Second Thoughts in Moral Philosophy

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Reader in Philosophy in the University of Cambridge

SECOND THOUGHTS IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

by the same author

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by

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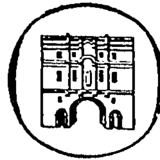

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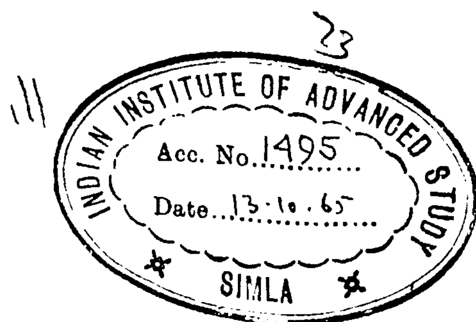

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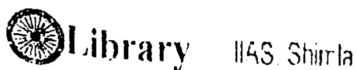

PREFACE

It is not necessary today, I think, for a philosopher to apologize for having second thoughts; it would rather be necessary for him to apologize for not having them. At the same time I certainly do not wish to suggest that my second thoughts have been such as to undermine most of what I had to say in the previous book in which I tried twelve years ago to expound a more or less original theory of moral philosophy, *The Definition of Good*. I still consider that Moore and Ross have made a much greater contribution to the subject than any of the 'linguistic' philosophers who followed them, but in my earlier book I overlooked the possibility of intermediate positions which have been developed since Moore and Ross did their main work, and I hope that I have by now benefited from the criticisms of recent philosophers without abandoning what essential truth there is in the objectivist theory of ethics. Those who criticized my earlier works will certainly find a reply, but I hope that they will also find substantial amendments which will make the work seem to them much less one-sided. While before I called myself uncompromisingly a non-naturalist, I now aim rather at a synthesis of what is true in the different conflicting types of theory.

I am greatly indebted to the following for having read through portions of my typescript and given me the benefit of their comments: Professors B. Blanshard, H. D. Lewis and H. H. Price, Dr. D. A. Rees, and Mr. R. Hare. I have also to thank the Macmillan Company of New York for having given me permission to publish this work despite the fact that it covers part of the ground covered by my *Definition of Good* published by them, and the editors of the following for having given me permission to use articles printed by them, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* (no. 39),

Preface

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A. C. EWING

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Chapter One

THE NEW SUBJECTIVISM

Since Professor G. E. Moore first tried to refute 'naturalism' in moral philosophy, a great deal of water has flowed under the bridges. There has been a very strong reaction against Moore's view, but all the same I think that, if a poll of British professional philosophers were taken today, very few would support the straightforward naturalism which simply equates good and right with empirical scientific concepts, though probably none would endorse Moore's precise arguments against it. Nor would Moore himself for that matter. Most philosophers in this country would now recognize quite clearly that what are known as 'ethical judgements' do not simply state psychological, biological or sociological facts about most people or about the speaker's social group or about the speaker. That at least is a real big step forward in moral philosophy. Among scientists and amateur philosophers the proportion of straightforward or muddled naturalists is no doubt very much greater, and I therefore still regard it as a matter of importance to bring arguments against naturalism in ethics, as I tried to do in *The Definition of Good*.[1] But I shall not repeat them in this book, though I shall say some things relevant to naturalism.

Understanding by 'naturalism' the view that all ethical judgements are completely analysable as assertions of factual propositions falling within the subject-matter of a natural science, we may say that the position of naturalism as the leading opponent of any objective non-naturalist theory has now been inherited by the more subtle view that it is not the function of ethical sentences *qua* ethical to make statements, and that therefore there are, strictly speaking, no ethical propositions. It is contended that the

[1] 1947, publ. New York, Macmillan & Co., London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

reason why naturalist modes of ethical analysis are unsatisfactory is not because there are non-natural properties or relations involved which they do not cover but because they omit any reference to the functions of ethical language other than that of asserting propositions. A naturalist analysis makes ethical language informative like the language of natural science, but ethical language as such, it is said, is not informative either about natural or non-natural properties. If an informative element is admitted at all, it will on this view be naturalist (usually a psychological statement about the speaker), but even where this element is held to be part of the meaning of an ethical sentence it is not regarded as the characteristically ethical part. By itself it would be psychology and not ethics; in this respect the philosophers of whom I am speaking are in agreement with Moore. But what is the missing element which alone is characteristically ethical? It is not a proposition about a non-natural property, nor indeed a proposition at all. Ethical sentences are ethical, it is held, not because they assert anything, but because they express a certain attitude which is not cognitive, or at least not primarily cognitive, but emotive and practical.

Thus philosophers have accepted the paradox that 'ethical judgements' are neither true nor false, objectively neither valid nor invalid, because their function is not to state (even if they in some sense incidentally imply) propositions. It is this view that I shall start by discussing. The view is on my definition not naturalist, but it would be still more misleading to call it non-naturalist. Many writers would indeed include it under the term 'naturalism'. Since a name is wanted, I shall call it 'subjectivism'. But the name does not matter much; if you still call it naturalism, you must at least recognize a great difference between it and the older naturalism.

It must also be distinguished from the view, often also called 'subjectivism', which maintains that 'ethical judgements' are simply judgements about the speaker's psychological states or dispositions, a view which would on my definition be a form of naturalism. This is different from saying that they *express* his psychological state but are not judgements at all. Professor Stevenson[1] tried to blend the two views by making them emotive

[1] C. L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language*.

or practical and non-assertive as a whole but adding that they include an assertion about the speaker's state of mind, but it is clear that for him the first point was of primary importance. The assertive element was plainly for him not essential if they were to be ethical, but as mere statements about the speaker's psychology they would not have been for him ethical at all.

Now I attacked such views as well as naturalistic views in *The Definition of Good*, and I still think the arguments given there to be valid against at any rate the only forms of 'subjectivism' which had up to then been expressed in published works. But unfortunately I must conclude from the subsequent development of ethical controversy that my arguments and the statement of my own position were not put in a form which has very wide appeal today, and this, even if my position had remained quite unaltered in essence, would call for an attempt either at restatement or at any rate at a reply to the main counter-objections. But a second reason for restatement lies in a new philosophical development of great importance. Till about 1950 or later it seemed to me that the gulf between myself, for instance, and philosophers who denied that 'ethical judgements' could be objectively true was as great as almost any there could be in philosophy and was one that admitted of no bridge or compromise position. But since then it has become clear to me that a new kind of view was developing in many quarters which held the promise of being just such an intermediate position and was in fact far more like my own view than its exponents have usually realized. This view I shall discuss in the second chapter under the heading of the 'middle way'. It amounts to saying that, although we cannot have ethical judgements which are true or false, there can still be good or bad reasons, justified or unjustified decisions in ethics, in a sense in which 'good reasons', 'justified' etc. are neither to be defined naturalistically nor regarded merely as subjective expressions of attitude without any claim to objective validity, but have criteria of their own as worthy of respect in their sphere as are the criteria of science in hers, though they are criteria which establish value or rightness but not truth. I do not hold the view to be above criticism, but I certainly think that it escapes the worst defects of subjectivism, and I must admit that I have learnt from it myself

and am ready now to adopt a view intermediate between it and the view I maintained in *The Definition of Good.* In the present chapter I shall still be discussing the more straightforwardly subjectivist view, so that the respects in which my own theory has changed will not yet appear. I must ask the reader to await the second and third chapters for this. When he has read them, he will see that I am more prepared to admit good points in subjectivism and naturalism than will be apparent from the present chapter, the main purpose of which is negative. In fact a number of the views which I criticize in this chapter in their extreme form will appear in a more moderate form in my own solution, which I can thus claim does justice to the points that have led people to adopt subjectivism and naturalism as well as to those which had led others to adopt non-naturalism.

According to the subjectivist view what we should ordinarily call 'ethical judgements' are held incapable of being either true or false, and therefore they should, strictly speaking, not be named 'judgements'. However, since I am unable to think of another word which is suitable, I shall go on using the phrase 'ethical judgements' in inverted commas to stand for what is normally expressed by ethical sentences without, by the very use of the phrase, intending to connote that they can be true, but leaving it open whether they do or do not assert anything. On some views we should then have to draw a very sharp distinction between 'judgements' and judgements. In particular it would today widely be held that an objective theory does not do justice to the practical character of 'ethical judgements'. Now, the accounts given by Moore, Ross and myself, may well be at fault in treating 'ethical judgements' in a way which suggests a greater likeness than they have to the theoretical judgements of natural science.[1] If so, the naturalists must be admitted to have been much more in error than we were, since the point of their view is that ethical judgements are not merely similar but just reducible to judgements of natural science, but that does not refute the criticism of our view. Still I must remind critics that for all three of us the problem what ought to be done was central. For Moore himself the concept of good owed its supreme importance in ethics to the fact that we

[1] *Vide* below, p. 50 ff.

ought always to do what would produce the greatest good; and both Ross and I discuss much more what kind of things ought to be done (and why) than what things are good in themselves. However, I must add that a view which like mine finds the fundamental concept of ethics in *ought* has much more affinity to the modern theories to which I have been referring than one which finds it in good as a quality. To say that 'A is good' means 'we ought to adopt a certain attitude to A', a view which I laid down in *The Definition of Good* and am still prepared to defend in some form, as will be seen later in this book, is to make all statements that something is good (in an ethical sense), if not quite commands or resolutions, at any rate statements about a practical attitude that ought to be adopted. This will not satisfy our opponents, their purpose being not to make 'evaluative and ethical judgements' into theoretical judgements about practical attitudes but to deny that they are judgements in the strict sense at all; but it must be admitted that it involves a considerable move in their direction, made by me before the type of theory I am discussing had been, to any considerable extent at least, developed in print.[1]

Now of course it must be admitted that 'ethical judgements' at any rate are normally not merely theoretical, in the sense that they have a practical function as well as a theoretical one. The point of making them is usually not mainly to find out the truth but to decide what ought to be done. This seems hardly to hold of ethical judgements about matters of purely historical interest, e.g. was it right of Brutus to kill Caesar?—but in the use of ethical judgements for the purpose of practical decision may reasonably be regarded as fundamental and primary. But we are not necessarily entitled, because ethical judgements have usually a practical function, to conclude straightway that they are not in themselves just cognitions or statements of knowledge or belief. I have great sympathy with the attitude of Professor Brandt who says: 'Let me make clear at the outset that I shall ignore the purpose for which ethical utterances are made, as well as their non-cognitive effects on attitudes, and in particular their alleged "emotive

[1] I first put forward my analysis of 'good' in terms of 'ought' when I gave the ethics course at Cambridge in 1935–6. I published an article in *Mind* advocating it in 1939 (Vol. XLVIII, p. 1 ff.).

meaning". I ignore these matters because they are irrelevant to our concern. They are irrelevant because whether an utterance makes an empirical assertion is a matter logically independent of the purposes which motivated it and of its non-cognitive effects.'[1] Brandt was defending an empiricist, naturalist view of ethics, but what he says here might equally well be said by an upholder of a non-naturalist view, omitting presumably the word 'empirical'. The view which insists on the purpose of 'moral judgements' as the essential key to their nature is too much in the air for me just to ignore it as Brandt suggests; but I must point out that the medical judgements of a doctor diagnosing a disease certainly have a practical function and are made solely for practical ends, but that this does not prevent their being as much on the internal side cognitive and on the external side statements of what is taken to be true as anything in natural science. Why can we not say something similar about the judgements of ethics? As the doctor in order to prescribe effectively must know what the patient's disease is and what the causal laws relevant to its cure are, so in order to act rightly must we not know true propositions in ethics?

On the other hand nobody would say that the whole moral attitude is just reducible to a cognition of truth. Everybody would admit the presence of cognitive, conative and affective factors alike in the typical moral attitudes; the only dispute is as to their relative place and functions. It is obvious that the adoption of a moral attitude towards a possible action presupposes some knowledge of the circumstances and some belief as to what its more immediate consequences would be likely to be. But so far this is just 'naturalistic'. These are factual and not distinctively ethical beliefs, though presupposed in an 'ethical judgement'. And it is certainly not necessarily to say that the moral attitude as a whole is essentially cognitive or even that there are in the strict sense any moral judgements at all. The same applies to evaluative 'judgements' in general. We cannot identify them with the factual judgements they presuppose without falling back into naturalism, and I agree with the prevailing school in this country that naturalism is inadequate. But what about the view now very widely held that 'ethical judgements' and 'evaluative judgements'

[1] *Mind*, vol. LXI, no. 244, p. 458.

in general do not assert anything, or a view which admits that they include a descriptive factual element naturalistically conceived but insists that what makes them evaluative or ethical 'judgements' is neither this nor anything they assert but the practical (and perhaps emotional) attitude they express? We must not necessarily take for granted either that, because they presuppose cognitions or beliefs, they are themselves cognitive, or that, because their function is to lead to action, they are themselves decisions to act or exhortations to action.

Probably few would now defend the view that ethical sentences just express emotions as feelings. Apart from any criticisms from the objectivist side there is the necessity of distinguishing ethical feelings from others, since obviously all emotions are not such that their mere expression involves an 'ethical judgement'. It seems that we cannot make the distinction adequately by referring merely to a qualitative difference of feeling, which would inevitably be indefinable and incommunicable, but only by bringing in the nature of the tendencies towards action with which the feelings are connected, and psychologists would in general certainly take this view about emotions today.[1] But in that case any definition of ethical emotions will be in terms primarily of action, or rather, I should say, conation, not feeling.

However, not only 'ethical judgements' but even the most indisputably and coldly theoretical judgements express a state of mind, i.e. belief. Further even those who are unwilling to admit that 'ethical judgements' can assert what is objectively true are not bound to say that they are *merely* expressions of the speaker's state of mind. Even if they do not state propositions but, for instance, issue commands, the issuing of commands can just as well be distinguished from the mere expression of a state of mind as can the asserting of propositions. Similarly if they are said to be decisions to act, and therefore also if they are said to be doing something quite unique but analogous to the issuing of commands or the making of practical decisions. In so far as they are regarded as expressing states of mind at all, such theories give primacy to the conative side. But the influence of much modern 'psychology' and of Professor Ryle has told very strongly against talking in terms

[1] *Vide* e.g. Lament, *The Value Judgement*, pp. 219–21.

of states of mind and in favour of talking in terms of behaviour, and that helps to lead philosophers to prefer a theory of 'ethical judgements' which emphasizes their affinity with commands, though it must be noted that this is not the same thing as saying that they *are* commands. It is quite plain and would be generally admitted, not only that all commands are not 'ethical judgements', but that 'command' must be used in an unnaturally wide sense if it is even to *include* 'ethical judgements'. The most significant of such judgements that we make relate to our own actions, and it is not a normal or very intelligible usage to speak of 'commanding oneself'. Even as regards our relations with others, the 'ethical judgements' we make to them are much more commonly better styled exhortations, appeals or requests than commands, even if they refer to their possible future actions. And it is not easy to see how the theory is to be applied to the very numerous 'ethical judgements' which we make about past actions. All these cases do have something in common, but I cannot think of any term except 'ethical judgements' which could appropriately be applied to them all. It would be still more difficult to extend the command theory to cover all 'evaluative judgements'.

These are not to be considered as fatal objections to the type of view under discussion. I have no doubt that the philosophers who insisted on the affinity between 'ethical judgements' and commands would usually either admit that they were using the word 'command' in a somewhat loose sense, or say that 'ethical judgements' were not commands but only like commands in certain respects. It may be contended that all 'ethical judgements' consist in urging some action, principle or attitude on oneself, or others, or both. Even when I make an 'ethical judgement' condemning the past actions of some historical personage, it may be said that I am urging on myself and others the principle that that kind of thing should be regarded with disapprobation, I am throwing my influence behind the condemnation and avoidance in the future also of that type of action. And, even if this reply is not accepted, it can still be said that we may reasonably regard such 'judgements' as secondary compared to 'judgements' as to what I ought to do next. As regards these latter, however, 'resolve' or 'decision' seems a more appropriate word than 'command', in fact it is hard

to see what else 'commanding oneself' could mean. At least if we take 'commanding myself' to mean 'urging myself in some special way to do something', this already presupposes the decision to do it or at least to try to do it. And recent ethical theories have commonly talked in terms of decisions rather than in terms of commands.

It has been contended plausibly that a theory that 'ethical judgements' were a kind of commands or 'imperatives' would escape the usual arguments against 'ethical subjectivism'. An important objection to the view that 'ethical judgements' only express the speaker's state of mind or maintain that he is in a certain state of mind has been that the same 'ethical judgements' could then never be made by two different persons, and another has been that in that case 'ethical judgements' made by different persons would not contradict each other. But it can now be replied that two people can issue the same command and that commands may contradict each other as well as propositions.[1] It seems to me clear that the sense in which they contradict each other is not the same as that in which propositions do, but it is sufficiently similar to give at least some slight plausibility to the explanation that the objectivist has confused two different senses of 'contradiction'. It is also an improvement to substitute for the view that 'ethical judgements' state the results of introspection or just express one's feelings the view that they consist in doing something practical. And, finally, to repeat, the theory avoids the objection that, when I say that somebody else ought to do something, I am plainly not talking just about my own state of mind. To issue a command is not to make a judgement about my state of mind, though a command is sometimes expressed by a sentence which looks as if it just made such a judgement, e.g. I wish you would go.

But a theory which makes 'ethical judgements' merely a kind of commands or closely analogous to such is liable to two very serious objections of a type which in some form, I think, upset all

[1] On the other hand two people cannot, strictly speaking, make the same decision but only similar decisions, and I do not think it quite correct to talk of contradictory decisions unless the same person has made both of the decisions said to be contradictory, but I do not wish to press this verbal objection. We do say, 'I have made the same decision as you', though it cannot refer to literally the same act, and my decision may well be 'in conflict with' (if not 'in contradiction to') yours.

subjectivist and naturalist theories. The first is especially apparent when we realize that many 'ethical judgements', if imperatives[1] at all, are imperatives addressed not to others but to ourselves. Now an imperative to oneself either is or implies a decision to act in the way laid down by the imperative. And even in my relations to others I cannot command sincerely except with the intention of having what I command done. Yet it certainly would be generally held and is, I think, obviously true that I can judge that I ought to do something and yet refuse to do it. Hence the imperative theory leads to the paradox that we never do what we really judge to be wrong. The paradox in fact seems to be accepted by Professor Nowell-Smith[2] and Professor Braithwaite[3] and with certain reservations by Mr. Hare, thinkers who do not indeed hold that 'ethical judgements' are commands but who are at least very much influenced by their analogy with commands and still more with decisions to act. The first two seem indeed to make then simply a variety of such decisions, while Hare makes the test whether 'someone is using the judgement "I ought to do" as a value-judgement or not, "Does he or does he not recognize that if he assents to the judgement he must also assent to the command, 'Let me do X'?" '[4] I wish for heaven's sake that, every time I did

[1] I use 'imperative' to cover what is not exactly a command but like it in function.

[2] *Ethics*. 'In deciding that something is the best thing for him to do a man has already decided to do it,' (p. 102). 'If I say to myself "I ought to pay that debt" in the verdict-giving sense of "ought", I am not merely recognizing the existence of a moral rule; I am subscribing to that rule. . . . In such a case, therefore, "I ought" entails "I shall", of which it is a special case,' (p. 268). On p. 288 however Nowell-Smith seems to admit that cases of voluntarily not doing what one ought occur, but discounts their importance.

[3] *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, p. 14.

[4] *The Language of Morals*, pp. 168–9. He makes this a matter of verbal definition, but he obviously would not have given the definition if he did not think it came close to the ordinary usage of 'value-judgement'. On p. 171 he maintains that to say that 'ought' is used evaluatively is to say it is used as entailing at least one imperative, which is not the same as saying that it itself is an imperative, but has some of the logical consequences of the latter doctrine. My objection is not avoided by saying that not all decisions are moral judgements. The philosophers I am criticizing certainly do not want to say that they are, but while they thus avoid the objection that we can make decisions which are not moral, there remains the objection that we can make a moral judgement without deciding to carry it out, which is incompatible with moral judgements either being or entailing decisions to act. Because I have cited Hare it must not be assumed that I suppose his views to correspond to my

assent to the judgement that I ought to do X, it always followed that I assented to the command, 'Do it,' i.e. that I did X! Nor in view of the testimony of the greatest saints that they often had done what they knew they ought not to do can this discrepancy be regarded as due solely to any special depravity in me, incomparably below them as I am. If Hare's test taken literally were the right one, there would be no such thing as sin. And we have been told *ad nauseam* that all men sin. On this issue I do not wish to challenge the theologians, though I think they have often much exaggerated human depravity. Hare recognizes this point partially because he goes on to say, 'If a person does not do something, but the omission is accompanied by feelings of guilt, etc., we normally say that he has not done what he thinks he ought. It is therefore necessary to qualify the criterion given above for "sincerely assenting to a command", and to admit that there are degrees of sincere assent not all of which involve actually obeying the command.'[1] But this seems to be to fall back on defining moral attitudes in terms of feeling. How is guilt to be defined? Either we must just say that it is an indefinable but qualitatively recognizable kind of feeling, or we must define it as the feeling we have when we go or recognize that we have gone against our moral decisions, and then the moral has been defined in terms of itself. Hare adds an 'etc.' to his criterion, but I cannot discuss this as he does not say what the extra criteria are. It would obviously be circular to make them avowals that one has done wrong, and hesitations in action might be due to many other causes.

However, there is more point in the view I am criticizing than may seem at first sight. In two respects at least the Socratic paradox about sin may have something true and important to tell us. Firstly, if we recognize that we ought to do something, we tend, *other things being equal*, to do it. The trouble just is that other things are very often not equal, i.e. though following the right course has an attraction for us, something else attracts us also. Perhaps

account of the subjectivist; on the contrary, discussion with him has convinced me that on the whole he belongs to the type of thinker whom I discuss in the next chapter.

[1] Pp. 169–70.

even an utter scoundrel would usually adopt the honourable rather than the dishonourable course if he thought them equally certain, equally pleasurable, equally easy and equally speedy ways of fulfilling his non-moral desires, and if he did not so act under these conditions I should doubt whether he could make genuine 'ethical judgements' at all. It may even be that it will turn out a necessary implication of 'ethical judgements' that the person who makes them fulfils them in action *ceteris paribus*. If so, we shall be able to agree with Hare as regards what appears from discussion with him to be the main point on which he wished to insist, although the expressions quoted from his book certainly suggest that he meant something more. All the same we cannot possibly define the moral as what we tend to do, other things being equal, not because we do not tend to do it, but because we tend also to do a great many other things. We have a tendency to do, other things being equal, whatever we think leads to the furtherance of any one of our desires, there is nothing destinctive in this respect about the desire to act rightly.

Secondly, if by 'knowing' we mean not merely intellectually knowing but fully realizing emotionally the nature of an action and its consequences, it may be that anybody who knew in this sense what was right or wrong *could* not act against his knowledge. Would we ever selfishly hurt anybody else if we were so sympathetic as to feel their troubles as much as our own? It might thus be urged that we can only go against our 'moral judgements' because they are pretty poor specimens of 'moral judgements'. To learn the true nature of anything, it might be added, you must consider it in its most perfected form, and in that form 'moral judgements' would inevitably be decisions to act. But it remains true that in the ordinary sense of a 'moral judgement' we can very well go against it, and it therefore for us in our ordinary experience neither necessarily is itself nor necessarily carries with it a decision to act. No doubt very often it is acted on as a matter of course without even a further conscious decision so to act, but this is by no means always the case. We must not underrate the completeness of the psychological revolution which would be required to make us realize emotionally the effects of our action on everybody else so fully that we could never even be

tempted to do what was wrong. It is not only that we should have to get rid of any desires that would normally be pronounced bad, but we should have to feel everybody else's troubles, even those of strangers, as much as if they were our own, and this we could not do without being driven mad, unless we suddenly become of quite superhuman mentality. It seems to me that, if we are to give an account of 'moral judgements', we must give an account of them as they are with us now, not an account of them as they would be with archangels or with us if we were totally and miraculously changed.

There need be no intellectual difficulty whatever about the fact that people sometimes do something they have decided to be wrong. If A has decided that it is wrong to do B, he will indeed tend not to do it *ceteris paribus*. But suppose there are other reasons which make him desire to do it. Practically all men, we may suppose, have some desire to do their duty,[1] and therefore they will do it, other things being equal. But other things are often not equal, and since this is only one of our desires it may easily conflict with other, stronger ones. I think it is possible to act against the strongest desire if we mean by that the desire felt most strongly,[2] but it is easy enough to understand that human beings are not always ready to make the effort and sacrifice involved. The cause of immoral action (in so far as it has a cause) is that people's desires do not vary in anything like a strict proportion to the goodness of their object or their aversions in proportion to the latter's badness. I do not wish any of you, readers, to starve, but I must admit that my knowledge that one of you was starving would arouse an aversion in me less strong than the aversion I should have to starving myself, and if we were marooned on an island and short of food, this might expose me to a temptation, which I can only hope I should overcome, to try to get more than my fair share of food. This disproportion between desires is not in itself the result of human badness. Even a saint

[1] Some moral philosophers, e.g. Kant, would refuse to call this a desire, but it does not seem to me to matter much whether we say that it is not a desire but admit as we must and Kant does, that it is at least analogous to a desire, or whether we call it a desire but admit, as we again must, that there are distinctive differences between it and other desires.

[2] *Vide* below, p. 173 ff.

cannot love all men equally. Our own suffering is present to us continually in a way in which hardly anybody else's can be, and in the second place the very possibility of satisfactory family life and of many of the most valuable experiences there are depends on our loving some people much more than others and therefore desiring their welfare more. But as long as we desire the welfare of one man more than that of another we are liable to the temptation to sacrifice the welfare of the latter to that of the former. No doubt, the weaker desire may be supported by the desire to do what is right, or at a lower level the desire to save our own reputation, to such an extent as to outweigh the other desire, though the latter is in itself stronger, but this is not always so. It is also in the nature of most people to desire the relatively immediate too much compared with an equal remote advantage and to desire happiness for oneself more than the more valuable moral goods. Consequently there is plenty of scope for temptations to sacrifice the more valuable to the less. So I do not see why moralists should have felt any special intellectual difficulty about the possibility of sin, and most of them do not seem to have done so (apart from the theological problem of reconciling it with the goodness of God).

The question is not here whether a particular writer has been consistent or not, or whether he has really committed himself to the Socratic paradox. The trouble lies deeper, for from the theory that a 'moral judgement' is or implies a decision to act in the way in which we judge that we ought to act it must logically follow that we cannot judge something to be our duty without deciding to do it, and the fact that this is not so empirically is a fatal argument against the theory that 'ethical judgements' are or imply decisions to act. If the holders of such a theory do not hold the former view, they ought in logic to do so. They are not free to modify the logical conclusions of their theory in order to square them with empirical facts without abandoning the theory from which these conclusions follow. If the theory is correct, it follows that it is a self-contradiction to suppose that anybody could have acted immorally.

It might be replied that, although we can act against our moral principles, we cannot deliberately decide so to act. This view would admit sin, but only the sin which consists in being swept

away by our desires either in the absence of a decision or against a decision we have already made, but in either case without a special decision to perform the wrong action being involved. I can see no ground whatever for holding such a view; on the contrary it seems to me almost as easy to decide to do something one believes to be wrong as to do it without deciding. To take a minor instance. I can surely *decide* to have another look at the morning paper, although I judge that I ought to go through my lecture once again before giving it and I have no time to spare if I am to do this adequately. Even if I take up the page automatically without thinking, it is still a decision if, having taken it up, I decide not to put it down till I have read the article on which my eyes fell. If we take any conscious struggle with a temptation where the latter is not rejected the moment it occurs, the occurrence of such a struggle itself necessarily implies that it is recognized as a temptation to do something wrong. For the struggle to continue we must therefore at least have an inclination to decide to do the wrong thing, knowing or believing it to be wrong, and this is surely sufficient to show that the sincere decision that something is wrong by no means automatically involves the decision not to do it in fact. A man may surely indeed even urge himself to do what he thinks wrong by making a special resolve and effort of will. A criminal with some grains of timidity in his constitution, one would imagine, must do this before committing a burglary or other planned crime in which the risk of detection is not absent. However, in order to defend the theory that moral judgement consists in or entails a decision to act, it would not be sufficient to maintain that there are no decisions to act immorally; it would be necessary to hold that to judge something one's duty is already to decide to do it, and surely this at least is obviously false as a matter of empirical fact.[1]

Again it may be said that the view that a 'moral judgement' is or involves a decision to act applies only in cases where 'action' means the adoption of a general policy (to which we may later make exceptions even though we think this morally wrong). But

[1] On this topic *vide* C. A. Campbell, *Scepticism and Construction*, p. 191 ff. His argument that deliberate wrongdoing occurs could well be accepted without accepting the indeterminism that he links with it.

surely I might judge a general policy to be the wrong one and yet decide to adopt it, still more judge it to be the right one and yet not adopt it. In view of the frequent cases of, e.g. persistent dishonesty involving long-range planning it is hard to suppose that people cannot do so, and at a higher level it is surely clear that a man may believe that he ought to go as a missionary or give up a lucrative post and yet decide to adopt a way of life which excludes this. In such cases it is surely never a foregone conclusion irrespective of the particular character and desires of the person that he will adopt what he thinks to be the nobler policy. Further, to adopt a policy in action can always be reduced to performing a series of individual acts, so what the view seems to amount to is that we cannot decide in advance that we shall perform a whole series of acts which we think wrong but that we can decide at the time to perform any one. But how large a series of acts constitutes a policy? If we can decide not to do any particular one, surely there is nothing in principle that can necessarily exclude us from deciding against doing any at all. Further, obviously not all moral judgements are decisions as to general policy, most are decisions as to particular acts. If they are not decisions to do the acts, since it has now been admitted that we can judge at least some particular act to be our duty without deciding to do it, what are they? And if the connection with actions which the holders of the theory looked on as its greatest advantage is severed as regards all particular actions and only applied to decisions as to policies, which admittedly cannot be carried out at once, are not its supposed advantages lost?

Surely, here is a simple argument to refute anybody who takes this kind of view. To say 'I have decided to do so-and-so but I do not intend to do it' would be self-contradictory unless it was implied that I had reversed my decision. To say that 'my policy is to do so-and-so but I never do it' would again be self-contradictory. But to say 'I have judged that I morally ought to do so-and-so but I do not intend to do it' or 'I have judged that I morally ought to pursue the policy of doing so-and-so but I never do it' would, in the absence of a change in my moral views between the judgement and the time of saying this, be indeed to make a damaging admission but by no means to contradict myself.

Any intelligible account of sin presupposes a distinction between 'moral judgements' and decisions what to do. It presupposes that to 'judge' that something ought to be done by me is not already to decide to do it. And in that case it is very difficult to see what 'judging' that it ought to be done can be except coming to the belief (or knowledge) that it ought to be done.

In favour of the view that 'moral assertions' are essentially expressions of resolutions to act it has been urged that this theory has the advantage over all others 'that it alone enables a satisfactory answer to be given to the question: What is the reason for my doing what I think I ought to do? The answer it gives is that, since my thinking that I ought to do the action is my intention to do it if possible, the reason why I do the action is simply that I intend to do it if possible. On every other ethical view there will be a mysterious gap to be filled somehow between the moral judgement and the intention to act in accordance with it: there is no such gap if the primary use of a moral assertion is to declare such an intention.'[1] But I must confess that this mysterious gap seems to me non-existent. I do not see what 'the reason for doing A' could mean except either the reason why someone ought to do A or the motive he has for doing A, and in neither case does there seem to me to be any place for the question asked by the author of the above quotation. To think that I ought to do A is already to think that there is good reason why I ought to do A, and as long as I think this the desire to do what I ought will be an adequate motive to explain why I do A. It would be self-contradictory to think both that I ought to do A and that there was no reason for doing A in either sense, though my desire to do what I ought might not in fact be strong enough to lead to my doing A.

There are two ambiguities which lend a spurious plausibility to the theory I have just criticized. Firstly, there is an ambiguity in the word 'decision'. It seems quite proper to describe the judgement that I ought to do A rather than B, at least when preceded by some reflection, as a 'decision', and I do not want to deny that it is one. But it is not yet necessarily a decision *to act*. We can also have 'decisions' that something is true. When I judge that something is my duty, but do not immediately decide to do it, I can

[1] Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, p. 14.

still be said to have made a decision but not a decision to act, only a decision that this is what I ought to do.

Another ambiguity arises in relation to the term 'accept'. 'Accept a principle' is generally used in such a way as to imply not only that the person who accepts it agrees with it intellectually, but that to a considerable extent at least he acts on it. If he hardly ever acted on it, it would not, I think, be good English to say that he accepted it, unless we qualified 'accept' by adding 'intellectually' or a similar phrase. Consequently, when it is said that we do not accept a principle sincerely if we do not act on it, this does not seem in the least paradoxical. But we can well accept intellectually principles on which we ought to act but rarely do so, although people are perhaps not often candid enough to admit it frankly in a particular case.

A theory which found the essence of ethical judgements in decisions might seem less unplausible if applied to good rather than to obligation. It might be said that to 'judge' something good is to decide *ceteris paribus* to favour or promote this kind of thing, and since it is arguable and has in fact often been held that we never act except for the sake of what at least appears to us good, though we may sin by deliberately choosing the lesser rather than the greater good, this may seem to avoid the Socratic paradox. But an objection of the same type still arises. If to 'judge' something good is to decide to favour it in action, to 'judge' it better than something else must be to decide to favour it more, and then we could not voluntarily choose to bring about A rather than B judging A less good. So we have not escaped the Socratic paradox after all. It is an important point to be remembered that a definition can be refuted not only by showing that the *definiens* is present when the *definiendum* is not or vice versa, but by showing that they are not always present in the same degree or even could conceivably not be so.

