral judgments are not determined by the actual existence of facts of the natural world, but by one's feelings (or desires or preferences) and the objects of those feelings. In contrast to the naturalist, the subjectivist holds that the truth of moral judgments is determined by one's feelings. In contrast to the naturalist, the subjectivist holds that the truth of moral judgments is determined by one's feelings. In contrast to the naturalist, the subjectivist holds that the truth of moral judgments is determined by one's feelings.

## MORAL OBJECTIVITY AND RELIGION

Having argued in PART ONE for the possibility of a thesis of moral objectivity, and shown that this is not satisfactorily established by any of the 'objectivist' theories we have discussed, we can now go on to argue for what might be called a positive thesis for objectivity. As we have already shown, this is going to be non-naturalistic; so we begin this PART by trying to explicate this position.

### 1.

The truth of an empirical statement, for example, 'That is a book' is determined by a fact - the fact that it is a book. It seems by the same token that since moral judgements have a truth-value there must be facts which determine them too; that is, truths which justify moral judgements.

As we have seen, ethical naturalists, themselves objectivists, hold that the truth of moral judgements is determined by straightforward matters of fact of the natural object itself. The ethical naturalist - Mrs. Philippa Foot, for example - holds that it is relevance for human flourishing (or good and harm) which determines the truth in morality, and that what counts as 'human flourishing' can be established on ordinary empirical criteria.

Ethical subjectivists, on the other hand, (e.g. the emotivist, C.L. Stevenson) hold that moral predicates are not found on an object itself, but in one's feelings (of desire or approval) about the object.

On closer view, however, and as our analyses in Part One show, one discovers that the naturalist and the emotivist only disagree in principle; that is, that the naturalist comes, as it were, through the back-door, to found morality on the aversions and desires which

men, as a matter of fact, happen to have; although, unlike the emotivist, he is concerned with the desires of others rather than those of the agent making the judgement.

It is at this point that the non-naturalist objectivist would probably take up an issue with both the emotivist and the naturalist. He would probably agree with the naturalist that there is a range of considerations that have to do with human welfare which in some central cases may entail a moral conclusion (e.g. that pointless suffering is objectively wrong), but he would not accept the conclusion that it is simply the fact of human aversion which makes it wrong, whether the aversion is the agent's own (as the emotivist holds) or that of other people, or the sufferer (as is held by the naturalist). So one cannot say that moral judgements are determined in truth-value by empirical facts, and since they have a truth-value, it seems that the objectivist would look for a set of non-natural (i.e. non-empirical) facts which do the job. Thus he comes up with non-natural objectivity.

In seeking to define more precisely the nature of such non-empirical facts we shall confine ourselves to statements of the form

P ought to X,

that is, to statements of obligation. For it seems that the distinctive character of morality, if not its complexities, can be brought out by concentrating on what may be called a moral sense of 'ought'. The vocabulary of moral constraint expressed in the moral sense of 'ought' with its accompanying urge to assert the objective existence of obligations (because we cannot translate the term 'ought' or remove it in a context without altering the meaning of the sentence) expresses a particular sort of practical commitment. It expresses, one might say, what the naturalist wants to - an objective content for morality - in a different language. The moral 'ought' conceptualizes the moral

life in claims and demands.

Now if the distinctiveness of the moral 'ought' is to be preserved, it would seem that what must determine the truth of a moral statement - 'P ought to X' - is simply a distinctively moral fact - (the fact) that P ought to X - just as what determines the truth of the empirical statement 'that book is on the table' is (the fact) that the book is on the table.

But at this point comes a difficulty. 'Oughts' do not generally refer to present existence; they refer to prospective actions, and thus to the future, the not-yet existent. We may find a solution in an analogy. Take a weather forecast - 'It will snow in the afternoon' - made in the morning. If indeed it snows in the afternoon, then the forecast was true in the morning even though nothing happened then to determine its truth. The forecast is made in what we might call a future-tense inductive sentence. Thus if I say 'It will snow at  $T^2$ ', then the statement will be true at  $T^1$  even though nothing happens actually to determine its truth. The truth of such a future-tense inductive sentence is parallel to, and illustrates the truth of, a moral obligation of the form 'P ought to X'. So we may argue that sentences may be truth-valued even though this value is not determined by anything happening at the time. 'P ought to X' may therefore be true though its truth is a not-yet existent.

However in the example that we took of the future-tense inductive sentence, the truth-determining event did exist at some time before  $T^2$  (i.e. at  $T^1$ ), e.g. the atmospheric conditions which made snow fall at  $T^2$  were existent at  $T^1$ . But it is difficult to see how any truth-determining fact can be said to exist at any time in relation to 'P ought to X'. For 'P ought to X' may be true whatever the facts; that is, it may be true whether P does, did, or will<sup>not</sup> do X,

unlike the empirical example which will not be true if it does not snow in the afternoon. The moral statement: 'A child who will undergo a surgical operation ought to be given an anaesthetic', for example, is true whether the child is given an anaesthetic or not.

Of course this is just to say that 'P ought to X' is not a statement about the actual behaviour of P, so is not a statement about any empirical fact whatsoever. The situation is rather something like this, that at a certain time, T, at which P is meant to choose, P is faced with two or more courses of action between which he is free to choose, and of these courses of action X is the one that he must choose. It is incumbent on him to do so; it is a claim laid on him; it is an obligation which he must fulfil.

'P ought to X' thus means that P ought to choose from a list of possible actions, and the fact that makes 'P ought to X' true is the fact that there is a claim which binds him to a certain possible action at a given time. The fact that P ought to choose X is identical with the fact that a certain non-empirical claim that P ought to X exists. In other words, it means that there exists a claim on P (at T) to X (that is, to choose a certain course of action). A demand to choose a certain action is therefore being made on P.

But, it may be objected, does the existence of a claim on P entail that P ought to obey it? This question suggests that the existence of the fact that P ought to X would need to have included with it a further proposition that P ought to obey the claim. But suppose we were then to include the proposition 'P ought to obey the claim' as supplementary to the original proposition, we would still need to justify our supplementary proposition; and this would demand our presenting another non-empirical fact; and then another demand, ad infinitum. What this means is that such an objection as this that

the apprehension of a fact must always be distinguished from commitment to act if it has to bind one to action, results in infinite regress. For there seems to be no possible way by which one can move from the existence of a moral fact (even of an empirical fact) to a moral commitment. But this makes all moral objectivism impossible. So what P need do with the fact that he ought to X is to apprehend it, and then act according to it - choose to X, that is. He is to apprehend the fact that X is a claim made on him, and then act according to the claim.

It may be suggested that we can avoid this apparent dilemma, this seeming gap between a moral claim and a commitment to act according to it, by assenting to moral propositions in another way, via self-evident truths. But moral truths are not self-evident truths if by that is meant that they behave like truths of logic, having apparently little or nothing to do with the world. We have argued this in Chapter V, and here add that even for truths of logic, if by saying that they are self-evident we mean that we can assent to them without practical commitment, then we are mistaken; for manipulating verbal symbols, such as we do in logic, is itself a form of practical commitment, a having to do with the world.

What happens is that when people think that we can assent to truths without practical commitment, they mean by 'assent' that we can accept a rule of action. In a similar way they then suggest that assent to moral propositions may be taken as acceptance of a rule of action. Looked at in this way, they would think, the alleged distinction between the apprehension of the fact and practical commitment to it would seem to be undermined.

But we do not want to proceed in this manner for moral propositions. We do not want them to behave like rules of action,

for as rules of action are reducible to many hypothetical propositions, they cannot be true or false. The rule of contradiction, for instance, which is a rule of action, can be reduced to 'if I ascribe  $\emptyset$  to something, I cannot ascribe not- $\emptyset$  to it at the same time'; or alternatively, 'if something is good it cannot be not-good at the same time', and so on. And these hypothetical propositions are not regarded as true or false in ordinary usage, while moral propositions are taken to be true or false.

We would also not deal with moral rules as rules of action because in dealing with the latter one still exposes oneself to the question 'Ought one to keep it?', and this is a question to which we have just said that moral rules cannot be subjected, for such a question is at bottom a demand for truth-value, and moral obligations have a truth-value.

Nor can it be suggested, in order still to avoid the apparent dilemma between the apprehension of a moral claim and acting according to it, that one just intuitively moral truths. For even the 'intuitionist' (pace Ewing) would have initially to find factual ground for his truths - some fact or facts which make them true - in the structure of the world. Thus both the ethical intuitionist and the objectivist in logic would have to appeal to facts about the structure of reality to justify their intuitions; for, whether one accepts it or not, whenever propositions are true, there must be something in the facts which makes them true.

We have said that moral propositions, since they have a truth-value, must have something in the facts which makes them so. And we have also said that statements of logic must also involve facts. What then, it might be asked, is the distinction between moral facts and logical facts? One striking difference is that

while facts of logic are couched in conditional rules or propositions, moral statements are unconditional. In logic one ought to think thus if one wishes to think in accordance with the facts, but one is not bound to wish, although if one wishes one has to think in the way prescribed by the facts. In morality one just ought to act thus. What this means is that while statements of logic are grounded in straightforward matters of fact about the world (which bind only if one has a certain wish to think rationally about them) moral statements are statements which obligate of themselves, whether or not one has the wish to be so obligated.

So the objectivist, while he may intuit certain moral propositions, does so on the belief that the world is so structured that it contains morally-binding non-empirical facts.

We reiterate then that for the moral statement 'P ought to X', what P has to do is to apprehend the fact and act according to it. To apprehend a moral claim is ipso facto to acknowledge it as binding; that is to say, one commits oneself to act according to it, for moral claims are human experiences, and as such, are comparable to such other human experiences as sensations of pain or pleasure which we cannot detach ourselves from once we have them. The bindingness of moral claims is not detachable from ourselves. Weakness of will and other states may inhibit or try to suppress moral action, but this does not remove the commitment which the apprehension of an obligation entails. What must be said is that something exists which, when apprehended by a man, is ipso facto acknowledged as demanding a certain course of action from him.

Why some men choose to implement moral claims made upon them and others do not is a problem traceable to human freedom. What the objectivist knows is that there exist non-empirical facts which can be

apprehended by men, and that they impose a certain course of action on men as right, and as a future possibility which it is binding on them to bring about. This relation of 'bindingness' is unique since, as we have seen, logical claims do not bind in the same way. Bindingness is a relation which obtains between a moral fact and its apprehender. The moral fact is the fact that the apprehender ought to take a course of action (that P ought to X, for example) that is binding on him. The moral fact therefore exists, but it exists conceptually, and is the fact which justifies or makes moral propositions true. When a moral fact is apprehended, a claim is thus made upon the apprehender; so moral claims are claims which (like moral facts) make moral propositions true. For example, the proposition 'You ought to be kind' is made true on my apprehending the claim made upon me by the fact that I ought to be kind.<sup>1</sup>

The account of the moral fact that we are giving suggests that it is intimately bound up with whatever is the nature of man, and not what men felt. Whatever men felt, or said they felt, the claim would exist. This follows from the fact that once the claim is apprehended it binds (and leads to action); and we apprehend the claim whether we choose to do so or not since it does not behave like a logical claim, but rather behaves like sensations (such as pain or pleasure) from which we cannot detach ourselves. So once we can experience, as it were, we can apprehend, and once we apprehend, it becomes binding on us. That is why we have said that 'P ought to X' is true whether P does, did, or will not do X. The claim which the moral fact makes is not temporal.