The objection I have brought is an example of a more general line of criticism which is, I think, valid against any view that reduces 'ethical judgements' either to judgements stating that people in fact have certain attitudes[1] or to the adoption or expres-

[1] I have used 'attitude' as the only general term of which I can think to cover all the cases mentioned below. I do not see that it need, as contended in a recent dis-

sion of a certain attitude by the speaker without any claim to objective justification. If 'ethical judgements' are decisions to act, I have argued, then we cannot judge that something is our duty and yet not decide to do it, but men plainly sometimes do just this. Similarly, if 'ethical judgements' are commands or quasi-commands, this is incompatible with my making an 'ethical judgement' and yet not commanding or 'quasi-commanding' somebody, at least myself, to act accordingly, still more with commanding or advising somebody to act against it, as I quite conceivably might do from non-moral motives. If 'ethical judgements' are expressions of feelings of approval or disapproval, this is incompatible with my feeling guilty about an action; and yet believing it right, as may well be the case if I have been brought up to condemn such actions and since changed my mind. Again, if 'ethical judgements', as on some naturalist views, assert that people in general approve of certain things, then that of which most people disapprove could never be right. If, as on other naturalist views, the judgement that something was good were just a judgement as to what men actually desired or what would further their desires in fact, it would follow that men only desire what is good, a proposition which seems false in fact and certainly could be so without absurdity, and even that things are always desired in proportion to their goodness, which certainly is false empirically, whether we mean their real goodness or the degree of goodness they are supposed to have. Likewise, if 'good' meant what would satisfy men, then it would have to be the case that men are always satisfied by what is good in proportion to its goodness. In general, if 'ethical judgements' are just defined as judgements that certain attitudes have been or are adopted, it is not possible without contradiction even to condemn these attitudes when adopted, unless this again should just mean that most people repent of them; and if they consist merely in the actual adoption or expression of an attitude by the speaker without making any further claim, the 'judgement' can never rightly be condemned, unless 'condemnation' just means adopting an opposite attitude in fact. We cannot even condemn a man for be-

cussion (*vide Aristotelian Proceedings*, Supp. Vol. XXXI, p. 47 and p. 69), be limited to relatively permanent dispositions towards something.

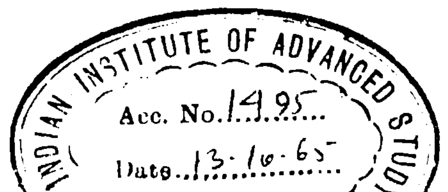
ing inconsistent unless we assume either that it is wrong to be inconsistent or that the principle with which he is inconsistent is morally binding. The 'ought' is reduced to the 'is', but unfortunately what is need not by any means be identical with what ought to be, and this applies in the sphere of emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, as well as of actions. Naturalists indeed often evade this objection by smuggling in ethical concepts under the guise of a hypothetical impartial spectator. Thus if 'right' is defined as 'what the unprejudiced observer would approve', this may mean either 'what an observer who judged rightly would approve', in which case naturalism is abandoned by giving up the reduction of 'ought' to 'is', or 'what an observer who was not affected by any personal feeling of friendship or antipathy towards the particular people concerned would approve', in which case it is open to the objection that ethical mistakes may occur for other reasons than because people are affected by these feelings.

This criticism can be met only if 'ethical judgements' are understood as making a claim that the attitude they express is objectively justified (which is not necessarily the same as saying that it can be *proved* right). Such a claim to objective justification is clearly made by all theoretical judgements. No account of 'ethical judgements' either can be adequate unless it allows for this claim. All 'judgements', ethical and theoretical alike, are no doubt expressions of some attitude, if only a factual belief, but their rightness does not consist merely in expressing the attitude. The 'judgement' also makes a claim that the attitude is justified. This applies even to the kind of 'judgement' called intuitive. It is true indeed that we cannot ever claim justification for *ultimate* principles in the sense of producing more ultimate principles from which they can be said to follow, but the difference is that on an objectivist view ethical judgements are not merely factual decisions but right or wrong, even when their rightness or wrongness cannot be established by argument. The subjectivist account in general makes it impossible to express this claim, unless we mean by saying that an attitude is right just taking up the attitude itself in fact or a second attitude favouring the first attitude. But we must leave room for the claim, since I can easily favour, urge, command, resolve, decide to do what I do not think to be right. I cannot indeed

'morally favour' it, but this is because 'morally favouring' already includes thinking it right. The fact that men take up a certain attitude in fact can never guarantee the rightness of that attitude.

This, I think, is the real point of the argument commonly urged by objectivists that moral feelings presuppose an objective judgement as to the value or disvalue of their object. A man might have feelings psychologically like those of genuine guilt or moral approval without presupposing this objective judgement and even in the presence of a contrary judgement, at least if he had been brought up to regard the kind of things of which he now approved as wrong or vice versa and had been subsequently converted, but if there were no implicit claim to objective grounding, his attitude would not be really ethical. In the absence of this 'qualms of conscience' would be on the same level as any mere physical or psychological discomfort to be ignored if prudence required. If we looked at them like that why should we not go against them in the same sort of way as we may work even if we have a headache, bearing moral discomforts like men, as we ought to bear physical discomforts? I suspect that if we could really get out of the way of thinking as if there were an objectively valid judgement behind them, these discomforts would rarely give us as much trouble as even a very mild physical indisposition does. Similarly I should argue that a decision to act is not ethical unless it presupposes the belief that the action taken is ethically right.

Allied with this is a second objection that can likewise be brought against all theories of the subjectivist type. It is to the effect that such theories exclude the notion of good reasons in ethics, so that no argument in favour of an action can give any better reason than any other for it. Holders of such views may indeed admit ethical arguments in two senses. In the first place it is obviously true that, if we have adopted certain general ethical principles, we may base on these reasons why we ought to do certain things, but unless the general principles themselves are either self-evident or in turn based on other good reasons this justifies nothing. Secondly, ethical arguments may be viewed not as giving support to any proposition, but merely as psychological means to producing a certain mental attitude in somebody which will give rise, if there is occasion, to the action desired. This line



is taken by Stevenson. A 'subjectivist' or 'imperativist' will be likely to support it on the ground that there can be no evidence or argument to support 'ethical judgements' if in 'ethical judgements' there is nothing judged to be true. In the absence of real arguments there are still things we may say to a man which will make him more likely to do what we want for the sake of humanity. For instance, though the fact that a proposed action will hurt somebody else very badly cannot on this view even support the conclusion that it is wrong, it is the case that most men at least most of the time are reluctant to do things which will cause suffering, and therefore to call their attention to this fact is commonly an effective means of preventing them from initiating such actions. Unfortunately however all methods used to induce people to take up certain attitudes or do certain things are not of such a kind as to commend themselves to moral philosophers, as this one generally does. The indoctrination methods of communist police, for instance, seem, judged by results, on the whole more successful in inducing people to change their views than are the methods of moral philosophers. Stevenson indeed repudiates the accusation that his view involves saying that one method of persuasion is as good as another, and he gives various reasons for preferring one to another on account of their effects,[1] but ultimately for him to say that one set of effects is better than another is only to say that he in some way prefers them. He need not say that the communist police use better methods than the philosophers; but, if he condemns their methods, he can only express a mental attitude incapable of rational foundation towards them. There is a story of a speaker (I hope not a philosophy lecturer) in whose notes occurred the words: 'The argument is weak at this point. Shout.' In the absence of real reasons for ethical decisions or approvals I do not see how the function of ethical words could differ from that of the raised voice of this speaker.

The two general objections I have mentioned do not constitute by any means all that can be said against subjectivism in ethics in its various forms,[2] but I think they are the most important ones

[1] *Ethics and Language*, p. 156 ff.

[2] In *The Definition of Good*, ch. I, I have given other, more detailed objections, which I do not now withdraw.

and ones which, I am glad to say, are coming to be more and more generally felt, especially the second. We must not indeed press our argument too far. We must not say that the subjectivist cannot in consistency act, or even approve or disapprove of the actions of others. There is nothing inconsistent in his doing what he wants and approving or disapproving what he feels inclined or compelled to approve or disapprove. What he cannot consistently do is claim that his actions or approvals or disapprovals are justified. Similarly even the absolute theoretical sceptic (if there is one) can say things; what he cannot do is claim justification for his statements. It is plain that the force of this objection is not lessened by including in the analysis of 'ethical judgements' an empirical proposition about the state of mind of the speaker, as is often done, e.g. by Stevenson.

In view of these arguments it would seem to me that the only reasonable course for a subjectivist or naturalist to follow is to admit that actual 'ethical judgements' assert more or less what I have said they assert, but to maintain that in doing so they are mistaken. This attitude is adopted by Mr. R. Robinson[1] and Mr. Mackie,[2] but hardly with frankness by any other writer I know. Other critics of objectivism mostly cannot really believe that all our ethical judgements are mistaken, as they should on their theory, and therefore try to make out either that, although they are genuine judgements, they do not assert what they seem to assert, or that they are not really judgements at all. The former is the course of the older naturalism, the latter of the now prevalent subjectivism or 'prescriptivism'.

A persistent attempt has thus been made to escape having to contradict our ordinary ethical beliefs by putting forward an essentially sceptical theory as if it were an analysis of our actual common-sense attitude. Philosophers of a very empiricist turn of mind have in recent years constantly adopted this policy of 'both eating their cake and having it' in many fields of philosophy. On the one hand they have wanted to be sceptical about anything which was neither directly given in experience nor formally provable, but on the other hand they have wanted to be in agree-

[1] *Arist. Soc. Supp.* Vol. XXII, p. 79 ff.
[2] *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 1940.

ment with common sense or at least not flagrantly to contradict it. For this the concept of analysis has proved very useful, as it has enabled them both to accept common-sense propositions as true and yet to gain their point by analysing them in a way which is very different from any that would appeal to common sense. These tactics have been pursued in many fields—in regard to physical things when it is insisted that we know our common-sense propositions about them to be true but that we have to analyse these in terms of sense-data or hypothetical human experiences; in regard to minds when it is said that we know them to exist but that assertions about them have to be analysed in terms of bodily behaviour; in regard to induction or probability when probable inductive propositions are reduced to propositions about the already observed evidence; and in ethics when sentences about what is good or right are said either to assert propositions which fall within empirical psychology or to assert nothing at all but only express non-cognitive attitudes of the speaker. This use of 'analysis' is diminishing, but it is still very common in the field of ethics, and I must make some general remarks about those who meet arguments for an objective ethics in this fashion.

A number of arguments have been advanced by myself and others against such modes of analysis. They have been intended to show, and I think most often do succeed in showing that the proposed modes of analysis do not give an account of what we usually mean, in the sense of 'actually have in mind', when we use the words in question and reflect on what we are doing. But this does not satisfy the philosopher who advances such an analysis that he is wrong, for he will say that a person may mean something other than what he thinks he means. He contends that people like myself have taken too naïve a view of meaning as discoverable by introspection. The fact that a man even after the most careful introspection still seems to himself to see quite clearly that an alleged analysis does not express what he means is not taken as evidence that it does not really do so. From this we must conclude that 'meaning' is being used in some sense other than its ordinary literal one. Clearly one sense of 'meaning', and I should have thought both the usual and the fundamental one, is

that in which it signifies what a man intends to assert when he is using certain words, and surely a man is the chief authority for his own intentions. In this sense of 'meaning' there is something highly paradoxical about a man not knowing what he means, at least if he asks himself the question and really does mean something by his words, as there would be about a man who was in pain not being conscious of it. It might be replied that we sometimes do assert something without being conscious that we intend to assert it, but surely if I do this what I assert is indeed the meaning of the words but not what I mean by them. If I intend to say, 'The meeting is declared open,' and say instead, 'The meeting is declared closed,' the trouble is just that *my words* mean something different from what *I* mean. To say that I am mistaken about what I mean thus seems, if taken literally, to be like saying that I consciously intend to do A but do not know that I intend to do A. No doubt a man may not accept what is really a correct analysis of his meaning as far as it is susceptible to analysis, but I think that in such cases this must be either because (a) he has misunderstood the meaning of the words in which the analysis is expressed, or because (b) his own view is confused, i.e. he did not mean this only but also had in mind something else which he could not express or which was inconsistent with the rest of his meaning or self-contradictory in itself. But it seems that the tactics of the philosophers I am discussing debar one from the possibility of a straightforward demonstration that a particular analysis is not the correct one. However, they do so only at a great price the nature of which will become clearer as we proceed.

Certainly if thinkers who put forward a naturalist or subjectivist analysis of the meaning of ethical sentences are using the word 'meaning' in its straightforward ordinary sense, I still have no doubt that the arguments I and others have given show them very plainly to be wrong. I do not wish to repeat these arguments in full: they are widely known to the philosophical public. Examples are the point against naturalism that, when we make ethical judgements, we are not talking about statistics as to people's state of mind or anything that could be established from such statistics alone, and the point against subjectivism that in 'ethical judgements' we say something which can logically contradict

ethical judgements made by other men.[1] It may be objected that the plain man does not understand what is meant by 'non-naturalist', 'subjectivism', etc., and therefore cannot be said to take an objective non-naturalist view. But he certainly does think that his 'ethical judgements' are true,[2] and he certainly intends them as something more than statements about his own psychology, or statements to the effect that people in general have certain feelings or desires, and if so, the modes of analysis which treat them as not claiming truth or as claiming truth only in so far as they are really psychological statements of the kinds mentioned can clearly be rejected as accounts of what he consciously has in mind when he uses ethical terms. One is inclined to answer in the negative the question—Does the plain man believe that the non-natural concept of goodness applies to anything?—because the plain man has not heard of 'non-natural concepts', but we must distinguish two things here, the assertion that a concept applies to something and the precise classification of the concept in question. The latter is not undertaken by common sense. Of course the mere fact that a man does not use the technical terms employed by a philosopher in analysing what he means does not prevent the analysis being right as a description of what the man has in mind, but in the case of a naturalist or subjectivist analysis it is plain that the technical terms are not a correct description of what the plain man has in mind. If so it can only be legitimate to say that the man does after all really mean what the analysis says he does if 'meaning' is being used in some other sense.

There are therefore two tasks incumbent on the thinkers whom I am criticizing which they must fulfil if they are to defend their analysis and give a coherent account of their ethical theories. One is to explain precisely in what sense of 'meaning' their analysis, whatever specific form it takes, is supposed by them to give the

[1] It has been objected that these arguments beg the question on the ground that nobody would find it absurd to say, e.g. that ethical questions could be settled by statistics, unless he already rejected the naturalist view, but their point was to bring people to see that the naturalist theory did not express what they meant by making clearer what the theory implied. A person might well accept a naturalist theory without realizing that it entailed that all ethical questions could be settled conclusively by statistics and then reject the theory when he came to realize that it did entail this.

[2] *Vide* below, p. 36.

common-sense meaning. It does not give it in the straightforward literal sense in which one's 'meaning' signifies what one intends to assert, what one has in mind and believes and wishes to communicate when sincerely and on reflection making the statement. That must be admitted once the authority of the speaker as evidence for what he means is rejected. In what sense then does it give it? Now, whatever answer is made to this question, the philosophers I am criticizing have now lost the great advantage which they thought they had gained by the use of the conception of philosophical analysis, they can no longer go on with their comfortable practice of eating the cake and having it. For they have only escaped the arguments against their modes of analysis by admitting that the plain man is mistaken in his conscious ethical beliefs and in the normal sense of 'mean' means in his 'ethical judgements' something which he asserts as true but which is really false. They can no longer maintain that they are in agreement with common sense.[1] This does not necessarily prove them wrong, but it is at least a serious *prima facie* objection to their view, since it is excessively difficult really to believe that all our ordinary ethical judgements are mistaken as to the chief thing they are intended to assert. No doubt we can find or at least invent senses of 'mean' in which an analysis might be said to give what the speaker 'really meant' and yet contradict his conscious belief, but in that case we can no longer claim to be agreeing with him. It might for instance be maintained that a particular common-sense belief was self-contradictory and then argued that, strictly speaking, a man cannot be said to believe what is self-contradictory, but if we then substitute for the proposition he asserts the proposition he would have asserted if he had been self-consistent as an 'analysis' of his belief, we are not only using 'analysis' in a strained sense but can no longer be said to be agreeing with

[1] 'Anyone who tries to explain moral experience purely in terms of personal feelings or emotions is, by implication, saying that all moral judgements are false, because they all claim to be asserting the presence of something which is not really there at all. This is, no doubt, a tenable view, and if held, it is desirable that it should be stated plainly and unequivocally. What is not tenable is any claim to base such a view on the examination or analysis of the actual moral experience we have or the moral judgements we make. For that reveals unmistakably that we do make the claim to objective validity.' (Field in *Proc. of Arist. Soc.* Suppl. Vol. 1950, p. 6.)

common sense. If a boy thinks that $8 \times 9 = 71$, his teacher can hardly be said to be agreeing with his beliefs when he insists on substituting 72. Similarly a naturalist or subjectivist philosopher cannot be said to be agreeing with common sense if he analyses ethical propositions in his own way on the ground that the other element in them which the plain man thinks he is asserting is meaningless or a self-contradictory muddle and that therefore his analysis gives what the man must 'really mean'.

In any case naturalist and subjectivist theories certainly ought not to be stated in such a way as to deceive people into believing that they do not have the paradoxical implications which they in fact have. If it is admitted that what the plain man is actually thinking when he makes 'ethical judgements' must not be analysed in such ways and yet at the same time it is held that such a view of ethics is the true one, our common-sense ethical beliefs are all being contradicted. This will still be so even if in some recondite sense of 'meaning' the analysis gives the meaning. The fact remains that what is 'meant' in the sense of 'what the plan-man actually intends to assert by his reflective use of ethical sein tences' is contradicted and that his ethical beliefs in any ordinary sense of 'belief' are thus asserted to be false. You can prove anything to be true if you care to use words in unusual senses.

The second task for a philosopher who takes such a line is this. When he has explained what is the sense of 'meaning' about which he is talking, he must also explain just how the reasons he gives for his analysis show that the analysis expresses what ethical sentences 'mean' in just the sense of 'meaning' he has selected to talk about. It is by no means obvious that all arguments in favour of naturalism or subjectivism as a philosophical view in ethics are arguments for such an analysis of what we mean when we make 'ethical judgements', unless we assume that common-sense beliefs are all true. Unless we make this assumption, we cannot argue from the falsity or untenability of a belief to the conclusion that it is not really held or is not what the plain man is asserting when he uses ethical words. This is plain if 'meaning' is being used in the straightforward literal sense. If it is not being used in that sense, the philosopher should explain how any arguments that he uses in favour of naturalism or subjectivism show not only that

it is wrong to make 'ethical judgements' otherwise than in a naturalist or subjectivist sense but also that in the sense of 'meaning' in question even the plain man does not make them except in such a sense.

Neither of these tasks have, as far as I know, been carried out by any philosopher, and so the attempts to defend subjectivism or naturalism in ethics on the ground that common-sense propositions are to be analysed in a subjectivist or naturalist way seem to break down. If subjectivism or naturalism is a correct ethical view, then we must accept the unpalatable conclusion that all actual ethical common-sense judgements are in their main contention altogether mistaken. This conclusion subjectivists and naturalists have usually made great but, as we have seen, unavailing efforts to escape.

If a philosopher does take this sceptical view I do not claim to be able to refute him, but it seems to me completely incredible that he can be right. I do not see how I can possibly be mistaken in thinking that it would be wrong of me to torture him because I disagreed with his views, and I cannot believe that he would not at bottom agree that I was acting wrongly if I really did torture him. This is not the same as to say that my or any other current interpretation of ethical beliefs is perfectly correct any more than my claim that I am right in saying that $2+2=4$ is a claim that I have achieved the right analysis of the concept of number. Our ordinary understanding of the concepts of good and ought may and no doubt is partly at fault, but this is very different from saying that none of our ethical judgements are true.

At any rate, even if a sceptical view cannot be refuted, there is no good reason for holding it, and the *onus probandi* is on the person who does so. The chief ground which has inclined people to scepticism in ethics, namely the sharp divergence of ethical beliefs, is one of which I shall speak further in the next chapter,[1] so I shall just give here what seems to me an overwhelming *argumentum ad hominem*. Anybody who asserts, as many do today, that because there are not agreed criteria available to decide conclusively disputes within the field of ethics there can be no true propositions in ethics, must equally admit that there are no

[1] *Vide* below, p. 38 ff.

agreed criteria available to decide whether his theory of 'ethical judgements' is true, and therefore on his own showing it cannot be true either. It will hardly avail him to say, as he reasonably could, that he is putting forward not a theory within ethics, but a theory of 'meta-ethics', for if 'ethical judgements' are all to be denied truth-value simply because of the absence of agreed criteria the very same argument will apply to judgements in meta-ethics too. There is certainly no more agreement there but rather far less than in ethics.

To turn to another point, the particular forms of naturalist definition that I had in mind when writing *The Definition of Good* did not include the type which is probably the most popular in Great Britain today. That is the view according to which 'good' stands not for a single definite natural property but for any of all the natural properties on account of which we call something good. The consequence that the meaning varies with the person who uses the word and the occasion on which he uses it is accepted. It was indeed in line with contemporary naturalist thought even at the time I wrote my first book, as I recognized in it, not to put forward any single definition as the only one, thus leaving the naturalist the chance of varying the meaning according to the context, and it has now become fashionable to say that we need not look for any single point in common between the various criteria which make us call a thing good and should trust indeed merely to a 'family resemblance' between them which expounders of such views do not then feel themselves bound to describe in any precise fashion.

It might be argued, on one interpretation of this account, that after all it only puts 'good' in a similar position to, e.g. yellow, which Moore himself treated as logically analogous. For 'yellow' after all does not, as Moore's account suggests about 'good', in the sense of 'good-in-itself', stand for a single definite quality but for a variety of resembling shades, though the natural qualities which make things good are very much more varied and complex than the different shades which constitute yellow. But, if this is what is really meant, why not say that good is indefinable and have done with it? I suppose the answer is that the real objection to Moore felt by these philosophers is not that he makes 'good'

indefinable but that he makes it a non-natural property. But if we wish to maintain a naturalist view and yet make it indefinable, there are only two alternatives. Either we must find a simple empirically detectable property which is present in all cases of intrinsic goodness and only in these and varies in degree in proportion to the degree of the thing's goodness, so that it plausibly can be identified with goodness; and this seems out of the question, at least if, as we ought, we reject hedonism. Or we must say that there is an indefinable relation or relations, a particular mode or modes of resemblance, between the different things which are intrinsically good. But can we claim any more plausibly that we have an idea of such indefinable relations between natural properties than that we have an idea of a simple non-natural quality of good? And would it not be still less plausible to claim that this is the idea people ordinarily have in mind when they use the word 'good'? Are the relations empirically observable at all, and if not what is left of naturalism? And can we see that their presence entails that we ought to act in a certain way, as the goodness of something entails an obligation not to destroy it but to further it, if occasion arises, to the best of our ability? And what is meant by 'ought'? Does this just signify another, empirically observable relation between the different things we say ought to be done by people?

I think, however, the people who hold the view would not wish to maintain that to say that something is good just meant that it stands in such indefinable relations to other things. What they are maintaining is rather that to call something good is to say that it is either a thing of beauty or an expression of benevolence or something conducive to intelligent understanding etc., and that we must not try to find what these have in common but should be satisfied with an extensional definition of good in terms of the things we say are good. To this view, it seems, we may make, in addition to the general arguments against all naturalism, the following specific objections.

(1) We certainly should not rest in such an account unless the different qualities which make a thing good have nothing common and peculiar to them, and they do have something common and peculiar to them, namely the circumstance that they are grounds for producing, approving, and otherwise treating favourably what

they qualify, so why not make use of this circumstance to arrive at a definition of good? This suggestion I shall develop in a subsequent chapter taking up with some modifications the line of thought I followed earlier in my *Definition of Good.*

(2) If 'good' just means 'either A or B or C', then what is meant by saying that a particular kind of thing A is good? It must mean A is 'either A or B or C', which is a useless tautology of no possible ethical value. It has been indeed suggested that 'ethical judgements' are valid or invalid simply because it is part of the meaning of 'ethical' that certain criteria should be accepted or rejected, but this surely will not do. On such a view we need not indeed hesitate to call the ethical judgements in question true and even *a priori*, but they are true and *a priori* only because they are verbal. As 'all fathers are male' is true only because it is against the rules of language to call a person a father unless you are prepared to admit that he is male, so 'it is against ethical principles to hurt people because you enjoy the sight of their sufferings' would be true only because it was against the rules of language to call such conduct ethical and in accordance with them to call it wicked. I cannot see that the mere fact that it was in accordance with the rules of language to apply to my conduct a word 'wicked' if 'wicked' merely meant 'one who tortures or cheats, etc.' should worry me if I wanted to do one of these things. If 'wicked' means 'one who tortures or cheats' then of course I am wicked if I torture, but that is only saying again that if I torture, I torture, etc. Similarly with the word 'good' *mutatis mutandis*. Further, unorthodox ethical judgements would become verbally self-contradictory ones, or at least merely cases of the improper use of language without objective significance, since they applied a word which just meant A or B or C or D to something that was neither A nor B nor C nor D. Such a theory can appear tolerable only because an ethical sense is already smuggled into the words 'torturing', etc.

In this chapter I have sharply criticized subjectivist and naturalist accounts, but my criticisms can only be considered valid if they are regarded as expressing the whole truth. We shall later come to recognize that any adequate account of ethics must somehow incorporate them as having grasped a considerable part of the truth.

Chapter Two

A MIDDLE WAY IN ETHICS

TILL a few years ago it did not occur to me that there was a possible intermediate theory between objectivism and subjectivism, but a compromise position has recently been developed in a number of quarters which claims to avoid the objections to both views. At the time I am writing it seems indeed that it will soon become, if it is not already, the prevailing type of ethical view among philosophers in Great Britain. It agrees with the main variety of the views discussed in Chapter One in maintaining that, when we do what is ordinarily called 'making ethical judgements', the form of language is misleading in that it suggests that we are making factual statements when we are doing nothing of the kind, except very incidentally at any rate. It agrees that the function of 'ethical judgements' is not informative but practical, and that they are too unlike scientific judgements to be regarded as capable of being true or false. But it is now suggested that the main argument brought against views of this type formerly propounded can be accepted without abandoning this general attitude. I am referring to the argument, discussed above,[1] that they are incompatible with the distinction between good and bad reasons in ethics. To meet this it is now proposed that we should regard 'ethical judgements' as not indeed true or false, but still right or wrong, valid or invalid.[2] There are, it is now admitted, good (and bad) reasons in the ethical field, only these, it is held, are not reasons of the sort which make propositions true or false, or even probable or improbable. But the asserting of propositions is not the only activity that can

[1] *Vide* p. 21 ff.

[2] This would also meet my first argument (*vide* above, pp. 19–21) since it would allow us to admit that ethical judgements can be objectively justified.

be exercised rightly or wrongly and that we can rightly approve or condemn, or for the approval or condemnation of which there can be good reasons. We need not say that 'ethical judgements' are really imperatives or decisions or mere expressions of emotion. If they are not similar enough to ordinary factual statements to be called judgements in the proper sense, neither are they like enough to commands to be called imperatives without qualification, nor like enough to exclamatory phrases to be called mere expressions of emotion. As many, perhaps even most, of those I should call subjectivists would admit today, we must regard them rather as something unique, the nature of which may be brought out by analogies with other mental activities but which cannot be reduced to any of these. Now it is contended that, as forming this unique class, 'ethical judgements' may have reasons of their own as valid in their own sphere as the reasons of science are in hers. The reasons will not prove anything logically or scientifically, but will provide an adequate justification for action. On this view we do not, when we talk ethically, know or express our *knowledge that* some ethical propositions are true, but we do *know how* to act rightly. As Professor Ryle has pointed out, all knowledge cannot be reduced to knowing propositions, 'knowing that', and so we may know how to act and even to talk ethically without knowing any ethical propositions to be true. Similarly, it is urged that good should not be called a property, because its presence cannot be determined by any criteria like those applied in other cases for detecting properties, and I suppose on like grounds it would be argued that obligation is not a relation.

Professor Toulmin,[1] Professor Barnes,[2] Mr. Hare,[3] and Miss Macdonald[4] provide examples of this line of approach, and Professor Paton[5] is at least feeling toward the position from an

[1] *Reason in Ethics*, ch. 2–3, though he verbally admits that 'ethical judgements' can be 'true' (p. 53).

[2] *Aristotelian Proceedings Supp.* Vol. XXII, p. 1 ff.

[3] *The Language of Morals*. When first starting to write this book I classified Hare with the 'subjectivists' of chapter I, but after I had discussed my first chapter personally with him, it seemed to me that he belongs rather to the group of writers to be discussed here.

[4] *Philosophical Analysis* ed. M. Black, p. 211 ff.

[5] *Aristotelian Proceedings Supp.* Vol. XXII, p. 123 ff.

objectivist and Professor Findlay[1] and Professor Paul Edwards[2] from a subjectivist standpoint. The view constitutes a most important new departure. It maintains a distinction between right and wrong ethical attitudes which is not to be understood merely in terms of the attitudes people actually as a psychological fact adopt or approve, but does so without having to maintain the view that 'ethical judgements' ascribe objective properties or relations to the real as do the judgements of natural science. It therefore does not lead one to the conclusion that, since they do not ascribe natural properties, they ascribe non-natural. I am not sure that all who have suggested such a view are quite clear what it involves or where they stand, and in some cases a writer who has suggested or seemed to suggest it falls back on a form of naturalism after all. This happens, for instance, if a philosopher after saying that 'ethical judgements' are not true but valid, or true only in a different sense from that in which descriptive judgements are so, goes on to say that validity or truth in the case of 'ethical judgements' just means that most people after consideration (apart from factual mistakes or lack of the relevant experience) would in fact accept them, or that the ultimate reason which makes some ethical criteria or reasons valid and others invalid is that the former are part of what we mean by ethical terms and that the latter contradict or are at any rate not part of what we mean by them. But, if the position is not explained away in naturalistic terms, it is as definite an assertion as Moore's—indeed a more extreme one—of the autonomy of ethics. 'Ethical judgements' are as irreducible to factual judgements ascribing natural properties as on Moore's view, and since they are now not judgements at all in the proper sense, even more different. In this respect the view is the antithesis of naturalism, which makes ethical judgements simply a particular kind of judgements in a natural science. On this view ethics has a quite distinct character, a quite distinct logic of its own. It expresses a unique attitude, not indeed cognitive but practical, and it has its own criteria not justifiable in terms of anything else. The view would seem to combine the

[1] *Mind*, Vol. LIII, no. 210, p. 142 ff. He however seems ultimately to fall back on the linguistic theory criticized already (op. cit., pp. 161–2, *vide* above, pp. 31–2).
[2] *The Logic of Moral Discourse.*

advantages of the rival theories. It avoids the introduction of mysterious non-natural properties apprehended by intuition; it avoids the reduction of ethics to a branch of natural science effected by equating good and right with natural properties; it avoids the transformation of ethical judgements into mere expressions of attitude, none of them in any objective sense more justified than any other. It is thus fitted to have a very wide appeal. But is it ultimately tenable?

Now if the theory were subjected to the same linguistic treatment as has been commonly meted out to many others in recent times, e.g. theories about physical objects, it could be overthrown quickly enough. Ethical sentences are grammatically of the same structure as factual statements. They can go in the indicative except in cases where it would be against the rules of grammar likewise for the latter to do so. It is certainly correct English to speak of them as if they expressed propositions known or believed to be true. It has indeed been asserted that we do not in ordinary speech use 'true' or 'false' of 'ethical judgements', but all that can be said is that this usage is less frequent than with factual judgements. It certainly does occur, and nobody who employs it could possibly be said to be using language incorrectly. Further, we constantly use phrases such as 'know that' or 'believe that' followed by an ethical sentence, thus implying that the latter expresses a proposition which could be true, and if we *know* it, is true. It thus may be argued, as it has been similarly argued in other cases, that if we deny that we can have true or false propositions in ethics we are contradicting ourselves, because it is good English to describe them as true (or false) and therefore they are true (or false) in the proper sense of the terms. And it is certainly good English to say we can know them. It is even good English to say 'it is a fact that he has a bad character'. This seems to me precisely the type of argument which is so commonly accepted as proving that we know physical object propositions. I do not myself think it a good argument even as regards knowledge of physical objects, but I quite fail to see how it could establish the former unless it could equally be used to establish the objectivity of ethics. Again, it may be said that 'good' is certainly an adjective which we can according to ordinary usage rightly employ to qualify something, there-

fore it is senseless to deny that good is a property. (For the contention that good is not a property is certainly not intended to amount merely to the claim that it is not a quality but a relational characteristic.) Further, it may be said that the view involves holding that it is right to adopt certain ethical attitudes towards certain objects rather than others, and if so it will have to be admitted that right is a property of the attitudes in question, in certain contexts at any rate, and 'being such that it is right to take the attitude in question towards it' a property of the object towards which the attitude is directed.

But is this criticism more than verbal? What is meant by holders of the view under discussion is surely that 'true', 'false', 'property' as applied in ethical discourse are not being used in the same sense as when applied elsewhere, not that they cannot be applied in it in any sense at all. And this is not a statement which is necessarily absurd or which can be disproved merely by pointing out that the words occur in our ethical language. What is insisted is that 'ethical judgements' cannot be objectively true in anything like *the sense* in which factual judgements are, and that goodness is not a property or obligation a relation in the sense in which factual properties and relations are.

But if the view can be described as plausible, this does not seem to be the case with the arguments by which it has been most commonly supported. It has been urged that with factual judgements there are definite agreed empirical criteria for their truth or falsity and that in ethics this is not the case, and this is often now held by itself to render meaningless the claims of an objective ethics.[1] The exact nature of the argument must be carefully noted. The point is not that ethical cognition is too unreliable for us ever to trust it, but that the notion of objective truth includes a reference to agreed criteria, which are lacking in ethics, so that it is not merely unplausible but self-contradictory to call 'ethical judgements' objectively true or perhaps 'true' at all or say they ascribe properties. Nor is it merely that there are many actual

[1] Nowell-Smith, *Ethics*, pp. 55–6, Toulmin, *Reason in Ethics*, p. 13 ff. Nowell-Smith I should however class as a subjectivist and not as a holder of the middle view, though he finds an attenuated (subjective) sense of truth in which he admits that scientific judgements and 'ethical judgements' are both true (*vide* below, p. 47 n).

disagreements in ethics which cannot be settled and few in science, it is that in ethics, unlike science, there is no agreement even as to the methods of settling them.

But I cannot see any reason for limiting 'objective truth', or 'truth' as such, to the field of the tests recognized by natural science. To do so is to assume without proof that the only reality is that discoverable by natural science; to limit it to cases where there are agreed criteria is to admit only truths which can be discovered with relative ease and assurance. Even if we exclude ethics and any provinces of thought which positivistically minded thinkers are liable to dismiss as futile, like transcendent metaphysics, it is patent that the criteria of truth are very different in some branches of thought, e.g. mathematics, from what they are in the ordinary empirical sciences, and that in some, e.g. history, complete agreement is a far-off ideal indeed. For truth to be attained easily and securely we must have agreed tests, but we cannot in this world expect to be able to do everything with ease and security, and difficulties and insecurity do not necessarily make a pursuit not worth undertaking at all. Some people seem to regard it as a fatal argument against objective ethics if any fool, e.g. a Nazi misled by Hitler's propaganda, disagrees in ethics with wiser men, but have we any right whatever to expect that it will be always easy to discover what is objectively true? A person who refuses to admit objective ethics because we cannot always have certainty in ethics is like one who should refuse ever to leave his house for fear that he might take the wrong way.