Now, it may be asked, suppose a man apprehends what is impossible for him, how can his apprehension of the claim lead him to action? But this situation need not arise. For, as the moral claim

is bound up with whatever is the nature of man, it could not demand the performance of a physically impossible act. There is, in fact, a triadic relation existing between moral facts ( or claims), moral agents and possible acts, which can be stated in this way:

Claim (A) binds (P) to do (X).

And this relation is necessary, not contingent: it could not have been otherwise than it is, for it binds the agent only to what is physically possible for him to do; indeed the concept of obligation loses its meaning if it binds to what is impossible. Thus statements like 'I am obliged to do X, but I cannot do X' are inconsistent: that is to say, the proposition that one is obliged to do what one cannot do is self-contradictory.

A moral claim therefore cannot bind an inanimate object, although it can bind us to an inanimate object. So the nature of a moral obligation is delimited by the nature of the objects it relates. If this is so, then we can say a priori that it must be possible in general to realize the moral demands made upon us, because the concept of demand requires that it demands only sorts of act which are in general possible for men. Corollarily, whatever claim that is not possible cannot be a moral claim.

It is therefore of the nature of moral objectivity that we must know when to expect the triadic relation of obligation to hold; for it is only when we observe

(a) moral agents

and (b) certain possible courses of action, that a triadic relation of moral obligation can exist. It can be seen from this that it is only the moral agent and the courses of action that can be said to be empirical existents in the triadic relation of obligation; the claim, which is the third component, exists only conceptually. That

is why we say that the moral fact exists only conceptually.

We seem now to be coming to the heart of the matter in the objectivist claim that there is moral knowledge - that we can know what ought (morally) to be done. We have said that the moral claim is not a temporal one; this of course, follows from the fact that the triadic relation is not contingent, which includes that it does not exist between referents at one time and not at other times. So what the objectivist has to do is to watch the data given above - that is, when there are moral agents (or persons) and possible courses of action - and then he can 'predict' an obligation (or the claim that binds, or what ought to be done). So indeed it is because there is a triadic relation of this obligation, and this relation is necessary, that moral knowledge is possible.

Moral knowledge is a vital element in moral objectivism. If the triadic relation were a contingent one, then moral knowledge, and indeed moral objectivity, would no longer be possible, and relativism would have taken over. But the relation is always necessary, for the objectivist. Given the existents of moral agents and certain future possibilities, therefore, the agents are necessarily obliged to realize one of these possibilities as binding. This means that moral obligations are not just arbitrary; they do not depend on contingencies.

If there exists a moral demand, and it is to be taken objectively, it must be possible for moral agents to meet its requirements in an actual world. Moral facts must therefore presuppose a schema of a possible world in which the moral claims could be realized. This is in fact what is implied in our earlier assertion that the moral claim must bind an agent only to what is physically possible for him. For it is only in this way that there is a necessary and

not just a contingent connection between moral demands and human possibilities.

Our concept of obligation is therefore essentially practical in being concerned with action, and it seems that one must conceive the moral fact as something constituting, or at least, helping to constitute, the essential possibilities of human being. Also it seems from our argument that the empirical universe is so constituted that it could exemplify all the moral demands made upon it, since necessarily no moral obligation can be put upon it which is not physically possible. And as this is a matter of necessity one must regard the moral fact as having the metaphysical status of an efficient cause in the world, as itself constituting (or being the pattern for constituting) those human possibilities, the realization of which it demands.

Here our analysis of the moral fact is both Kantian and Platonic. Kant has rightly located Practical Reason which legislates the moral law in the sphere of noumena, the ground of the natures of things<sup>2</sup>. This is also true of the Platonic doctrine of the Divine Demiurge fashioning the empirical world in accordance with the Eternal Forms. Or one may think of the Forms themselves (those universal quasi-concepts which define the moral demand, what man ought to be) as being patterns and examples of a world which shapes itself on them. Whichever way, what is important is that the fact in which our moral obligations are grounded is also the ground of its own possibility in the world. (This will be developed in Section 5.)

We have already noted that our moral obligations are about the not-yet existent, and that though they have a truth-value, it is truth that will be actualized in the future. This means that our moral obligations are surrounded with uncertainty. What would the moral demand be when actualized? it might be asked. And such knowledge is

essential for objectivity to be maintained.

The easiest way for the objectivist in this dilemma is to posit a being, on the analogy of human minds (i.e. a being credited with the power to know and to will), who is able to know when future situation x arises and to determine that y (the moral claim) will consequently exist. This being must be one which constitutes and can actualize the moral fact, who should know, in any possible world, when x occurs and when y must follow. It must be a being who is, by the same definition, omnipresent and omniscient and ultimate, for it should know exhaustively all possible worlds and all possible beings, and also have control over the coming into being of all possible worlds. The only being which fits this description is the theist's 'God'.

What we have said so far is that to accept objectivism in ethics is to accept a realm of conceptual values - moral facts - which are non-empirical (i.e. non-naturalistic) and are the grounds of specific moral demands and claims upon moral agents. In order to give a clearer picture of the moral situation as we see it in a situation of uncertainty such as is implied in the notion of 'ought', to explain how we can know our demands in new and unforeseeable situations, our mind has been led to posit an Ultimate Being with causal efficacy in the universe in whom moral facts will be grounded.

## 2.

To speak of an Ultimate Being in morality is clearly to invite religion to settle a dilemma in ethics, and this calls for some investigation of the character of such a morality which can only be explained in terms of the religionist's 'God'. In positing an Ultimate Being, the objectivist implies that morality is related to religion. This relationship is often mistaken for a dependence; but in our argument we

shall reject this.

Suppose we define religion as the holding of certain express beliefs about a being that transcends and somehow sustains the whole context of human affairs, and with the employment in association with these beliefs, certain distinctive ritual procedures or distinct practices in which beliefs (of the sort indicated) are implicit, can religion so perceived exist altogether apart from morality of some kind?

There does not seem to be any reason why religion so conceived cannot be detachable from morality or at best be tied to it, not necessarily, but only such that they may establish the essential truism that we can have nothing in human life without morality. The question whether morality can thrive apart from religion is of course a different matter. There are those who disclaim religious beliefs and who hold on to morality in a way that looks sincere to all on-lookers. On the other hand, there are those who believe that there is a quality of human life that is at stake if and when life is defined purely in moral terms, and that morality is in danger when religion is threatened.

It is probable that when people debate such dependence of morality on religion and claim this to be a fact they have in mind that at a given time there is a certain well-established norm of decent morality, and that those groups with whom religion is strong are nearer to this ideal than those who hold it feebly. Such people not only hold morality objectively, they also hold that this objectivity is deeply entrenched in religion.

Yet reflexive religionists, at least in the Judeo-Christian world, hold that the existence of the habit of religious observances is simply not enough to make a religious man, even though it is known that the most generally available criterion for religious conviction is perhaps the habit of such public observances and rituals.

This feeling that attendance to religious observances was not enough to make a religious man was the central message of the Eighth-Century Prophets, such as Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and, to some extent, Hosea<sup>3</sup>. And even before their time Samuel had rebuked Saul for preferring to offer sacrifice to God to obeying His commands: "To obey", he said, "is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15 v.22). The same note seems to run even among contemporary theologians, as this by the former Archdeacon of London:

Because God Himself is holy, He requires that all who worship Him shall be holy too. Church-going and religious observances are not enough: we must cease to do evil, learn to do good, live honestly, and try to help all in need.<sup>4</sup>

It seems therefore that for many reflexive religionists, religion is not self-sufficient, and the existence of the habit of keeping religious observances provides a somewhat weaker evidence of the presence of religion than perhaps the non-existence of that habit does its absence. But if, on the other hand, morality did depend on religion as is also claimed, it would mean that where religious observances were strongest should correlate with where moral practice was most strongly held as well. Reflexion throws doubt on this; but whether it is true or not, that is to say, whether there is indeed a correlation of religious strength with moral strength, is a social-historical issue, and therefore can be settled empirically. What is important is that there is nevertheless a suggestion in such remarks that are made by reflexive religionists that there is an essential gap in religion which can only be filled in by strong morality; or, in other words, that there is an essential gap in morality which cannot be filled in even with strong religion. Thus it cannot be maintained that morality depends on religion, even from the reflexive religionist's point of view, if by

that is meant that morality is derived from religion.

What all this means is that the question of the relationship of religion and morality in general, and in particular of the postulated dependence of morality on religion is rather a complicated one; for while it is held, that morality depends on religion, it is also held that the same religion can only find consummation in morality. Yet it would be difficult, or perhaps impossible, to show, where religious faith in any and every sense is expressly disclaimed, that it is not in some sense operatively present, in the very fact that morality is present.

In the face of this web of real or imagined connections, what seems important for our purposes is to see whether morality can indeed be said to be related to religion in any essential way. Although the presence of one agnostic elite may suggest a negative answer to this question, it is not one that can be discussed in an empirical way, because, in the end, when people discuss it, both sides take themselves to be concerned with something more than mere contingent and historical facts. They regard themselves as maintaining a view about the very nature of morality which empirical facts only indicate or illustrate or tend to confirm.

This is the point at which the philosopher is called in, for we can no longer regard the dispute at this stage to be of a social-historical nature. Suppose there is indeed a correlation such as we have hinted, between the fall of religious faith and the quality of conduct, how can we tell, by only empirical methods, whether it is the rise and fall of the former that determines the latter, and not the other way round? For it could also be possible that the rise and fall of the quality of moral conduct determines the quality of religious faith.

We say this is the stage at which the philosopher comes in because what is needed now is an investigation of the concepts involved in the definition of morality and of the logical concepts in the interpretation of morality, and of the relations, whether of entailment, mutual indifference or exclusion that hold between the two. The question at this stage has become a metaphysical one; that is to say, it is at bottom a question of the relationship to God of man's moral experience.