At one time there were agreed supreme criteria in ethics for European civilization provided by the authority of the Church and the doctrines which it upheld. From the above argument does it then follow that in those medieval days ethical propositions were true, while now, since agreement is lacking, they are neither true nor false? And if it is replied that the agreement was not complete since it only extended through Christendom and not throughout the world, we may answer that no agreement as to scientific criteria extends through the whole world, including all 'savages'.

Again it is not the case that all ethical questions are disputable. It should at least be true even by the standards proposed that I ought not to kill a man merely because I do not like the look of

his tie, since there could hardly fail to be ethical agreement about this. This is an ethical proposition, and therefore some ethical propositions are true. It may seem very trivial, but that is only because it is so obvious. My opponent would not find it by any means so trivial if I were to take in his own case a different view in practice. And there are many millions of similar ethical judgements on which agreement would be complete. It is irrelevant that these very numerous agreed ethical judgements are not often expressed. They are not commonly expressed just because they are so obviously true. If it is suggested that there might be some lunatic who disagreed with any of these propositions, likewise there might be a lunatic who disagreed with any of the accepted propositions of science and could not be convinced by or persuaded to accept the criteria of the scientist. Would that prevent the scientific propositions he impugned from being objectively true? And I do not think one could plausibly maintain that the 'ethical judgements' about which there is agreement are objectively true and yet that the others are intrinsically incapable of being either true or false. If 'you ought not to shoot B', asserted when there is no moral reason for shooting him, is certainly true and therefore a proposition, 'you ought not to shoot B', asserted by a pacifist in the course of a battle to a soldier convinced that he is only defending his country against the army to which B belongs, must surely be a proposition also, though one the truth of which would be very much in dispute. I may add that, as I said earlier, any argument on the ground of absence of agreed criteria to the effect that no 'ethical judgements' can be true could be applied equally to show that the statement that 'ethical judgements' were not true could not be itself true. If there is a lack of agreed criteria in ethics there is certainly still more of a lack of agreed criteria as regards the judgements people make about the general nature of what are claimed to be 'ethical judgements'.

So I think the argument invalid even if the greatest possible emphasis is laid on the divergencies in ethical view. I, however, think myself that the difference between ethics and natural science is in this respect much more one of degree and much less one of kind than is usually held. Admittedly the differences in ethics are more frequent and serious than in well-established

natural sciences, but this does not prove a difference of principle such that we can therefore say that the word 'true' is not being used in the same sense in the two fields or that 'ethical judgements' are not objectively true. It is unfair to ethics to oppose it to such a well-established science as physics or chemistry; if we take the part of geology which deals with prehistory, the part of astronomy whieh deals with the origin of the solar system etc., history itself, economics, anthropology, meteorology, medicine, we find disagreement and uncertainty in plenty. And we must remember that science has only reached its present position as the result of long eras of trial and error in which most of its judgements were less certain than are most of ours in ethics today. It may be retorted that in a science all differences are removable at any rate in principle, if not in practice. This amounts to saying that at least there are agreed criteria. But there is certainly a great deal of agreement about basic ethical criteria. It is universally or almost universally agreed that the fact that an action causes pain or is a breach of a promise is some reason against it. The *prima facie* duties of Sir David Ross have been very unfairly referred to as just 'the code of the English gentleman': I should have thought they were statements of principles which would be accepted as grounds of obligation within any civilized community,[1] though there are great differences in their application on account of the different factual beliefs, emotional psychology and external circumstances of those who apply them, and because of the real difficulty of weighing fairly against each other the different conflicting factors which constitute reasons for or against an action. (I think this applies even to 'uncivilized' peoples, except that they would tend to limit duties to the agent's social community, but whether this is so or not is irrelevant here, for neither would such peoples agree with us as regards scientific criteria.) I do not know that it would be much easier to arrive at a complete agreed general statement of the criteria of natural science than it would be to do so with ethics. We must remember that, only probability and not certainty being commonly attainable, different persons will attach

[1] It is true that there are great differences among *philosophers* as to the ultimate rationale of these criteria, but there are equal differences among *philosophers* as to the justification of scientific induction.

different weight to the same scientific argument, and the degree of probability an argument carries with it cannot (except in artificial cases where probability can be treated as equivalent to frequency[1]) be determined by sense-perception and mathematics alone. I do not see how there can be any way of guaranteeing that all scientists will always attach the same probability-weight to the same observable facts when it is a question of their bearing on a theory, and I have never come across a table in which the probability-weights of all possible basic scientific types of argument were listed. I doubt very much whether even an attempt at such a comprehensive table has been made by any scientist or logician. Just as in ethics we have to balance with difficulty values or conflicting obligations against each other in order to decide what to do, so in a science we have to balance different probable arguments against each other. Consequently we can hardly say that even scientific disputes are all soluble on principle, failing universal agreement as to how much weight to attach to the different criteria, except in cases where we are concerned not with a complex theory but only with simple sensibly observable facts. Finally, it may be doubted whether what we now call scientific criteria were generally accepted by even the educated portion of any nation prior to the nineteenth century.

I have dwelt at length on the above argument because the widespread disagreement in ethics has always been one of the major reasons, probably the chief one, why people have denied truth to 'ethical judgements', but I must add that, even if there were no agreed criteria in ethics, this would not prove that 'ethical judgements' could not be true. For the view that 'truth' has to be defined in terms of agreed criteria I know of no arguments except those based on the verification theory of meaning, and this theory is now generally admitted only to apply at the most to factual propositions. In discussing the notion of truth as applied to 'ethical judgements' we are discussing what it is the function of 'ethical judgements' to do and not how successfully it is done, or

[1] Whatever the use of a frequency theory of probability, science in general and the frequency theory itself must presuppose another sense of 'probability', for future and unobserved past frequencies can clearly themselves only be estimated with 'probability' and not known with certainty.

whether it can be done easily and surely or only with difficulty and uncertainty, or whether the difficulties are sometimes so great that it cannot be done at all.

Nor can I see the slightest reason for concluding that, where disputants about ethical questions agree as to the empirical facts, their ethical differences are to be explained merely by supposing that they are using ethical words in different senses. Even scientists may, while agreeing as to the observed facts, yet have different theories about them not because they use words in different senses, but because they disagree as to the relative force of the probable arguments to be based on admitted premises. Similarly people may differ in an ethical dispute not because they used the word 'good' or 'ought' in different senses nor because they disagree as to the factual nature of A and B, but simply because one party thinks A better than B and the other thinks B better than A.

At the same time, while what is perhaps the most popular argument today against saying that 'ethical judgements' can be true in the same sense as scientific judgements must be rejected, there remains a considerable plausibility in the suggestion that 'true' does not bear the same meaning in the two cases. It is not very unplausible to say that, though mathematical judgements are true, they are true only in a different sense from either factual or causal judgements; it is not unplausible to say the same of hypothetical as compared to categorical judgements; and there is likewise a certain plausibility in saying the same thing about the 'judgements' of ethics. We must however remember that two judgements might well be true in the same sense and yet have different criteria and deal with a quite different subject-matter. In fact it is very difficult to decide where we are to draw the line between saying that two true sentences assert quite different things and saying they are not both true in the same sense of 'true', and there has been hardly any discussion as to how we are to do this. The only criterion that has been given, as far as I know, for deciding whether a word is being used in the same sense or different senses would lead directly to the conclusion that ethical and factual sentences are true in the *same* sense of 'true'. It has been pointed out that, when verbally the same predicate is applied to both A and B in the same sentence, an absurd or at

least linguistically inappropriate sentence results if A and B are being used in different senses, e.g. 'my last meal and the reason I gave for my view were both solid'. But this does not happen if we thus use the words 'true' or 'false' both of an ethical and of a factual statement. If a Nazi had said to me 'England is governed by the Jews' and 'The Jews ought to be exterminated,' it would not have been absurd or linguistically inappropriate for me to reply, 'Both your statements are false,' or, 'Neither of your statements is true'. It might be urged that ethical sentences could not be true in the same sense as factual sentences because with the former we are not only saying something quite different but fulfilling a quite different function, evaluating as opposed to informing. But, on the other hand, what is evaluating except trying to decide what is true about the value of something?

In order to deal with these questions I think we must digress temporarily from ethics and turn to the general theory of truth. Two things seem to me quite plain here. Firstly, whether a judgement[1] is true or false always depends in some way on its relation to a reality which is not itself a set of judgements or 'propositions'. In this sense the correspondence theory seems to me quite obviously true. But, secondly, it is unreasonable to hold the correspondence theory in a sense which implies an exact correlation between true judgements or 'propositions' and facts as elements in the objective real to which the 'judgements' or 'propositions' refer. It is not merely that any notion of a copying theory must be excluded as a misleading metaphor and that we cannot even replace it by a theory of correlation that splits propositions neatly into two terms which are ordered in the proposition as corresponding elements are ordered in reality. It is that it is unreasonable to suppose a separate fact for every true judgement we can make. Is it a distinct fact that there is a man in this room, another distinct fact that there is an Oxford graduate in this room, another that there is an Oxford graduate in the village where I am staying, etc? And are there negative facts as well as positive so

[1] This is not the place to discuss the status of 'propositions', but to guard against misunderstanding I must say that I do not wish to maintain that they are distinct entities but much prefer the view that to talk about 'propositions' is simply a way of talking about beliefs or judgements.

that every conceivable true negative proposition corresponds to just one of these? Is there a distinct fact that there are no lions in this room, another distinct fact that there are no tigers, etc., each fact as an element in objective reality? If it is replied that facts are not real entities but that to talk about them is merely a convenient way of saying certain things about reality, the theory that truth consists in correspondence to facts as an ultimate definition of truth is abandoned, and we are left merely with the vague statement that our judgements somehow depend for their truth on reality.

Again, the straightforward correspondence theory seems to break down even with affirmative judgements apparently directly ascribing properties to a thing where the property concerned is dispositional. It is by no means clear that, if I say this lump of sugar is soluble, I am asserting the existence in the lump of an actual quality, solubility, which is there even when the sugar is not exposed to water. And what about hypothetical judgements? If we accept the correspondence theory in a straightforward form, it seems that we must hold a theory of subsistent entities. For contra-factual conditionals do not describe what exists, therefore if those of them which are true correspond to anything at all, they must correspond to subsistent entities. Either hypothetical facts must then be accepted as an ultimate objective part of reality, or the hypothetical judgements in question must be said to assert relations between subsistent universals, if they are to correspond to reality. And how can any judgements about the future be true, including even judgements as to what will probably happen, if there is nothing yet in existence to which they correspond? Faced with these criticisms the correspondence theory begins to look very unplausible, and the unplausibility is not decreased by the fact that it has been found impossible to give any tolerable definition of correspondence. It may well be that truth is indefinable in the sense of unanalysable, but if so what is gained by a mock definition which merely substitutes for it a technical term that itself has to be admitted to be indefinable? Does it tell us anything to say that 'true' means 'corresponding to facts' except that it is some sort of relation to the real, and that this relation has a vague analogy to copying, in some cases at least, as must be admitted

since otherwise the correspondence theory would have not even seemed plausible, as it does at first sight?

All this suggests that we should replace the notion of correspondence as a definition or necessary condition of truth by something more general. The strong point of the theory is that it insists that the truth of a judgement is dependent on reality, a point to which some theories of knowledge, e.g. the coherence and extreme pragmatist theories, fail conspicuously to do justice, but the mode of dependence may still be different as regards different kinds of judgements. Straightforwardly descriptive affirmative empirical judgements are directly rendered true by the possession of a quality or relation by the thing or things to which it is attributed. With them the analogy of copying, though weak, is not altogether without point. Other judgements too are dependent on existent beings for their truth but not dependent in the same direct way, and here the analogy of copying loses whatever point it had with factual propositions. Contra-factual conditionals, for instance, where true, are surely made true not by a subsistent hypothetical fact to which they correspond but by the nature of existent things which is such as to imply (not of course just 'materially' but causally, if not logically), that, if things had been different in way *a*, they would have been different in way *b*. Thus the real nature of the existent Nazis was such as to imply the truth of the judgement that, if they had conquered England, they would have subjected the inhabitants to a tyranny: the nature of skyscrapers is such as to imply the truth of the proposition that, if I had jumped from the top floor of the Woolworth building in New York and my fall had not been broken, I should have been killed. Thus a judgement can depend for its truth on the existent world without expressing a fact simply exemplified in the existent world. And if we are to take this view of contra-factual conditionals, it at least suggests that we should take a similar view of all conditionals.

On this basis we may now answer the question about different meanings of 'truth'. It might still be said that all true propositions 'correspond' to the real in an extremely wide sense of 'correspond', but I think the sense has now become so wide as to make the word inappropriate. However, we can say at any rate that all

depend for their truth on the nature of what is. I do not see how this principle can be abandoned. But different kinds of propositions may depend for their truth on the real in different ways, and this may constitute a ground for saying they are true only in different senses of the term 'true'. I have not a definition of truth, as I claim to have of good, to enable me to do this neatly, but it seems to me that in either case we might distinguish a general meaning of the word and a set of more special meanings which can all be regarded as applications of the general. Thus I define 'A is good' in most usages as 'A is such that it ought to be the object of a pro-attitude' giving the general meaning of the term good, but this itself involves a number of special meanings according to the kind of pro-attitude involved.[1] If I am then asked whether 'good' bears the same meaning as applied to moral virtue and to pleasure, I shall reply that it does if we are thinking of the general meaning, for they ought both to be the object of pro-attitudes, but not if we are thinking of the more specific meanings, for there is one pro-attitude at least, admiration, which we ought to adopt towards the virtues of others but not towards their pleasure as such. Similarly, if we are asked whether hypothetical propositions are true in the same sense as categorical, we can say that they are so in the widest sense of 'true'. But since they are only made true in different ways by the real, we may prefer to say that they are true only in different senses of the word 'true'. To take another illustration, we might ask whether Churchill is clever in the same sense as Kant was. Now to say somebody is clever is to say that he has outstanding mental ability, and no doubt both Churchill and Kant had this, so we can well justify ourselves in answering Yes. Yet the way in which the two manifested their cleverness was so different that it would be more natural to say No, they are clever in different senses. This not being a work on epistemology, I shall not try to develop the view in more detail except in relation to evaluative and ethical propositions.

What are we to say of these? They clearly are made true by the nature of the real. Whether something is good or an action right or obligatory depends on its factual nature plus, in the case of

[1] *Vide* below, chap. III.

actions at least, the factual nature of its circumstances. But it does not follow that ethical judgements are just factual statements about the empirical nature of the objects concerning which the judgements are made. That is the mistake of one form of naturalism. Yet they are dependent for their truth on 'natural properties'. The natural properties and circumstances of an action being what they are, if right (or wrong) at all, it could not fail to be right or wrong,[1] and similarly with goodness. Evaluative and ethical judgements then correspond to reality at least in a very wide sense. There is clearly a sense in which for a valuation to be correct it must correspond to the real nature of what is valued. But while an ethical or an evaluative judgement is better regarded as saying something dependent for its truth on the nature of the real than as describing the real, I contend that the term true should still be applied to such judgements. If however you ask me whether they are true in the same sense as factual judgements I decline to answer Yes or No without qualification. If the term *true* is used in its widest sense they are true in the same sense, but if it is used in a narrower sense they are not, i.e. the truth-making relation to the real, though it is present, is not the same as in the case of factual judgements.[2]

My account will give rise to the objection that it implies what has often been stigmatized as a capital error, namely the supposition that ethical conclusions can be derived from non-ethical, factual premisses. For I have insisted that, in order to correspond to reality in the way which makes them true, evaluational and ethical propositions must be based on and follow from the empirical nature of what is evaluated or the empirical circumstances of the

[1] This is not of course the same as saying that in any case where a man acts rightly (or wrongly) he could not have failed to do so, the proposition which offends the indeterminist. What I am saying is that, when a man does X, the rightness or wrongness of doing it is fixed by empirical properties and circumstances, not that whether he does X or not is fixed by other (past) empirical properties and circumstances.

[2] Nowell-Smith (*Ethics*, p. 196) says that ethical judgements may be true in the same sense as those of science, because to call them true only means that you side with them. But I may side with a command, policy or emotional attitude, yet I do not call these true. And if it is replied that this is because these are not judgements, that involves admitting that 'ethical judgements' are genuine judgements after all, which I think Nowell-Smith does not at all want to admit.

action. This may seem shocking, but what would really be shocking would be to maintain that ethical propositions could be *reduced* to merely factual ones or deduced *formally* from the latter. Such doctrines assuredly find no place in my theory. But after all on what are our valuations and judgements of obligation based save on the factual nature of what we value and pronounce obligatory? Does not the ethical proposition that I ought not to do A follow directly from the factual proposition that to do A will hurt another person (in the absence of any countervailing factual circumstances)? It may be objected that for an ethical conclusion we need besides particular factual propositions a general ethical principle to serve as a major premiss, whether this be viewed as a proposition or as more analogous to an imperative, but I do not see on what, e.g. the general principle that we should not tell lies could be based except on the factual nature of lies and their consequences. It is this which makes them wrong. Whether we claim to see intuitively that lying is (*prima facie*) wrong, or to base the principle on an argument from the usual consequences of lying, or to lay it down by an act of decision which is not a judgement, it must be based on what we take to be the factual nature of lies and their effects. Of course for *formal* deduction there would always have to be an ethical major premiss to the effect that a certain kind of act (A) was wrong, but then what would this be but to assert that 'X has property A' entails 'X is wrong'? (I shall however later defend the view that the general principles of ethics are *prima facie* and not absolute, so that simple syllogisms cannot be used here to show conclusively what particular thing ought to be done.) Similarly to evaluate something is to judge its factual nature to be such that it is more or less good or evil.

I do not think I need deal here at length with Hare's argument[1] against the view that ethical judgements can be derived from factual. For (a) it presupposes a principle which has not been proved and which for many reasons not connected with ethics I and others reject, i.e. the principle that all deductive inference is 'analytic';[2] (b) even if the principle were true of all logical in-

[1] *The Language of Morals*, ch. 3.
[2] Id. p. 32.

ference, it would not follow that it applied to ethical judgements. Hare himself admits that, although we cannot infer ethical from factual propositions, we can on the basis of the latter make rational ethical decisions, which perhaps really reduces the difference to one of terminology, since I do not maintain that we can deduce them like the conclusions from the premises of a syllogism or like theorems in geometry. I should not want indeed to say that we can 'infer' imperatives from indicatives, but then imperatives are not the sort of thing that it is sensible to talk about inferring at all. To his argument—imperatives cannot be entailed by indicatives, ethical judgements entail imperatives (he does not hold they *are* imperatives, though he has often been interpreted as doing so), therefore ethical judgements cannot be indicatives or entailed by indicatives—I reply that 'ethical judgements' do not entail imperatives in the sense in which 'entail' has normally been used by recent philosophers, for there is no sort of logical absurdity in judging that A ought to be done and yet refusing to urge anybody (including oneself) to do it or even urging them not to do A. Hare has defined 'P entails Q' as meaning that a person who assents to P but dissents from Q must be taken as having misunderstood P or Q,[1] but he means by 'assenting to a command' obeying it, or at least this is his criterion of assent, and it is surely plain that I may quite well understand that I ought to do A and what the command to do A means and yet not do it.[2]

I should add two further points here. (1) I do not wish to maintain that ethical or evaluational judgements can ever be *formally* deduced from purely factual ones. (2) I recognize, as Professor Emmet has recently pointed out,[3] that the apparently factual premises of an ethical conclusion very commonly already contain a valuational element, but this only puts the problem further back. They have acquired this valuational element only because it was already implied or thought to be implied by the factual nature of the situation, though we may have learnt this at so early an age that the two are now in our minds inseparable. (3) I agree with

[1] Id. p. 25. He makes reservations for complicated cases of entailment, as in mathematics, which are not relevant here.

[2] *Vide* above, p. 10 ff.

[3] *Vide Facts and Obligations* by Dorothy Emmet.

Hare[1] in not regarding 'loose' as a suitable adjective to apply in connection with the derivation of 'ethical judgements' from factual judgements, but this need not prevent one holding that there is a relation between an ethical judgement and a factual situation such that we can see that the former is justified by the latter, though we cannot prove this by logic.

An important distinction must however be made here, which incidentally does much to explain the reluctance of people to admit what I have just said. We can infer the intrinsic value from the factual nature of an experience or the rightness or wrongness of an action from its nature and circumstances in the sense that, if we know the factual character of these, we can know or rationally 'judge' whether they are respectively right or wrong, good or bad. But from no factual propositions whatever can we infer the proposition itself that what has such and such factual properties will be good or bad or that any act of a given kind in a given situation will be morally right or wrong. This may be illuminated by considering a parallel situation in logic. We can infer from the factual premises that A is a man and all men are mortal the conclusion that A is mortal, but that premises of such a kind entail such a conclusion could not itself be inferred from any factual premises. Similarly we can infer from 'experience A is painful' that 'experience A is in so far intrinsically bad', but no factual premises can themselves establish the ethical proposition that painful experiences are intrinsically bad.

But now I am going to make a very important concession and one which may even seem to some philosophers to destroy most of my view. Both sides in the controversy which we have been discussing have generally assumed that ethical and evaluative judgements can only be objective if there are 'non-natural' qualities or relations, though they drew different conclusions from this assumption. Moore, Ross, and myself asserted non-natural characteristics, our opponents denied the objectivity of ethics, but both conclusions depend on this premiss, which I now propose to deny. And to this question the points in the theory of truth which I have just discussed seem highly relevant. Of course in one sense good must on my view be a non-natural quality and obliga-

[1] Op. cit., p. 49 ff.

tion a non-natural relation. Good, being expressed by an adjective which can truly be attributed to certain things, must be a quality, and for similar reasons obligation must be a relation, and since ethical and evaluative judgements are not factual empirical judgements they cannot be called 'natural' qualities or relations. But this argument is only verbal except in so far as it is a denial of naturalism. And while I am sure that ethical words do not just describe 'natural' qualities or relations, I have now realized, thanks to those recent developments in ethics of which I have spoken, that it is dangerously misleading to say that they describe other, 'non-natural' qualities or relations. The trouble about this way of speaking is that it still treats these judgements as if they *described* something. It was realized that they did not give the same kind of information about what they described as do ordinary factual judgements, so it is supposed that they described something else of a peculiar kind, non-natural properties, and I, like many others, assumed that I could not maintain the objectivity and autonomy of ethics if I did not take this view.[1] But the oddness and elusiveness of these 'non-natural' properties cast grave doubt on the objectivity of 'ethical judgements' and inclined people to say that they asserted nothing, whereas they should have said that they did not assert anything directly or at least primarily about the factual nature of the real, including even the factual nature of our experience, but only about the right way of action and valuation. Ethical judgements, while still judgements properly speaking, I should now say, evaluate actual or possible existents, but do not ascribe qualities or relations to them, except in the verbal sense in which anyone must admit they do so. It may be that we are no more bound to assert the existence of ethical properties in the real because some ethical propositions are true than we are bound to assert the existence of a peculiar kind of events, hypothetical events, because some hypothetical propositions are true. The error we made is inevitable if we regard all

[1] Both Moore and I admit that goodness is not part of the description of anything (*Philosophical Studies*, p. 274; *The Definition of Good*, p. 200), Moore indeed went further and made this the differentiating ground between non-natural and natural properties, so it may even be said that he anticipated this criticism. But Moore probably and I certainly did not realize anything like the full implications of the admission.

true judgements as corresponding to the real in the way in which straightforward categorical descriptive judgements do and also hold that 'ethical judgements' are genuine judgements. My solution is now to reject the former of these two assumptions but retain the latter. It is clear that, if an ordinary descriptive judgement which ascribes a quality to a thing is true, that quality must actually exist in the thing. If I say of a physical object that it is round and the judgement is true, the roundness must actually exist as a property of the thing (unless physical object propositions are interpreted in some phenomenalistic way, in which case the proposition is really hypothetical except in so far as it asserts the existence of a quality in the actual experience of an observer). If I say truly of somebody else that he is in pain, there must be painful feelings actually present in the experience of the person. So it was natural to assume that, if we can truly speak of something as good in a sense in which good cannot be further analysed, there must be present a simple quality of goodness in what we call good. This quality, it was indeed admitted by most philosophers, could not exist in a physical object, but it was still supposed that it existed in a mind or experience. But with evaluative and ethical propositions it seems to me that such a straightforward interpretation of correspondence breaks down.

What I have said involves the denial of non-natural objective properties or relations in moral philosophy, but it does not involve the denial of 'non-natural' concepts,[1] though I must say that I do not think 'non-natural' a very good term and should prefer 'non-empirical'. I still do not see how the concepts of good and ought can be reduced to any empirical concepts in the sense of something given by observation or concepts of causal properties. It is true that the empirical features of the conduct of the people who put Jews in concentration camps gave sufficient ground for blaming them without our needing to suppose that their acts also had the 'non-natural' characteristic of badness or wrongness as an objective property in the real world,[2] but to blame them is still not just to state informatively the empirical

[1] This important distinction was first suggested to me by Raphael *Moral Judgement*, pp. 35–6.

[2] P. Edwards, *The Logic of Modern Discourse*, p. 233.

features of their actions. It is to do something quite different from descriptively ascribing qualities. To those philosophers whose intellectual digestion is too weak to stand non-empirical concepts at any price I should like to put the question—What are the concepts of logic? They are certainly not empirical. But it need not follow that, if the non-natural concepts of ethics are to be used correctly, there must be non-natural qualities and relations in existence. It would be usually held today, rightly or wrongly, that the concepts of logic do not refer to non-empirical qualities or relations actually present in existents.

It is however reasonable to ask and difficult to answer the question—What are these 'non-natural' concepts, if they are not concepts of qualities or relations existing in anything? I think myself that the corresponding question about logical concepts (badly neglected by logicians) is very hard to tackle unless we are willing to go much further in admitting a logical element in the real than most philosophers do today. But this is not the subject of the present book. What then about the non-natural concept or concepts of ethics? It has been admitted that they are not concepts of some simple quality or relation given in experience. What are they then? Simply ways, I should now say, of regarding experiences, states of mind and actions which, though they do not give descriptions, may however be right or wrong just as well as descriptions can be. In so far as they are right, they express favourable or unfavourable attitudes which are justified by the facts, but the way in which they are justified or the reverse is different from the way in which factual judgements are justified and so is the very notion of their justification. To admit an indefinable ought here is just to admit that 'ethical judgements' do something generically different from factual judgements and not to be understood adequately in terms of concepts derived from the latter or from any other non-ethical activity, and that we can sometimes see that they do it in the right fashion.

It may be asked how we can even form an idea of obligation if it is not a relation given in an experience and therefore really present at least in human experience. Is it an innate idea? If not, it must be derived from some experience. But at any rate we have the experience of feeling ourselves to be under an obligation.

This is a genuine experience even if an obligation does not itself *exist* in the sense in which, e.g. the relation of remembering or being remembered does so. I do not mean that obligation is itself a feeling, but that certain experiences include the consciousness of the idea and irresistibly impel us to apply it in thought at least, if not in action. Similarly the concepts of logic are presumably derived from the experiences of judgement and inference. No doubt the possibility of having such experiences may be said to depend on our innate constitution, but this applies to every experience. What exactly we do when we form or apply in reasoning a concept not derivable simply from sense-experience is a very difficult problem indeed, but it is one for epistemology or general philosophy, not specifically for ethics.

I am not motivated in what I have said by any *a priori* objection to non-natural qualities or relations. I have certainly not been converted to a 'positivist' view; I still maintain that the concepts of ethics are unique. And I still hold that ethical judgements are objective in the sense that they are not merely statements about our actual psychological attitudes or expressions of these but claim and can receive objective justification. But I do not now hold that the best way of regarding ethical thought is to think of it as the detection of special qualities and relations existing in experiences, mental states and actions. I can now agree with the criticism that such a view assimilates ethical too much to factual judgements. And this may be supported by the following considerations. In the first place the great majority of philosophers who have considered the topic (including myself) have either failed to find on inspection the simple non-natural quality of good alleged by Moore to be present or at least been very doubtful whether they had found it. It is for this reason chiefly that I substituted obligation for goodness as the fundamental concept of ethics, and there does seem to me to be no doubt that I am aware of a quite specific and unique situation of obligation.[1] But if we regard this as the discovery of a relation in the real world, the difficulty arises that, when we ask whether we ought to do something, one of the terms of the relation, the action which we

[1] I shall deal in the next chapter with the complication which arises because 'ought' seems to stand for at least two different concepts.

ought to do, does not yet exist and perhaps never will, so how can there be a relation between it and something else (the agent or the present state of the agent)? We may discover by thought what relations would hold with things that do not exist if they did exist, but then the relations are not present till the things exist. Yet before something has been done I can be under an obligation to do it. It might indeed be said that in judgements of obligation what is asserted is that the possible agent, who does exist, has the property of being obliged to do something, but this seems a very odd kind of property and is surely secondary to the fact that the action ought to be done by him. And we have still the paradox that the property of my being obliged to do A depends on the nature of A though A does not yet exist, a very odd thing to say about an actually existing property. For, though there is a sense of 'ought' in which I ought always to do what I genuinely believe I ought, so that my duty depends on my state of mind, this is not the only or primary sense of 'ought'. It is only because I at least believe that I ought to do something in another and prior sense of 'ought' that I ought to do it in the first (subjective) sense, and this other sense is not dependent on my state of mind as such.

Another circumstance which supports the view that goodness or obligation is not an objective quality or objective relation in the real is that nobody would ever think of either as playing a part in causing anything. The heat of a physical object or the painful quality of a sensation may have effects, but its goodness or badness can cause nothing, though our belief that it is good or bad can have causal influence enough. It might be thought indeed that, if we are to recognize something directly as having the objective property of goodness, its goodness must at least cause the cognition that it is good, but as far as I know even this has not been suggested, and certainly nobody would say that it plays a part in producing any other effect.

When I have admitted this much, what is left? If I grant that ethical judgements *qua* ethical do not inform us as to what exists, is anything gained by still giving them the title of 'true' or 'objective' or, for that matter, 'valid'? What is gained, I say, is this. On a subjectivist view nothing is admitted except that we have feelings and attitudes of a certain kind in favour of what we value which

impel us to feel obliged to perform certain acts. 'Ethical judgements' are either not true at all or true only in so far as they are judgements in psychology simply affirming the existence of the feelings or attitudes, which admittedly is not of itself to affirm a value or an obligation. It is all very well if these obligations together with any other desires which support the same line of conduct are felt more strongly than desires which pull in the opposite direction. In that case we shall probably do what we ought or at least what we think we ought, whether we hold an objective or a subjective view of ethics. But suppose we on a particular occasion do not feel them more strongly. In that case it is difficult to see what point there is in making the extra effort or sacrifice required to do what we ought, to say that we ought to do it being only to express an attitude towards it not susceptible of rational justification. Why not satisfy ourselves by doing what we want most? On my view this is an immoral question, since that it is what we ought to do ought to be a quite sufficient reason for doing something; but if there is no rational justification for saying we ought to do anything, I do not see why we should not ask the question and answer it by declining to make the required moral decision. If my moral judgements are just my own decisions and it is not true that I am under obligations, or at least unless some obligations are not merely felt but are valid, surely the only rational course is to make the decisions which will be in the long run most in accord with my own desires (including of course my altruistic desires, which however are with most people not sufficiently strong to ensure that they will do right, especially in the case of those to whom they are not tied by strong links of love or friendship). No doubt, it will often be to one's own selfish interests in the long run to do what is right, but there are few people to whom this will always seem to be the case. As for the sense of obligation, this no doubt functions as one desire or feeling among others making us disinclined to do wrong and more or less uncomfortable if we do it, but with most people it is often outweighed as a feeling by other feelings, and I do not see what sense there could be from a subjectivist point of view in giving it the supreme position that is implied in the notion of duty. The same will apply if we fall back on the definition of good or right

as 'approved emotionally by the speaker or by any group of people'. That it is so approved is clearly not always a sufficient reason why we ought to perform a given action. It may be a very bad reason.

That is why I regard the subjectivist theories as dangerous practically. They could not make a good man into a scoundrel, but we should expect them to make him less inclined to do what he felt he ought in cases where he was strongly tempted not to do it. This is not of course meant as an attack on the moral character of my opponents. In so far as a subjectivist theory does tend to weaken the hold of obligation, it is all the more to their credit that they are such good people as they usually are in spite of their theory, and the evil effects of subjectivism in any case are fortunately very much lessened, I strongly suspect, by the fact that it is extremely easy to hold a sceptical theory intellectually without really thinking in these terms in the actual moral decisions of daily life. However, what I have said at least satisfies me that the distinction I have made is not a mere triviality. A person who holds an objective theory *may* of course be morally very bad; no theory guarantees one's personal ethics.

But is what I have said an *argument* against subjectivism? I do not think that it is in general a valid intellectual ground for rejecting a theory that the theory will lead to bad consequences if believed, unless there are specific reasons for thinking that the consequences of its acceptance would not be bad if it were true. But what I have said shows not merely that the consequences of the acceptance of subjectivism would be bad, but that subjectivism is untenable as an account of our moral attitude. For it is certainly involved in the moral attitude that there is a great deal of point in doing what you ought even when to do so is not in accord with what you desire most. On a subjectivist view it seems to me that such an attitude would be senseless. But moral conduct in face of temptation is not senseless, unless you are going to say that the whole of morality is based on illusion. It is sometimes said that nothing is gained by claiming objective truth or validity in ethics because to assert that a judgement of mine is justified does not add anything to the judgement, but would anybody really be content with this view in the case of theoretical judgements? It is true

indeed that to make a judgement and to claim that it is objectively justified are the same thing, but that is only because the notion of objective truth is already presupposed in making the judgement at all. I should not however use this argument against anybody who denied that ethical judgements could be true or false but admitted that they were valid or invalid in a sense not analysable naturalistically or subjectively. What I do contend is that, if no ethical judgement is objectively preferable to any other, the main motive for right action, i.e. the desire to do what is objectively right disappears altogether, except in so far as the sceptic is emotionally inconsistent, as fortunately will usually be the case.