We shall try to analyze this relationship, to trace what relation, essentially, not merely contingently, exists between our moral experience and religion considered, as we have defined it, as the holding of express beliefs about a being that transcends and somehow sustains the whole context of human life. Because our purpose is to see how this being is the ground of our moral experience, we shall pay little attention to the aspect of religion which deals with practices and observances; for, as we have seen, even religious people do not consider this an essential part of their faith. It is only through such analysis that we can come to know what should or should not be taken as the essential relation of religion and morality which we are seeking to establish.

To broad issues will be taken up here:

- (1) whether theological notions such as our living in 'God's World' or Divine Command or Will do in any way elucidate or explain our moral experience, and
- (2) whether our moral experience can be explained by being taken as based in a theistic personality.

These issues are important, for if we can explain or elucidate moral experience in any of these ways, then the relationship of the Ultimate Being with morality will have been naturalistically explained.

In section 1 we explained the moral 'ought' (or moral obligation) in terms of a claim or demand made on an agent to choose a certain course of action. From this we can infer two facts which may be taken as fundamental to moral experience:

- (1) that certain moral duties are demanded of us and
- (2) that we are free to respond to these duties or not to.

The one fact leads to a consideration of what these moral duties are - that is, a consideration of the notion of moral duty - and the other of what dutifulness involves. We shall first consider moral duty as seen under the two broad issues we outlined, and then our conclusions will be carried into the consideration of dutifulness.

There are two ways in which theological notions can be said to explain, or at least elucidate, moral duty - contextually or aetiologically. The contextual explanation is based on a claim that there is a relationship between the universe and moral duty. It maintains that because the universe - 'God's World' - is 'friendly' to moral obedience, it is reasonable to follow the path of duty. The aetiological explanation, on the other hand, treats our sense of duty as having God command us. The claim on us is authoritative, it says, because God is the source.

In its crude form the contextual explanation simply explains morality away. Its central theme is reward. The good man, it is claimed, will be rewarded and the evil punished. By it virtue is not its own reward, but is instrumental to some extrinsic reward. Even if it is accepted, as sometimes claimed, that it is the practice of morality itself that is rewarding, as different from any supposed gains the world may offer us for being moral - whichever way we look at it - it still makes reward a moral aim, which it is not. Morality is not to be identified with any egoistic propaganda.

The more refined form of the contextual explanation allows that a man may be expected to do his moral duty without hope for reward, but insists that he cannot be expected to do so unless he believes the universe to be friendly to the realization of moral purposes and ideals. In fairness to this theory we must admit that moral duty depends for some of its character on some degree of the tolerance of the universe. This at least makes us will to achieve better, for we hope that some measure of our ideals can be realized in the world. And this is an empirical fact. The arguments of this theory of course go further than state merely this. They claim that man cannot have any incentive to be moral if he knew that there was not going to be a power greater than, and outside himself, to appreciate it. This is why, they claim, in times of war and disaster moral standards fall, for people think nothing any longer matters since no one seems to be taking readings of our conduct; since no reward, no censure.

Again we must accept that this pessimistic hypothesis is held by many people and, 'may be, by us all sometimes. But we also know that even in those times of disaster when it was thought that the universe was in disorder and God had lost control, some people still do not count such lack of a sense of duty justified, and would still know the difference between acting worthily and unworthily if - as Professor Maclagan put it - "as the crew of a doomed vessel and not as rats it harbours in its hold"<sup>5</sup>. So the refined version of the contextual explanation does not elucidate much more than does the crude form, and is rather more a refined misconception.

We therefore find ourselves constrained to believe that the moral demand derives none of its authority for us from a supposition of the friendliness of the universe. We find ourselves constrained

not to accept a breakdown of the claim of duty even in a pessimistic universe, because we cannot doubt the absoluteness of the moral demand.

We do not accept the morality that we do merely because of the type of universe in which we live; for if we do, it would follow that if the universe were different, our morality would also be different. This would perhaps be true for the particular act but would it also mean that our basic moral values would also be different from what they are, so that what we know as truth, for example, would then be falsehood, and what we know as honesty, dishonesty, and so on? We do not know what such a world would be like, but we would think it most unlikely that our moral values can be other than they are, as we shall show later in this chapter.

We would also reject any modification of the contextual explanation to the effect that while the moral demand is not to be supported by the hypothesis of a friendly universe, it can at least be illuminated and made more intelligible by it. But here again we would accept that the hypothesis of a friendly universe could be 'illuminating' in the sense that it would be absurd to think that an unfriendly universe would demand our unconditional obedience to duty: this would be a tautology, to expect, that is, that a universe that was morally evil would demand its occupants to be morally good. So our conviction is that while an unfriendly universe will be such that it is absurd for us to have any moral duty, a friendly universe does not necessarily produce moral duties or demand that we shall be dutiful.

We therefore conclude that duty does not derive any extraneous support either to explain or to illuminate itself. It is quite possible that it is only when duty is conceived in this way, as not deriving any extraneous support, that is, that it can transcend itself to include all

of human experience, such that we may come to realize that it is our moral duty even to be religious. Duty could then be called the experience of God. If this is attained, then moral experience, as Professor Maclagan suggests, would be

... one index of what we mean when  
we speak of 'God'. (ibid.p.64).

To speak of 'one index' implies that we do not mean that all that the term 'God' involves is vested in morality, although it means that all that morality involves is vested in 'God'. But we would not come to this conclusion in a hurry so as not to prejudice the aetiological explanation of duty which we have not yet discussed.

The aetiological explanation claims that duty is somehow derived from or illuminated by the fact that it is God's command or will for us. In other words it claims that a Divine Command Theory can explain how theological concepts can be used to elucidate moral duty.

The question of whether God's will is consistent with duty in the objective or subjective sense - that is, whether God wills an already objective duty or whether duty becomes objective by God's willing it is the substance of the well-known Euthyphro Question<sup>6</sup>. The question raised in the argument is generally transformed as whether human actions, dispositions, etc. have whatever qualities they do have independently of any divine command or approbation, so that when God himself is responding to them he is responding to the qualities he finds in them; or whether there are no moral distinctions independent of, and antecedent to God's will, so that his will constitutes whatever moral qualities there are, and to be good or right is simply to be approved of, or commanded by God.

This question is however not at the heart of the Divine

Command Theory, for whether what God commands is prima facie objective or made objective contingently by God adopting it, it presents problems to the theist. There are such problems as of how we know the divine command in the first place. This can only be through our conscience, but how would we know when our conscience has misled us? What is at the heart of the Divine Command Theory is, we would think, the doctrine that what we ought to do is made such by the fact that God commands it, and this is inept.

The divine command theory has both a more radical and a less radical form. The less radical form presents the divine command as an arbitrary fiat. It argues that each one of us has just one fundamental and undeniable duty - to obey what God wills - and that all the detail of what we ought to do is determined for us simply and solely by that will. His will is therefore the source of every specific 'norm' of our conduct and is thus above judgement or censure as human commands may be.

It is natural to raise an objection here and to ask whether God is not being dishonoured by a theory which piles up on him the character of a despot. This objection may be answered by the suggestion that we raise the objection at all only because we think of God as a person while he really has an otherness which transcends personality. But how can we contain this quality of "otherness" within the context of commands, which can only relate to human and personal relationships?

The question of the personality of God will be taken up later in this essay, but meanwhile we see that the position taken by the doctrine of arbitrary fiat is such that can be true only if we have a properly moral awareness of a duty to obey God, and no other moral awareness whatsoever. Granting, that is, that we have a moral duty to obey God - which is not guaranteed - is it the only moral awareness

presented to us? The answer would be yes, perhaps, if judgements of the form 'This is what God commands' are themselves moral judgements; but they are not, and there is nothing compelling us to accept them. It thus means that our moral consciousness is not restricted to divine commands, and, in fact, some people - atheists, for example - do not even include them as options in their moral consciousness. If it is true that our moral consciousness is not so restricted, it means that it must be allowed that at least part of what can be thought of as morally required of us cannot be God's commands.

Moreover if, as the doctrine of arbitrary fiat wants us to hold, what God wills is intrinsically binding on us, and we are at the same time to suppose that whatever is binding on us is made so only by God's commanding it, we find ourselves in a vicious circle by holding both that what God wills is intrinsically binding on us and that what is binding on us is made so by what God wills.

Again to think of what God wills as intrinsically binding on us, and at the same time to suppose that whatever is usually binding on us is made so always and only by God's commanding it, we find ourselves in a collision between the suggestion of contingency involved in the concept of 'making' and the seemingly intrinsic authority of the specific obligation that is supposed to be thus 'made'. This perhaps needs to be clarified. To say that P has made r an obligation, for instance, means (1) that r was not originally an obligation until P made it one, but that r was at least existing (even if in the mind of P) before it became an obligation. So, that r was made an obligation is a contingent matter - there was, in fact, the chance that r could not have been made an obligation at all. There is always a contingency in the concept of making. For to ask 'Who made you that?' is to ask who

caused you to be what otherwise you would not have been. (2) That r has the authority of P to become necessarily an obligation. So there is in the concept of 'being made' a necessity, while there is a contingency in the concept of making itself.

This is why we say that we come into collision of a contingency and a necessity when we regard what God wills as intrinsically binding on us and at the same time that whatever is usually binding on us is made so always by God. Such a collision may make us regard our specific moral obligations not as instituted by God's will but as being opposed to it, and thus opposed, as inferior to it, or at least, less authoritative. What then comes to be at stake is no longer whether God's command is what makes an obligation a moral one, but the very status of God's command itself, the question whether it is superior or inferior to our moral obligations. At this stage a divine-commands theory which was concerned with establishing the nature of morality would be transformed into a theory of the status of God's commands.

This is what happens in Kierkegaard's interpretation of the story of Abraham and Isaac. In Fear and Trembling<sup>7</sup> he presents Abraham's conduct as approved precisely because he was willing to trample upon his ethical convictions in order to obey the command of God, thus showing God's command as just another command though perhaps a superior, over-riding and authoritative one. "Ordinarily speaking", says Kierkegaard, "a temptation is something which tries to stop a man from his duty, but in this case it is ethics which tries to prevent him from doing God's will". Thus we come to the point at which God's will and ethics conflict and, as Kierkegaard presents it, duty is here opposed to morality, so that 'duty' is itself no longer a moral term. This is perhaps the ultimate situation in which the recognition of God's will as arbitrary fiat may leave us in.

While this less radical view of the Divine Commands Theory allows one solitary underived moral obligation - the obligation to obey God - and leaves room for others to be manoeuvred into it, the more radical view admits of no obligation at all that is not a product of the Divine Will. By emphatically and categorically disallowing that its conviction that moral obligation cannot be left to stand on its own feet is contestable, it maintains a consistency which the less radical view lacks. If, it argues, the divine command is erroneous, it should not be allowed to stand at all, but if it is not, then nothing should contest its place in being the only thing which sustains moral obligation.

Perhaps what is meant is that the divine command is to be taken as an ultimate moral fact. If this is so, it would obviously be circular to suppose that this obligation simply binds because God commands it. It would be like supposing that God's existence can be explained by saying that he created himself, or caused himself to exist. To this caveat it may be replied that obedience to God is not a duty (or obligation) at all but a common rational character of all duties. This then would be definitive, and when 'Duty is what God commands' is understood as a definition, 'duty' would be reduced to 'what God commands' without remainder. But this cannot be allowed for, as we have already argued, to obey God cannot be the only moral duty we can be aware of, if ever it is one.

In whichever way we look at it therefore - as a definition or as not - the Divine Commands Theory is unsatisfactory. If it is not a definition, it means that duty stands apart from what God commands (as Kierkegaard sees it) and each is separately identifiable; and if it is so, we are back to the same problem as in the less radical view, for what would make the commands-theory binding on us? But if, on the other

hand, it is not a definition, then it just states "Duty is what God commands", without any normative, for there is nothing presenting it as what ought to be done; it would become just a statement of a positive fact.

Perhaps the only way to reverse the failure of the definition is once again to appeal to the 'otherness' of God: God is not like us, human beings, it might be said. 'Duty is what God commands' can fail to have any normative force when we think in terms of ourselves as humans; but as for God, the normative is implicit.

Appeal to God's otherness here is not something enabling us to suppose that God can, by way of command as we ordinarily understand the term, do what commanders cannot do, but as requiring us to acknowledge that the concept of command itself is not to be taken anthropomorphically; that is, that it is implicit in, and a prerogative of, the Divine. But this only brings back to us the problem that we cannot talk in the language of commands without being anthropomorphic, since the concept is drawn from personal relationships. The theory cannot, in fact, be stated unless we are anthropomorphic, and if we are, there does not seem to be any defence for it. It is possible however to argue, as indeed we shall, for conceptions of God which are separately personal and divine; but this is not the same as anthropomorphism which is a representation of God in human form, per se.

So the aetiological explanation seems to lead to a blind alley. An alternative out of this is sometimes offered in this way, that God commands the right as being right - that is to say, what makes it an obligation is not his command, but that the act is right, the emphasis being thus shifted from being a command to being right - a question raised in the Euthyphro Dilemma to which we have referred already and which sets

moral objectivity apart from, and even superior to God's will. Considering such various interpretations to which the Divine Commands Theory may be subject to, it becomes necessary to ask what it is precisely that the Command does.

There are two ways in which the Divine Commands Theory can be supposed to be doing something. Either (1) we must suppose that we can recognize an act to be wrong without recognizing any obligation to refrain from it until we conceive it also as God's will; or (2) we must suppose that we can recognize the obligation without regarding it as authoritative for us until we can conceive it as God's will. But, in fact, neither position is possible. Neither between perceiving wrongness and not perceiving an obligation to refrain from it, nor between perceiving an obligation and not perceiving its authority over us is there a gap which we shall need the divine command to bridge. None, in fact, leaves a gap. Does it need God's command or willing to inform us to refrain from what we know to be wrong? Or that what is an obligation is binding on us? The latter is in fact analytic, for what we need is to apprehend an obligation, and once we do so it necessarily binds. In the former however weakness of will may prevail, and we cannot say that we know analytically that we should refrain from what is wrong. But does God's will or command make our wills stronger? If this is claimed, it cannot be true by definition and needs to be argued; but arguing it is irrelevant in this context, for the subject in dispute is that God's will makes us recognize an obligation to refrain from evil not that it strengthens our wills to refrain from evil.

This alternative of the divine command theory - that is, the shift from being a command to being right - is therefore unsatisfactory both to the moralist and to the theologian (or religious person). To

the latter it unhappily suggests, as we have remarked, an 'order of values' or 'a moral law' which has its being not merely apart from God, but above God, and to which he (God) has to bow. Divine activity is therefore externally-conditioned. To the moralist the alternative is unsatisfactory for the reasons given in our foregoing arguments.

There could be another way of connecting God with moral duty which may avoid this controversial Divine Commands Theory, if moral distinctions are regarded neither as product of his will nor as altogether independent of him, but as constitutive of his understanding, and as 'having reality' only by being thus connected. But again this will not do: it will still leave morality distinct from God, and will not have made the connection that it is thought to make. This failure derives from the notion of understanding which we seem to be using in this context in a way that violates its meaning in those human contexts from which it derives such meaning as it has. To talk of moral distinctions as being 'constitutive of his understanding' is to imply that God understands moral distinctions, and thus that they exist, once again, outside his knowledge and understanding. For to understand is to try to comprehend, or grasp with the mind something that already is the case. We should therefore either claim that God has no understanding of moral distinctions, or that they, like all that enters into his 'understanding', in the sense of being objects or ideas, are what they are independent of it.

Again wherever we go, we meet some problem. For to suppose that God has no understanding of moral distinctions and yet claim that morality is subject to his will, will mean a reassertion of the claim that he has arbitrary will, forcing people to do what he himself does not understand. And to suppose that moral distinctions are what they are independent of his understanding is again to propose an externally-

conditioned divine activity, which proposition is against the supposed dignity of God.

In short then we have to accept either that there are no moral distinctions or that they exist independently of God. But we know that there are moral distinctions, that is why it makes sense even to discuss whether they are independent of God or not; so the supposition which has led us to the alternative conclusion that there are no moral distinctions should be rejected as self-defeating. What all this means is that the supposition that we have made is not helpful since it seems only to say that if you accept that there are moral obligations you must accept that they are given by God arbitrarily.

Now, it follows from our arguments that theological notions such as 'God's world', 'divine commands', 'arbitrary will' (and it might be suggested that even such others as Divine Providence) neither explain nor elucidate moral duty, so do not help us to see how we can ground morality in God. Have we got then to accept that moral duty exists independently of God? Indeed all the attempts we have made so far to establish it seem to point to the fact that moral demand or its authority as derived from God is ineffective.

The arguments however have not touched upon theism itself, and are not meant to exclude the possibility that theism is true; indeed our arguments presuppose it. And if theism is true, in the absolute and ultimate way it is held to be, then, by definition, nothing, be it the moral law, can be more ultimate than God, or even co-ultimate with him. If our attempts to establish morality on theistic authority have been so unsuccessful, and there is theism, it means that God and morality are still what they are. But if, as we have argued in Section 1, the nature of non-natural objectivity is such that moral obligations cannot but be

based in an Ultimate Being, and the attributes of God fit those of the Being in which our moral obligations can only be based, we are left with one option, that is, to seek other ways of doing this, ways which are different from seeking to derive morality from divine authority.

This brings us to the second of what we called 'basic issues' in seeking ways to establish the relation between morality and religion.

Three other arguments must therefore be considered which are slightly different in that they seek to explain morality not as something 'given' by divine authority (i.e. derived from him) as such but as something based in theism itself: God, as a theistic personality, as it were, is the source of moral law (or moral duty). Two of these arguments are based on the classic theory that 'Every event must have a cause'.

These arguments are

1. The argument from the Divine Law-giver.
2. The argument from the Divine Claimant

and then, a third: The argument that reverence for the law is to a person.

The argument from the Divine Law-giver is based on the Law/Giver dichotomy. Its premisses are that

- (a) every law must have a law-giver
- (b) the moral law is a law
- (c) God is a law-giver

So (d) God gives the moral law.

The controversial premiss here is (c) although (b) can also be disputed. The claim that God is a law-giver is a petitio-principii. For if a moralist who is not an atheist or agnostic accepts it, then he will have accepted both that God is ultimate and that he is a law-giver, and thus will be constrained by his beliefs to accept conclusion (d). This would

prejudice all the argument that can be given against the Divine Commands Theory.

There is moreover at least one counter to the argument from the Divine law-giver - that is, from moral autonomy - that the moral agent is his own law-giver. We say this is plausible because, following from our argument about moral individuality (in Chapter VII), there is some sense in which every moral agent is his own law-giver - the sense that he can at least think out his own moral position, and the law has authority on him only insofar as he gives it to himself, he accepts that it binds him, that is. To say this is not to suggest that a man can choose his own moral obligations, but it is to affirm that to some extent a man's conscience is his own moral judge, though even at that, as we have argued, it is not a proof that he is infallible. If we accept this dimension of moral autonomy, the doctrine of the Divine law-giver stands questionable.

But an equally plausible theory of moral heteronomy can be placed against this. It can be argued that the man who 'gives the law to himself' certainly does not regard himself as its author, and that the point at issue is that of divine authorship of the law. The moral law is what he or she discovers and then adopts.

It might still be retorted that the man who adopts the moral law accepts it as authoritative to himself without regard to 'who gives it'. So, in a somewhat Kantian way, it is the content of the law which matters more than its author, and the heteronomous aspect of the moral law may be said to be not whose law it is, but what law it is.

It might however be insisted that were we to seek an account of the moral law in terms of a law-giver, God, and no other is the

law-giver, and that this is the crux of the matter.

It is at this point that an issue may be raised with premiss (b), for it may be questioned whether we in fact need the notion of a 'giver' at all in the moral law: the moral law is sui generis; it is a law without a law-giver. And this can be supported by suggesting that the use of the term 'law' in connection with the moral law is somehow just metaphorical, and that it is only when we forget this and think in terms of law in the legal sense that we think that a law-giver is necessary, thus allowing ourselves to be led by the nose by language. We would think that this objection is acceptable, and if it is, then we can still uphold the charge that the major premiss of the Divine Law-giver argument is question-begging.

The Divine Claimant argument, also basing on the theory that every effect has a cause, has the following premisses:

(a) Moral duty consists in 'claims' made on us.

(b) A Claim presupposes a claimant.

(c) God is a claimant.

So (d) God is the claimant to our moral duty.

This argument is structured on the obligation/claims dichotomy: where there is an obligation, there must be one to whom the obligation is made, and he is the claimant.

We find here, first in premiss (b), that although it may be analytically true that a claim does involve a claimant, it may still be asked whether an obligation always involves a claimant, for an obligation may involve either an ideal duty or an actual duty. The ideal duty is the one to which we owe the boon of realization, and it does not need to have a claimant. An actual duty may indeed have a claimant, but it is clear that an obligation as such is not always of interpersonal

character; it is interpersonal only when it involves an actual duty.

Our concern to realize goodness, whether properly to be called a sense of obligation or not, incorporates no consciousness of an other to whom the realization is owed. Perhaps it is the theistic conception of God as a person that makes theists think that either our moral obligations stand in relation to a personal God or they are no moral obligations. But there does not seem to be any such obligation/claims awareness in duty-consciousness itself.