It has been asked how I know that the general adoption of a subjectivist theory would have bad practical effects and whether I intuited that it had these effects as well as intuiting that it was false.[1] I reply that I know it in the same sort of way as I know that, if a person did not think the people he loves would be very sorry if he committed a crime, or if any other motive against committing a crime which is now present were absent, he would be more likely, or less unlikely, if tempted, to commit one. A very important reason why men do not do certain things is that they believe that these are objectively wrong; if they cease to hold this belief, a very important motive tending towards right action will be lost. Men would still indeed feel an aversion to certain acts, but since they would now think there is no ground for this over and above their feelings and any consequences of the act which they dislike (egoistically or altruistically), they would be that much less likely to make the extra effort needed in cases where the aversion is felt less strongly than some desire or desires favourable to the action.[2]

I must admit that I do not know any conclusive way of refuting consistent subjectivism in ethics. One can show that its negation is involved in our ordinary ethical thought, and one can refute any positive arguments for it. But a person who still consistently insists that all our ordinary ethical thought is mistaken and that there is no good reason for preferring any action to any other

[1] *Vide* R. Robinson in review of my *Definition of Good* in *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. I, no. 4, p. 104 ff.

[2] For the sense in which we can act against 'the strongest desire', *vide* below, p. 173 ff.

unless we mean by saying 'good reason' simply to express our approval or the approval of a certain group of people without any claim to more justification than that, cannot be logically proved mistaken, though his view seems to me utterly incredible, and I should claim that I have removed any reason for thinking it true. I leave it to the reader to judge how far various actual thinkers approximate to a view like this: more commonly they put forward their doctrine as an analysis and not a contradiction of the ordinary ethical viewpoint, and in that case it seems to me they are open to refutation.

On the other hand it is of less importance whether we say that 'ethical judgements' are true or deny them the title of truth but admit that they can be valid or invalid, reasonable or unreasonable in a sense that is not itself to be analysed in subjectivist or naturalist terms. I do not know that it matters much *practically* which of these two courses we adopt, except in so far as some people may be more strongly or less strongly influenced by the idea that an ethical judgement is true than by the idea that it is valid (a circumstance which might vary from person to person), but I shall argue that 'true' is an appropriate term. I have already rejected the argument that there are no agreed criteria in ethics and that therefore 'ethical judgements' cannot be true. But apart from this mistaken contention it may still be said that, since they do not state any 'facts', they cannot be true. The words 'true' and 'false' (though less common than with factual statements) can indeed, it must be admitted, be used of them with verbal correctness,[1] but it may be said that the sense in which they are so used has practically nothing in common with the sense in which they are used of the former except that it signifies in both cases something such as approval of the 'judgement' for having done what it set out to do, a feature that also belongs to a good many things besides any we should call judgements, e.g. strokes in a game. A contrary view to this is however strongly supported by the following points. (a) There is the irresistible tendency shown in language to treat 'ethical judgements' as indicative statements: that at least needs explaining. We have no temptation whatever to speak of commands or decisions as 'true' or to say 'we believe

[1] *Vide* above, p. 36.

them', in fact this would be regarded as utter nonsense. As I admitted earlier, the common usage of language does not prove that ethical judgements are true, but it certainly at least suggests a marked analogy and badly needs explaining on the opposite view, and our unhesitating inclination to use such language here is in the most marked contrast to our attitude to commands.

(b) When I try to decide what I ought to do in a given case I am clearly conscious of trying to find out something and not merely of trying to decide one way or the other and so escape from the discomfort of indecision; I feel that I am trying to discover the truth about what I ought to do. I could not be said, e.g. to be asking for advice sincerely if I were trying only to do the former and not the latter.

(c) 'Ethical judgements' at least agree with ordinary judgements in depending for their validity on their relation to the factual nature of the real. Although they are not statements of empirical facts, they are made 'true', valid, correct, rational, or whatever we call them, by these. To determine whether an action is right we must have information as to what the action and its circumstances and likely consequences are, and if the action is right, it must be right, these being what they are, as a factual proposition, if true at all, could not fail to be true, the facts being what they are. It may be objected that this applies to commands too, but what is it to say that a command is right or valid except to assert an ethical, prudential, or legal *proposition*? (This of course does not make the command itself a proposition.) 'Ethical judgements', where successful in what they are meant to do, seem to share with all other true judgements the wide general characteristic of being made true by a relation to the real, without having the specific relation that true affirmative categorical factual judgements bear to the real and that philosophers have primarily had in mind when they talked of 'correspondence'.

(d) An ethical judgement may refer exclusively to a past action, but we cannot command or decide a past action. Some people might regard it as more plausible to speak of general than of singular 'ethical judgements' as commands or decisions to act, but I do not see how a general ethical principle could be a command or decision without any 'ethical judgement' derived by

applying it in a particular case also being a command. I certainly agree with Hare that an indicative cannot be validly deduced from an imperative or from an imperative together with another indicative from which the conclusion would not follow without the imperative. Consequently any objections against singular ethical judgements being anything of the nature of commands are objections against the general principles from which they are derived being so. I think that this shows that 'ethical judgements' have at least a greater affinity to judgements in other spheres than they have to any sort of imperatives.

(e) But the principal point is this. There is at least one very important respect in which 'ethical judgements' differ from mere commands, exhortations, or practical decisions. They do not only urge actions on oneself or others, they claim that there is good reason for urging them. But it seems to me that 'there is good reason for commanding, exhorting or deciding to act' must itself express a proposition and not again only a command, exhortation or decision to act, and if the action or exhortation, etc. is justified this proposition must be true. If 'A is a good reason for urging the action' were itself an imperative, it could not provide any more justification than the first imperative, which it was intended to justify. And similarly if 'ethical judgements' are interpreted as decisions to act. Nor do I see how it could be true only in some very far-fetched sense of the word quite different from that in which it is applied to scientific propositions.

In defending an 'ethics without propositions' use has been made of the distinction, specially associated with Ryle, between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that'. Knowing, it is admitted, is involved in moral action, but it is said to be not a knowing of propositions but the picking up of the knack how to act rightly. But, if there is a distinction between acting rightly and acting wrongly, we may ask, must there not be true propositions to the effect that one action is right rather than another? And, if they are true propositions, can it not sometimes be known that they are true? Any plausibility there is in making all ethical 'knowledge' a matter of 'knowing how' seems to me to disappear when we realize that the distinction between knowing how and knowing that falls *within* ethics, unless indeed the knowing of propositions

in every field can be reduced to a species of 'knowing how', in which case this distinction cannot be used as an objection to saying that there are propositions in ethics. It is certainly true that a great deal of knowledge how best to do things is 'picked up' without the use of explicitly formulated propositions, e.g. how to criticize tactfully, and no doubt some of this would belong to the ethical sphere and would not just be a matter of non-ethical skill, but it can hardly be denied that this knowledge *could* be formulated in, at least singular, propositions. Neither can it possibly be denied that there are very many cases in which ethical decisions are only made after very careful consideration of what is at any rate put in the form of general ethical propositions, even where the words 'know how' could reasonably be used, e.g. 'knowing how to rule justly'.[1] What is the significance of this distinction if the 'know how' account appropriate to some is extended to all ethical action?

Modern critics of objectivism have made great use of the practical character of ethics in their argument, but I do not see why this should prevent ethical judgements being true in the fullest sense. As I said earlier, if I summon the doctor, his aim will be practical, but this does not alter the fact that in order to achieve his practical aim he will need to make true judgements about my condition of health and the medicines likely to cure me. Similarly in order to act rightly we sometimes, though not always, need to make explicit conscious ethical judgements. These are just as necessary for right action as are the factual judgements about the patient's disease and the means of cure made by the doctor. If we are to act rightly we must know what action is right, and while we can do this sometimes without explicitly formulating it to ourselves, it is obvious that this is not always so, and when we do formulate it, what can it be but a judgement in a genuine sense?

On my view, as we shall see, to pronounce something good is to say that a favourable attitude ought to be adopted towards it. The attitude itself is either not a judgement at all or more than a judgement, but this does not prevent the *judgement* that the attitude is right or obligatory being a judgement that may be true or false.

[1] On the other hand it would sound rather odd to talk about 'knowing how to refrain from stealing', presumably because this does not require skill.

What attitude ought to be adopted, and so the truth of any proposition as to what is good, will depend on the factual nature of its object. Value judgements are thus based on the nature of the factually real, but are not about it in the way in which factual judgements are. Directly and primarily they tell us nothing about the empirical facts except that these are such as to give an adequate reason why a certain attitude ought to be adopted. And similarly with judgements that we or others ought to act in a certain way. In fact we might well widen the term 'attitude' to include 'actions'. We could then say that all ethical and evaluative judgements are about the attitudes we or others ought to adopt. The reason why we ought to do something will always lie in the situation, including certain psychological facts about the agent, and when the situation is such-and-such the judgement that I ought to act in such-and-such a way will be true.

This may well be stated in terms of reasons.[1] To say that some particular thing is intrinsically good is then to say that its nature in itself provides a reason for adopting a favourable attitude towards it. To say that some general kind of thing, e.g. knowledge, is good is to say that the fact that something increases our knowledge is, *ceteris paribus*, a reason why we ought to adopt a favourable attitude towards it. To say that 'I ought to do something' is to say that the reasons in favour of doing it are stronger than the reasons in favour of any alternative course;[2] to say that I have a *prima facie* duty to do it is to say that there is some (not necessarily a conclusive) moral reason for doing it. Debates about practical ethics are debates as to whether the reasons for doing action A are stronger than the reasons for doing alternative action B.

Now if we are to know that there are good reasons for acting in a certain way or adopting a certain attitude, we must be able to know sometimes that something is a reason without being able to give a further reason why it is a reason. If not, we shall plainly

[1] As will be noticed, I am under a debt to Professor Toulmin (*Reason in Ethics*) as regards the conception of ethical judgements in terms of reasons.

[2] This is not intended as a definition of 'ought', but only as a way of bringing out a certain aspect of obligation i.e. its close connection with reasons. As a definition it would be circular, since 'reason in favour of doing it' means 'reason why we ought to do it'. The further distinction between different senses of 'ought' will be treated in Chapter III.

be confronted with a vicious infinite regress and never be able to know anything at all in ethics. That is in general why the concept of intuition has been thought necessary if objective ethics is to be defended. But the word has proved a great stumbling-block, and if I were starting to write on ethics afresh I should try to state my views without using it. The use of the word has given the impression that intuition is intended to provide a sort of psychological explanation of our knowledge of certain things, and if so it is faced with the criticism so commonly brought against explanations in terms of faculties. Of course, it will not serve as an *explanation* of our knowledge of something to say we have an 'intuition' of it. On the contrary, this is rather to say that our knowledge does not need any further explanation. But it still remains a matter of philosophical importance to determine which things we can know directly and which only by the intermediacy of reasons, and this is what has been mainly meant when the question of intuition was debated among objectivists in ethics. It is not a question of postulating special faculties to explain anything causally but of distinguishing different kinds of valid knowledge and belief.

At the same time we should be on our guard against other associations of the term intuition. It suggests, as we have seen, a pseudo-explanation of our knowledge in terms of faculty psychology. It has been generally limited by philosophers to the *a priori*, but we must not prejudge by using it the question whether ethics is *a priori*. Even if ethics is *a priori* in a sense, it is surely clear that it is not so in just the sense in which logic and mathematics are, and the conclusion may well be that it is misleading to call it either *a priori* or empirical. Again 'intuition' suggests a mystical penetration into the nature of the real, but I have now concluded that ethical judgements as such have not the function of disclosing the nature of the real. The use of the appeal to 'intuition' may also convey the misleading suggestion that the truth of a proposition alleged to be intuited is guaranteed by the nature of our psychological state in apprehending it or can be *inferred* from the nature of this state.

Again, it must not be taken as implying that there is no history behind 'intuitions', that there are no causes for them or even no

inferences which, without proving them true, facilitate their occurrence. The man who knows much of his subject and has reasoned hard is much more likely to make true judgements that are not, strictly speaking, inferred. The proposition that there is no further explanation needed as to why something is true because it is just evident is not identical with the proposition that there is no causal explanation of a man's ability to see its truth. There may be a very complex process of understanding and inference behind what presents itself as an 'intuition', even in cases where the intuition is not just implicit reasoning but makes a jump to something which cannot be established by inference. For, even though it goes further than mediate inference can go, it may be helped on its way by such inference. The evaluation of a complex situation with its ethical requirements is usually ultimately intuitive in the sense that you cannot *prove* its truth even by deduction from general ethical principles, but it can still be very much assisted by inference. I agree with this quotation from a recent article: 'Although I believe that I can apprehend an intrinsic goodness in, say, a life of justice, my apprehension of this has little in common with my perception of the blue in the sky on a clear summer day. The latter is unmeditated, sensuous and almost effortless. The former has none of these qualities. Rather it comes as the fruition of a long and difficult effort to understand, appreciate and evaluate the almost infinite complexities of human life. On this point, the intuitionist position rests on a serious oversimplification; the data are vastly more complex than it makes them out to be.'[1] I do not say that this applies to all ethical 'intuitions', e.g. that pain is bad, but it does more or less to most. Similarly, if, as has been said by a critic of it, 'the word "intuition" carries the suggestion that we do not, or even cannot, deliberate and calculate in deciding what we ought to do',[2] I do not wish to use it. At the same time we must recognize that, however much we reason, the possibility of reasoning itself presupposes the immediate apprehension of something as true. As even Professor Ayer now admits, 'we may prove one mathematical state-

[1] *Ethical Intuitionism—A Restatement* by O. A. Johnson in *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. VII, no. 28, p. 199.
[2] S. Hampshire in *Mind* 1949, p. 470.

ment by deducing it from others but the proof must start somewhere. There must be at least one statement which is accepted without such proof, an axiom of some sort which is known intuitively. . . . To conduct any formal proof, we have to be able to see that one statement follows logically from another. The bases of this argument are sound. We do just have to see that certain proofs are valid.'[1]

Finally 'intuition' has not uncommonly been limited to cases of certain knowledge, but though I do not exclude real knowledge in ethics I must admit that there are a great many rational judgements in the field which one cannot well call certain and which yet are not based on inference. No term that I could suggest can be quite free from objections, but I shall use instead of 'intuition' the phrase 'direct cognition'. This is much wider than 'intuition' since it includes all that we directly perceive and remember, as well as those cases where *a priori* self-evidence is claimed. It is also free from most of the misleading associations which I have pointed out that constitute objections to 'intuition'. If we admit that in ethics we have some knowledge and reasonable belief not based completely on either logical inference or sense-perception or memory or induction, we may well express this by asserting that there is direct cognition in ethics. What we cognize will be that certain factual properties or circumstances constitute a reason why certain attitudes ought to be adopted or certain actions done. It is not that we see immediately that we ought to do certain things without a reason but that we see immediately that certain factors constitute a reason.

Some people want to reduce 'intuition' to 'implicit' as opposed to 'explicit' inference. But I am not thinking of the cases where a person has good grounds for believing something which grounds may influence him 'subconsciously' but which he is unable to state. I mean to cover only cases where the belief is not capable at all of proof by further reasoning, though it may be supported by it. Nor do I mean to cover any probable belief ultimately based on induction, whether the person who holds it explicitly realizes his premises or not. But I do mean to cover cases not only of know-

[1] *The Problem of Knowledge*, ch. I, sect. 3. I do not mean however to suggest that the author is yet prepared to apply this to ethics.

ledge but also of rational belief, and I should not deny that something was a case of direct cognition because I held it partly erroneous. That is why I have used the term 'cognition' not 'knowledge'.

We must now deal with what is probably one of the most popular arguments today against any appeal to 'intuition'. It is expressed by Strawson thus: 'If the word "right" or the word "good" expresses an indefinable intuitive concept, then it is self-contradictory to say, "I know what the word 'right' or the word 'good' means, but I can't remember ever *intuiting* rightness or goodness, and I don't know what it would be *like* to intuit rightness or goodness" . . . but it is not at all obvious to me that it is a contradiction. I should be quite prepared to assert that I understand the words "right" and "good", but that I could not remember ever intuiting rightness or goodness and that I could not imagine what it would be like to do so. And I think it is quite certain that I am not alone in this but that there are a large number of people who are to be presumed capable of accurate reporting of their own cognitive experience, and who would find nothing self-contradictory in saying what I say. And, if this is so, you are presented with a choice of two possibilities. The first is that the words "right" and "good" have quite a different meaning for one set of people from the meaning which they have for another set. But neither of us believes this. The second is that the intuitionist theory is a mistake.'[1] To sum up, if 'good' or 'ought' is indefinable, the meaning of either term cannot be understood unless we have an immediate experience of what the quality or relation is as something distinct from the experience of the factual characteristics which lead us to say of something that it is good or ought to be done, but if we have such an immediate experience it is strange that there should be so much doubt as to whether we have it or not. If we have it at all, must we not know that we have it? If some people have it, surely it is only reasonable to suppose that all who can appreciate goodness and obligation do, and therefore if many such do not have it, is not the only rational conclusion that none do?

I was never very much impressed by this argument, for it seems

[1] *Philosophy*, vol. xxiv, no. 88, p. 25.

to me that such an argument could be turned equally against any theory about the concepts. If they are definable, it is very odd that with words of such common use there is so much disagreement about the definition. But then this same difficulty occurs with all or almost all our fundamental concepts. Is it at all clear whether number is definable or not? And what about the fundamental concepts of logic? They are obviously not naturalistically definable, and whatever the role of language they surely cannot be reduced just to concepts about words. Even in regard to pleasure, which we obviously can recognize immediately as an empirical datum, it is a disputed matter whether it is an indefinable quality of feeling or should be analysed in terms of attitudes of liking or disliking. I may add, as an *argumentum ad hominem*, that it is clearly inconsistent both to refuse to accept my criticisms of the naturalist and subjectivist modes of analysis on the ground that meaning cannot be determined by simple inspection and yet to argue that, if Moore's account of the meaning of 'good' or mine of the meaning of 'ought' had been right, we should all have known that it was so.[1]

But I can now give a more specific answer, which explains the difficulty in the case of value judgements. Plainly ethical experiences and experiences of values involve something analogous to non-ethical, non-valuational cognition, but are not quite like any kind of such cognition. Under such conditions it is the most natural thing in the world that there should be a temptation to assert and also a temptation to deny that this is a kind of cognition. Those who stress the likeness more will call it knowing or rational belief, and those who stress the differences more will deny that it is either, but even the former ought to emphasize the differences also and the latter the likeness. I do not mean to say that the division between the rival parties is merely one of emphasis, still less of language. There are plain differences in different attempts at the description of our experience which cannot be reduced to this, but do not such differences arise whenever we start discussing philosophically any but the simplest psychological facts? It is not a question of one side admitting and another denying ethical experiences, but of rival attempts at analysis or

[1] *Vide* also my *Definition of Good*, pp. 45–50.

description of the experiences. I should not indeed feel that I had any right positively to assert the existence of an indefinable quality or relation unless I could refer to some experience in which I seemed clearly to be aware of its presence, but if I do feel this I do not feel that I am bound to reject the belief in an indefinable just because everybody does not agree with it, any more than Strawson would on that account feel he had to give up his own view. However, in any case I have now separated the notion of intuition (direct cognition) from that of non-natural *characteristics*.

Ethical and evaluative judgements (having decided to call them genuine judgements, we can now dispense with the inverted commas) are judgements about human actions and attitudes, i.e. they say what we ought to do and what attitudes we ought to adopt. But this does not make them subjective in the sense in which objectivists have usually denied they were so. For in a very important sense they can be true, and their truth does not depend on the state of mind of the person asserting them except *per accidens* when a man is judging directly about the goodness or rightness of his own state of mind or this is in some indirect way relevant objectively.

We are under obligations to take favourable and unfavourable attitudes to certain objects and on certain occasions because of the objective factual nature of these. The 'objects' to which I refer are indeed not just physical, they are persons or states of persons, but this does not contradict what I have said. Human beings are part of reality, and to say that all ethical judgements refer to persons and their states is not to say that they just depend for their validity on the wishes or arbitrary judgements or feelings of the speaker or are made true by these. Thus, even if the non-natural concepts of ethics do not guarantee the presence of corresponding non-natural qualities and relations in reality, this need not necessarily prevent the objectivity of ethics being used as a starting-point in metaphysical argument. At any rate reality must be such that ethical and evaluative judgements can be legitimately made, and anybody who thinks that this cannot be so unless there is a God, or that this at least points to the existence of God, may still argue accordingly. I do not wish to discuss his arguments

here: I have only noticed them in order to say that my view need not *necessarily* make any difference in one way or another to their validity or invalidity.[1] For even if non-natural properties are not seen directly to belong to the real, we have to fit into any metaphysics we may adopt the fact that reality is such that true value and obligation judgements are possible.

A feature of ethical and evaluative judgements which has struck me very much is the necessity of all true propositions in ethics, and not only of general laws such as that it is a *prima facie* duty not to steal. For it certainly is clear that, if it is the case that I ought to do a particular thing A now, it not merely in fact is not but *could* not have been the case that it was wrong (or not obligatory) of me to do A under the circumstances. Similarly, if it is true that A is intrinsically good, A could not have been other than good, A's factual nature being what it is. I think now, however, that it is a mistake therefore to describe ethical judgements as synthetic *a priori*. The phrase had a point since they cannot be established merely by empirical observation and are certainly not analytic. They convey new knowledge as genuinely as do scientific judgements. But the term *a priori* suggests too great an affinity between ethics and logic, and the word *synthetic* suggests that they are discoveries of facts to be included in the description of the real.

There is, I now think, a simple explanation of their necessity, which falls outside the dichotomy, analytic-synthetic. Is it not simply this? If we evaluate A correctly (otherwise than by chance), the evaluation must depend on the nature of A and so could not be different, A being what it is in fact. Otherwise it would not be a correct evaluation. This is different from the logical necessity with which it follows from 'A=4' that 'A=2+2', or from the necessity which excludes the possibility of the same thing being both red and green all over, and again from indisputable cases of analytic propositions, such as 'All fathers are male'. If the original doctrine of non-natural characteristics were maintained, we should have to say that there was a necessary synthetic connection in reality between certain empirical proper-

[1] Of course on further examination it might turn out that it did, but a specific reason would have to be given for this.

ties or groups of them and the additional quality of goodness or the relation of obligation because these follow from the empirical properties, but this is not involved in my doctrine in its present form. At the same time what I have just said can still be used as an argument against straightforward naturalism, i.e. any theory that equates good or obligation with some empirical property, for we cannot say of these empirical properties that they *must* belong to the object to which they are ascribed, its other properties being what they are. Where something has intrinsic value, it follows necessarily from its empirical nature that it has this value. But if its value is itself equated with some empirical property (naturalism), the objection arises that we shall therefore have to suppose that empirical property to follow necessarily from its other properties, but it would not be admitted that it could follow necessarily from the others. If, e.g. we define good as desired, it can be objected that, while the properties of something good other than its goodness being what they are it must necessarily be good, it is not the case that its other properties being what they are it must necessarily be desired.

Perhaps it might then be said that the general proposition that all correct valuations follow necessarily from the nature of what is valued was itself analytic and only therefore *a priori*, since a valuation which did not conform to the nature of what was valued would *ipso facto* not be correct; but this does not make any one particular valuation analytic. If the general proposition is analytic, so is the proposition that all correct factual propositions must conform to the nature of the real,[1] but this does not make any particular factual proposition, e.g. that Cambridge is north of London, analytic. It remains the case that we do see both in particular instances and as regards general rules a connection between value and obligation and certain factual properties (good-making or right-making properties). We do not observe their goodness and observe these other properties, then concluding inductively that such properties generally go with goodness; we see that these qualities by their inherent nature make what has

[1] I am not myself sure whether the two propositions are appropriately described as being analytic or not, but I think we should have to say either that they are both analytic or that neither is so.

them in so far good. And if we did not see this, we could not evaluate. If the valuation were not derived from our factual study of what we value it would not be a valuation of it and to derive it in this way we must be able to see that what has these features necessarily has this value. And similarly with ought. No doubt this does not apply to instrumental value, where the process of valuation depends on our knowledge of causal laws, or to grading things like apples where we have a list of properties which are already fixed as constituting qualifications for each grade. It may not seem involved even in just deciding that A is better than B as being more pleasant, but this is a mistake, for unless we saw that pleasantness is a good-making quality the fact that it was more pleasant would be irrelevant. We must here distinguish the empirical judgement that A is more pleasant than B from the value judgement that *ceteris paribus* the fact that A is more pleasant than B is a reason why we ought to produce A rather than B; the second alone is an ethical cognition. In the case of general laws, what we see is not indeed that something ought to be done in all cases or that whatever has a certain property is always good as a whole, but that in so far as A has a certain property this *tends* to make it good or right to do.[1]

But the situation is more complicated than is often realized. It is not just that we see directly some propositions in ethics to be true and use these as self-evident starting-points from which to infer others. A proposition ostensibly cognized directly by us may not present itself to us as absolutely certain but as having an inherent plausibility. We may think we see its truth but not be quite sure whether we really do so. In these cases and in cases where there is a conflict between different people in what they claim to see immediately, confirmation by other ethical beliefs becomes important. It is one of the commonest arguments against an objective ethics that ethical disputes end in a clash of 'intuitions' and there is no way of deciding between 'intuitions'. But this argument assumes wrongly that in ethics there are not available any tests such as those which can be brought under the general heading of 'coherence' that may be applied to supplement or refute the ostensible direct cognitions to which the criticism

[1] I try to meet the objections to this in the next chapter (p. 109 ff.).

refers. At the same time I want to emphasize that there is an intermediate term even in direct cognition between knowing with certainty and having no right to believe. There are constantly cases in ethics, as in philosophy generally, and in the weighing of probable arguments in daily life, where we seem to see something to be true (or a reason for holding something else) but are not quite sure whether we really do so. These must not all be dismissed as worthless evidentially: in the absence of a whole loaf half a loaf is better than no bread, and we must not despise something less than certainty where certainty cannot be obtained. This is obvious where it is a case of forecasting consequences, but even if we have forecast the consequences of an action rightly, their evaluation relatively to other alternatives may be, like their forecasting, still a matter of probability, although in a different sense of the term, for we must distinguish the uncertainty which is due to lack of evidence and the uncertainty which is due to our imperfect capacity to use rightly the evidence we have got and so evaluate correctly. Even a direct cognition may justify belief while falling short of certainty, and this initial justification may in a given case be reinforced by coherence with other ethical cognitions.

What are we then doing when we make an ethical judgement? We are saying something that in an important sense can be true, but we are not describing or at least not just describing what is the case. Similarly we are not commanding or just commanding. It is easy and true to say that we are exercizing a unique mental activity not reducible to anything else, though having some analogy to descriptive judgements, some to commands, some to decisions to act, etc., but one would wish to say something more positive about it, difficult though this is. It will however be convenient to treat separately ought-judgements and judgements which ascribe goodness or badness, and I shall here confine myself to the former. I do not think that the answer for the two types of judgement is fundamentally different, but till the concept of good has been considered specifically in the next chapter it will not be possible to say whether it is so or not.

Now when I make an ought-judgement, I am no doubt expressing a pro- or anti-attitude towards an actual or conceivable

course of action. So far the subjectivists are right. All judgements, even the most purely theoretical, express a mental attitude of some sort on the part of the person who makes the judgement, though this does not prevent their also claiming objective truth about something else. My judgement that Peru is west of Brazil at least expresses the mental attitude of belief,[1] though it may have no emotional or practical interest at all for me. Similarly ought-judgements will at least express the belief that some act ought or ought not to be done. Since we have decided that ethical judgements can be called 'true', we are now entitled to speak about 'ethical beliefs'. But a belief is not ordinarily the only mental factor present when we make ethical judgements or even the only factor which they can properly be said to express. In some cases an ethical judgement may be purely intellectual, but then I should say that it was not a case of a genuine first-hand ethical judgement at all, but of one based either on authority or on the mere subsumption of the act under a general principle already adopted. Where the judgement is the immediate outcome of a genuine ethical experience, it must surely express some inclination in favour of the act or aversion from it. It may not express anything definite or strong enough to be called an emotion, but at least some sort of feeling must be involved.

But I should not describe the central feature as a feeling but rather as an incipient conative attitude for or against the act. It is not just that we have a certain kind of organic sensations (if the James-Lange theory is true), or images of such, or other mental feelings if there are any; it is that we turn towards the act in support or against it in aversion, we side with or against it, at any rate in imagination. If a further account is required of what I mean by 'conative attitude', perhaps the least inadequate one I can give is to say that I regard it in its more developed forms as willed decision or effort, in its less developed as the active element (distinguished from the feeling element) in desire, the element that tends, at least in thought, towards action. Hence my

[1] I admit that 'belief' is commonly to be interpreted dispositionally, but at the time we express a belief in words and do so sincerely and not parrot-wise there must be an actual state of mind present, however that be analysed, in which we consciously believe what we are asserting to be true.

use of the word 'incipient' to identify the attitude expressed by moral judgement with a full-fledged volition would be to fall into one of the views criticized in the last chapter and ignore the possibility of sin. What we are doing in moral judgement is indeed to make a beginning of what, if unchecked, will lead to a settled policy for or against the kind of act approved or condemned, though one instance need not lead to any overt action. To have such a conative attitude is distinguishable from 'doing anything about it': there is nothing to be done if the act is recounted in a novel or belongs to remote history, and we surely can experience on reading the newspaper a marked ethical aversion against some action reported there without either *feeling* emotionally angry or doing anything such as complaining to other people. But where there is something realized as in our power to do, such an attitude will tend towards action if not prevented, and so we may now see the element of truth in the doctrine that, if we make a moral judgement, we must act on it. It seems that we could hardly make it[1] (except on mere authority or merely by applying a major premiss previously accepted) without a conation which involved *tending* to act accordingly where action was possible, but this tendency is only one among others and one which may easily be counteracted by other conflicting desires without the sincerity of our moral judgement being affected. It is equally true of anything else we desire that *other things being equal* we shall do what we think furthers the object of desire. Probably almost all men desire in some degree to do what is right, and I should regard any who do not as incapable of making genuine moral judgements, but the desire is only one among others by which it may easily on occasion be overcome. What I have said gives no excuse for asserting the Socratic paradox that no one can knowingly do wrong.

To find in conation the basis of the experience we have in making ethical judgements is not to say that their essence consists in trying to influence other people. That I regard as something external to the judgement and in no way essential to its nature. It is often more difficult to separate the judgement from an attempt

[1] I do not think we need add the word 'sincerely'. If we are lying or just saying the words mechanically, this is not a case of a moral judgement but only of a moral sentence.

to influence oneself, but at least this cannot possibly be regarded as the purpose or essence of most ought-judgements about other people, so it cannot be used to define ought-judgements as such. Besides we do not always even try to make ourselves do what we think we ought. Again an ethical judgement is of itself not a decision to act. Alas! we can so easily believe that we ought to do something and yet not decide to do it. Still, as I have said, an ethical judgement about what the person who makes it ought to do carries with it at least a *tendency* to action.

It is not at all popular to talk about 'conations' nowadays, but I do not see how I can possibly reduce them to physical behaviour. The experience of inclining in favour of or against something, of wanting or welcoming it on the one hand and having an aversion to it on the other, is a genuine enough experience, and one which I think constitutes the difference between an emotion and a mere feeling, an emotion being always based on an excited and then satisfied, thwarted, or opposed conation. Similarly, while I admit that many propositions about belief, as about desire, may be understood dispositionally, I do not see how we can possibly avoid admitting also that there sometimes occurs the actual experience of consciously coming to believe something ('seeing' or seeming to see that it is true or probably true). I should further insist that, where a dispositional analysis is given, it should be in the main in terms of possible experience and not only possible behaviour. I have settled my account with Professor Ryle's well-known book elsewhere.[1]

At the same time it is clear that not all conations are ethical experiences or accompanied by such. Indeed, if an 'ought-judgement' were merely an incipient conation for or against something, it would not be a judgement in the proper sense at all and could not be true or false. We have concluded above that ethical judgements can be appropriately described as true or false, but have accepted the anti-objectivist argument that they are not descriptive and therefore cannot be regarded as asserting the presence in their object of 'non-natural' any more than of 'natural' qualities or relations. I still maintain that 'ought' stands for a non-natural concept in the sense of not being reducible to anything which can

[1] *Proceedings of Aristotelian Society*, 1952–3, p. 47 ff.

be given in sensation or observed in introspection as a psychological quality[1] or relation, but I have renounced the view that ethical judgements assert the existence in things (experiences and minds) of a quality of goodness and a relation of obligation as my judgements about a penny assert that it has the quality of roundness and stands in the relation of being in my pocket. What then do ought-judgements do? In what respect does my view now differ from subjectivism? My answer is that the subjectivist overlooks the fact that in an ought-judgement we are not merely expressing a conative attitude but asserting it to be justified and indeed imperatively required by the facts. It is by virtue of this claim that ought-judgements have a cognitive function, and it is in respect of this claim that they can be called true or false, although of course the conation which they express cannot itself be called 'true' or 'false' but only 'right' or 'wrong'. It is this claim too which gives ethical judgements universality. Without it they would express merely the speaker's individual attitude; with it they claim validity for any rational beings judging what attitude should be adopted in the same situation to the same facts, and therefore for the agent to whose action the judgement refers, whether he be the same as the person judging or another man. In the limiting case where the claim is absent or all but absent the sentence—he ought not—becomes merely a bad-tempered exclamation like, 'Damn him!' I have an aversion to A's act as, e.g. an instance of cruelty, I judge that this aversion is morally justified by the facts, therefore I can judge not only that I ought to have it but that A ought to have had it and so ought not to have done what he did.[2] And similarly with the pro-attitude of approval. One must distinguish the pro-attitude from its object, even if both are conations, but to count the pro-attitude justified, either absolutely or in a certain respect, is to count the act justified either absolutely or in the same respect, and similarly *mutatis mutandis* with anti-attitudes.

[1] Though the *recognition* of it of course is.

[2] This is compatible with our judging that a man who we think has acted wrongly may still be admitted by us to have done what he ought if he *believed* that it was his duty to act in the way in which he did. This is a different sense of 'ought' to which I shall refer later (p. 101). We should still claim that he had made a mistake as to what he (objectively) ought to do if we were right.