The Divine Claimant argument may still be pressed from another angle. It may be argued that God is the owner of a right to each obligation. But this too is problematic. We cannot attribute a right to a person unless the realization of those values would constitute his own good; and in order to conceive God as having a right to our obligation to realize values (i.e. our goodness) we must be able to suppose that the realization of such values would actually constitute his own good - his own advantage, that is.

A likely analogy is to suppose that our goodness is to constitute God's good just as the goodness or nobility of a son gives his father happiness. But a son's goodness and his father's happiness are two different things, having, in fact, only emotional or psychological relationship, but no necessary one. There is no correlation between God's good and goodness actualized in the world. Moreover this whole argument presupposes that God is conceived as a human person, but suppose we discard, or at least question or amend this analogy, then we have only to see that the talk of God as having rights, qua God, becomes rather shaky.

Our rejection of the Divine Claimant argument on this interpretation is not at all meant to discredit the common belief that

(if we are God's 'children', then) as God's children, our achievement of goodness is a way of giving him pleasure just as we can speak of a son's nobility being a source of happiness to the father. But it is both to emphasize that moral goodness cannot be taken as pleasing God, and that to take it <sup>as</sup> doing so is denying the demand that duty makes on us and rather giving duty a utilitarian explanation.

The third argument directed towards establishing the moral law (or moral duty) on the theistic personality is broadly this: Kant spoke of the reverence we feel for the moral law.<sup>8</sup> But it is widely held that reverence can only be felt for persons, or at least, for what includes the character of being personal. We feel reverence when we are in contact with Duty or the Moral Law, and this is to a personal Holiness, that is to say, God. So the reverence which Kant spoke about in connection with the moral law is reverence for God, the argument runs.

But it can be objected that Kant's reference is to 'personal' reverence. It is true that Kant tells us that respect or reverence for the moral law is only for persons, never for things (including animals) but his concern in saying this is with the contrast of person and thing, not with that of moral law and person. It is quite clear that as regards the relation between persons and the moral law he finds the explanation of our ability to reverence persons in the fact that a person can be, as it were, the law itself made manifest in an example; our reverence is strictly not for the person but for the law. To find in the nature of the personal the explanation, or inner truth, of our reverence for the law is thus precisely to reverse Kant's position. There is a distinct reverence for the moral law which is not reducible to reverence for a person, and once we understand the term 'law' to be, as has already been suggested, metaphorically rather than literally

applied to moral experience, we shall not find it queer to think of reverence for law.

Thus our arguments for founding moral duty on what we have called the theistic personality have failed just as the previous ones which were directed towards explaining it in terms of theistic authority. So our arguments show that we have good reasons now for thinking it unsatisfactory to view moral duty as a separate institution which either depends upon God's 'personality' or <sup>is</sup> derived from his authority in any way. But to view it as something entirely unrelated to him leaves a gap in our moral thinking for, as we have already argued, there seems to be no other way of solving the impasse which non-natural objectivity poses of knowing what our moral demands will be when actualized except in vesting it in a being who is able to see into and will the future. Again, we have already asserted that we have in our arguments neither denied theism nor claimed that the theist's 'God' is not ultimate.

Now since the moral law must be related to God but cannot be seen either to derive from his authority or emanate from his 'personality', it can only be that they, Moral Law and God, that is, do not exist separately. The solution we shall adopt is therefore the Kantian one that the moral law is God<sup>9</sup>. This is the thesis we shall develop for the rest of this chapter.

But as we hinted when we remarked that duty (or the moral law) may be seen as 'one index' of what we mean by 'God', what we mean in saying that the moral law is God is that so far as consciousness of the moral demand is concerned, in and by itself, we understand what the theological term 'God' means through understanding the meaning of the non-theological term, the 'moral law'. If what the reflexive

religionists say about religion not being true without morality is true, it must be this then that since the term 'morality' is an index to the term 'God', you cannot be religious (i.e. know God) without knowing and doing your moral duty. It must also be why it is thought that atheists and agnostics who are known to be seriously moral are, by the same definition, also religious people, whether they acknowledge it or not. That seems to be the only way in which such assertions can make sense. Corollarily we would not call anything 'God' unless it acted according to, or perhaps fulfilled the highest moral demands that we could conceive. So it is by starting with, and developing our moral values that we come to gain some idea of what is meant by the term 'God'. This means that in considering the relationship of the will of God to the moral fact, we do not have to have a prior conception of a God, which must subsequently be brought into some sort of relationship with the moral law so that they either depend on him or he is conditioned by them. We identify the will of God with the realm of values which constitutes our morality, the goodness of things.

It is not at all implied by our position that the term 'moral law' exhausts the meaning of the term 'God'. It allows that the full meaning of the term 'God' spills over what is signified by the moral law. If 'God' has a 'larger' meaning then it will encompass a larger experience for us than that of the confrontation by the moral demand itself. It seems proper then to claim that the moral law in a sense would be illuminated if it were seen as an aspect of the richer totality of the Divine Being and were not simply derived from it.

It might then be asked why we rejected the theological arguments we examined if we were going to take this view of the explication of objective morality. The answer is that if the position

we have taken after severe scrutiny is the one which the arguments were aimed at, then the arguments did not faithfully express the point of view of those who held them. We judge the validity of a person's logical position by the way he has argued it, but still an argument may be sound without proving its case. The theological arguments may have been sound in many ways but they did not prove the conclusions arrived at. At best they seemed to waver between identifying the moral law with God and deriving it from him. But to follow from and to be part of are not synonyms, and the position we have taken cannot be arrived at through derivation.

The arguments from theological authority (arguments from 'God's World' and Divine Command) are directed towards making us accept the moral as derived from God just as ethical naturalism wants to make us derive it from natural facts; so they are naturalistic, though theologically so, and we reject them for the same reason we reject ethical naturalism<sup>9a</sup>. Arguments from theistic 'personality' (the Divine Claimant, and so on) base their claims on the highly questionable and faulty premiss that God is a person; and we reject that presupposition. It is the moral experience that interprets to us the term 'God' and not the other way round, so 'God' is, so to speak, the 'larger' meaning of what we mean by morality.

### 3.

Dutifulness or moral response is the other of the two facts which we said were fundamental to moral experience.

There are at least two ways in which the moral agent may respond to duty in theistic morality. It may be through performing particular acts or as what we shall call 'attitudinal response'. The first may bring the agent into conflict with the divine will, but our analysis of

moral autonomy (Chapter VII) and identifying moral duty with God or the Divine Will (in the last section) show that this need not occur. The alternative kind of response has the advantage that in it we can see how objectivism involves human nature itself, for moral response is seen, not in the performance of specific acts but as a response to the ideal of human nature. The emphasis is here shifted from the will to act, in the individual person, to what a person must become in himself. And in this the purported clash with the divine will would not arise since it is only in obedience to, or observance of, moral rules in specific acts that human freedom is called to action, and the possibility of a conflict suggested.

Attitudinal response, as we have called this type, is concerned with the realization of a certain sort of character or attitude than with obedience to rules. So when in theistic morality we ask the question, 'how should a man respond to duty?', we expect the answer in the form of what a man must become in himself rather than what moral rules he has to keep. This attitudinal response to moral duty is distinct for its emphasis not on the external acts of a man but on the inner aspects which are characteristic of man's nature, which ought to be realized, and whose realization implies being dutiful or doing what ought to be done. It is also distinct because it does not regard 'rightness' just as a quality synthetically a priori related to situations or acts of a certain type, but locates it in the nature of the human being itself - a nature defined not only by its present being but by a final end or goal implicit in it. Acts are therefore right not because they possess a supervenient quality of rightness, but if they conduce to the fulfilment of man's nature; or secondarily, if they maintain a state of affairs in which such fulfilment is made possible. When dutifulness

is seen in this way its factual core will be seen to lie in the ideal of human nature, an ideal conception of what the human being ought to be. Objectivism is therefore located, as it were, in the human nature, for it is the ideal of human nature which constitutes the moral facts which make the principles of duty true.

Two related problems may be raised at this point. It may be objected that ideals are not facts, so cannot be said to exist; that they are mere conceptions of a possible future which we would wish to realize. Secondly it may be argued that ideals are very diverse and are not stable; different men may choose different ideals and may change them every so often at will. So in talking about the ideals of human nature we must be talking of a plurality, of things which do not bind us as duties do, which may never be attained and for which, when not attained, we cannot be blameworthy, since we are generally not committed to our ideals.

These are, we would think, strong objections. For if ideals are not facts, they must be things we choose, and then choice, being ultimate, is criterionless, and an ideal without criterion cannot bind us objectively. So it matters to us that ideals are facts, and that they do exist. And if, as the second objection claims, ideals are a plurality, then objectivism is a pluralism and it would be misleading to claim to explain it in one Ultimate Being.

But the question of ideals not having existence need not astound us. We have already argued that although the moral fact borne by the moral 'ought' is a not-yet existent, it is, like facts in future-tense inductive sentences, nevertheless truth-valued although this is not determined by anything happening at the present; and that they are non-empirical facts (or truths), existing only conceptually. Thus to

say that our ideals are not-yet existents is, in other words, to say that they behave like, or indeed are, moral facts. Being moral facts they are therefore not criterionless, and their criterion lies, as we shall soon show, in their being subject to a transcendent realm of values. The problem would indeed have been great if there were no such realm of values.

In talking about ideals as what human being ought to be, we imply that they are claims, and as such are indeed a possible future to be realized; that is to say, the final end of man's nature is a claim. Being a claim it is made on him, not just in him as though his moral autonomy were 'duty-free'. As a claim made on him he has only to act in response to it; so although he enjoys some measure of autonomy, this autonomy is not meant to make him a purely natural phenomenon, something like the inanimate life of stones and trees, or at best, beasts - a life to which no values are attached, which is all that it is made of, the monarch of all that it surveys, so to speak.

If values are attached to his life then he has to respond to them; indeed they control his moral action and therefore transcend him. So when we speak of the agent realizing the ideal of his nature in his moral response or action, we mean that the ideal is his, not in the sense that it places him above the transcendent realm of values but in the sense that it is a claim on his nature to which he must respond. So the 'natural end' of man can only be defined in relation to the Ideal which makes claims on him, claims based in a realm of values above him.

This is where the word 'attitudinal' comes into the picture. Theistic morality is a function of man's attitude to this claim; that is to say, his reaction to it should exhibit theistic morality: in

other words, man realizes the objective claim in a certain way - as a claim to realize his ideal within the context of a transcendent realm of values. So the vital question which the attitudinal response to duty answers is 'what is man's attitude to the claim made on him?'; and the answer is that man apprehends an ideal which <sup>he</sup> has to realize within a transcendent realm of values.

It would be seen from this that attitudinal response to moral demand enlarges and develops the meaning of morality by involving human nature in it, seeing human nature as consisting in ideals which dutiful action aims to realize. Thus human nature fulfils rather than negates moral values. This is why in rejecting ethical naturalism we still uphold at least its claim that morality is connected with the human situation. But we see this connection not in the natural facts of the human situation but in human nature itself.

Now it may be asked how attitudinal response to duty is to be practised if it is not dutifulness directed to particular acts. Does it not just entail being ready to bring about the value in question wherever possible? It must be denied that this is the case.

Let us try to illustrate what is involved with one moral value - honesty. The principle of honesty provides a general description ("being honest") which covers many instances of human action, one or many of which may be practised. The principle also suggests that acts of honesty be done as often as possible, or at least that no act contradicting it (such as being dishonest) be practised. But it is often unclear when practising the principle whether it provides an adequate description of any given action or whether it need be supplemented by different or more general principles (e.g. being dishonest so as to provide for a sick child). The practice of the principle thus presents

problems of a seeming lack of direction to anyone who insists on practising it ordinarily.

To have an attitude towards honesty is a different matter. It is to have a concern for honesty, to adopt a general policy of action towards honesty so that one does not just refrain from being honest, but is positively and actively being prepared to act in accordance with the value. It is to adopt the value as something which extends over the whole of one's conscious life. It is not merely not to accept any moral rule as one which should not be broken. It is this cultivation of a general policy of action to moral values that is the attitudinal response to them; and as it is not just being obedient to any rules as such, it does not conflict with any purported moral authority, but rather involves the free human being in a way that mere observance of rules in the performance of specific acts does not.

We can now see what has got into this venture. Human nature is fully and freely involved, for it needs the full and free response of the person to the demand to effect a general policy of action towards moral values. But it must be denied that this means that the talk of the ideal of human nature implies a belief in human autonomy in the sense that opposes the belief that man's freedom is transcended by a realm of values which makes a claim on him. To think that an ideal so based is a plurality shows a failure to appreciate the unity which transcends it. So we answer the second objection - the objection from plurality of ideals - and assert that since the ideal is a claim, it binds, and we are blameworthy if we fail to respond to it. We shall develop this further in the next section.

Let us now sum up our argument on dutifulness or moral response so far. In examining dutifulness within theism we have

emphasized not the performance of specific moral acts but an aspect of the dutiful response which we have described as attitudinal. We have found that the conception of dutifulness as attitudinal response reveals a very essential aspect of moral objectivity - that morality involves the human nature itself - vital, we think, because the human agent is ultimately the subject of morality. In our analysis of attitudinal response we have shown that dutiful action implies following a policy of action rather than look at moral practices as existing on particular and disparate occasions; and that although attitudinal response to duty has for its purpose to show that human nature is involved in morality, it includes with this the full cognizance that the moral agent is still acting within a realm of values which makes claims on him and to which he must respond. Such a transcendent realm of values can only be found within an Ultimate Being - God. So acting dutifully is seen as man's adopting a policy of action towards values which are part of, but transcend his nature, but which constitute the ideal of his nature.

## 4.

Although we have argued that dutifulness requires that we follow a policy of action towards the realization of our ideals, this does not mean that for moral objectivists moral decisions will be easier. Moral decisions remain decisions even for objectivists, calling for thought, and an element of risk. They are not turned into a sort of 'reading off' of moral rightness in every human situation such that all that one has to do in moral action is to implement what one has clearly seen to be right.

Nevertheless for objectivists morality is not a pluralism. They do not just accept that there is an indefinitely large number of

ideals, all of which demand realization by men, and that it is entirely up to the individual which ideals he chooses to realize, and when. Religious objectivists such as Confucians, Buddhists or Christians choose different values as a result of holding different ideals, but there is always a unifying factor, for each of these religions has a paradigmatic life which unites the values and objectifies the chosen moral ideal. As one looks at the notion of 'the ideal' in this way, one sees the sense in which it may be said that ideals are a unity and not a diversity<sup>10</sup>.

But how, it may be asked, are the values chosen which constitute the ideal? The Confucian ideal man, for instance, is the man of gravity, and the accompanying values are benevolence, decorum, wisdom and sincerity, as exemplified in Confucius himself. The answer is that these values are chosen, not just for their merit as single values, but they are modified and juxtaposed with other values into a unity which constitutes the ideal, each value receiving its distinctive character only by the controlling unity of the ideal. Although one may say that there is a great number of diverse values, various groups of them are unified nevertheless by ideal conceptions of human life, and can properly be spoken of as elements in, or forms of, the unitary ideal which they express. The ideal for human life becomes, as it were, the ultimate moral principle within which all moral values are unified and possess their character.

Moral values are therefore not self-subsistent: they belong within a unity - the ideal of human life. It means that in speaking of the moral life we do not speak of self-subsistent values, any or all of which one may choose to realize at various times. We speak of a realm of values from which one will choose not just what is to be

realized at one time or the other, but an indefinitely large set of ideal patterns of human life, each governed by a dominant character according to the ultimate principle governing the choice of values (i.e. the ideal conception of what human life as such ought to be).

The existence of such a controlling principle seems to be an essential component of the moral life, for in setting the predominant note of a pattern of life it modifies the way in which values themselves are interpreted. It gives unity and direction to the individual life so that one seeks to develop a realization of values in a certain direction with that consistency which only a dominant principle can give. Thus suppose I want to set up my moral life what I need is a set of values for what is my conception of what human life ought to be (i.e. my ideal conception of human life). Then I, as it were, "apply" to the controlling principle, and am offered a set of values which would weld together to form my chosen ideal. The 'choice' of my ideal is to some extent<sup>11</sup> my own but the values which constitute it are not chosen by me but have to be the values which are demanded by my chosen ideal. Thus we may say that we 'choose' our ideals but do not choose our values<sup>12</sup>. Each value within the realm belongs within an ideal pattern and is controlled by the controlling unity - the ultimate moral principle<sup>13</sup>.

The various values which make up the ideal pattern of life must prop up one another before they can form the ideal. As Kant points out at the opening of Groundwork, no values are good in themselves as such. Humility, for example, is attractive, and so is courage; but one can be a humble idiot or a courageous bandit. So the realization of any one value in a life does not make that life morally laudable: it is a sign of moral inadequacy.

But we would not reject an ethic of values entirely as Kant does. What one should do would perhaps be to uphold the necessary unity of diverse values in one total ideal of life, unifying a set of values in one coherent pattern. It is only a commitment to the realization of these values that deserves to be called an adequate response to the moral demand made on man. So it is only in the light of the whole of a man's acts and attitudes throughout the whole of his conscious life that we can interpret adequately his disposition to virtue or the moral life. Those who devote their lives to the pursuit of ideals in life do not envisage them as binding on us at certain periods of our life and not at others, just as they do not envisage the practice of one moral value to the exclusion of others.

It is because of this integration of moral values as realized in human dispositions that morality tends to be exemplary in character; that is to say, it defines the attitudes and dispositions it requires not in terms of abstract values but in actual human life (e.g. Jesus Christ, for the Christians; or as we have pointed out, Confucius). It seems then that the moral demand is considered by the objectivist not as a sum of demands made by a number of discrete values but as a unitary ground which demands the realization of integrally related attitudes. For a Christian, for example, this set of attitudes constitute the 'Christian Virtues' and is a total response of the human person to a unitary moral demand.

We have now seen that it is unsatisfactory to speak of moral facts or moral values as though they were separate existents making demands on men. Rather the values which objectivists accept are to be seen as forms of one integrated response to a unitary moral demand. We have also seen that since this is so it would be misleading to

speak of values as if they were self-subsistent if this is meant to imply that each existed on its own. A more appropriate way would be to speak of moral values as attitudes and dispositions which express an integral response to a unitary demand. To speak of a moral value then is to speak of a claimed response to a unitary demand. Since attitudinal response results in taking a policy of action, this response leads to a policy of action in relation to the value demanded. To speak of courage, for instance, would be to speak of a response to maintain an attitude of truth in the face of danger; and to speak of humility would be to speak of a response to set one's dignity at nothing, and so on.

The unitary demand binds one to act in ways demanded by the value in question. Thus the general form for speaking of moral values will be

$X$  binds one (to do  $\theta$ ); or  $X$  binds one (to  $\theta$ ) (where  $\theta$  is an attitudinal response to adopt a policy of action in relation to the moral value in question, and  $X$  is the unitary demand). The unitary demand does not alter; what alters, depending on what ideal is pursued, is the value to which it binds one. It is the same demand which binds one to adopt attitudes to different values, and this is because they can only be adequately conceived as elements of one total response, the theistic attitude.

This unitary demand ( $X$ ) which binds one to pursue specific moral virtues in the realization of one fundamental moral response ( $\theta$ ) is what we call 'God'. Thus we can speak of God as the ground of moral values. 'God' is that which binds men to respond to, or adopt a policy of action towards the realization of, various moral values as forms of one integral responsive attitude to his being. And to be bound in this way is to be bound by the Moral Law.

Since it is God who binds men to these moral values, it is only natural to think of the values as concepts in the mind of God. But it would be mistaken to understand this as meaning that God apprehends these values from outside himself and then binds men to them, such that the values constitute, so to speak, part of his 'understanding'. Our meaning is far beyond this, for having taken God as the ground of our moral values we mean that these values, as they are apprehended by men, are within him: they are his will, and comprise the Divine Intention for man's being. Being within him, these values are part of the nature of God, as it were, not part of his knowledge or understanding. This is why we said that in considering the postulated relationship of God with the moral fact we do not have to have a prior conception of a God who would be seen to fit or not fit into the moral law as jig-saw puzzles do. The moral law is the mind or will of God, or at least constitutes part of what is known as his will.

But one thing must be made clear about our use of the phrase the 'will of God'. The presentation of the phrase in these arguments is licensed only by a general belief in moral objectivity. But there are other uses of the concept which are sometimes allowed to pervert the objectivist sense. Perhaps the most important of these is the notion of what God purposes for the world, and what, as omnipotent, he will eventually bring into being. This is sometimes expressed when people say of some event that happens to them that it is the will of God. They mean that God will embrace it within his general purpose for them to bring about some result he desires, which will inevitably be consummated at some time in the future. Such a conception is often interpreted to mean that an external force is controlling and thwarting human efforts to please himself, and that they do what they do because

they are constrained by that force.

Now this is a perversion of the objectivist notion of the 'will of God' which we are employing in these arguments. What is perverted is the objectivist belief that certain states of the world will be brought about by God which are in consonance with the objective moral ideal. That is to say, that not only is the ideal binding men as their final end, it is also determined to be actually realized in them however they, as men, try to suppress or thwart it. To understand this as a person's will being thwarted by an external force which imposes on him is a gross distortion. For what the objectivist is saying is that there exists a real teleological causality in the world which imposes binding claims on free human beings to realize specific ends.