By what are ought-judgements justified? By the 'natural' characteristics of the act which is the object of judgement and of its circumstances. The factors which make an act right or wrong are the natural characteristics and relations it has, as being, e.g. motivated in a certain way and liable to produce certain effects. This gives ultimately the only possible way of justification and also explains why there is a temptation to adopt naturalism and gives the element of truth in the position of the naturalist. But what this is will be clearer when the concept of good has been discussed.

The parallelism and difference between ought-judgements and theoretical judgements may be brought out as follows. Theoretical judgements express a primarily cognitive attitude and claim this to be justified (imposed on us) by the facts; ought-judgements express a primarily conative attitude[1] and assert the conation to be justified (imposed on us by the facts in a different way). The claim that the attitude is justified is at the very same time for both also a claim that every other rational being ought to adopt it in a similar situation. That sounds intolerant, but it is inescapable from the nature of judgement. In so far as my judgement is right anybody who contradicts it will be wrong, and it must claim to be right or it would not be a judgement at all. The implication of intolerance is removed when we consider that our own judgements, whatever their claims, are like everybody else's very liable to be mistaken, and when we further realize that, in so far as they relate to our own actions, it may well be the case that, even if right, they would not be so if directed to many other people's actions in the same external circumstances because the internal psychological circumstances are different. Further, the above claim to universality implies something else objective, i.e. with theoretical judgements that the facts are what the person who makes the judgement thinks them to be, with ought-judgements that in the case of pro-attitudes the act to which the judgements refers is right (either absolutely or in certain respects) and in the case of anti-attitudes wrong.

[1] Note that I say 'primarily'. There is a cognitive element too, for the person who makes the judgement *believes* his conation to be justified. The conation is also inseparably linked up with empirical beliefs about the factual situation and with feelings.

We are now in a better position to appreciate the precise force of the argument that a theory like Moore's is incompatible with the goodness (or badness) of anything ever being a reason for action.[1] The argument may be interpreted in three ways.

(1) It may mean that there is no way of explaining how the knowledge that something is good, or would be good if achieved, can be the psychological cause of action. We cannot pursue the good unless we have some desire to do so, and an explanation is demanded why we desire to do so. But Moore might ask, could this not be regarded as just an ultimate causal law. The critics of non-naturalism in ethics would usually be the last people to wish to maintain that we could know *a priori* what we could or could not wish to pursue, and until, if ever, all psychological causal laws have been seen *a priori* to be valid, it may be urged that the fact that we have no explanation of one beyond the empirical facts is no objection to admitting the law.

(2) Or it may be meant that the anticipated goodness of its effects cannot provide a reason why we ought to do something as distinguished from a cause of our in fact doing it. If good is a simple property, it is felt that there is a special difficulty in seeing how it could entail something else, obligation. I should however still reject the argument since I do not see any objection to admitting synthetic *a priori* propositions in a quite full-blooded sense. It may be argued that, even so, it is easier to see how something complex could have *a priori* entailments than how something simple could, but it seems to me that two attributes or a quality and relation might be inseparable just because they were simple and so could not stand by themselves. And, explain it as we may, there certainly does seem to be something in the nature of goodness such that it is evident that it is at least a reason, *ceteris paribus*, in favour of doing something that the action will produce some good. That liability to produce evil would constitute a reason against it is more evident still.[2] The argument that factual propositions cannot entail an ethical one is irrelevant here, for 'A is

[1] The objection was brought by Field as long ago as 1921 (*Moral Theory*, p. 56). He seems to have understood it in the first of three senses I shall specify.

[2] I myself make the connection *a priori* but analytic, as will be seen later. This is not however because of any general objection to synthetic *a priori* judgements.

good (intrinsically)' is not a merely factual proposition, since it already includes an ethical term *good*, whether that term already includes an 'ought' or only entails it.

(3) But the argument sometimes bears the following sense, in which I now think it a valid objection not only to Moore's but to my own former view. If in making ethical judgements all we saw was that there existed some sort of characteristic or relation in reality (including under 'reality' human beings and their experiences), that of itself would not be to see that we ought to act in a certain way. A fact about what things are like is not an obligation to act, whether we call the fact a natural or a non-natural one. In this sense I am now inclined to accept the validity of the argument.

Chapter Three

GOOD AND OUGHT

EVEN if we no longer assume that the different ethical concepts stand for objective properties, we have still to consider how these concepts are related before we can build up any systematic theory of ethics. Further, having denied that judgements ascribing goodness are descriptive, we still have to give some fuller answer to the question what they are. The answer at the end of the last chapter to the question as to the nature of ethical judgements, it will be recalled, dealt with the concept of ought but not with the concept of good. The ethical concepts of 'right', 'ought' and 'duty' except for certain differences of emphasis are obviously interdefinable, but there remains as fundamental the question of the relation between them and good. In *The Definition of Good* I rejected the view of good as indefinable as well as naturalist and subjectivist views of it and defined 'good' in terms of 'ought'. I however drew a distinction between the 'ought' of moral obligation and an 'ought' which merely signified what I called 'fittingness', while regarding both as non-natural concepts; and it was in terms of the latter 'ought', not in terms of the former, that I defined 'good', when I said that to say something was good meant that it was 'something to which one ought to have a pro-attitude'. Here I must make some amendments, as will appear later. But before discussing the question at all I must make the reservation that I am not committed to the view that my definition covers without exception all senses in which 'good' has been used. I think, however, that it will be found to cover every normal sense that is of much interest to the moral philosopher, (Moore did not claim that good was indefinable in every sense only in one sense, that of 'intrinsically good'.)

The main ground for my definition of good lay in the inability,

not peculiar to myself but common to most philosophers today, to discern clearly the alleged simple quality of goodness in our experience. It may be less difficult to hold that we have a simple concept of good than that we here discern a simple objective quality, but the difficulty still remains serious. Further, it is clear that the statement that something is good is in most of its uses and, I think, all its ethical uses logically equivalent to a statement containing 'ought', meaning by 'logical equivalence' here simply that the latter is necessarily true wherever the former is true and vice versa. This does not settle the question of definition, for two statements might entail each other and yet not assert the same proposition, cf. 'this triangle is equilateral' and 'this triangle is equiangular'. For this reason no definition can be strictly proved correct. An opponent may always assert that the concept alleged to be defined is really indefinable, though in many cases of course this would be unplausible in the extreme. We are however in a position reasonably to defend the view that something is indefinable only if we can point to an experience in which we are aware of the concept in question;[1] if we cannot do this, we can attach no meaning to the concept, a definition being *ex hypothesi* out of the question. Now there are no doubt plenty of experiences in which we should say we encountered goodness; in regard to a very great many experiences we have no doubt that they are good when we have them, and this gives some plausibility to Moore's view. But unfortunately most philosophers, including myself, are either clear that they have no idea of an indefinable goodness, or are at least not at all clear whether they have one or not. This renders Moore's account unplausible, but it seems to me very much clearer, quite clear in fact, that we are aware of obligations and that the concept of obligation is quite distinct from an empirical concept. It further seems to me that a sentence with 'ought' but without 'good' conveys the same meaning as a sentence containing 'good' in all those cases where 'good' is predicated with a significance other than that of mere present liking. At least it says the same thing, though the emotional flavour may be different. Having substituted such a statement I cannot detect any further

[1] Of course to say that something is indefinable, is not merely to say that a satisfactory definition has not yet been given.

residuum. The answer to the question why I define 'good' in terms of 'ought' and not 'ought' in terms of 'good', or do not, as has been suggested, admit that it is immaterial which is defined in terms of the other is that I cannot form an idea that I should call a simple concept of goodness as something over and above the definition I give in terms of ought, while I can form an idea of obligation that seems to me to resist reduction to any other concepts. It is very unfortunate that naturalists have thought that their main task was to define good; I do not admit that they could give any plausible naturalistic definition of 'good', but I think it would be more difficult still to give one of 'ought'. 'Good' of course remains a 'non-natural concept' for me, though not a simple one, because it cannot be defined in its ethical employment without using the non-natural concept of obligation ('ought'). It must, however, be remembered that I have now abandoned the view that 'obligation' stands for an objective relation in reality (including human experience) in the sense in which relative terms do in a true descriptive statement.

A difficulty that I have not cleared up in this connection which may be made the ground of criticism is in what sense a philosopher can be said to give the correct analysis of a common-sense concept or proposition. Whatever analysis is proposed it may always be objected that it is not the exact equivalent, and it has even been argued that no two expressions are ever quite synonymous. I think we must distinguish however between the content normally asserted and the subjective associations and emotional flavour. If a philosophical analysis gives the former, one may be well satisfied. The latter after all are liable to vary with each individual speaker or hearer and will not remain constant even for him on different occasions. At any rate I shall be satisfied if my definition of good is synonymous with the definiendum in whatever sense and degree a satisfactory definition can normally be expected to be so. And I certainly do not regard it as a refutation when anybody says that the situation is much more complex than I make it and that it is unreasonable to suppose that all usages of 'good' without exception can be brought under a single formula. No doubt there will be some odd usages of 'good' to which my formula is not adequate, but the main task is surely to define good in its main

normal senses, not in all exceptional senses, and if I were successful in the former it would be very unreasonable for anyone to put aside my work because I had not achieved the latter. What we want is an adequate account of ethical and valuational judgements, not a complete linguistic dictionary of all uses of 'good'.

It seems to me to be an important additional argument for my definition that it alone of objective theories enables one to escape from a quantitative view of good. In order to decide what we ought to do in a given situation we must consider in some sense which of various possible alternative courses will produce most good. This is the case even if we are not utilitarians, provided we admit that the goodness or badness of its consequences is at least relevant to the rightness or wrongness of an act. Now, if we think of good as a property, we must think of it as possessed in various degrees, and the ability to decide which act is best as regards its consequences is the ability to estimate the consequences empirically and judge which set of foreseeable consequences will include the *greatest* amount of good. But the difficulties about the quantitative comparison of different goods have often been emphasized, and where we are concerned with different kinds of goods, it is in any case very doubtful whether we can attach any meaning to saying that one set of consequences includes more good than another except in the sense that we think it ought to be preferred.

In *The Definition of Good*[1] I added an argument of my own which seems to me unanswerable. Any infinite quantity is greater than any finite quantity. Therefore, if good were capable of being quantitatively conceived, the existence for ever of one lower animal, provided it enjoyed itself on the whole, would be a greater good than the existence for any finite time, however many million years, of a world comprising a finite number, however large, of rational beings, however happy with the highest kinds of happiness and however good. This is quite incredible, yet surely it follows logically, if we admit that 'better' means 'including a greater amount of the quality goodness'. Some people would meet this by maintaining that no quantity of pleasure, however large, could equal or exceed in value any amount of higher good,

[1] Pp. 197–200.

however relatively small, but even if this to me quite incredible view were adopted, the difficulty would still remain. For we should still have to admit that, if good can be quantitatively viewed at all, the unending life of a single being with some degree of moral goodness, however slight (provided only it outweighed his moral badness), would contain more good than the lives for billions of years of billions of beings far wiser and better than any we can conceive. As far as I can see, the argument can only be avoided, if we define 'better' as meaning 'what ought to be preferred' and not as 'including more of the quality good'. ('Prefer' is such a general word that I think it may be used to cover any case where a more favourable attitude is adopted to something A than to something else B, whatever the pro-attitude in question.) While it is axiomatic that the infinite, in so far as it admits of quantity at all, is greater in quantity than the finite, it is not axiomatic that it ought always to be preferred to the finite. But if we give such a definition of the comparative, we must surely define the positive in a similar way. If the comparative is 'suitable to favour in preference to something else', the positive should be just 'suitable to favour'.

Another advantage of my view is that we need not then have a second indefinable, bad. Bad, I should say, is just what ought to be the object of an unfavourable attitude, as good is what ought to be the object of a favourable. Again, my view explains the connection between value and desires and conative and emotional attitudes without reducing goodness to meaning merely the *actual* object of these. It also explains why the natural and normal way of teaching a child the meaning of 'good' and 'bad' is by evincing emotional attitudes towards those things we call good and bad, a point very much emphasized by subjectivists and naturalists.[1]

In most cases 'good' may then I think be defined as 'what ought to be the object of a pro-attitude'. The term 'pro-attitude' covers any favourable attitude towards something. The variety of the different possible pro-attitudes is for me part of the explanation of the fact that 'good' has so many different senses. The most important are—choice, pursuit, approval, admiration, liking. They mostly go together—what it is right to like it is also right, other

[1] *Vide The Definition of Good*, pp. 178–83, for an account of the advantage of my view.

things being equal, to seek or pursue, but there are some things, especially pleasure, which it is appropriate to like but which it would be quite inappropriate to admire, and again it is not right to admire oneself even if one does things for which it would be right to admire another person. Further, the distinction remains between intrinsically and instrumentally good. There are some things (at least experiences and states of mind) towards which we ought to adopt a pro-attitude on account of their own nature and others toward which we ought to adopt one only on account of their consequences. The former are intrinsically, the latter only instrumentally good. But my definition of good can be applied even to what is only instrumentally good. A good tool is a tool of such a kind as ought to be employed for the purpose in question, whatever that is. We ought to choose good means rather than bad. Only here we are concerned not with the specifically moral 'ought' but with the 'ought' which I described as signifying fittingness in my earlier book and should now prefer to describe as signifying reasonableness. It may be admitted also that in some cases we use 'good' purely naturalistically to mean that we (or most people) in fact like what is pronounced good, e.g. 'this does taste good', though even in this case there seems to be an implication that any person who had the same experience ought[1] to pronounce it good. But in cases of ethical significance, at least, I contend that the usage is never purely naturalistic.

It has been objected that my view is too indirect since it makes value judgements judgements not about the object valued but about people's attitudes towards it. But even on my view, in so far as the value judgement claims that the pro-attitude is not merely there in fact but is rightly based on the nature of its object, it is a judgement about the object. If as examiner I said one ought to give a certain candidate a first class, it would be odd to comment that I was not talking about the candidate's papers but about people's attitudes towards the papers. The right attitude is in separably linked up with the objective character of that towards which we have the attitude and the value judgement asserts that it has such an objective character as to justify this attitude. On the extensional side it can still be about the object, though on the

[1] 'Ought' of reasonableness, not moral 'ought', *vide* below.

intensional side it is about the attitude which ought to be adopted.[1]

The view I have suggested might be supposed to make 'good' relative to human beings, but this is not so. Where something is really such that it ought to be the object of a pro-attitude for its own sake, this must apply to any being who apprehends its true nature and is capable of acting from a sense of obligation. This does not mean that a tone-deaf person or a Martian with quite different interests and psychology ought to value Beethoven's music in the way in which a human musician does, but even such a person, if aware of the relevant empirical facts, ought to realize that it is of value to others and act accordingly, e.g. not interrupt their enjoyment unnecessarily. What ought to be the object here of a pro-attitude as intrinsically good is of course only the experience of musical persons, when listening to Beethoven, not that of tone-deaf ones. I do not see how the mere fact that a being was not a man but, say, a Martian could dispense him from obligations provided he was capable of acting from a sense of obligation, or even alter his obligations except in so far as it made a difference to the circumstances of his actions, as e.g. my being in Cambridge and not in the Arabian desert and being a teacher of philosophy and not a medical doctor make a difference to mine.

It has been made an objection to my view[2] that something could be good though there was no possibility even of its being the object of a pro-attitude. I should reply that it is logically possible that it might be good without being the object of an actual pro-attitude, provided it ought to be the object of a pro-attitude if apprehended, but that it would be absurd to say it was good if it were *logically* impossible that it could be the object of a pro-attitude, though I cannot myself think of anything of which this is logically impossible.[3] Also I could not sincerely say that any-

[1] *Vide* below p. 117 ff.

[2] By Professor Blanshard in a lecture.

[3] It is a curious fact that even what is itself logically impossible, e.g. that the past should be changed or that both of two contradictory beliefs that I should like to hold might be true, can be the object of a wish (a pro-attitude), or even a purpose (provided the person is not convinced that it is logically impossible). This is however a different matter.

thing was good without thereby making it the object of an actual pro-attitude of my own.

Still less must the definition of 'good' as what ought to be the object of a pro-attitude be confused with the definition of it as what is in fact the object of one when contemplated. What I sincerely say ought to be the object of a pro-attitude will in fact be its object in my case at least, but this does not make identical the meaning of the two statements (the factual and the ought-statement). Nor is to say that A ought to be the object of a pro-attitude the same as saying that it would be the object of a pro-attitude for most people or for 'reasonable' people, if 'reasonable' be defined without the use of any normative terms. Some moral philosophers have supposed that there was something very difficult or odd about supposing that all human beings might have been wrong in some ethical judgement, but I cannot see the difficulty. Human beings are very imperfect and fail to see many things. Up to a certain point in history nobody presumably had seen that we ought to forgive those who have wronged us, and what is the difficulty in supposing that the whole human race might be in error right to the end of the world about some other point of ethics?

I think I erred in *The Definition of Good* in giving my account on the whole primarily in terms of feelings. There are serious objections to this. (1) It is not the case that one's degree of feeling ought to be in proportion to the degree of goodness or badness in its object. There is no obligation to work oneself into a terrific rage at the crimes of Hitler or Stalin, or to try to feel a million times as miserable because a million people have met a horrible death as we should on seeing one man thus die. That there is a real obligation to try to see things in proportion is true, but it is not to be achieved in this way by feeling. (2) If we try to define a particular kind of emotional attitude in terms of the quality of feeling felt, this becomes a thoroughly subjective matter. How are we to know the exact felt quality of other people's emotions? Though the qualitative differences in feeling are no doubt real, they are only discoverable by introspection and may vary from person to person without any possibility of correlation.

What is the alternative to saying that the good is that towards

which we ought to have certain feelings? I do not think that we can define it in cognitive terms; to say that the good was to be defined as what we ought to judge good would involve a vicious circle or infinite regress. This leaves the alternatives of defining it in terms of conations or conative tendencies. That was the course I actually adopted in the case of desire in my previous book,[1] and it agrees with what I said about ought-judgements in the second chapter of this. Indeed the reasons I have just given against defining good in terms of feeling are also potent reasons in favour of the view which finds in ought-judgements the expression of conative attitudes rather than of feelings. Clearly what matters is not whether we feel a desire for something good in the sense of an uneasy emotion proportionate to its goodness, but whether we strive for its attainment. Similarly to say in general that something ought to be approved is not to say that we ought to have a certain feeling about it but that we or other people ought to pursue or ought to have pursued the policy of backing up this kind of thing, or at least imaginatively to put ourselves on its side. We may not be able to make any difference in a particular case, but our course of life depends on our ways of approval and disapproval, and each new approval or disapproval helps to build up a habit of thought, even if in itself it is of no practical importance because the matter is settled apart from us.[2]

The same principle should be applied in answering the question whether we can be under an obligation to act from a certain motive. This question will be answered in the negative if we think of 'acting from a certain motive' as meaning 'having a certain feeling when we act' on the ground that we cannot at a moment's notice alter our feelings, but not if we mean 'acting' with our attention directed in a certain way, which is normally in

[1] *The Definition of Good*, p. 153.

[2] Cf. J. N. Findlay's complaint against much current ethics that 'it treats the question, "What shall I do or avoid,[2]" as if it were a question different in kind and unrelated to the question, "What shall I in all earnestness wish or not wish,[2]" whereas from a reasonably withdrawn standpoint they are questions altogether of the same sort. The ends of action . . . are remoter, wider objectives of the same sort as the objectives we are in an immediate position to realize, nor is a considered turning of the mind or the will to the one more impossible or difficult to compass than its considered turning to the other.' (*The Structure of the Kingdom of Ends*, British Academy Lecture, p. 102.)

our power,[1] e.g. not voluntarily gloating over the fact that my action annoys somebody I dislike but attending rather to the reasons which really justify the act. At the same time I fully recognize that we cannot have a conation without feelings of some sort, only I regard the former as primary, at least when we are concerned with *moral* emotions. It is not the felt character of our feelings of moral admiration or indignation which accounts for our attraction or repugnance (as the quality of the sensations we get from food usually does) but rather the reverse, and it is the conation, not the feelings, to which I think moral predicates can appropriately be applied.

To proceed to another point, in *The Definition of Good*[2] I distinguished an 'ought' which I described as signifying 'fittingness' from the 'ought' of moral obligation and held the former to be the primary ought and the one to be included in the definition even of intrinsic goodness. By the 'ought' signifying 'fittingness' I did not mean merely the 'ought' we have in mind when we talk about the means which it would be useful to adopt for a given end, but meant also the 'ought' which requires us to seek certain ends or to reject certain means to what we desire because they are intrinsically evil or conflict with certain other good ends. I thought that it was a genuine irreducible ethical concept, and so I had still two ultimate ethical concepts left, the ought of fittingness and the ought of moral obligation, for though I suggested a definition of the latter in terms of the former[3] I was not even then prepared to accept that definition. I still recognize these two meanings of 'ought', but now I wish to lay more stress on the moral 'ought' and to reduce the 'ought' of 'fittingness' to reasonableness. By the 'reasonable' course I do not mean to signify just the course which a man who knows the relevant empirical facts would adopt but the one which he intellectually ought to adopt, at least relatively to certain ends. Some would say that it was better to define this sense of 'ought' naturalistically as just signifying that an action would produce the effects wanted. But I

[1] For my discussion of Ross's views of this *vide The Definition of Good*, p. 137 ff., where I apply the principle here adopted to this question, if not to others.

[2] P. 150 ff.

[3] Pp. 168–70.

prefer my account, for (a) we are still condemning or commending, if only relatively, and not stating facts; (b) the act we ought to do even in this sense is not the act which will in fact produce the result desired, but the act which it is most reasonable to choose in the light of the probabilities for the attainment of this end; (c) reasonableness is shown not only in selecting means but also in selecting ultimate ends. I have already mentioned two grounds for distinguishing different meanings of 'good' under the general rubric of my definition of 'good' as what ought to be the object of a pro-attitude, namely (1) that the pro-attitude referred to may vary, (2) that there is a distinction between adopting a pro-attitude towards A for its own sake and adopting it towards A for the sake of A's consequences, this distinction being the one between intrinsic and instrumental goodness. The difference between the 'ought' of reasonableness and the moral ought is another ground for such distinctions.

My main reasons for maintaining that 'good' was definable in terms of the 'ought' of 'fittingness' and not in terms of the 'ought' of moral obligation were as follows.[1] (1) I held the former to be the primary 'ought' because for a man to be subjectively under a moral obligation to do something, i.e. under a moral obligation in the sense in which a person is because he believes that he is, even when he is mistaken, he must first believe that it is 'fitting' to do it. But it has been pointed out to me[2] that in order to be even subjectively under a moral obligation I must believe not only that the act is fitting but that there is independent of my belief a moral obligation to do it. If I believe only that it is fitting or reasonable, it will be subjectively only fitting or reasonable and not morally obligatory. Thus the subjective moral ought presupposes an objective ought not only in the sense of fittingness but in the sense of moral obligation. The ought of moral obligation must be as objective as the ought of fittingness or reasonableness, since I can be mistaken not only as to the latter but equally well as to my moral obligations.

(2) It is not clear that there is a contradiction in saying that something is good in itself and yet denying that we are under a

[1] P. 185.
[2] By Professor Brandt

moral obligation to pursue it. For it seems at least plausible to hold that my own pleasure is good in itself and yet that I am not under a moral obligation to pursue it. However, if we reject my previous view, we need not go to the other extreme and say that in all cases 'good in itself' has to be analysed in terms of the moral 'ought' and not the 'ought' of reasonableness. Indeed if something is an end-in-itself, it must always be at least reasonable to treat it as such, even if it is also morally obligatory, and it will remain reasonable if it is not morally obligatory, provided at least there is no moral objection to it. Further, in most cases where the intrinsic goodness of pleasure has been discussed by philosophers they had been thinking of the obligation to further the happiness of others, and it is certainly a moral obligation to further this.

(3) The pro-attitudes mentioned are not always under our control, and therefore I argued that we could not be morally obliged to adopt them. Thus I defined 'good' in the sense in which we apply the term to a morally good act as equivalent to admirable. But can it be our moral duty to admire somebody? Surely either I recognize his goodness and I then cannot help admiring him, it may be said, or I do not recognize it and then I cannot admire. We cannot produce an emotion to order and therefore we cannot be morally obliged to do so, yet on any particular occasion certain emotions rather than others will be fitting or suitable. This seems to me to be the strongest argument in favour of an ultimate ethical category of fittingness. Sympathy seems to be an intrinsically fitting emotion when another person is known to be suffering, admiration when he has done something heroic. It seems intrinsically more fitting to admire a great work of art than trash. And I am not yet sure what we should say about this. Certainly even if fittingness is an ultimate category, its importance was greatly exaggerated by me in *The Definition of Good* when I treated it as the basic concept of ethics. What I am now inclined to suggest is this. We must not look on it as if what is important were to have a certain kind of feeling; it is rather, as I have said, to have the kind of conative attitude which would lead one, if occasion arose, to pursue a certain policy in thought and action. Now, while conative attitudes are not entirely in our power, they are so

to a much greater extent and more directly than our feelings. Desires, it is commonly said, are involuntary, but we can at any rate decide whether we shall merely recognize the presence of an evil desire, which any psychotherapist will tell us is only wise, or, so to speak, officially endorse it by allowing ourselves to dwell on its attainment. Thus if I have a strictly involuntary feeling which could be called 'desiring that somebody should suffer', I am not to blame; but I am if I voluntarily gloat on the thought, still more if I entertain it as a possible basis for voluntary future action. It is this that I regard as a conative attitude. Further, there is at least a duty indirectly to *cultivate* right emotions in the sense of feelings. The adoption of the right conative attitude will tend at any rate towards the production of feelings to match.

It is certain that we use the terms 'ought' and 'right' in many cases where they do not express moral (even *prima facie*) obligation.[1] But I should now maintain that in the cases of which I was thinking 'the action A ought to do' usually means 'the reasonable action'.[2] We often say that a man ought to do something merely because we think it prudent relatively either to the attainment of some particular object of desire, of which we may even disapprove (Kant's hypothetical imperative), or to his happiness in general (Kant's assertoric imperative). We use 'ought' to signify the views or line of argument or general attitude we think reasonable in practical as well as theoretical matters. Now reasonableness is not a naturalistic concept. It cannot be analysed in terms of people's actual attitudes, thoughts or feelings. Yet, though a normative notion, it is not a specifically ethical one. It can be applied anywhere in the field of thought. Consequently I

[1] I doubt whether we should ever use the term 'duty' except in cases where there was either a moral (*prima facie* or absolute) obligation or a legal obligation.

[2] I do not maintain that its use to signify reasonableness is the only non-moral use of 'ought'. There are at least three other widespread usages which I do not think I need to discuss here: (1) the sense in which 'ought' just stands for what one is legally or by convention required to do, (2) the sense in which it stands for what is expected e.g. it ought to be warmer in July than in May, (3) the sense of 'ought' as signifying conformity to type. But perhaps the second and third could be brought ultimately under the same head. There is also a hybrid sense of 'ought' in which it is occasionally used by a dissenter from the accepted code of morals to express what the code (wrongly on his view) requires one to do. In that sense he may regard it as permissible or even praiseworthy not to do what one 'ought'.

shall now be able to claim for my view the advantage that it has reduced the distinctively ethical concepts to a single fundamental one, expressed by 'ought' in the moral sense, the other 'ought' not being specifically ethical.

Any judgement which we can approve must be reasonable, and this will apply not only to theoretical judgements but to ethical. People have indeed said that it is better to be unreasonable than reasonable, but I imagine that, in so far as they were not quite muddled, they meant either that it was better to trust conclusions not based on reasoning than to try to argue things out (a very dangerous but not a self-contradictory view since a person with little capacity for arguing reasonably might be worse off if he relied on his arguments than if he did not), or that it is right in some cases to take great risks, a view which has also some applications, though I certainly think the tendency to applaud the unreasonable in either of these two senses is often carried much too far. To say that it is better to be unreasonable than to be reasonable is really to say in a very wide sense of 'reasonable' that it is reasonable not to trust to reasoning or to a certain kind of reasoning, but reason is not identical with reasoning. Whatever we think of 'intuitionist' views of ethics, we must admit that a man's reason may work intuitively at least in the sense of not involving explicit reasoning. Now with merely factual judgements the concept of reasonableness is relevant to the making of the judgement but does not figure in the content of what is judged, but with judgements of value, as with judgements which, e.g. appraise inductive arguments, it often does so. For in many cases good is to be analysed as, e.g. 'reasonable object of choice or pursuit', and ought-judgements also often include or are limited to the sense of 'ought' in which it can be interpreted adequately in terms of reasonableness.

A major ground for which I now deplore my extended use of the term 'fitting' in *The Definition of Good* is because, contrary to my intentions, it suggests too much analogy between ethics and aesthetics. The knack of putting in just the line or stroke of the brush which fits the whole picture or the words which aesthetically fit the situation is not to be compared with the imperative force of moral obligations. However, I suspect that fittingness is

an ultimate concept in aesthetics, and in so far as there is an aesthetic flavour about some ethical judgements it is not possible to exclude altogether this aesthetic fittingness from the sphere of ethics. Further, though we do not say we are under a moral obligation to feel in a certain way, it cannot be denied that there is an appropriateness about certain feelings to which we attach ethical importance, and we might well signify this by the use of the word 'fitting'. We should say, e.g. that it was fitting to feel admiration for a man like St. Francis or sorrow for those in distress. But perhaps all this means is that such feelings ought (morally) to be cultivated and encouraged.

But if we had confined ourselves to the ought of reasonableness, it is by no means clear that we should have had any unique concept of ethics which eluded analysis in non-ethical terms. If we did not admit any further, specifically ethical concept, our ethics could not indeed be called naturalistic, reasonableness being a logical rather than an empirical concept, but it would reduce value concepts entirely to concepts which are not specifically ethical, ethical conduct being just reason in action. But there remains one ethical concept at least which has a uniqueness about it and can hardly be treated in just that way, the concept of 'ought' in the strictly moral sense of the term. It is not just reasonable to abstain from a brutal murder, though I do not deny that it is reasonable. If 'reasonableness' is all there is to ethics, what about a man who asks why he should be reasonable if he does not want to be so? Indeed reasonableness conceived as the sole ultimate concept of ethics is so patently inadequate that there would be a very general hesitation to use the adjective of any ethical acts which require real sacrifice, although it is commonly used of those acts of which it is thought both that they are duties and that the non-performance of them would be harmful to the agent. I do not wish to deny that in a very important sense it is also unreasonable to demand for yourself what you would not concede to others, even where it is a real sacrifice not to do so, and that this does not mean just that it is against your ultimate interests to act like this, but one feels that when one has said of this sort of action that it is 'unreasonable' one has not spoken nearly strongly enough in condemnation of it, except in very mild cases or

where the man did not really know himself what he was doing.

There remains then the distinctively moral concept of ought. This cannot, I think, be reduced to a mere combination of any other concepts. If anything is unique, this is unique. To say that I ought to do A in this sense of 'ought' is not just to say either that it is reasonable to do A or that it would be reasonable to blame me for not doing A. I ought to be blamed for not doing it only because it was morally wrong not to do it. It is important to realize here that the view that good should be defined in terms of ought plus a pro-attitude by no means entails that ought should be defined in terms of ought plus another pro-attitude. The ought is already there and need not be defined in terms of a second ought. No doubt 'doing what one ought' ought itself to be the object of the pro-attitude of being approved, but this is not what is *meant* by the 'ought' in 'ought to do'.

At the same time in claiming that 'ought' is unique it is important to realize that one is not necessarily claiming that there is some peculiar non-empirical quality or relation there in the action as an event. All I am claiming is that, as there is a distinctive rightness or wrongness about thinking, so action has a distinctive and different rightness and wrongness of its own. 'Ought' is not, I think, indefinable in the sense of standing for some irreducible entity, some single simple relation intuitable by itself, but in the sense that ought-judgements fulfil a unique function quite different from that of judgements which give factual information. This function is not adequately brought out by merely saying of somebody who is guilty of deliberate cruelty or injustice that he made an intellectual mistake as to what was best for himself or for humanity as a whole, as the word 'unreasonable' suggests. Nor is moral condemnation of an act identical with just saying that the act caused a lot of suffering or even a lot of harm, for inanimate causes and, even with human beings, sincere mistakes may also produce a vast lot of harm without thereby calling for moral condemnation. Something more is required if we are to take up a right attitude to deliberate wrongdoing and this is obviously closely connected with the circumstance that the acts condemned were either willed or could (in some sense of 'could' to be later investigated) have been prevented by an act of will. What the

unique function of 'ought-judgements' is cannot be understood by anybody who has not had moral experience, but we all or practically all have had that.

Moral obligation is naturally envisaged and expressed in terms of laws which bind us to do something, though we may voluntarily violate them, but this sense of 'law' is radically different from either that in 'political law', or that in 'law of nature', so that the concept of law cannot be used in defining the moral 'ought' so as to explain away its uniqueness. It is sometimes right to violate a political law, and we cannot violate laws of nature. Further, all philosophers know that there are grave difficulties about expressing our moral obligations in terms of laws which are strictly universal.

It must be noted that to do something is itself to adopt a pro-attitude towards what is done. Consequently it will follow from my definition that an action one ought to do is always good, as in some sense of the word 'good' it certainly and admittedly is. But philosophers have asked the question whether right action or some right actions were also intrinsically good, which might mean: ought they to be admired or approved for their own sake, or ought they to be done for their own sake? An action might well be intrinsically good in the first sense and not in the second. Also we might well approve of an action for its own sake without thinking it admirable, and then we might hesitate to call it intrinsically good. Is my action in paying my bill when I go into a shop always admirable or intrinsically good, even if I do it from the right motives? It does not seem to deserve positive praise, though its opposite would deserve positive blame. However, I have no doubt that some actions are intrinsically good in the first sense (admirable) and others intrinsically bad. But it might be argued that an action could never be intrinsically good in the second sense on the ground that it would be quite senseless to act without envisaging at least some limited consequences. Even only to obey the categorical imperative not to lie we should have to consider the effects of our words on others at least in making what we mean understood. But at any rate there surely are features about certain actions which make it at least *prima facie* wrong to choose to act in that way because of the inherent character of the action,

separated at least from its actual consequences though not from the anticipation of certain consequences from the action. It seems to me that a malicious course of thinking and planning is itself an evil piece of existence over and above any consequences it has, and I do not think this means only that I should blame the person who was guilty of it. I should also hold that the present nature of such states of mind provides an additional reason for avoiding them over and above their bad consequences and that it would be wrong of me wilfully to produce such a state of mind in somebody even if I could know that it would have no further effects. It is true that the state of mind would not be intrinsically evil if it did not involve any intending or hoping for certain consequences, but it is still evil if the bad consequences are averted. It has been suggested that spite is not intrinsically evil on the ground that there might conceivably be a world in which spiteful action always failed and did good, and there it might actually be our duty to be spiteful, but if a person were 'spiteful' in such a world in order to do good he would not be acting from the motive of spite and therefore would not be really spiteful but benevolent. Or if his benevolence under these extraordinary conditions involved arousing in himself states of mind which were really spiteful, this would be an objection to his course of action, though one which might be outweighed by its good effects.