We have been led to theism in our explanation of moral objectivity because of the necessity of knowing what our moral obligations will be when actualized. We now see that when they are actualized they will be the Divine Intention or the Will of God. But we have already said that acting dutifully is adopting a policy of action towards transcendent values which lead to the ideal of human nature - values which we have identified with the will of God. It then means that to see the moral life as the will of God is to see it as the realization of distinct human possibilities or ideals in response to a unitary moral demand (God) which calls us to be what we ought. To act dutifully or morally is therefore to be what we ought as well as to perform the Divine Will or Intention.

Suppose then it is asked why anyone should interpret the ultimate moral facts as elements of the will of God, the answer is that this is so because God is the ground of moral values, and moral values are concepts within the mind of God, so they constitute his will.

If the objectivist takes God as the ground of morality, and as a result of this identifies moral facts with the will of God, then he is on that count a theist. But his conception of God is not exactly the same as that which many religious people hold. There are, for instance, certain attributes of God - e.g. as Father - popular with religion, which do not seem to him to have any moral significance. The moral objectivist's conception is therefore different, and may even seem incompatible with what we might call the religionist's anthropomorphic presentation of God. Such a state of affairs could put the objectivist claim that God is the ground of moral values in a precarious position, for it would suggest a dualism about God's being which would be unsatisfactory for both the moral objectivist and the religionist. Moreover although the objectivist rejects certain 'personal' notions of God, such as 'claimant', and 'law-giver', which are employed in morality, he accepts some others such as 'will', 'purpose', 'intention'. It seems necessary therefore to clarify the notion of God in theistic morality, and this is what we shall try to do in this last section.

Professor Maclagan has suggested that the God of moral experience cannot at the same time be a personal God: we can only experience him in meditation, he contends, and meditation is not moral experience; in any case, that the acceptance of God as a person neither embraces nor elucidates our moral life -

... the God to which it (moral experience)  
testifies is a God that not only need not but  
cannot be conceived under the form of a person.

(ibid.p.94).

His argument is that although theism conceives of God in personal terms,

the nature of the moral demand requires that Deity (if it is accepted) be conceived as impersonal. For the concept of person cannot be purged of anthropomorphism while it retains its qualities of personality and this is what theism (that is, religion) seems to do. If Deity is to be presented as personal and impersonal, both features cannot co-exist. MacLagan then suggests that the term 'person' should be applied univocally unless we wish to introduce analogy into our usage.

Let us consider this opinion by first examining the use of analogy as a mode of communication. A broader look at what happens when we use words suggests that we cannot insist that they be used univocally unless we are concerned with cases where they are qualitatively identical in some clearly definable way. Usage makes allowances for the introduction of metaphors and analogies, without apology. We look at a large audience, for instance, and we talk of seeing 'a sea of faces'; and we do 'drive' our points home in an argument, even though we are aware that the words 'sea' and 'drive', when used in some other contexts may refer to a mass of water and forcefully inserting a body into somewhere or putting a vehicle into motion by steering it, respectively. We do not always use words either in equivocal or univocal sense, but rather we make room for a lot of borderline cases of usage. A vast majority of word-users use analogies to elucidate their points of view.

If we accept the fact that in most uses of language, even when there is nothing qualitatively identical between referents there is still something appropriate in speaking of them by using one term, then we should accept that the use of analogy is quite permissible in our descriptions, and that the theist may be justified in using the notion of personal for God, even as an analogy. By doing this he is neither breaking any language rule nor introducing something peculiar into usage.

Most of the appropriate and illuminating ways to talk of God are concepts drawn from personalistic contexts. This seems only natural and is not a claim that God is a 'person', just as we can talk of making 'room' for some point of view even though we are not talking in terms of a building. It is a likeness which in no way threatens to undermine the radical disaffinity between interpersonal relationships and the absolutely demanding Divine purpose. The likeness acknowledges the distinction between a 'person' (in the full human sense) and being 'personal' (i.e. being such that personalistic analogies are appropriate descriptions).

Professor Maclagan's contention that the concept of a personal God, in the sense of an omniscient, omnipotent being can neither add anything to, nor be deduced from, the mere experience of the moral demand is however true and well taken, hence we uphold our rejection of such arguments as those of God as 'claimant' and as 'law-giver', and so on, which take God as a person. But our exposition shows that it is all the same reasonable that the moral demand itself be best expressed in a personalistic language of the 'will of God', since doing this does not at least involve us in any logical offence.

But although we have argued that it is possible to conceive of God as 'personal' without committing any logical offence, it seems most likely that such a conception can be plausibly held only if we are prepared to accept a principle of complementarity, that is, that the (personal) conception of God as Father and his conception as a Necessary Being are complementary.

In the principle of complementarity two sets of concepts which are prima facie incompatible can each be shown to be essential to the understanding of certain features of a phenomenon. The

consequence of this is that each set of concepts must be denied literal applicability but may be taken as outlining a conceptual 'model', the use of which remains essential for certain purposes. It is fairly evident that we cannot refer to God in any normal way, for since our referential concepts are discursive (that is, they identify common or reidentifiable features in our environment) and there is nothing in our environment which can refer to the 'features' of God, it follows that when we speak of God we are not describing what some being is really like.

We use theistic language in worship and devotion and it is not out of place to say that we use the concept 'God' as a 'model' for the purpose of evoking certain attitudes in ourselves and others - attitudes of worship and devotion and thanksgiving, and so on, and that description was not our purpose. And since description was not our purpose we could not be expected to say what God was like by showing his similarity to earthly fathers. Such instantiation, if made, would be unconvincing even to impartial observers.

So we talk of God as Father, not as an earthly father, but as a form of reference deprived of empirical criteria, the connotation of which is left entirely open for a free play of the imagination in the shaping of our attitudes. Thus while it is possible for the religionist to interpret his experience in the light of such a concept - for example, he can view events in his life as moments of grace, forgiveness, providence or judgement - it is not possible to identify any event as a 'judgement' of God or his 'providence', etc. by any agreed criteria of what it is to count as such judgement or providence.

One can say of the religious use of concepts in this way that they are not constitutive concepts - that is, they do not derive

from specific cases of empirical instantiation - but regulative concepts, directing one's interpretative attitudes to experience, one's way of 'seeing the world', in general ways. In using the thought-model of 'Father', for example, the mind is directed to the conceptual image which is a mere thought-entity, from which all specific analogies with empirical criteria of application, or of spatio-temporal objects, are purged.

It might be asked how people come about using certain thought-models and not others; why, for example, the particular thought-model of 'Father' for God, and no other, is popular among religious people. The answer which they give - Judeo-Christians, for example - is that they came about the thought-models from the Scriptures, based on revelation.

In being based on revelation these models for conceiving 'God' naturally differ from the model of 'God' as necessary ground of moral values, which arises from natural reflection on the nature and presuppositions of moral experience. It then means that we can have two sets of models for conceiving 'God' - the set which asserts that there are necessary moral ideals, grounded in Necessary Being; and the set which asserts that this Being can, by revelation be described as Loving Father, Providence, forgiving, and so on, for purposes of religion and practical experience. The two sets of models do not contradict, since their function is not to assert properties, which may be incompatible. They are therefore complementary in that they show how 'God' must be conceived in different ways for different purposes - hence we talk about the principle of complementarity. That is why we said earlier that the moral objectivist's assertion that morality is an index of what we mean by 'God' does not exhaust what the term 'God' may

encompass. It does not, for instance, include this notion of Father, but as we see, it does not contradict it.

So while God must be conceived as the unchanging ground of moral obligation, to support moral objectivity, he can also be conceived as freely active in human experience and responsive to his creation<sup>14</sup>, to support religion or theistic devotion. We say these two conceptions are complementary because the former conception, if taken alone, leaves God remote and unconcerned about us; he would be only a moral ground, which is not necessarily an object of moral attitudes. And if the latter conception (i.e. the religious one, derived from revelation) is held alone, it would leave morality ungrounded (except in the power of an arbitrary divine fiat). But both conceptions, taken together, give an adequate conception of God for which he is both the ground and the proper object of our moral attitudes. So the moral objectivist accepts both conceptions of God - God is both the ground of morality and the object of devotion and worship.

Having said this, we can then have a closer look at the conception of God which is licensed by an interpretation of moral objectivity alone. We have used the term 'Necessary Being' in our discussion although we have not said how we come about it. As we have already seen, to the objectivist God is the unaltering unitary demand. But not being a pluralist, the objectivist also holds that there is a certain element of necessity about moral claims, namely, that only certain possibilities open to moral agents can be morally demanded.

There seems also to be something necessary about the very nature of the moral demand itself. The objectivist cannot, for instance, say that God is totally free: for God cannot be free to be evil. Suppose that he were free to be evil, would anything have been

right? Things surely would not have been as they are, and we cannot say that a different set of moral obligations other than what we now have would have been right. Thus one can say that God's will could not be other than it is, at least in its most general forms, and for this state of affairs to be maintained, God's freedom must work within certain limits of necessity. So God cannot be Unconditional Will: the Divine Will must be necessarily good if it is to be the ground of our moral values, since our moral values, qua moral values, cannot be otherwise than they are. One must suppose that God is necessarily good, and that goodness is necessarily what it is - for no other demands would be morally binding.

What one calls 'God's will' is the unitary ground of the moral demands made on one. But we must go further than this to say that only moral demands which are moral could, in principle, be made. This is, in other words, to say that the moral fact (or moral 'ought') demands only that which it necessarily demands, and no other. So one must say that if there is a moral demand at all it must be what it is. This is the basis, in moral experience, for the doctrines both that morality is necessary, not contingent, and that the being of God is necessary: it is not just a matter of fact which might have been otherwise that God is as he is or that morality is as it is. So morality is necessary, and God, being the ground of moral values, the unitary moral demand, is a Necessary Being.

So the being of a moral fact is not hypothetical. We cannot say, if there is a moral fact then its character must be necessarily determined. To say this is to imply the possibility of there not being a moral fact, and if we say if there is a moral fact it must be determined we make room for the question - by what would it be determined?

For if it was determined by something other than itself, it means it would be determined by a non-moral fact, and this is impossible. So the answer must be that it must be determined by itself. The moral fact is in this sense therefore a priori.

This is not to say that it determines itself to be what it is, as if it would have determined itself otherwise; nor is it to say, as the intuitionist might, that it is not based on any kind of reason, but is rather mainly intuited - suggesting arbitrariness. It is only to say that since the moral fact demands only that which it does demand, and no other, there must be something 'prior' which determines that only certain attitudes can be demanded, and no other, and this existent can be no other than the moral fact itself which must therefore exist necessarily with the character that it does have.

The notion of a being the existence and general nature of which is necessarily what it is, but is not determined by anything outside itself, is rather a mysterious one, and can be disputed.

David Hume<sup>15</sup> has contended that the very nature of a 'necessary being' is senseless:

whatever exists must have a cause or reason  
for its existence; it being absolutely  
impossible for anything to produce itself,  
or be the cause of its own existence. (p.161).

A necessary being, he insists, would have to be a being the non-existence of which was inconceivable, whereas one can conceive the non-existence of any being whatsoever.

Much as we cannot argue the existence of God in this thesis, something must be said briefly about our claim that he is a Necessary

Being, in the face of this objection. It might at least be said that although Hume's general supposition may be acceptable, and it is analytically true that whatever exists must have a cause or reason for its existence, there are some flaws in his reasoning in that supposition. What human beings can, or cannot intuitively conceive is a rather unreliable guide as to what is really possible. Perhaps one can visualize very clearly the impossible (for example, a thing existing in two places at the same time, or going back in time) but that will not make them possibilities. Also that we are able to visualize a centaur or a dragon does not make them existents. On the other hand there may be existents which we cannot visualize.

What this means is that there is a distinction between 'logical possibility' and 'real (or actual) possibility'. And it may well be that the non-existence of God may be logically possible (i.e. one can construct a linguistic formula denying God's existence); but factually possible (i.e. God could not not-exist). And since we do not know what the grounds are of its factual necessity, possibility and impossibility, we have no grounds to rule out such possibility. Or, as Aquinas has argued, since we cannot conceive the reality of God in itself, we are not in a position to know whether we can conceive its existence or not. Moreover since the claim that God is is not self-contradictory, we have no ground (as we saw in Chapter III - argument on 'Meaninglessness') to call it senseless. If God exists, and as is supposed, is ultimate, it means that as nothing can be more ultimate than, or co-ultimate with, him, nothing can cause or un-cause his existence. And since whatever exists must have a cause, it means that God alone can cause himself to exist.

We therefore have a reason to form the concept of a necessary

being. Our reason is that we have argued it to be so from moral experience; and since nothing precludes us from having the concept, we may as well assert it, being however aware that it is incomprehensible, in that we cannot understand how such a thing can be. What we know is that it seems to us to be so required that what is good or right is not just a contingent matter which could have been otherwise, but rather must be grounded in necessity.

We must conceive God then as a necessary being - a being which could not be non-existent, and which necessarily has the general nature that it has. And again if there is a physical universe (as our experience seems to show there is, though the necessity of the being of God does not entail it) the moral claims which exist in it will be necessarily determined to be what they are by the being of God. And it will be appropriate for moral agents in this universe to speak of the being of God, as apprehended by them, as an objective teleology (or goal or purpose) of the world, morally binding on them. It is in this highly qualified sense that the being of God, even as expressed in moral experience alone, can be properly spoken of as 'personal' and also is incomprehensibly far beyond 'personal' categories.

## 6.

Since moral judgements have a truth-value, there must be some fact to determine this. This fact - the moral fact - is non-empirical (that is also, non-natural) and is best illustrated in statements of obligation, i.e. statements of the form 'P ought to X', containing the moral sense of 'ought'. The moral 'ought' conceptualizes itself in our moral experience in claims and demands made upon moral agents which, once apprehended, bind; and binding, lead to action. Moral

facts make moral judgements true (i.e. they constitute the facts which justify them), and being thus justified, moral judgements are non-naturally objective, since the facts which justify are non-natural.

But statements of obligation sound a note of uncertainty, being futuristic in aspect and, as objective truths must need be actualized, the objectivist finds it necessary to resort to an Ultimate Being who should not only have knowledge of what our moral obligations will be when actualized, but will also be able to bring them about. The religious person's (or theist's) 'God' answers to these qualities.

Moral experience can neither thrive on the friendliness of a theistic universe, nor as Divine Commands, nor even as caused by a theistic personality just as a person can cause something to be. As moral obligation (or moral law) must be related to God in any case, and yet is neither derived from, nor caused by, him, it must be that the two - morality and God - do not exist apart. So the moral law and God are one. This does not imply that all that can be said about God is morality, for God has other attributes. But it means that to know God one has got to know and practise morality. We interpret our moral experience by seeing the will of God and our moral values in a continuum. It is perhaps when we do not realize this relationship that we tend to see them, so to speak, as two parts of a large metaphysical jig-saw, which do not fit. 'God' is the unitary moral demand - that which demands and binds men to regard to moral values, values which constitute the ideal of man's nature - what man ought to be. And because these values, though varied, are grounded in God, they are not a plurality as it might seem (he is the unitary demand), but are part of one Divine will or Intention for man.

These values are within God, not just part of his 'understanding', so he does not seek to apprehend them from outside himself and then to demand them. Yet God is not Unconditional Will: he can only demand that which he demands; so the moral demand is necessary, and God, as the unitary moral demand, is a Necessary Being.

It may be difficult to comprehend the notion of a necessary being, but there is nothing logically impossible in thinking there can be one. And what we know is that it seems to be so required by our moral experience that rightness is necessary, not contingent.

To the religious person this Necessary Being is also Father, and worthy of devotion and worship. These two conceptions - that the Necessary Being is the ground of morality, and that he is worthy of devotion - are complementary and are both held without contradiction by the moral objectivist.

#### Notes and References

1. It is therefore convenient to use 'moral facts' and 'moral claims' or 'demands' synonymously.
2. We have made reference to this in Chapter I.
3. The message of the 8th Century Prophets is believed to have been summarized in the following words of Micah: "He has showed you, O Man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to work humbly with your God?" (Micah 6 v.8).
4. George Appleton: Daily Prayer and Praise. World Christian Books No. 41. Butterworth Press, London. 1962. Day 8 Morning.
5. W.G. Maclagan: The Theological Frontier of Ethics. Allen & Unwin. 1961. p.61.

6. The Dialogues of Plato : Euthyphro. The question which is raised in the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro is whether piety is loved by God because it is holy, or holy because it is loved by God.
7. S. Kierkegaard : Fear and Trembling. Translated by W. Lowrie. Princeton Univ. Press. p64ff.
8. The Moral Law : H.J. Paton. Reverence is Kant's third proposition in his analysis of the Good or Dutiful Will - "Duty is the necessity to act in reverence for the law" (p.14).
9. Kant did not think that the analysis of morality showed that the moral law must be commands of God. What he did believe was that 'a conviction of the existence of a supreme being' can be 'based on moral laws'. (Critique of Pure Reason. A632).
- 9a. J.L. Mackie hypothesizes a morality which would fully accommodate ethical naturalism and some form of theism - what he calls a coherent view or the descriptive/prescription distinction (op.cit.pp231-232). In it natural facts could supply the content while theism supplied the normative or prescriptive element. He rejects this hypothesis, and we reject it too but for different reasons. We think that any morality which evolved from a coalition of ethical naturalism and theological naturalism would only combine the weaknesses of those theories for which we rejected them.
10. The pattern seems to be something like this: moral values unify to form moral ideals, and the ideals are unified in a paradigmatic life, or what we may call the ideal conception of human life. Our values determine what we ought to do - that is, our obligations.
11. We say 'to some extent' because the choice of ideals is not random.

We have shown that they themselves are united in a paradigmatic life. It would perhaps be better to speak about 'thinking out' our ideals rather than 'choosing' them.

12. Again it would perhaps be better to speak of our 'adopting' rather than 'choosing' our values.
13. In rejecting naturalism we had commended the naturalist opinion that moral choices are not random, and that moral judgements have a background, and then that individuals cannot freely formulate their own backgrounds. We have reiterated this issue in our arguments on the autonomy of moral judgements and in our observation in Section 2 of this chapter that moral obligations are not just arbitrary. It is now clear what we mean.
14. We are aware of the assumptions we make in talking about God as 'Creator'. But arguments about the existence, and/or attributes, of God cannot be pursued in this thesis more than we think necessary for our purposes.
15. Hume on Religion. ed. R. Wollheim. Part 9 of 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion'.

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5. Taylor, A.E. : Plato. University Paperbacks. Methuen. (1971).
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7. Wollheim, R. (ed.) : Hume on Religion : 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion'. Fontana.

## CONCLUSION

Moral objectivity is not just presupposed in our moral discourse and consciousness it is a fact that morality is objective. This objectivity is neither naturalistic, nor established merely by intuition; its propositions are not analytic, nor can they be arrived at through rational deduction or through obeying God's commands as such. It is rather based on moral facts, which justify our moral judgements and establish moral truth. Moral truths are synthetic - a priori truths and are grounded in God. This last fact constitutes their relationship with religion.

In order to establish objectivity in this way it has become necessary for us to reject some of the main claims of the moral theories we examined. In doing this we take cognizance of the fact that there is hardly a moral theory which has nothing to commend it. To deny this would be an over-simplification of our problem, and indeed of the whole complex nature of moral philosophy. This is why, as far as possible, we point out what we think are the merits of a theory even though we may reject its main thesis, and we have tried to build these qualities into our own formulation, as much as is necessary and feasible.

Our own conclusions, namely, that moral truths are non-natural synthetic-a priori truths, and that they are grounded in God, may themselves be questioned, for both the existence of synthetic-a priori truths and the existence of God are, to say the least, highly contestable. About the synthetic-a priori we have only this to say: that whatever can be said about it, ethics is not alone in employing it. We have already argued (in Chapter III) that it alone can be the theory on which the Verification Principle is set up since the propositions in

which it is couched can neither be analytically true nor verified by the senses. Or, as Dr. A.C. Ewing points out, paradoxically the proposition that there are no synthetic-a priori propositions can itself only be maintained as a synthetic-a priori proposition (The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy. op.cit. p.39).

And it may quite legitimately be asked about an atheist's values, or what is sometimes called 'secular morality' - does the identification of morality with theism mean that there is no such thing? Our answer is that as far as our arguments go, there is no secular morality if by that is meant morality that is not grounded in God, and that anyone who accepts our arguments is bound to accept the non-secularity of morality. The reason for this is that since a man's being moral consists in his acting in accordance with values which fulfil certain ideals of his nature, and these ideals are demanded by God necessarily, it follows that a morality which claims not to be grounded in God is ipso facto not based in human ideals. And we do not think such a morality possible. We are however aware that the issue of secular morality may be too vast to be disposed of in a few sentences.

In arguing for a theistic morality we have presumed that God exists, and we are aware, once again, of the temerity of this particular presumption. In our arguments we have not involved ourselves in giving reasons for it more than we think necessary to elucidate our position. We have rather taken advantage of the fact that the dispute over the existence of God is still going on among philosophers and that no settlement has yet been reached against it (nor for it). If and when the dispute is over it happens to be settled that God does not exist, then our arguments fall, and with them perhaps most of the world's religions.'

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