We must attribute intrinsic value to something if we are to have an ethic, and there can surely be nothing to which we have more justification for attributing it than virtuous states of mind, unless we are going to be hedonists. I do not wish now to go again into the whole question of hedonism. At the same time I do not identify saying that something is intrinsically good with saying that it would still be good even if there were nothing else in the universe; I merely mean that it is to be valued not solely as a cause of something else but on its own account also.

I have said that 'ought' often is applied only to signify what is the reasonable course, and in very many cases where we say something is good we need not be taken as saying that we ought to adopt a pro-attitude towards it in any other sense than this. But I now think that in the more fundamental discussions of moral philosophy 'good' will have to be defined in terms of the moral

'ought' rather than in terms of an 'ought' of fittingness or mere reasonableness. The main disputes about good within ethics, as opposed to 'meta-ethics', among philosophers in the past have been as to what things are intrinsically good, and I now think this in general must be analysed as 'what things we morally ought ultimately to pursue'.

The chief argument that has been brought against my view from an objectivist standpoint is that there can be no reason why we ought to adopt a pro-attitude towards A unless A is first recognized to be good. This may be connected with the argument that an 'ought' cannot possibly follow from an 'is', and I admit that an ought-proposition cannot be deduced from a factual proposition by formal logic. But it is surely quite obvious that the occurrence of certain things in fact, e.g. an illness, would quite directly provide a reason why a certain action ought to be taken.[1] Nor in denying that the inference is formal need we take the view that it is in any way 'loose'.[2] It may follow with complete cogency and certainty even though it cannot be established by formal logic. In such a way I should contend 'this is bad' follows from the proposition 'this is a case of the infliction of pain on another so that the agent may take pleasure in his pain'. But in concrete situations because of their complexity it is liable to be much less certain. The mistake of naturalism as such is not that it supposes normative propositions to follow from factual but that it reduces normative propositions to factual. I certainly held and still hold it one objection among others against most naturalist definitions of good that the particular property to which they claim to reduce good is not one that could possibly constitute an adequate reason or at least not the sole reason why we ought to do something. For instance, we cannot say that the reason why we morally ought to do things is that most people approve of them. But this is not an objection to all naturalist theories, at least not to one which defines 'good' by giving a list of the properties which can make something intrinsically good. There remains however the objection that we cannot identify a normative proposition with any list of factual ones. But, if normative proposi-

[1] *Vide* above, p. 47 ff.

[2] Hare, *The Language of Morals*, p. 50 ff.

tions could not follow from factual, it would not help to interpolate a quality of goodness (or badness). If the proposition ascribing goodness were factual, the ought proposition could not *ex hypothesi* follow from it; and if it were normative, it could not follow from the factual nature of what is pronounced good.

Yet I must admit that there does seem something plausible about the contention that an obligation to adopt a pro-attitude towards A can only be based on the goodness of A. This may be explained, at least partly, by the fact that, even if 'good' is defined as what ought to be the object of a pro-attitude, the meaning of the word will still vary according to the different pro-attitudes involved, and it often is the case that something ought to be the object of a certain pro-attitude only because it primarily ought to be the object of another pro-attitude. If we ought to pursue something we ought to welcome it if we attain it, and it is because it is the sort of thing we ought to welcome if attained that it ought to be an object of pursuit. If it were a right object only of antipathy and indifference when present, it would be foolish or wrong to pursue it when absent except as a means. If it is objected that this is only the prudential ought, we can easily transform it into the moral ought by thinking of an example in which the object of the pursuit is the good (or the deliverance from evil) of some person other than oneself. If we morally ought or ought not to do something, it is after all, mainly at least, because it is conducive to results which we ought to produce or avoid, but the ultimate reason for both pro-attitudes or both anti-attitudes still lies in the factual characteristics of that which is the object of our attitude, just as, if we adopt Moore's view of a non-natural quality, the factual characteristics of what has this quality must constitute the reason why it has it. It cannot indeed be just an ultimate fact that we ought to adopt a pro-attitude towards certain particulars, but the ultimate reason must lie in their general factual nature. We must be able to cite their 'good-making' qualities, i.e. the qualities from which it follows that they ought to be the object of a pro-attitude. But to say that goodness or obligation depends on factual properties is quite different from simply equating it with those factual properties.

I think, however, another reason for the tendency to take the

view that we ought to have a pro-attitude towards something only because it is first recognized as good is to be found in the fact that it is very natural to pass from an intensional to an extensional meaning of good. In this lies the explanation, and the excuse, for naturalism.[1] If the term is used extensionally, 'good' will stand for just those factual characteristics which are such as to make something the fitting object of a pro-attitude, and we can then without qualification say that we ought to have a pro-attitude to something only because it is good.

It is a commonplace of ethical discussion that, where a person genuinely believes that he ought to do something, he really ought to do it, if possible, even if his belief is mistaken.[2] We thus have to hold that one sometimes both ought to do and ought not to do the same thing, which is a plain self-contradiction unless we are using different senses of 'ought'. Further, since both different senses are in frequent use and are plainly not self-contradictory or without application, it is pointless to dispute which is the 'right' use. The two uses are sometimes distinguished as 'subjective' and 'objective', though not in the same sense of these words as when a distinction is made between a subjective and an objective theory of ethics in general. Philosophers have also commonly employed a sense of 'ought' in which it refers to the action which of those in his power would be the absolutely best possible for the agent to choose in the eyes of one who knew all its consequences and all the consequences of all possible alternative acts in the situation and judiciously compared them, but it is rarely used in this sense outside philosophy and the usage carries with it the disadvantage that it would make it highly doubtful whether any human being

[1] *Vide* below, p.117.

[2] My attention has been called by Professor Brandt to the point that the words 'if possible' should be added. The words have not usually been inserted here by people who were discussing this point, but I think they are needed. For I might believe that I ought to do something, e.g. refuse to speak under certain forms of psychological pressure, thinking that it was possible when it was not psychologically possible for me, and in that case it would not be true that I ought to do it even in this sense. I think the principle requires a further amendment, or at least clarification, to exclude the case of the man who momentarily believes something to be his duty and then (without there being any need for immediate action) rushes to do it at once without adequate reflection to confirm his momentary belief.

has ever done what he ought. In *The Definition of Good*[1] I therefore distinguished three senses of 'ought' as relating (1) to that action of those in the agent's power which it would be absolutely best to perform, (2) the action which the agent ought to perform, his moral and factual beliefs being what they are, i.e. the action which he sincerely thinks he ought to perform, (3) the action which would be best in the light of the available evidence, as far as is humanly foreseeable. (This is rather vague, but common-sense terms are vague, and it is certainly a very usual meaning of 'ought'. We very often say that a man ought not to have done A, not because we think he judged it to be wrong and yet did it, but because we think he was mistaken in judging it to have been right.)

I limited 'moral obligation' to the second sense and brought the other two under what I then called 'fittingness', but it has been pointed out to me that for a man to be under a moral obligation in the second sense it is necessary not merely that he should believe the act 'fitting' but that he should believe it morally obligatory in an objective sense. That my third as well as my second sense of 'ought' may involve moral obligation is shown by the mere fact that we can make mistakes about our 'moral obligations'. We should not indeed say that a man had violated his moral obligations merely because he had made a mistake in forecasting probable consequences, but we should say so if he had overlooked what appeared a quite clear obligation even if he did not admit that it was one. When we use 'ought' negatively in the third sense, we are thus leaving it open whether the person condemned has violated the moral 'ought' or the ought of reasonableness. Other writers have adopted instead of my third sense a sense in which what a man 'ought' to do is what he objectively ought to do, his factual beliefs being what they are, so that he could do what he ought in this sense even if he were relevantly mistaken about the actual consequences but not if he were relevantly mistaken about what obligations he would have on his view of the facts.[2] This has some advantages for philosophical

[1] P. 118 ff.

[2] Carritt *Ethical and Political Thinking*, p. 14 ff.; Ross *Foundations of Ethics*, p. 161; Broad in *Philosophy*, 1946, pp. 110–11.

discussion, but I should insist that my third sense gives the sense in which 'ought' is most commonly used in ordinary conversation just because of the difficulty of deciding how far only a factual mistake and how far a moral mistake or again deliberate neglect of duty is involved. This is plainly the usual sense of 'ought', for instance, when we discuss whether a government ought to have pursued a given policy, criticisms of the policy depending partly on charges that the government had made mistakes as to matters of fact (chiefly in forecasting consequences) and partly on charges that they had made mistakes in evaluation or violated moral obligations consciously or unconsciously.

We can make a corresponding distinction between three different senses of the non-moral 'ought'. We can distinguish between the lack of reasonableness[1] which consists in making a mistake of judgement as to what it is reasonable to do, and the lack of reasonableness which consists in not acting in accord with the judgement one has made. Both the man who really thinks he has a safe system for making a fortune by gambling and the man who goes on gambling, though he judges it imprudent, are unreasonable but in a different way. It is as true that it is reasonable for a person to do what he thinks reasonable, as it is that he morally ought to do what he thinks he ought. The non-moral 'ought' is also occasionally used to stand not for what it would have been reasonable to do but for what we now see would have turned out best, though we could not at the time owing to the limitations of human knowledge be expected to have foreseen this. But very much the most common sense of the non-moral 'ought' is that in which it relates to the action which in the light of the available data it is reasonable to choose (a probability judgement, which like an ordinary categorical judgement can be either true or mistaken). But we may use 'ought' in each of these three senses, even where we are merely talking about the most efficient means of committing a crime which we condemn.

On the other hand I do not think that the distinction between

[1] I say 'lack of reasonableness' rather than 'unreasonableness' because the latter term conveys a reproach which we should only feel justified in making if the error was a fairly gross one. But however pardonable the error it obviously must show some lack of reasonableness by ideal standards if it is an error at all.

the three different senses of 'ought' has much point when we are just asking if something is intrinsically good, i.e. if it ought to be the object of a pro-attitude for its own sake. Here we can dispense with the tricky business of calculating consequences, for these do not affect intrinsic goodness, so that the first and the third senses in practice coincide, and it is not usually of interest in a general discussion to point out that a person who thought A to be intrinsically good, when it was not really so, still ought in the second, subjective sense of 'ought', to adopt a pro-attitude towards it. But as regards particular actions, the distinction is extremely important.

I have mentioned three distinct senses of 'ought', but I do not think that there are three distinct ultimate concepts involved here, for it seems to me that these three merely apply the same concept in different relations. In the first sense of 'ought' it is relative to the total objective situation so as to signify what would be the morally obligatory or the reasonable act for anybody who knew this fully; in the second it is relative to the agent's beliefs on the subject of his action; in the third to the evidence available to him. But there remain as distinct concepts the ought of reasonableness and the ought of moral obligation. This distinction will be discussed later.

My definition of good has, I think, a very important bearing on the controversy between the utilitarian[1] and anyone who believes in *prima facie* duties as ultimate. In this controversy what is being discussed when we talk about good is what we morally ought to aim at producing for its own sake, so for the purpose of the controversy the definition of 'intrinisically good' becomes 'what ought to be sought or produced for its own sake'. But to say that we have a *prima facie* duty to produce something is the same as saying that it ought to be produced by us for its own sake, other things being equal, so the two theories can no longer be opposed, or rather we can say that utilitarianism is wrong, at least formally. Utilitarianism holds that the good is the ultimate reason for the ought, but this involves a vicious circle if good has to be defined in terms of ought.

[1] In the wider sense in which the terms 'ideal utilitarianism' and 'teleological ethics' have been used.

It may then be objected against my view that it is much more reasonable to make the primary datum in ethics consist in intrinsic goodness than to make it consist in *prima facie* duties. To this I answer that the primary datum is 'this attracts (or repels) me rightly'. It is an elementary enough psychological state to feel attraction or repulsion, and if we can make ethical judgements at all we can judge that the attraction or repulsion is warranted by its object or the reverse. Any naturalistic or metaphysical definition of intrinsic goodness that could be even plausible would give us a much more complicated object to apprehend than this is.

But while in a sense my definition of good makes my ethics deontological since it gives the primacy to ought as a concept over good, it would be misleading to speak of myself without qualification as a deontologist. I certainly do not hold that it could ever be obligatory deliberately to produce less good rather than more, as Prichard and Ross thought, because in the only sense in which we can sensibly talk of the greatest good in this connection it must for me mean the good which ought to be preferred. And I regard all ethical principles as based on certain concrete goods (worthwhile experiences and states of mind) which we ought to bring about and corresponding evils which we ought to avert. I do not think that, e.g. the keeping of a promise would be intrinsically good or even *prima facie* obligatory in abstraction from any tendency to such effects, but I should add that keeping or breaking of promises cannot be properly considered in abstraction from this. Kant's work in ethics I value rather as giving an account of what our attitude should be to the right action than as giving grounds for an action apart from its results. In so far as the Greek and Hebrew views of ethics have been opposed to each other, it is decidedly rather the Greek view which appeals to me, if this be interpreted universalistically and not, as too much by the Greeks, egoistically. Moral laws imposed apart from any worthwhile experiences for somebody to be obtained or the reverse avoided by obeying them seem to me pointless, nor do I think that ethical laws are valid because they are commands of a deity, whether there is or is not a deity. The sole aim of ethics, I think, is to enrich life, one's own and other people's, including under 'enrichment' the averting or lessening of evils. This is not,

of course, hedonism, because I do not consider all equally pleasant experiences equally valuable. It is worth noting that this view as well as its opposite can be stated either in terms of 'ought' or in terms of 'good'. We can express the one view either by saying that what we ought to aim at is ultimately a certain kind of experiences and states of mind for ourselves and others, or by saying that these are the only things intrinsically good, and the other view either by saying that what we ought to do is simply to obey certain laws, or by saying that all that is of intrinsic value is obedience to the laws (on any enlightened form of the view the laws will include the requirement to act in a certain spirit).

In actual ethical reasoning I am mainly utilitarian in the sense that I fix my eyes mostly on the consequences rather than on the nature of the proposed action in relative abstraction from the latter, and I should give a very important place to straight hedonistic reasoning, but it would be unreasonable to say that the intrinsic character of an action in so far as it can be distinguished from its consequences ought never to be taken into account. If anything can be intrinsically good other than pleasure, actions have as much claim as anything else to be thus considered. I do not think indeed that the merely physical acts or their physical results have any intrinsic value, but the state of mind, the attitude of will accompanying an act may well have; and there are a great variety of possible acts which, before I have any time to reflect on consequences, would strike me at once as 'dirty' or 'caddish' with such force as to eliminate any thought here that I ought to calculate consequences and await the results of my calculation before deciding whether or not to do them. But this is, I suppose, only because I assume that the consequences of refraining from them are not going to be absolutely calamitous. I should not be prepared to say of these caddish things that they ought not to be done if it seemed really clear that they were the only means of averting a third world war, but that of itself would transform the whole character of the action. There is a danger that utilitarianism may lead to the abuses expressed epigrammatically by the phrases 'doing evil that good may come' or 'the end justifies the means', but on utilitarian grounds themselves there is a very strong presumption against adopting for good ends means in themselves

evil, because experience shows that evil means are apt to produce all sorts of unanticipated evil effects beyond what we can foresee at the time.

A difficulty for the utilitarian is constituted by the existence of special obligations to specific persons. It is recognized everywhere in the world that one has obligations to certain relatives which one has not to everybody. But special obligation to a person seems to contradict the very notion of utilitarianism. Special obligations imply that everybody's equal good is not to be treated by us as equal. Again if utilitarianism were true it would seem to follow that, if I consciously sacrificed my own greater good to another's lesser good, I should be acting in a way that was morally wrong. The usual utilitarian reply to the argument about special obligations would be to the effect that more good is produced by people fulfilling their special obligations to the best of their ability than would be produced by everybody aiming indiscriminately at the general good, but does not such an answer imply that there are really no special obligations? Is it not really to say that a man is under no more obligation *per se* to his mother than to a total stranger, but just happens to be in a position where he can help her more than he can help others, as he might be on some occasion in relation to a stranger? The notion of special obligations may very often be pushed too far in practice at the expense of the general good, but I do not feel that we can renounce it altogether, as we do in principle if we make it a mere means to fulfilling our general obligation to produce as much good as possible for everybody. Yet it may be objected that the notion of special obligations contradicts my own theory too on the ground that either the special obligations make no difference or they sometimes require a man to prefer the good of one person to the greater good of another thus consciously producing a lesser good than he might have done, whereas I have just defined the greatest good in terms of what we ought to prefer. But, if we define the greatest good in terms of preference, we can reply that there is no contradiction in admitting that what is really the greatest good from the point of view of A is not the greatest good from the point of view of B. It may well be that A ought to and B ought not to choose it. It is only because there is still a lurking idea of good as an objective

quality distinct from what we ought to prefer, possessing a certain degree or quantity in its own right, that there seems to be a contradiction here. Those cases where we are tempted to say that for A to do X would produce more good than for him to do Y and that he yet ought to do Y because of a special obligation to somebody are cases where we are contrasting what he ought to do with what a disinterested spectator would think best apart from the question who produced the effect under consideration. Indeed I have already conceded more than I need, for in order to uphold special obligations I am not really bound to admit that two people ought ever to make a different choice under the same circumstances. The production of a benefit for A's mother by A himself is a different object of choice from externally the same benefit produced by the action of somebody else unconnected with A's mother. Similarly a benefit produced for myself by my own action is a different object of choice from the same benefit produced by somebody else's action. We might then consistently say that one was better than the other even from the point of view of a disinterested observer.

An objection could more effectively be made on these lines against the definition of good as what we ought to desire, for it cannot be said that one ought to desire the good of a stranger as much as the equal good of one's own mother,[1] but I have never suggested that to call something good meant that it ought to be the object of all possible pro-attitudes in proportion to its goodness.

[1] Why should this be a fatal objection to the definition of good in terms of the pro-attitude of desire, whereas a similar objection does not refute its definition in terms of pursuit? Because, while what a man pursues will be from the nature of the case not just the good of his mother but this good as produced by himself, what he desires will be his mother's good as such, though he may have an additional desire to be the agent to whom she owes the good. Also the superiority in the strength of desire generally thought proper is out of all proportion to anything that it would be right to do. Nobody would blame a man for desiring a substantial improvement in his mother's health more than the continuance of the life of ten strangers, but everybody would blame him if he murdered ten men in order to obtain money for his mother to have an expensive treatment which would improve her health. But this discrepancy arises because 'desire' is interpreted in terms of feeling; the man would *feel* worse if his mother fell ill than if he heard ten strangers had died. It thus illustrates the importance of the distinction that I have made between feeling and conation.

My view commits me to the acceptance of the notion of *prima facie* duties—not indeed as an ultimate concept in quite the sense in which Ross made it so, as we shall see later, since I maintain that they are only binding as part of a system—but at any rate as something not derivable from a prior quality of goodness in the consequences. Now this concept has been subjected to severe attacks. It has been contended that, having given up the view that we can know that a particular kind of action is right under all circumstances, as Ross and I have given it up, it is impossible to escape objection by saying that it is '*prima facie* right', for this only means 'usually right' and that A is usually B is not the sort of thing that we could know *a priori* at all any more than we can know *a priori* that 2+2 usually =4.[1] If rightness follows from the nature of A at all, it surely must do so without exception wherever A occurs. But this objection assumes that tendency statements are reducible to the form *A is usually B*, and that is by no means clear even in the case of causal tendencies. The notion of tending is rather the notion that, other things being equal, A will be B, though this may be prevented by counteracting circumstances, the tendency being regarded as based on something positive in A. This is abundantly clear in the case of *prima facie* duties at least, whatever may be true of causation. There are at least two respects in which to say that something is a *prima facie* duty is to be regarded as saying something positive over and above a generalization as to what usually is the case. (1) It is plain on any view that there can be genuinely moral arguments both for and against an action. There may be features which rightly incline us to do it and others which rightly disincline us, e.g. it may carry out a promise and yet it may cause a lot of pain, it may be the fulfilment of an obligation to one person at the expense of another to whom we also have an obligation. We have something analogous in theoretical matters where a situation has certain features which rationally incline us to adopt one theory about it and others which, also rationally, incline us to adopt another inconsistent with the former. In neither the practical nor the theoretical case is it any sort of mistake, but a true objective judgement, to assert that these factors are present, and that they are related in a

[1] V. Strawson, *Philosophy*, 1949, pp. 29–30.

favourable way to a conclusion, yet the conclusion is not established by them. 'It is a *prima facie* duty not to tell lies' does not mean 'we ought usually to avoid telling lies', but 'that X would be a lie is always a valid moral reason, though not necessarily a conclusive reason, against saying X'.

(2) If I have a *prima facie* obligation which I cannot rightly fulfil because it is overruled by another, stronger *prima facie* obligation, it does not by any means follow that my conduct ought to be unaffected by the former obligation. Even if I am morally bound to do something inconsistent with it, it should in many cases modify in some respect the way in which the act is performed and in almost all it should affect some subsequent action. E.g., if I must say something to A which hurts his feelings I ought to do it as kindly as possible compatibly with the fulfilment of the purpose of the action. Granted that a man is under some obligation to help his parents, even though that involves denying his wife something, the amount of financial help he should give them will generally be affected by his obligations to her. If I have to break a promise even for a good reason, I ought, if possible, to ask the promisee to release me from it, or at least warn him that I cannot keep it, or if that cannot be done in advance, apologize to him and 'make it up to him' later in some fashion. At least my omission to fulfil my *prima facie* duty to him in this case will increase the force of any *prima facie* obligations I may have to him as regards future actions. And even if it did not affect overt action, the existence of a *prima facie* obligation not to do it should always affect our mental attitude towards an action. If we go to war with a nation, we are always violating a *prima facie* obligation not to kill its nationals and we cannot do anything to the people we have killed to make up for this, yet nobody would say that the fact that it involves the killing of people could be irrelevant to the attitude of a good man towards even a war of which he approved. Mental attitude is a positive thing even if not translated into action, and a good man will at least regret the violation of *prima facie* duties. Thus to say that we have a *prima facie* duty to do A is not by any means just to say that we ought to do A in most cases. It is interesting to note that at least one of the writers who has attacked the notion of *prima facie* duties most strongly has himself felt it necessary to

introduce the conception of 'ought-making features', which seems to me essentially the same thing.[1] It is common enough even today, and indeed true, to maintain that all moral action is action from a principle, but in face of our inability to state absolutely universal laws in ethics I do not see how we can avoid making *prima facie* duties of most at least of these principles.

As I have said, I must admit that I was quite wrong in supposing that the 'ought' involved in the controversy as to what ends we ought to pursue or whether we ought always to seek to produce the greatest good is in general not the strict moral ought. There are however conflicts between different goods in cases where it would not be in accord with Ross's terminology to speak of a conflict of *prima facie* duties, just because the 'ought' involved is regarded not as the moral 'ought' but as the 'ought' of reasonableness. Take some period of leisure time which I spend in reading a book. In choosing what kind of book to read I shall be deciding between different intrinsically worthwhile experiences: if I devote the time to one kind of book, I cannot devote it to another kind. The situation is like one where there is a clash of *prima facie* duties in that it would be a good thing to spend the time reading either book, yet I cannot spend it reading both at once. Yet Ross would hardly, I think, speak of *prima facie* duties here because it is not felt that I am under an obligation to read history rather than a good novel or vice versa.

This suggests the question under what circumstances we should regard 'ought' as signifying only reasonableness and not moral obligation. We certainly very often say that a man ought to do or ought to have done so and so simply on the ground that it was most conducive to his purpose without in any way implying that his purpose was a right one. Here, however, it is only in a relative sense that the action is pronounced even reasonable. If we say that a murderer 'ought' to have used a different poison, we do not in the least commit ourselves to the view that it was best even for the man's own selfish interests that he should commit the murder. In a less restricted sense we apply the term 'ought' to acts conducive to the agent's own happiness but without

[1] P. Edwards, *The Logic of Moral Discourse*, p. 163.

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[1] P. Edwards, *The Logic of Moral Discourse*, p. 163.

appreciable effect on the welfare of others.[1] Such acts we describe as 'reasonable' but not as 'duties'. At the other extreme we often speak of acts which involve great sacrifice for the general good as moral duties but should not be inclined to describe them specifically as 'reasonable', though we should not call them 'unreasonable' unless we meant to imply that they were not really right, though well-meant. On the other hand we should condemn not only as morally in the wrong but also as unreasonable a man who neglected to do his duty under circumstances where this neglect would obviously be likely to lead to unpleasant consequences for himself. This suggests a connection between reasonableness and benefit to oneself, but we should also say that a man who did things which he condemned others for doing or insisted on privileges for himself which he refused to others in similar circumstances was being 'unreasonable' as well as doing what was morally wrong.

There can be no doubt that pleasure[2] is good in the sense that it is reasonable to make it the object of a pro-attitude. That the fact that it will give me pleasure or save me pain is a good reason *ceteris paribus* for doing something is as self-evident as any moral reason can be; but it may be said to be a reason of a quite different kind. There can be no doubt also that the pleasure of other people ought *morally* to be the object of a pro-attitude. But *ought* one's own pleasure? That would be commonly denied, but it seems to me difficult to avoid admitting that it is in some degree morally wrong voluntarily to neglect to do what is conducive to one's own pleasure or happiness where no useful purpose is served by this omission. Of course neglect to do it through a mere mistake as to the effects of the actions is not morally wrong, but neither is similar action as regards other people, and voluntarily to neglect to do what is conducive to one's ultimate pleasure because of an insistent desire for a present pleasure or out of laziness does seem unworthy of a rational being and so, in a slight degree at least, the

[1] It is a curious fact of language that we do not use in this way the adjective 'obligatory', which unlike 'ought' seems almost always to have a moral connotation, except when it means 'legally compulsory', but I do not see what philosophical significance we can attribute to this. The same applies to the noun 'obligation'.

[2] I am not making any distinction for the purpose of my argument between 'pleasure' and 'happiness'.

violation of a moral obligation. The situation is complicated by the fact that it may reasonably be contended that it is my duty to further my own happiness because, other things being equal, the happier I am the better I shall work and the kinder I shall be to other people, but it seems to me that our moral condemnation of a man who has spoilt his health by persistently eating too much or is grossly extravagent is not dependent wholly on the bad effects such courses of action are liable to have indirectly on other people. It seems to me that, if human beings were differently constituted psychologically, so that they generally had much stronger desires to benefit others than to benefit themselves, and were apt to destroy their own happiness for the sake of the lesser good of another person, moralists would be inclined to dwell on the *duty* of controlling one's altruism.[1] It may be argued that pleasure is not intrinsically good in the sense in which other things are on the ground that the desire for it for oneself is not intrinsically good, but it might be reasonable that we should seek it and yet not reasonable that we should welcome *for its own sake* the desire which has it for its object, innocent, though somewhat dangerous, as this desire *per se* is. Further, to desire the pleasure of others is intrinsically good.

I think the situation is this. All acts that it can be said we ought to perform in either of the two senses of 'ought' under discussion[2] can also come under the other 'ought', i.e. they have an aspect both of moral obligatoriness and of reasonableness. I do not mean that all goods are moral goods: only conations and conative attitudes of rational agents can be morally good (or bad). This is a term that is not suitably applied either to knowledge or mere feeling. Nor do I mean to say that all morally obligatory acts are necessarily to the advantage of the agent. It is reasonable as well as morally obligatory to subordinate one's own interests to the general advantage. It is after all inconsistent to claim for yourself

[1] We must not push this argument too far. A large part of the reason for our different attitudes towards what we call morally wrong and what we call merely imprudent acts is that deliberately selfish, unjust or malevolent action toward others is intrinsically evil in a degree in which failure to control ourselves in the interest of prudence or to exert ourselves for our own sake on account of laziness is not.

[2] This does not of course apply to the hypothetical 'ought'.

a consideration that you would not grant to others, and to be inconsistent is to be unreasonable (whether we can convert the proposition or not). Wrong acts in accord with the agent's real interests (if there are any, which some would dispute) would be unreasonable on this account, or because they unreasonably favoured some other person at the expense of a third party or of the general good. With acts which are recommended simply or mainly as conducive to the agent's happiness with comparatively negligible effects on others the aspect of reasonableness, with acts which apparently conflict with or are indifferent to the agent's happiness, the aspect of moral obligatoriness predominates. There are obvious reasons in either case why it is undesirable to dwell too much on the other aspect. As applied to grave violations of moral duty towards others 'unreasonable' would be altogether too weak a word, and further it suggests that such actions are wrong merely or mainly because they go against the interest of the agent. On the other hand to speak of the neglect to do what is not conducive to one's own pleasure as morally wrong, in minor instances at least, would be to suggest that we view it with more gravity than desirable, while in major instances the course of action is almost always also gravely wrong in view of its effects on others (unless it is a sheer mistake of judgement, which calls for intellectual but not moral correction). It is not only that 'immoral' is a strong word, but that in the interests of morals itself as well as of their happiness it would be undesirable for people to try to think in terms of duty every moment of their lives. This being so, for various reasons the most desirable field in which to omit this thought is that which concerns primarily our own pleasure. We cannot afford to cheapen the concept of duty by applying it constantly to decisions such as whether to take thick soup or clear; and the anxious care for our own pleasure involved in constantly applying the concept of duty here would itself be detrimental both to our moral character and to the prospects of obtaining the pleasure we sought.

One's private happiness is not the only field in which it is sometimes legitimate to keep in suspense the notion of moral obligation. Even as regards the interests of other people it is obviously possible to be too meticulous in consideration of what

we ought to do, because a policy of too elaborate calculation in each particular case, though it might lead to gains as to particular actions, would be likely to result in a loss of good on the whole that outbalanced this. The policy would delay action too much and leave us insufficient leisure for the really important decisions, further it places too much faith in our capacity to predict. But the reason why it is not desirable always to think explicitly in terms of duty is not that we are sometimes exempt from the requirement to do our duty, but that we are more likely to do it if we are not always trying to think in terms of duty but rather in general proceed by selecting some end the furtherance of which we regard as good and which would be unlikely in the field and at the time we pursue it to conflict with other ends and then doing what seems to us most conducive to this particular end. Occasions on which it is a duty not to do what is conducive to the most efficient performance of the work for which one is employed certainly occur, but with most people they are distinctly exceptional.

There are a number of interesting cases of the generally approved temporary and partial suspension of what would otherwise be a moral obligation. For instance there is the case of competitive games. Here it is ordinarily reasonable and proper to do one's utmost within the existing rules and conventions to win regardless of the desires of our opponent and the fact that he would presumably enjoy the game better if he won. Selfishness is licensed. That is because it is usually in the long run best for the general enjoyment of all that people should play their best. I should not wish my opponent to *let* me win. In a more serious field of activity, if I apply for a post it is usually legitimate to do my best to get it, even if I do not myself think that I am the most suitable candidate, because on grounds of general interest it is better that it should not be the function of the candidates for a post to decide who should be appointed. The same applies to competition in business, but it is very important to realize that in all the cases there are rules as to what constitutes fair competition which must not be broken. And in the last-mentioned case controversies of the utmost political and social importance arose because competition was pushed to such an extent that terrible harm was done even while recognizing the established rules, so

that the rules required amplification, e.g. in the nineteenth century it was not permissible indeed secretly to adulterate the goods supplied, but it was often considered quite permissible morally to pay the lowest wages you could regardless of the interests of your employees, so that an extension of the recognized rules was urgently required. And similarly in all such cases, though we need not always be thinking about the moral law, a good man will have it in the background of his mind, in the sense that he will realize when his course is about to get beyond the permissible limit and alter it. That concentration on something without any conscious thought of moral obligation is quite compatible with this is shown by the fact that it is easy to try one's hardest to win a game and yet refrain from cheating.

My account of judgements as to what is good or bad fits in well with the conclusion of Chapter Two. There I said that, when a man judges that A ought to do something, he is normally doing two things: (1) expressing towards the act a pro-attitude of the nature of an incipient conation, (2) claiming that this pro-attitude is justified and imposed on us as an obligation by the facts. It is only the second element which could be true or false, but without the former there could be no first-hand ethical judgements. Now on my view all judgements ascribing goodness or badness that fall within the ethical sphere are essentially ought-judgements, so what I have said will apply to these also. That the pro-attitude is primarily conative and that value-judgements express such pro-attitudes is, I think, the truth in what I have called the subjectivist account.

But if my view incorporates in its account of good the core of subjectivism considered in terms of what it asserts and not in terms of what it denies, it has similarly a place for naturalism. And this in two respects. In the first place, as I have already insisted, I do not now see any need to interpolate non-natural properties in the real in order to explain valuational or moral judgements. That I ought to do so and so and that something is good or bad seem to me to follow directly from the empirical situation or from the 'natural' characteristics of what is pronounced good or bad where these judgements are true at all. Naturalism errs not in basing such judgements on natural properties but in *reducing*

them to mere assertions of the presence of such properties.

Of the second point of value in naturalism I shall have to speak at greater length. I may lead up to it by noting that the reader may complain that my definition of good is bare and formal and does not do justice to the richness and concreteness there is in the notion of good. One may reply by asking—Is not this the case with all definitions, at least of very general concepts? Would any scientific definition of 'animal' do justice to the rich variety of the animal world? Is not the person who makes such a complaint misunderstanding the whole notion of definition? Does not definition consist in selecting what all members of a class have in common and must it not therefore inevitably ignore almost all their particular features? As Moore insisted, a definition of 'good' is supposed to tell you not what things are good but what the characteristic of goodness is. I agree with this reply, but I now think that the natural characteristics of good things are more closely connected with their goodness than I suggested in my earlier work. When we call anything 'good', the hearer, besides the idea that it is the sort of thing we ought, e.g., to choose, will after all normally have in mind the kind of natural characteristics which make things of that kind good, whether it be a physical thing, which can only be instrumentally good, so that the good-making characteristics are such because of their causal relation (or potential causal relation) to human beings and their experience, or whether it be itself an experience or state of mind which its good-making characteristics directly make intrinsically good. If so they might be said to be part of what the word 'good' *means* for him, though we might also say that they are not part of the meaning of 'good' but closely associated with it. 'Means' itself sometimes does mean just 'is associated with'. We might alternatively use Nowell-Smith's convenient phrase 'contextually imply'.[1]

Approaching the question from a slightly different angle, we may ask whether it is improper to speak of the extension as well as the intension[2] as included in the meaning of a term in a more

[1] *Ethics*, p. 80 ff.

[2] I think that it is only a verbal objection to this to say that 'good' is an adjective and therefore the terms 'intension' and 'extension' have no application to it. At least there is a corresponding distinction with adjectives, even if the technical terms have normally been defined in relation to common nouns.

intimate sense than that of mere association. If not, then in an important sense natural characteristics will actually constitute part of the meaning of 'good'. One can indeed bring them in quite easily without abandoning my definition of 'good'. I have defined 'good' as 'what ought to be the object of a pro-attitude', but these natural properties are certainly among the things of which one can say that they ought to be objects of a pro-attitude. They are not indeed part of the definition in the sense of being included in the 'oughtness', or in the sense that there would be a verbal contradiction in saying that something ought to be pronounced good which had none of the natural properties on which we usually base such pronouncements but the reverse. But, if good means 'what ought to be approved', it cannot be described as an improper use of words to include in the meaning of 'good' the main qualities which ought to be approved. What the naturalism I have opposed and shall continue to oppose asserted is that natural characteristics comprise the *whole* meaning of 'good'.

In any case justice is not done to the closeness of the connection if we merely say that things with these properties are also good. To say they have them is not the same as saying they are good, because someone might agree as to the properties while disputing their value, but if what I have said earlier is right, it would at least be a mistake to think of 'good' as ascribing another quality besides the factual qualities and not rather as signifying only a way of regarding the latter for which objective validity is claimed. Because of the association of goodness with certain characteristics it is (as Hare has made clear),[1] often possible to convey factual information by means of statements which are formally evaluative. For we can hardly describe something as good to a person who is familiar with the kind of thing to which it belongs without thereby telling him a great deal about its factual characteristics (unless his standards of goodness are, unknown to us, very different from those we assume). Statements containing the word 'good' are often made for this informative purpose. This does not contradict my earlier statement that value judgements do not give information, because either 'good' here is not being used as only a value word or the information is not given by direct assertion

[1] *Language of Morals*, p. 111 ff.

but by implication. Now a list of the good-making characteristics to which I have referred would constitute one type of naturalistic definition of 'good'.[1]

Further, there are one or two natural properties implied in all valuation, in particular what is valued must give or at least be capable of giving some satisfaction, though its value need not be in proportion to its satisfyingness. Thus, even where the field is as unfamiliar as in Hare's instance of the game of 'smashmak',[2] there is understood to be present the natural characteristic of fulfilling the purposes of the people involved, even if we do not know what these purposes are. To use the term 'good' here will convey by implication much less information than in a more familiar field, but it will still convey some. 'Fulfilling purposes' or 'satisfying' might on these grounds be said to be part of the meaning of 'good', though they cannot be the full meaning. For this we must have the notion that it is right to have these purposes or to be satisfied with the object of approval. Further, where anything is sincerely judged good, it must be the object of an actual attitude of approval, at least on the part of the person who makes the judgement. On these circumstances two other well-known types of naturalistic definitions of good have been based, i.e. in terms of desire and in terms of approval, and we must at least admit a special link between good and desire and approval. The intensional meaning of 'good' as signifying that something ought to be the object of a pro-attitude must have the central role since it signifies what the concept of goodness is and not what things are to be described as good. But the reason for its application lies in properties which form the extension. But a full theory of value judgements must incorporate the naturalistic elements, only going beyond them.

I should now use this distinction between intensional and extensional meaning in dealing with another definition of good in certain usages which has occurred to me, also in terms of 'ought'. It might be said that to call somebody a good man simply meant that he usually did what he ought. I suggest that this belongs not to the intensional but to the extensional meaning, though it

[1] *Vide* above, p. 31 ff.

[2] *Language of Morals*, p. 104 ff.

would differ from the other elements in the extensional meaning in not being naturalistic. The reason why we ought to admire certain men morally is because they do what they ought, or at least what they sincerely think they ought. This answer without the second clause might also be given in cases where the 'ought' involved is not the moral 'ought': a good batsman is one who ought to be regarded with favour by a connoisseur of cricket, because when at the wicket he most usually plays the ball on the whole as he ought.

What I have said about 'good' may also be said about 'ought'. Though the ethical 'ought' is indefinable, there is a wider sense of meaning in which it could be said to include a reference to the main characteristics which make an act what it ought to be. However, the reference to the extensional side is less prominent with 'ought' than with 'good', as the terms are actually used.

Hence an adequate theory of good will include the positive element in the doctrines of all three main schools. It will include in the meaning of 'goodness' the notion of satisfyingness, the notion of being an actual object of approval, and the general concrete features which make things good, thus bringing in the main types of naturalist definitions which have commended themselves to philosophers. But, secondly, we must also insist that value judgements are not primarily theoretical but expressions of conations, thus admitting the positive part of what subjectivists have to say. We must indeed make a distinction between expression and meaning in the sense of content asserted, but 'meaning' is commonly used in a wide sense so as to include both, and here the psychological attitude expressed and the content asserted are very closely linked because what is primarily asserted is that this attitude is justified.

But thirdly, there is the claim not merely that I, the speaker, have such and such an attitude but that it is the right one, the one justified by the facts. Naturalism would give a merely factual judgement, and subjectivism not a judgement at all, but here we have something that is a judgement and yet not a merely factual one. It is linked with the conation, not because it is either identical with it or merely causally connected with it, but because it asserts that the conation is justified by the facts. The non-natural concept

of ought is not indeed, I must insist, reducible to anything non-ethical and so not to any merely factual properties, but the factual properties determine when it should be applied. It may be objected that 'should' here just means 'ought to' again. It does, but this is now a different 'ought', the intellectual ought, i.e. the factual properties of A determine whether it is true that we ought (ethically) to have a particular pro-attitude or anti-attitude to A. Naturalists and subjectivists have given valid partial accounts, but they are wrong in what they deny. Here the non-naturalist objectivists have an advantage, since they do not deny that ethical judgements are expressions as well as assertions and that they are clearly linked up with natural properties, but it may be objected that they have not paid enough attention to these facts. All the elements I have mentioned are present in the meaning of value terms if 'meaning' is taken in a wide sense, but it cannot be denied that 'meaning' is very commonly used in a narrower sense in which it includes only intension and not extension, still less the subjective attitude it expresses. In that narrower sense I should claim that the meaning of good is reducible to the definition I have given, at any rate in most of its usages. True ethical and other true judgements are parallel also in the following respect: the claim is not merely a claim for the speaker's belief or conation by itself, but has also an objective reference beyond and is a claim for all rational beings.

At the same time I do not want to define 'true' as just meaning 'ought to be affirmed'. Certainly it would not do to give this definition if the 'ought' here were the ethical or the prudential 'ought'. If it is replied that the ought is the ought of intellectual reasonableness, the definition is at once liable to the objection that there are many true propositions which it would not be reasonable to affirm because there is a lack of evidence for them and that it is sometimes reasonable for us to affirm propositions which do not after all turn out to be true. Further, the notion of truth cannot be defined in terms of the notion of affirming (or believing) without a vicious circle, for such notions already presuppose that of truth. To affirm something is to claim it to be true.

It may be asked whether 'true' is itself a value-word. It seems

to express a pro-attitude, i.e. belief or acceptance, even if it cannot be defined in terms of this pro-attitude. But, if so, it has been objected that it would follow that everything real is the object of some pro-attitude and therefore good. I reply that the pro-attitude is directed not towards the objective facts discovered, which may be very bad, but to the cognitive enterprise of discovering them. If the judgement is true this at least has been successful, and it is the judgement which is 'true', not the facts.

Chapter Four

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND THEIR APPLICATION

It is common to make it a point of criticism against a book on moral philosophy that it is of no practical value, and this is a charge specially liable to be brought against the kind of discussion to which the first three chapters have largely been devoted. For reasons which I have already made clear I cannot admit that it is of no practical value to put forward an objective theory of ethics in a form which can adequately be defended against the objections of subjectivism and naturalism and unmask the confusions on which the latter doctrines are founded. We may thus prevent people's ethical effects being weakened by doubts and at least cut off some excuses for wrongdoing. But some things of practical value are demanded of the philosopher which do not fall within his function at all. I cannot undertake to preach eloquent sermons in order to induce people to do what is right. It is not my vocation, and if I could do it I should be acting not *qua* philosopher but *qua* preacher. Nor, for different reasons, can the philosopher *qua* philosopher be expected to decide what it is right to do in difficult particular cases, though he may *qua* man, and even *qua* philosopher he may be able to give *some help* in deciding.

It is indeed very difficult, perhaps impossible, to give an account that is other than disappointing of the relation of moral philosophy to practice, but this need not be because the philosophical ethic to be applied is wrong. It may be merely because practical affairs are too complicated to be handled *in abstracto*. Philosophical ethics as such can only provide general principles, but in order to decide what to do in a particular case we require also knowledge of the empirical facts, ability to estimate the probable effects of

alternative actions, and in cases of conflict a good judgement as to which principle to apply that cannot be learnt from general rules in advance of the situation. A philosopher may well have these further qualifications too, but *qua philosopher* all he can hope to do in practical matters is to help one to see the issue more clearly by asking the right questions and pointing out the relevant principles to be taken into consideration. Even so the moral help he can give should not be despised. It may often be all that is needed to save one from a wrong decision. But philosophy certainly cannot by itself decide what we ought to do.

At the same time it is plain that we do in our ethical decisions constantly utilize general principles. We may indeed go further and say that any decision we make must always depend on one or more such principles. I cannot think of any moral decision in which some general ethical principle is not involved and is not a genuine ground of decision (though not necessarily a fully recognized ground). Most frequently the general principle is simply that we ought not to cause pain or ought to help to remove it when it is present, as far as we can, but of course there are others. Apart from the practical empirical difficulty of ascertaining the facts and estimating the relative degree of, say, the happiness or unhappiness likely to be caused by alternative actions, which is in itself a factual and not an ethical question, difficulties in deciding what is right arise mainly from the conflict of two or more ethical principles. These conflicts force us to regard at least those of our ethical principles which prescribe a certain mode of external action as *prima facie* and not strictly universal.

Some ethical propositions are indeed universally true. It is universally true that we ought never to commit a murder if by 'murder' is meant wrongful killing. Likewise the proposition that we should never be cruel is universally true if it means just that we ought never deliberately to inflict pain unjustifiably, or the proposition that we ought never to be selfish if it means just that we ought never to attach more weight to our own interests than is right. These propositions are in form tautologous, but they call attention to and presuppose what could be denied without *logical* absurdity. The first principle suggests and indeed 'contextually implies' that to kill human beings is commonly wrong and that

consequently we must at least not kill unless there is a special justification for it; the second that pain is an evil; the third that we ought sometimes to aim at something other than our own welfare. Thus, though they cannot be denied without verbal contradiction, they could have no application if we did not accept certain ethical principles the denial of which would not be self-contradictory. These latter principles, which alone make the former non-tautologous, are however of the *prima facie*, not the absolute kind. To say that you ought never to inflict pain without a special justification is to say that to avoid inflicting pain is a *prima facie* duty, and so one to which we ought to conform unless it conflicts with some other *prima facie* duty which might justify the infliction of the pain.

If indeed we regard the proposition that we ought not to be cruel as a proposition about motives, we may regard it as asserting a universal principle, i.e. that we ought never to be actuated by the desire to inflict pain as such.[1] But it is difficult to think of any other motives on which it is always wrong to act except motives the occurrence of which in human beings is perhaps doubtful, i.e. the desire to do wrong just because it is wrong and the desire to produce for their own sake as an end in itself evils other than pain. Nor is there any motive on which we always ought to act. It might be said that, though all actions cannot and should not have as their predominant conscious motive the desire to do our duty, we ought always to act on this desire if it is present to our mind at all. But (a) actions motived by this desire are certainly not all objectively right since the agent may be mistaken as to what is his duty; (b) where the desire prompts the same action as some other desire it is often better that the motive of the agent should be the latter rather than the former, e.g. a father who realizes that it is his duty to look after his children had better be motivated by love rather than the sense of duty in doing so, except when his love would lead him to actions that are in conflict with those he thinks right.

[1] I do not think we can reduce the principle that we ought not to be selfish to a corresponding universal proposition about motives because it is not always wrong to be actuated by our own private interests, while it is always wrong to be actuated by the desire to inflict pain for its own sake.

But I certainly want to maintain that principles of ethics which instruct us as to what class of actions we should perform are always *prima facie* in character. They tell us not that we ought always to do so-and-so but that we ought always to do it unless there is a reason against it. It might indeed be argued that by introducing sufficient reservations you could arrive at principles which are true universally, e.g. by enumerating precisely the different kinds of exceptional cases in which one ought to lie and saying that one ought to tell the truth in all cases except these. But no philosopher has ever, I think, carried out or perhaps even attempted to carry out the very complex and elaborate formulation which would be necessary for this, and it would be futile to try to base one's ethics on principles that nobody can formulate. It has been said that at least the principle that you ought never to condemn an innocent man is absolutely universal, but can we really say that it would always be wrong to mollify a mad dictator, lest he did worse things, by inflicting a fine of £1 on somebody for an offence of which the person punished was innocent? And at what point in the scale of more and more serious punishments are we to draw the line?

We should note however that even *prima facie* principles are still in a sense universal: the fact, e.g. that something gives pain is *always* a reason against doing it, and as I have pointed out earlier,[1] even where a *prima facie* reason against an act is outweighed by reasons for doing it, it will effect somewhat the manner in which we act now or subsequently and at the very least require some modification in our mental attitude towards the action we feel bound to perform, if only by way of regret. Sir David Ross, I think, made one of the most important discoveries of the century in moral philosophy in recognizing the fundamental character of these *prima facie* duties. To the objections against taking them as fundamental I have already replied.[2] Where we think we morally ought to do something, there is always one of these general principles which calls for the action. There are often others which forbid it, and it is the latter circumstance that presents great difficulties because we cannot give any decisive rules for choosing

[1] *Vide* above, p. 110.
[2] *Vide* above, p. 109 ff.

between conflicting rules. The same difficulty arises for the Utilitarian when it is a case of balancing against each other different goods and evils (especially different kinds of good and evil).

Most *prima facie* duties have generally been stated in terms of the production of certain goods or the avoidance or reduction of certain evils, but if my view of good is right, to say that something is good in the context of this issue is only to say that we have a *prima facie* duty to further it. It is a plain ultimate fact that a proposed action commonly has some features which attract and others which repel us. We often, though not always, recognize that they not only in fact attract and repel us but ought to do so, and in very many cases it is quite apparent, though not anything that we can prove, which set of features ought to weigh more, but in others there is grave difficulty in deciding. No philosopher has ever been able to say much in general as to how we are to deal with these conflicts; they have had to leave it ultimately to an individual judgement which may be wrong and cannot be proved right. And I do not see that I can say much more about it either.

But I can and must say something about the general principles involved. Ross's *prima facie* duties have most unfairly been described as just the code of the English gentleman. But it would surely be hard to find a community anywhere in which the fact that you had made a promise was not regarded as a reason for keeping it, the fact that you had harmed somebody as a reason for making reparation, the fact that somebody had intentionally benefited you as a reason for showing gratitude.[1] Even such a perverted system of ethics as that of the Nazis did not reject the *prima facie* duties as such, but gave (bad) reasons for breaking them in a great number of cases, e.g. that the Jews were so wicked that they deserved to be sent to concentration camps or that the Germans ought to practise cruelty in order to make themselves sufficiently tough to conquer the world, thus in their view inaugurating a golden age which would be to the ultimate benefit of the human

[1] 'If we compare the list of *prima facie* duties drawn up by W. D. Ross with the duties enumerated in comparative studies such as Westermarck's, the resemblance is striking . . . Westermarck himself concludes that "when we study the moral rules laid down by the customs of savage peoples we find that they in a very large measure resemble the rules of civilized nations".' (Ginsberg, *Reason and Unreason in Society*, pp. 25–6 quoted by Raphael, *Moral Judgement*, p. 174.)

race as a whole and not only to the victorious Nazis. Even Hitler seems to have strongly appreciated the obligation of promise-keeping when the Italians by making a separate peace broke their promise to *him*.

No doubt in almost all communities it is held right sometimes to violate most or all of these *prima facie* duties, but that is only in accordance with their nature as *prima facie*. The occasions on which it is considered right to violate them in a given society are often such as we should not regard as providing the least excuse for doing so, but this is generally because the members of the society in question hold a different view as to the consequences of violating the law. It is a case of divergence of views as to matters of fact. I do not think there is any reason for supposing that a tribe who practised human sacrifice ever thought it good as an end-in-itself that an innocent person should be sacrificed, but they thought that it was necessary as a means to stopping a pestilence.[1] I am referring to the general codes of societies and not to individual vagaries: it would be very surprising if some individuals had not a blind eye to certain *prima facie* duties.

It has been said that in many societies the obligation to tell the truth as regards very many matters is not recognized at all, but here a curious point arises. If the obligation not to lie about certain matters is not generally recognized, people will be expected to lie, and therefore one will not be deceived except through one's own carelessness. But what makes a lie is not saying something false but saying it with intent to deceive. We can imagine somebody visiting us from a remote country where the inhabitants never entertained themselves with fiction. He might then say, 'These English are most immoral. Many of them write books which are nothing but a tissue of lies from beginning to end, and so far from condemning the people who do it they admire them if only they think their lies clever, and even the most respected persons in the community by reading the books deliberately en-

[1] More rarely, as in the Abraham-Isaac story, it seems to have been valued as the supremest possible expression of devotion to a deity. But we also attach value to religious devotion (at least if we believe that a suitable object of it exists) and to self-sacrifice. The sacrifice is great just because of the great *prima facie* evil involved. The difference here is that we do not think the sacrifice is of such a kind as to be acceptable to God.

courage such practices.' To say what is false in novels does not indeed carry with it the inconveniences of, e.g. always telling people what one thinks will please them, but that is a utilitarian objection, and further if the practice is generally pursued and recognized as the proper course it will not deceive anybody, unless he wants to deceive himself, and we are hardly more justified in condemning the people in the community who talk thus as liars than you would be in condemning me as a liar because in a letter I addressed a person as 'Dear' whom I did not know or strongly disliked.[1]

In the attitude of more primitive communities to punishment there are indeed wider divergencies from what we consider right. Thus it has often been thought that it was just to punish a person simply for an external act even if he had no guilty intentions at all and that it was legitimate to punish, e.g. a son for the misdeed of his father. But guilt is a subject about which it after all does not seem at all easy to think clearly, as is shown by the controversies about 'original sin' in theology.

There is, however, one most important respect in which primitive communities commonly diverge very much from Ross's code: they are by no means willing to extend their obligations consistently to persons outside their community (except when the latter are their guests). In the absence of any special argument to justify it this seems to me sheer inconsistency, but there are obviously some very grave psychological obstacles in the human mind to a sufficiently universal application of obligations, as is shown by the fact that not only primitive communities but modern nations often show themselves quite unable or unwilling to practise towards other nations, or even admit that they ought to practise, a morality which recognizes their *prima facie* duties towards them to anything like the extent to which they are recognized in the relations between individuals within their community itself.

In emphasizing the universality of the recognition of the *prima facie* duties I was not taking this as an argument for their ultimacy

[1] Ross himself does not make the obligation not to lie a *prima facie* duty in its own right but derives it from the *prima facie* duty to keep promises, an implicit promise to speak truthfully being invo'ved in the use of language in most contexts. Clearly this promise is not implied by the use of language where the duty of truth-telling is not recognized as regards the subject-matter of what is said.

and so against utilitarianism of any kind. For practical purposes the important thing is, e.g. to keep your promises and not to decide (as philosophers want to decide) what is the full ultimate reason why they should be kept, and it would not be surprising if ethical principles gradually impressed on the members of a society by the obvious needs of life had come to strike them as valid in their own right when they were really only valid for the sake of the consequences which action according to them produced. Thus I am not including in the differences between communities as to *prima facie* duties the difference, e.g., between holders of a retributive and holders of a utilitarian view of punishment. This is rather a difference between philosophers. The question for the plain man is what he ought to do and not what is the ultimate reason why he ought to do it. Most people have not been and are not purely utilitarian in their view, but that does not mean that it is not possible to argue that the *prima facie* duties can be explained adequately on utilitarian grounds.

In fact I do not wish to maintain the complete ultimacy of the *prima facie* principles in question. It does not seem to me plausible to say that we know them to be self-evident in their own right. I think they are seen to be obviously true, but only because of their place in an implicit ethical system. I do not mean that to violate them is wrong merely because of its consequences in abstraction from the character of the act violating them itself, though it must be remembered that we cannot abstract from all consequences, actual and intended, if we are to assess the nature of an action. Neither do I mean to deny that we have a cognition of their validity going beyond what could be justified simply by inference, but I do not think this cognition lies in an awareness that certain kinds of outward acts are intrinsically even *prima facie* obligatory but in an apprehension of the desirability of a certain spirit in our relations with others.

It must be remembered that by analysing good, at least in the sense in which it is under discussion in the controversy between utilitarians and their opponents, in terms of what ought to be the object of our action or pursuit, I have undermined the basis of the controversy in its original form. But it is capable of restatement in terms of my own theory. There can still be a dispute between

those who affirm and those who deny that the only ultimate *prima facie* duties are simply duties to further the spread and development of certain states of consciousness, all other so-called *prima facie* duties being simply means to this. This is by no means a merely academic trivial dispute but may be highly relevant to moral decisions of the greatest importance. E.g. there were many Englishmen in 1914 who were at first against the intervention of this country in the war but supported it without any further utilitarian argument, as soon as they saw that we were bound by treaty to intervene because of the German invasion of Belgium. Is it irrelevant to such decisions whether we think there is an at least *prima facie* obligation in itself to keep treaties or base the obligation only on the effects of doing so? I mention this because it is a commonplace today to express disappointment at the allegedly trivial examples taken by philosophers who have discussed *prima facie* duties. The moral philosopher is in fact in somewhat of a dilemma as regards examples: if he takes trivial or fantastic examples, it seems to cast discredit on his subject, but if he takes examples of serious import he is always up against something which he cannot decide simply by his principles. We obviously could not deduce from any reasonable ethical theory what ought to have been done in 1914 without a long discussion of the factual situation which would make this chapter more like a political pamphlet.

My answer to the general question would be, firstly, that the utilitarians are right in thinking that our duties must ultimately be based entirely on the nature of certain experiences or states of mind themselves to be valued in their own right. (It is one of the strongest objections to Professor Ryle's *Concept of Mind* that it ignores everything of value in the universe. Life would be completely worthless if it were only physical behaviour without any feeling or consciousness, and Ryle even though he does not deny consciousness or feeling tries to build up a philosophy of mind in which it plays no part.) But, secondly, I should want to insist not that it is either good in itself or an ultimate end of action in itself physically to keep a promise, but that the promise-keeping spirit is good in itself and the reverse bad. By 'good-in-itself' I do not indeed mean that it would still be good-in-itself (a right object of a pro-attitude for its own sake) if there were nothing else in the

universe. If there were nothing else in the universe, promises would be meaningless. I mean that, though it could not be good by itself, it is good itself, i.e. really good and not merely a cause of something else that is good, or, on my analysis of good, that it ought to be developed and welcomed for its own sake, as well as for its consequences. My first and second propositions are not inconsistent, because a promise-keeping spirit can only exemplify itself in particular states of mind (including under 'states of mind' decisions or acts of will).

Nor do I wish to found the *prima facie* duties simply on direct cognition. We have an awareness of each of them not derived simply by inference, but these different awarenesses help to confirm each other by their coherence in a system, so that to fulfil one tends in general to fulfil others and to violate one tends to a situation in which you have to violate others. This is shown by the way in which the same duty may be urged on us for a number of different reasons. The utilitarians agree with Ross that what he calls the *prima facie* duties are in general obligatory but hold that this is because they further other ends good in themselves. The view that this is the only reason for their being duties is disputed but hardly the view that it is a reason, and on my analysis of good to say they produce a certain kind of good is the same as to say that they fulfil a certain *prima facie* duty, so that it must be admitted that what fulfils one *prima facie* obligation will almost always also fulfil others.

But at this point I must ask the reader's leave to quote at length from my earlier book, *The Definition of Good*. 'It is not only that, for example, the keeping of promises is a cause which produces good effects. It can be seen to be linked up with the other kinds of good in respect of its essential nature and not merely by causal laws. In the first place, it follows necessarily that a person who has a fitting regard for the intrinsic value of true cognition will be averse to thus deceiving people. In the second place, it follows from any real sense of regard for the well-being of others that we shall not wish to cheat and disappoint them by breaking our promises, promise-keeping is bound up necessarily with the good of benevolence or love.' Again 'it is unfair to benefit by the promises of others, as we cannot help doing, and yet not keep our

own, an argument which links promise-keeping with the good of justice. If you ask me whether promise-keeping would still be a good if it did not stand in any of these relations I could not say that it would, or rather I should answer that the question is absurd. It would not then be promise-keeping at all. . . . Now, if we had an ostensible intuition of the goodness of promise-keeping and not of the goodness of true cognition, benevolence and fairness, our intuitive conviction that promise-keeping is good (a *prima facie* duty) would be in a less strong position than is the case as things are, for now it is also supported by the ostensible intuitions that each of these other things is good. If any of them are intrinsically good, promise-keeping is in so far good and should in so far be pursued on its own account. For I am not saying merely that promise-keeping is good as a means for producing certain effects. The attitude to truth, to other persons, to the general happiness, and to the requirements of reciprocal justice, involved in promise-keeping is such that it must be better *per se* than promise-breaking if a right attitude to any of the above-mentioned itself has intrinsic value. So we now have not just one ostensible intuition, but a number of such intuitions confirming each other. . . . It is significant how often the same action may be rightly recommended on different grounds, and this fact, which incidentally has made a multitude of conflicting ethical theories possible, shows the fundamental coherence of different *prima facie* duties. Benevolence can itself be commended on grounds of justice because it is unfair to expect kindness from others in case of need and yet not be prepared to give it when others are in need.[1] All or most of the other *prima facie* duties may indeed be commended on the ground that they are bound up with the duty of promise-keeping, that is, they must be fulfilled if we are to keep faith with the community by fulfilling reasonable expectations, including the expectation that members of a community will sometimes devote themselves

[1] It has been objected to this argument, which is really Kant's, that some people would rather go to the wall completely than be the object of 'charity'. But surely a person who proposed to spend his life without ever benefiting in any way from anybody else's kindness—we need not limit this to financial help, kindness is needed even by millionaires—is not acting like a rational being because he is proposing to live a life grossly impoverished of real values. Kant is arguing that his moral principles are valid for all beings who are *rational.*

to the benefit of the community in ways the particular character of which cannot from the nature of the case be foreseen by others. But this is not to say that all other duties should be deduced from the duty of promise-keeping as their ultimate *raison d'être*. The different *prima facie* duties may confirm each other without anyone being supreme.'[1] The very clashes of *prima facie* duties, so common and sometimes so tragic, really add confirmation to this coherence test, as I also argued, since they mostly arise because a *prima facie* duty has already been violated, e.g. because a man has promised what he cannot fulfil without doing wrong to another man, or on a large scale in war, and with a coherent system of *prima facie* duties it is only to be expected that the violation of one will lead to a situation in which others have to be violated too. Arithmetic comes as near to being a coherent system as almost anything in the range of human thought, and just for that reason if we asserted a false proposition in arithmetic and then argued consistently from it, we should be perpetually contradicting other true propositions at every stage of the argument.

I think that each of Ross's *prima facie* duties can be justified as involved in a certain aspect of the spirit in which a good man lives and acts, as well as on account of its general social consequences. This is not to say that it ought always to be fulfilled. They *cannot* always be fulfilled because they sometimes clash, and it is occasionally more in accord with benevolence and fairness to break a promise rather than to keep it. But what can be justified is the proposition that they inherently tend to be obligatory.

Let us take first the duty to keep promises and tell the truth. I do not think that the breaking of a promise *per se* is intrinsically bad, but the choosing to break it is so, as is shown best by considering our valuation of the attitude of the man who makes the disregard of promises, whenever he thinks it suits him, a settled policy of life.[2] I do not claim to give a complete explanation of our

[1] Pp. 208–10.

[2] It has been argued that it is an analytic proposition that we are under an obligation to keep our promises because to promise, as distinct from merely expressing our intentions, is by definition just putting oneself under an obligation. But surely there would be nothing self-contradictory in a person not believing that he was under any obligations at all but still making promises because that was the only way in which he could induce others to do certain things for him, and also in most cases keeping

ethical revulsion against the faithless and deceitful man, but at least one main reason over and above the consequences of such actions lies in the fact that voluntarily to break promises or deceive men in any way is not to treat them as free persons. It is treating them as means rather than as ends in themselves, or at least encroaching on their liberty, even if the deceit is supposed to be for their own good. In so far as I deceive them I am making them do something, or at least take some attitude, to which I think they would not have freely consented, for otherwise deceit would be unnecessary, and I am depriving them of the right to do what they think best in the real situation in which they are placed. The unsatisfactoriness of this mode of action does not disappear totally even if it is justified by its consequences in a particular case. If I were prevented from doing something which would have very bad consequences by a lie I might ultimately be thankful, but I should be more thankful if I had been prevented by a rational presentation of the truth. I am not satisfied that the whole of that part of the evil of deceit and promise-breaking which is not merely a matter of consequences lies in the circumstance I have mentioned,[1] but I think a very great deal of it does. It seems to me of some significance that, while there are vigorous campaigns against cruelty to animals, in their case no objection is made against the deceit as such which is involved in the use of traps and baits. This suggests a strong connection between the evil of deceit and the violation of personality, animals not being supposed to have a personality to violate. I must remind readers of what I said earlier to the effect that a *prima facie* obligation is

his promises because he thought that, if he did not, it would not be to his advantage, since other people would either retaliate drastically or at any rate not believe his future promises. Nor would there be a contradiction in doing this on purely utilitarian (as opposed to merely egoistic) grounds and maintaining that these gave the sole reason for keeping promises. Promising might be said to consist in maintaining the fiction as opposed to the reality of an obligation. No doubt in either case it would be hard to give a good reason why we ought to keep promises in cases where they could be secretly broken, but there is no self-contradiction in that, only a clash with ordinary ethical beliefs.

[1] If that were the whole story it would not explain the ethical conviction that to get anyone to do what one wants by deceit is in general worse than to apply compulsion (unless the latter is attended by brutal violence). It does not account fully for the revulsion against anything 'underhand'.

something positive, even where it is overruled by other stronger *prima facie* obligations, and not merely hypothetical, as is shown by the fact that even in such cases it makes some difference to our subsequent action, e.g. we feel called to apologize, etc.

The *prima facie* obligation of gratitude can be based partly on the fact that a good man will feel it to be unfair that he should expect to be benefited by somebody else without making any return even in the shape of a specially friendly attitude towards his benefactor, and also on the fact that special relations of friendship and love, which cannot fail to be expressed in action of some sort, bring very great intrinsic value to life, but primarily on the fact that the spontaneous goodwill we ought to have towards others is *ceteris paribus* strengthened by any benefits they deliberately confer on us for our own sake and that this is something we not only feel in fact but approve of feeling. The *prima facie* duty to make reparation is the natural outcome of the regret of a good man for harm he has done, which expresses itself in a special desire to put it right and a special feeling of responsibility towards those who have suffered from his action.

The *prima facie* duty of justice in the sphere of punishment and reward is not, I think, best regarded as a duty to produce an intrinsic good consisting in the right distribution of happiness and suffering in proportion to moral goodness and badness. Firstly, I doubt whether there is such an intrinsic good at all. I am not clear that there can be an objectively right proportion between two such incommensurable entities as pain and sin, and I think that our tendency to believe there is may be explained not only as a legacy derived from the instinctive tendency to revenge but also by the fact that we wish, and see it to be right to wish, evil defeated. For defeat normally involves suffering, which in turn makes it seem fitting to symbolize our aversion to evil by the infliction of pain or the idea that pain should be inflicted. Punishment is a way of telling a person that he has acted wrongly more emphatically than can be told him by mere words.[1] Further, even if the proportion in question is an intrinsic good, it is one which, as Ross admits,[2] we can do very little to produce. In order to

[1] *Vide* my *Morality of Punishment*, pp. 83–119.
[2] *Vide*, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 58–60.

achieve it we should have to take into account a man's whole life and not only one act or a few special acts of his, and deal not only with 'criminals' but with all men, and any attempt by the state to do such a thing would involve an intolerable inquisition into private life with all sorts of abuses. Consequently, even though he ascribes intrinsic goodness to this proportion, Ross himself does not think that we have a *prima facie* duty to punish as an end-in-itself, and I should agree with him, at least in this conclusion. Punishment has some utilitarian justification, though not as strong a one as used to be supposed, and further, as Ross also points out, where there are penal laws, it would be breaking an implicit promise to members of the community, who are liable to suffer from crimes, if no attempt were made to check them by punishment.

What it does seem impossible to justify completely on utilitarian grounds is the special repugnance which any right-minded man feels towards the punishment of 'the innocent' for the sake of expediency.[1] There are three elements here, I think. (1) A system which allowed administrators to inflict pain or harm on people when they thought fit for the sake of what they took to be the general good regardless of innocence or guilt, would be giving powers which would be quite particularly liable to gross abuse. This is a utilitarian argument, but is based on the consequences of the class of actions, punishments of innocent people, taken as a whole, which are regarded as overriding any advantage derived from such punishment in special cases. (2) It offends against our sense of fairness to inflict severe damage on some people, at least against their will, in order to benefit others, and where damage has to be inflicted it is felt they should be compensated. (3) Punishment is not the infliction of pain but the infliction of pain on the ground that an offence has been committed, and what is most particularly objectionable about the punishment of the innocent is that it involves the pretence that they are guilty. Not to punish innocent people is one of the strongest of all *prima facie*

[1] Punishment has been defined as pain inflicted for an offence and it has then been concluded that it is a misnomer to speak of punishing innocent people. But the words as commonly used stand for something that unfortunately can quite well be done, and everybody knows what they mean.

duties, but even this principle cannot stand as a proposition self-evident in itself outside a system of duties. For the concept of innocence presupposes the concepts of law in the political sense and evidence. (If it were taken strictly in a purely ethical sense nobody would be innocent, for all men have sinned, and I do not think it is generally supposed that a parent has no right to punish a child for doing something that had not been first forbidden in so many words, provided the child could be expected to know that he was doing wrong.)

The duty of justice in punishment and reward is however far from being merely negative, especially if it is extended to cover all praise, blame and relative assessment of others. That this type of justice cannot be reduced to the production of a right proportion between a man's happiness and his goodness is shown by the fact that, while it is only moral goodness or badness that the retributionist takes into account as the basis of this proportion, most rewards are not based on moral goodness but on displays of ability. Yet nobody thinks that this makes them unjust. It would be on the contrary most unjust for an examiner to give a first class to a weak candidate because he thought him morally specially good. It might, however, be said that the ultimate ground of this kind of rewards is simply utilitarian, and that the duty of marking the candidates fairly is primarily the duty of abiding by the implicit undertaking the examiner has given in accepting appointment together with the duty of not deceiving people as to a man's real qualifications. In so far as the duty of fairness of judgement is based on something more than this, it can easily be seen to be involved in any right attitude to other men.

The *prima facie* duties of beneficence are obviously justified by their effects, but also by the fact that they are the natural expression of the attitude of co-operation, charity, Christian love towards one's fellows and this attitude is seen to be the right one rather than its opposite. Non-maleficence appears to us a more stringent duty than beneficence primarily, I think, because it shows a worse state of mind voluntarily to cause others to suffer unnecessarily than merely to omit to contribute to their welfare.

The *prima facie* obligations towards relatives, which play a very large part in the ethical practice of every society, have a complex

justification. They are often largely duties of gratitude, but this hardly applies to the duty towards one's children, at least when the latter are young. Here a principle seems involved which has not been mentioned by Ross, namely that a man has a special responsibility to see that what he has voluntarily brought into existence fares satisfactorily. This applies specially to conscious beings, but in a lesser degree, I think, even to institutions and policies. It may be regarded as akin to the duty of reparation, being like the latter an outcome of the sense of responsibility, but here it is a case of preventing harm and maintaining and increasing good rather than of atoning for harm done (unless we should take the pessimistic view that life is an evil). We have a *special* obligation not merely to atone for any harm done, but to see, as far as we can, that the results of our action do not lead to harm, and this seems to me stronger than the obligation to see that other people's actions do not do so. These obligations are much strengthened by the fact that in all states which have yet existed social institutions have been based to some extent on the assumption that people will accept certain duties towards relatives. In so far as this is so they are in a similar position to the obligation to do one's job properly, except that the relation carrying with it the obligation has not been voluntarily assumed in family relationships other than those of marriage and parenthood (from the point of view of the parents) and that the obligations are usually less definite. But the obligations are most deeply rooted in the high value we attach to family affection. Where there is strong affection, there must be a very special mutual concern and so a recognition of special obligations (even if more often than not their fulfilment is spontaneous and is not accompanied by a sense of them as duties). There would be no family life as we know it with all its value if people recognized no more obligation to members of their family than to perfect strangers, so that there are very strong utilitarian grounds for the special obligations in question.

To the question liable to be put by utilitarians why we should bother not merely about the effects of an action but also as to whether it expresses the right spirit I reply that this is what makes the action on its mental side *intrinsically* good or bad (on its

merely physical side it can be neither). A hedonist will dispute this, but any utilitarians who pronounce other things good besides pleasure or bad besides pain can hardly reasonably omit to include among these goods and evils the mental states involved in moral or immoral decisions. It has been objected that what counts for this is simply the motive and a person might do injustice from a good motive believing it right because he thought that, though unjust, it was obligatory as the only means to a greater good. But it seems to me that a person who underrates the evil of injustice is in a less good state morally than a man who does not, even if his motive is right. Possibly he does not deserve blame because he is honestly mistaken, but a man may be in a less good state of mind and yet not deserve blame for being so. You cannot attain 'salvation', or whatever equivalent of it a philosopher may admit, by persistently doing bad things, even if you think them right: a Nazi who knew about the concentration camps and sincerely believed that it was right to treat men as they were treated there was in a very bad state morally, whether it was due to his freewill or not. Possibly it was his misfortune and not his fault, but it was bad for all that. And this would have still been so even if there had been a very strong case for Hitler's policy on utilitarian grounds (instead of an utterly feeble one). To make a man's state of mind morally satisfactory it is not necessary only that he should do what he thinks is right: it is also necessary that he should have a proper attitude to other human beings. I do not maintain that injustice ought under no circumstances to be done: that I cannot possibly say, for to refrain from doing what is unjust in one respect might be to do an injustice in another, but when this happens there is something about either course which the good man will for its own sake regret. At the same time an intrinsically good attitude towards others will normally result in good consequences in many ways which it is quite impossible to predict at the time, and contrariwise with an attitude which makes light of injustice. There is, I think, good empirical evidence for these statements. The likelihood of this unanticipated good and evil, as well as the obvious effects, must be taken into account when we are considering whether to violate a *prima facie* duty for the sake of 'expediency'.

My view does not justify the *prima facie* duties primarily as

means to a good state of mind in the agent any more than does any other view which does not make their rightness or wrongness depend merely on consequences. I should not keep my promises primarily in order to make my own states of mind in future better, but I am already in a bad state of mind if I without special justification break them. To talk about the spirit in which one acts cannot however be altogether separated from talking about consequences. To act from a certain motive must involve at least intending to produce a certain kind of consequences. Further, even though on some rather vague meanings of 'act' the same act may be done from different motives, an act done from unselfish love cannot be in the full sense the same as one done for expediency and cannot have the same effects, because, even if, which is rarely the case, this difference in motive involves no difference at all in the way in which the choice is carried out externally, it must affect the agent's character and so the nature (even the outward nature) of his future actions.

But where *prima facie* obligations conflict, what are we to do? A decisive clear-cut answer has never been given by philosophers to this question in general, and I do not see how it can be. Neither can you produce a general answer to the question in theoretical matters which view is preferable when there are probable arguments for both of two conflicting views, except by the use of vague terms such as that we should prefer the one which coheres better with experience. This does not debar us from having adequate justification for deciding between two alternatives in a given case, nor does it debar the philosopher from saying things which help in such a decision; but decision on any particular issue involves introducing a good many factual considerations, knowledge and adequate judgement of which would be as important for a right decision as knowledge of the general ethical principles to which philosophers refer. This is not to deny that the study of philosophy could help a man, e.g. to be a good statesman, but only to assert the commonplace that philosophy is not sufficient to achieve this end without the help of other factors. And there is certainly scope for treatises by philosophers on specific departments of applied ethics. I should be the last person to deny this since I have myself written two, one on the morality

of punishment and one, *The Individual, the State and World Government*, mainly on the application of ethical principles to major political issues. But there is no ready-made scheme of logical inference by means of which we can sum up and balance against each other the advantages and disadvantages on either side in a practical problem.

On the other hand one cannot simply rely on the attraction or aversion engendered in one's mind by considering a proposed act together with its consequences. For all attraction or aversion is not moral attraction or aversion, and the degree of attraction or aversion actually felt is liable to depend even with the best of men on a good many ethically irrelevant circumstances, e.g. one's particular mood at the time or one's special like or dislike of certain people concerned. A very large part of morality just consists in not letting oneself be swayed by those causes in such a way as to act wrongly. What sways us should at any rate be not the attraction or aversion at first naturally felt but that which follows on careful thought involving an attempt to put oneself 'in the other man's place.'

Further, there is a very important place for reasoning on moral issues, though we cannot produce a precise system of logic specifically for the purpose. I do not mean merely causal reasoning as to the likely consequences of an action, which kind of reasoning every one must admit is highly relevant to moral decisions. Apart from the fact that, for the causal reasoning to be effective, it must be accompanied by a careful analysis of the elements of value and the reverse in the anticipated consequences, there are numerous other methods of reasoning in ethics which certainly at least serve as useful auxiliaries. It is often safer to go on general rules than to work out the consequences in a particular case and, though the general (if not universal) validity of these rules may be inferred from a consideration of consequences, it may also be inferred (as I have already suggested) from a consideration of the kind of attitude or spirit involved in habitually living in accordance with or violating them. In many cases we do not need to consider consequences at all because we know that the kind of action proposed is both such that its deliberate adoption would be intrinsically evil and would almost always have some bad conse-

quences, and though this might in some particular cases be outweighed by very good consequences it may be perfectly clear that in the instance before us there are no such justifying consequences to be anticipated. This obviously applies to the vast majority of possible acts of violence or deceit. Or we may ask ourselves which of our conflicting desires we should feel most strongly if we were better men or which course we should in a year's time feel most satisfied with ourselves for having adopted. Again we may use the coherence test and see which course fits best into a coherent system of moral beliefs. We may consider (and perhaps this is describable as an appeal to the coherence test), whether an act proposed is analogous to acts which in other similar cases we praised or condemned. This is a specially valuable test where our emotions are strongly excited by a consideration of the proposed act but were not excited in the earlier analogous cases or excited in a different way. Often the most effective way of bringing a man to realize the bad moral quality of an action he proposes to do may be to ask him how he would feel if somebody else did it to him. Again we may ask which of the alternative actions approach most nearly to a preconceived ideal of conduct. Concretely this often has taken the form of asking how, e.g. Jesus would have acted in similar circumstances. There is again scope for argument about prior obligations rather than about future consequences, and this would be so even if we thought that the former were of importance only because to fulfil them was normally the most effective way of producing good consequences. Arguments about relative obligations play indeed quite a considerable part in ethical discussions. E.g. 'A: I am under a stronger obligation to C than to D because his help was more valuable. B: No, it was merely incidental to C's normal business proceedings for his own sake, while D was at much trouble to go out of his way to help you, besides you did not ask D to stay with you the other day when it would have been very convenient for him and he is a relative after all. A: But C definitely counts on me to help him now, etc.' Or to take an instance that cannot possibly be accused of triviality. 'A: Country C has been attacked, this country is bound to help her. B: But we have never signed a treaty saying we should. A: No, but as the results of a private military understanding with our

government she has, on the assumption that we should intervene, organized her forces in a way which makes it extremely hard for her to defend herself if we do not. B: But the understanding was not made public at the time and therefore this country is not bound by it, etc.' A dialogue of the latter type would have taken place very frequently as regards our relations with France in 1914 if Belgium had not been invaded, thus enabling the advocates of intervention to cite a definite treaty obligation of a public kind. Finally there is the method of asking what would happen if everybody were to act (or fail to act) in the way we propose.[1]

Unfortunately moral philosophers cannot give all-inclusive rules as to which of these methods to adopt in a given case. But neither have we such rules for determining the methods to employ in trying to make scientific discoveries or deciding, where there are probable arguments on both sides, which weigh more and so which view we ought to adopt on a scientific question. Obviously the different methods are not mutually exclusive but can be used to confirm each other, and in most cases they are likely to yield the same result. But it remains an inescapable fact that, in very many cases, in considering which of two things to do we shall find advantages and disadvantages on both sides and have to balance these against each other, although there is no measuring instrument or mathematical method of calculating quantity with questions of value and obligation. Similarly there are with most scientific theories of any complexity no means of determining mathematically the degree of probability on either side. There has been much study of logic and scientific method, but nobody has, I think, come anywhere near producing a system of logic which will enable one to measure with exactness the force of all probable arguments and so decide all doubtful points by pure logic. We can only settle disputable questions in ethics by balancing arguments against each other in a way which does not admit of mathematical precision, but the same applies to any theoretical questions of science which do not admit of mathematical certainty and cannot be settled simply by observation.

[1] The methods of ethical argument I have enumerated here are not the only ones. I gave a fuller list in *The Morality of Punishment (with some Suggestions for a General Theory of Ethics)*, pp. 197–209.

I must say something more on the last of the methods I have mentioned, the method which depends on asking what would happen if everybody acted like me, for this method certainly raises serious problems. Its paradoxical character is brought out by asking what we should think of a doctor who knew that a particular patient was allergic to penicillin but, though believing it would have bad effects on him, still gave it on the ground that it would be a very bad thing if a general rule were made to the effect that nobody should have penicillin. What is the difference between this and declining, e.g. to break a promise where it would do good to break it on the ground that, if everybody broke their promises, it would do harm? It is certain that everybody will not break his promises whether I keep mine or not, and therefore it may be asked what is the sense in declining to do something beneficial not because of the consequences which the action will actually have but because of the consequences which would accrue if something else happened that we have no reason to think ever will happen and that will certainly not be brought about by our action. Yet this type of argument is used very commonly in favour of keeping rules. It must be distinguished carefully from two other types of argument which are easier to justify.

(1) The observance of a well-established general rule is thought usually to produce good effects but very occasionally bad ones, and where it is impracticable to ascertain beforehand about a particular case whether it belongs to the former or the latter class of cases, it may therefore well be best on purely utilitarian grounds to go on the principle that we should do what will at least most probably be beneficial and act according to the general rule. This would correspond to the case of a doctor who gave penicillin knowing that his patient might possibly be allergic to it, because he was unable to ascertain beforehand whether this was so or not, and hence thought it best to give what would probably be beneficial. This principle certainly has a very wide application in ethics. It is very commonly best to keep well-established general rules if for no other reason than that it would be extremely difficult to decide each case properly on its own merits and the attempt to do so would be liable to produce more harm than good, especially as the cases where we are most inclined to make excep-

tions to a good general rule are likely to be cases where we are biased because the law is felt as adverse to our own interests or those of a friend. On these grounds Moore, though a utilitarian, went so far as to say that we should '*always* conform to rules which are both generally useful and generally practised'.[1] Even if we do not go so far as this, we must certainly admit that there is a strong utilitarian point here in favour of keeping to the well-established rules in most cases.

(2) In cases where a particular action of itself indisputably does harm it may be an effective means of making the person inclined to do it realize this more forcibly if we call attention to the consequences that would ensue if everybody acted like him. Thus we might say to somebody who was excessively and unnecessarily gloomy—What a miserable place the world would be if everybody were like you? Here the man's depressing attitude in any case produces an evil effect on those around him, and the point of the remark is merely to make him see this more clearly by suggesting how bad it would be if the effects of his action, already bad in any case, were multiplied indiscriminately. We can see good and evil better 'writ large', as Plato taught. It is quite different from a case where the effects of the particular action prohibited seem good but the effects of widespread breaking of the general rule would clearly be evil.

Yet even in the latter class of cases reasonable and moral people would often none the less condemn the action, and if challenged as to why they did so would ask—What would happen if everybody broke the rule? For example, it is difficult to suppose that if the government were deprived of the amount I contribute in taxation it would lead to any diminution of social services or of any benefits conferred by the use of government funds, yet the amount I contribute certainly makes a perceptible difference to me. But supposing I therefore argued that more harm than good was done by taxing me and therefore I ought not to be taxed, the general attitude would be most unsympathetic. Again, while people have claimed on conscientious grounds that they ought not to be compelled to do military service, few, if any, would

[1] *Principia Ethica*, p. 164. I understand that he has not retained the view that it ought to be done *always*.

accept the argument of a man who claimed that he ought not to do it because he found it very unpleasant and dangerous and the addition of one man to the forces would not make any difference either to the prevention or winning of a war. In both cases the natural reaction would be to ask—What would happen if everybody acted as you propose to do? The argument has a very considerable resemblance to the one Kant treats as central to ethics. There is however also a considerable difference: for Kant the argument is *a priori* in that there is supposed to be some kind of contradiction, not necessarily a logical contradiction, in willing the universalization of the principles he condemns, but the argument as generally used appeals to consequences and contends that the consequences of the general adoption of a certain principle or breach of a certain rule would be very evil. But in both forms the argument seems endangered by the objection that it is unreasonable to settle the question by asking not what will happen if we act in the way proposed but what would happen if everybody acted like that, when we know they will not. How can it possibly be wrong to do something just because very evil consequences would follow if something else were to happen that in fact will not?

To this question it seems to me two answers may be given. In the first place there are two premises which any consistent universalistic utilitarian must hold, (1) that an act or class of acts is wrong if it does harm rather than good, (2) that, if it is right for me to do A, it will also be right for everybody else to do A under circumstances similar in all ethically relevant respects. Now in cases where the method I am discussing is employed the following argument may be used. It would be disastrous if everybody did A (broke the rule), so that by the first premiss this class of acts would be wrong; but if I were entitled to do A, it would follow from the second premiss that everybody might, so that the class of acts would not be wrong. From this it can be concluded that I ought not to do A, since the supposition that I might permissibly would lead to a contradiction. However, the conclusion of the argument, though it follows logically from premises which all utilitarians would admit, itself is incompatible with what is commonly regarded as the fundamental principle of utilitarianism, namely that

the right act is always the one that will produce the greatest good, at least as far as can be foreseen. It involves the admission that act A may have better effects than act B and yet that it may be wrong to do it instead of B because it belongs to a class which has worse effects than the class to which belongs act B. So the utilitarian seems to be entangled in a contradiction unless he abandons the form of utilitarianism which considers only the effect of each single act as relevant and considers also classes of acts.

This he seems indeed bound to do in any case. For after all most of the 'actions' of which we talk are really classes of minor actions. The principle I have discussed has an application also where we are concerned with a class of actions relating primarily to the agent's own interests.[1] Consider this case: A man has to pass an examination, although he is not sufficiently intelligent or interested in the subject for the experience of study in it to have appreciable intrinsic value. For any hour of study he could always think of an intrinsically much better way of spending his time. Now to decide to take any particular single hour off in such a pursuit will not endanger his chances of passing and therefore will always in itself be beneficial, but if therefore he took every hour off the result would certainly be failure. He can therefore deal with the matter reasonably only if he considers not merely the effect of any one of these decisions but the effect of the whole class. The situation is indeed not quite parallel to that with, e.g. breaking promises because we cannot say that he ought never to take an hour off except in grave emergencies, but it is certain that in regulating his work he must take account, not only of each particular decision as to work or leisure, but of the whole class of decisions. He must not drop his work each time that he considers the effects of an hour's break good but see that such decisions do not too much diminish the class of decisions to work. I may well be in a position in which I have to admit that it was wrong of me not to spend more time than I did on a given piece of work with-

[1] I do not mean that it applies in all cases where we are concerned with a class of actions. For in some such cases each minor act contributes sensibly to the value of the whole class, and in others they are all necessary if the purpose of the latter is to be achieved at all (e.g. where my purpose is to walk to a given point the omission of a single step would prevent me from arriving there if the step is worth taking for this purpose at all).

out being able to fix on any one of the alternative things I did and say that it was wrong to do this one.

But another factor is present in the case of rules the breach of which affects others more directly. It is that we consider it *unfair* to profit through others keeping a rule, as we obviously do profit if it can reasonably be argued that the effects of breaking the rule would be generally disastrous, and yet refuse to abide by it ourselves. Perhaps not to do this ought to be regarded as a *prima facie* duty over and above those specified by Ross[1], and certainly this idea of unfairness plays a very large part in our social morality. One who manages his life on the principle of always getting as much for himself as he can without taking his share in the burdens involved in producing it (or their equivalent in our economic system) is subjected to severe criticism on account of the inherent meanness of his attitude and not only because he does less good than he might.

These arguments bring out the limitations of the universalization method. It must not be used where there is a strong special reason for breaking the general law in the agent's case such that, if exceptions were made and made only when there were reasons as strong as this, it would be a good thing on the whole, for then we can no longer say that, if it were right for him to break it, it would be equally right to break it in all cases or in a sufficient number to cause disaster and that therefore it is not right for him to break it. And we could no longer contend that he is necessarily being unfair to others if he breaks it, for the argument presupposes that it would not cost him a much greater sacrifice than it costs others to keep it. (This is not to say that he is entitled to break it whenever keeping it would cost him an appreciably greater sacrifice than it costs others, for efficiency in practice requires general rules and understandings, the effects of which cannot precisely be measured in each particular case, and a good man will not be very anxious to measure exactly whether he does or does not lose more than others by keeping general rules.)[2]

The most important factor in deciding what we ought to do is,

[1] Or would Ross include it under the *prima facie* duty of gratitude?

[2] *Vide* also my more detailed discussion of the universalization method in *Philosophy*, *vol.* 28, p. 16 ff.

however, what may still be described as the intrinsic goodness or badness of the consequences. But are there arguments to enable us to decide what is intrinsically good or bad? To say that something is intrinsically good means on my view that there is a *prima facie* duty to pursue it for its own sake, and thus what I have said about *prima facie* duties in general will apply here. A coherence test can be used. But the most important and ultimate way of showing that something is good (or bad) in itself is to depict its true nature so that we may love it when we see it, a task which may be accomplished better by a poet or other great writer, or a preacher or saint, than by a philosopher. The same applies to relative degrees of intrinsic goodness and badness in the consequences of alternative actions. Many ethical disputes may be settled empirically not by giving new information but by getting a disputant to realize imaginatively what the consequences would mean for the persons concerned. He might greatly alter his valuations in this way without having to admit verbally any factual proposition that he had not admitted before.

It is one of the things that puzzle me most in ethics how to define the concept of injustice or unfairness,[1] since it is applied to so many different kinds of actions the common element in or 'family resemblance' of which is not clear. One very important kind of unfair or unjust action is so called because it is arbitrary; it involves treating A in a different way from B when there is no relevant difference between the two cases. This looks as if it were wrong analytically, but it is not so, for there are cases where it is perfectly justifiable. If the number of things of a certain kind available is smaller than the number of those who want them and the things form units which cannot well be divided further, it is usually better that they should be given to some and refused to others, even when there is no really relevant ground of choice, using instead some arbitrary system of selection. But in most cases arbitrariness is unjust. Secondly, it is unfair to attempt to gain an advantage for oneself at the expense of others against their will

[1] I am not at all clear what the distinction is between these two terms. Some actions, e.g. cheating in a game, would naturally be called 'unfair' rather than 'unjust'. In other cases, where both the terms 'unfair' and 'unjust' are applied to the same kind of action, 'unjust' carries with it a slightly stronger condemnation.

except in fields where it is generally recognized that competition is allowable. Thirdly, if rewards or distinctions are professedly being distributed according to a given principle, it is unjust for the distributors to go on some other principle, e.g. award university degrees for athletic prowess or even moral virtue when they are supposed to be awarded for proficiency in an examination. Neither in the second nor in the third case can the unfair conduct be described as arbitrary. There is a principle used, but the principle is not suitable for application where it is applied. Fourthly, it is unjust to blame, and *a fortiori* punish, people more than they deserve, including under this the flagrant cases of injustice which consist in punishing those who have not committed the offence for which they are supposed to be punished at all. To blame men less than they deserve, or praise them more than they deserve, would usually be called unjust, or unfair, only in relation to other people who by comparison suffer a disadvantage. Fifthly, to 'let a person down' who has reason to trust us is to treat him unfairly. Sixthly, to lie and cheat is in general stigmatized as unjust or unfair. Seventhly, there is the type of unfairness I have mentioned in connection with the method of universalization, i.e. the unfairness which consists in benefiting by a rule because others keep it and yet refusing to keep it yourself. Eighthly, if arbitrariness is unjust, it is *a fortiori* unjust to favour A rather than B in a given respect where the claims of B should on the contrary make one favour him rather than A. (We should be inclined to describe it as 'wrong' indeed but not specifically as 'unfair' or 'unjust', at least to B, if the reasons for favouring him related to the consequences to others rather than to the claims of B himself.) Ninthly, there is the kind of injustice of which William James was speaking when he said that it would be intolerable to base the salvation of the whole of humanity on the undeserved damnation of one soul. I am assuming that the alternative to this is supposed to be not that everybody should be damned (suffer an existence of misery), but that nobody should survive at all. Here it cannot be said that the damned person's good is treated as of less value than the good of others. It might be argued that to spare him would be to rate his good far more highly than that of other people and therefore be itself unfair, for if his good were treated as of equal value with

that of anybody else, the harm of his sacrifice would still easily be outweighed by the bliss of millions of other people. But that argument leaves us cold: this is partly because it is hard to admit that real salvation could be purchased by such means, but also because we are convinced that it is by no means always permissible to exact sacrifices from the individual for the sake of a greater good to others. The recognition of this is one of the chief features which differentiates democratic from totalitarian ethics today.

As I have said, it is difficult to find a common element in all these types of action except that they are wrong and that there is something intrinsically evil in the attitude involved. But then this is true of all wrongdoing and not confined to those acts we call specifically unjust. I think the answer to our question is that fairness and unfairness are distinguished from rightness and wrongness in general in that they relate primarily not to the production of good or evil but to its right or wrong distribution to other people. In fact if good is wrongly distributed less good will also be done, but the two aspects of a wrong action, what we might call the utilitarian aspect, by which I mean the aspect of the act as producing more or less of certain kinds of desirable or undesirable things in abstraction from their distribution,[1] and the aspect relating to distribution, can be distinguished, and it is the wrong distribution primarily which catches the eye when we condemn an action as unfair or unjust.

It seems to me indeed that every wrong act excepting those, if any, which are wrong simply because they violate self-regarding duties, can be regarded as in some respect unfair. It involves taking for oneself a larger share of good or a smaller share of burdens than one is entitled to have or allotting to others a different proportion of either than any to which they are entitled. It involves unfairly treating one man's good as more important than the equal good of another man. Unfairness or injustice is thus not so much a particular kind of vice as an aspect of all wrong acts in relation to others than the agent, which aspect how-

[1] I have denied that we can thus treat good quantitatively except as meaning 'such that we should, e.g. further it more or less', but we can certainly speak in a definite quantitative sense of particular good things, e.g. more knowledge, more happiness.

ever may be more or less prominent, so that it is much more natural to speak of some wrong act as unjust or unfair than to speak so of others. Even acts of 'generosity' to those in distress may be brought under the duty of fairness by arguing that it is unfair not to help the distressed when we could not but expect help if we were distressed ourselves and have in any case been favoured in comparison with them, mostly for no merit of our own. We are indeed not inclined to think of the aspect of fairness as involved where we are confronted with an act of self-sacrifice going far beyond established expectations. We should not be inclined to say that Dr. Schweitzer would have acted unfairly if he had continued his career at home normally and had not gone to Africa, but then we should not say that he would have acted 'wrongly'. We should not have praised him to the extent we do, but we certainly should not have blamed him for not going. This is not however the way in which he himself looked at the matter. He did regard doing this or something similar as a duty which it would have been sinful for him not to perform, and in making him think of it as a duty the idea that it was unfair for him to enjoy the advantages he enjoyed without devoting the main part of his life to helping the under-privileged seems to have played a large part. We are told that he has generally dissuaded people who had a desire to do something special such as work in Africa 'unless the person can feel that what he wants to do is not something out of the ordinary' and unless 'he has no thought of heroism but just recognizes a duty undertaken with sober enthusiasm'.[1] Our ethical terms of disapprobation are adjusted to deal with those who fall below and not those who rise above the general standard, so that we should hesitate to condemn the action of one who refused to make such a sacrifice as 'unfair', but this does not affect the principle and is only our allowance for human frailty. At least we can say that Schweitzer, if not blameworthy, would, if he had not gone, at any rate not have acted so well, but he having a higher standard would still have blamed himself. Praise and blame are relative in this sense.

At the other extreme it would not occur to us to describe a

[1] Schweitzer, *Autobiography*, p. 110 (London 1933) quoted in Emmet *Function, Purpose and Powers*, p. 254.

murder or brutal assault primarily as unjust, but it certainly is unjust to kill people because you want, e.g. to take their money, or gratuitously to inflict on them severe physical pain. They certainly suffer evil without there being any ethically relevant reason why it should be distributed to them. But these are acts the harm-producing character of which is obvious at once without any special reference to the notion of maldistribution. It is not that the man murdered or assaulted the wrong person, but that he ought not to have murdered or assaulted anybody. It is therefore primarily a question not of the injustice of the act but of its character as producing evil. In any case justice or injustice is not more than one aspect of right or wrong acts; the utilitarian aspect is at least equally important. Only the two cannot really be separated: it is unfair to others not to produce as much good as one ought, and in so far as the good is badly distributed its value is diminished, otherwise it would not be a bad distribution. The latter indeed is an analytic proposition on my view of good, but it does not mean that for distribution *a* to be worse than distribution *b* the good produced by *a* must necessarily be less worth having in abstraction from the fact that it has been produced by this particular mode of distribution.[1]

But there are also very many cases of desirable action where the notion of fairness does not enter the agent's mind at all, especially where he is impelled by general benevolence or personal love, and this may be in some cases a higher attitude provided the benevolence and love do not interfere with other obligations. Yet the fact that, e.g. a devoted husband does not think of what he does for his wife in terms of fairness and vice versa does not prove that this aspect is not present in the ethical situation in which he stands to his wife, and this is in fact obvious if we imagine him turning into a bad husband. We should soon say then that he was 'unfair' to his wife. It is true that the spirit of a personal relationship like that would be spoilt by too precise and frequent calculations of fairness and rights, but there is no doubt that not to do one's best for one's partner is unfair.

Where, it seems to me, the concept of fairness or unfairness, as I have been thinking of it, has no place, is in self-regarding duties,

[1] *Vide* above, p. 108.

if there are any, and perhaps this is the chief reason why there is an inclination to deny that there are such duties. There is a sense in which a man can be said to be unfair to himself, i.e. he may deprive himself of a good which he ought to have, but to be 'unfair' to oneself in this sense, though it may be foolish and even, I think, morally wrong, does not involve the bad, selfish spirit which is involved in being unfair to other men.

Chapter Five

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

THERE remain for discussion the allied ethical concepts of guilt, desert, merit, responsibility. These clearly presuppose freedom in some sense, i.e. that in some sense we could have acted differently from the way in which we did act, but we must not be too hasty in therefore supposing that they necessarily presuppose freedom in the sense of indeterminism. Whether determinism is ultimately compatible with a reasonable ethics or not, it is certain that a greal deal of the objection to determinism is due to sheer misunderstanding, and that when this is cleared away it is not the ethically revolting doctrine that it at first sight seems to be, even if it does not altogether square with all our common-sense ethical notions.

There is a further point that is very commonly overlooked. I submit that, whether it is the case that every event is caused or not, it is quite clear that I cannot be responsible for an act of choice or volition unless it at least is caused, i.e. by myself. Indeterminists may object to the use of the word cause here, but at any rate it must have been fixed, settled, decided by myself, and I do not see what this can mean unless it means that I caused it. If it were not determined by anything at all, I should be no more responsible for it than if another person had brought it about; my responsibility implies that the action is due to myself. Consequently it is useless trying to save responsibility by arguing that it has not been proved that every event is caused. For anything we can prove, some events may be uncaused, but unless the particular events we speak of as free acts are caused we cannot be responsible for them. This would no doubt always be admitted as regards external actions, but it applies equally to mental choices or volitions. Of course I do not mean that the agent must be

their whole cause. This is never the case, but it is also never what is meant when we speak of 'causes' at the common-sense level, whether in the psychological or in the physical sphere. Without embarking on the hard and perhaps impossible enterprise of defining the precise conditions which according to ordinary usage justify us in saying that A is 'the cause' of B, we may at least commit ourselves to the assertion that I can be responsible for a choice only *in so far* as its occurrence is causally dependent on me. Indeterminists ought therefore not to talk of uncaused volitions. What they should say, and what I think they really mean in so far as they understand the issue is not that free choices are uncaused, but that they are caused in such a way that they are not fixed completely by anything occurring or existing prior to them. What the indeterminist should do is not deny causation but assert causation of a peculiar kind, for in any other case of causation it is admitted that the effect is fixed in its entire nature by what has happened in the past. I shall call a determinist one who asserts and an indeterminist one who denies this to be true also of all mental events. The determinist notion which seems irreconcilable with responsibility is the notion that free choices are completely determined by the past. It is this which raises the main difficulties of an ethical kind.

I do not think that we can solve the problem in the facile way of Hume[1] repeated by various modern writers. It has often been said from Hume onwards that causation is just regular sequence enabling us to infer the effect from the cause, and that if this is recognized, all moral difficulty about determinism disappears. No doubt it is true, as these writers have pointed out, that the problem has been aggravated by thinking of the causes of my action as if they compelled me to act in the same sense in which I should be compelled to move in a certain way if a stronger man forcibly moved me. Certainly the past causes must not be personified and regarded as compelling me in that sense. In particular to say that I am determined by my character is to say that I am determined by myself, and it is not so obvious that to be determined by oneself is incompatible with freedom as it is that to be forced by someone else would be. But the difficulty still remains that according to

[1] *Enquiry into the Human Understanding*, sect. 8.

determinism it is settled what all our actions will be before they are done, and this difficulty would remain even if a regularity theory of causation were adopted. It has been urged that, if the effect can be inferred from the cause, it is equally true that the cause can be inferred from the effect, yet we are not therefore even inclined to think that we did not act freely when we performed the past acts which have present effects.[1] Why should we then, it is asked, complain that we are not free if our future acts can be inferred from our past? But even if a purely regularity theory of causation were true (which I strongly deny),[2] there would still be a relevant difference between the two cases. Suppose all events in 1958 could be inferred from the events of 1959. This would not in the least imply that the events of 1958 were fixed before they happened. They would certainly have to be fixed by the end of 1959 if they were all to be completely inferable from the events of 1959, but then that would not trouble anybody. Everybody knows that the events of 1958 will all be fixed before the end of 1959 in any case, independently of the question of causation. But suppose all events in 1959 could be inferred from the events of 1958. This would imply that they were fixed before they happened and this is just what offends the indeterminists. If B could conclusively be inferred from A, it must be fixed as soon as A has happened. If it is objected by a holder of the regularity theory that to talk of events as settled or fixed before they happen already implies a view of causality as a mysterious nexus in some way compelling the future, I reply that in that case so much the worse for the regularity theory. Surely at least some physical events (if not human actions) are fixed before they happen, and therefore if the regularity theory entails that events cannot be fixed before they happen, the theory must be false. But, if human actions are all thus fixed, this is quite sufficient to raise at least a serious difficulty about freedom. How can I be free to do something if it is settled what I shall do before I decide to do it?[3]

[1] *Vide* Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, pp. 237–8.

[2] *Vide* my *Idealism*, ch. IV, sect. 3. I should, however, now prefer not to commit myself to saying that causation was a kind of logical entailment, but only that it had strong analogies with logical entailment.

[3] We must not commit the error of substituting 'without my deciding' for 'before I decide' in this argument.

The opponents of determinism sometimes appeal to an alleged immediate awareness of freedom. I have never attached much weight to this, for I do not see how we could discover by introspection that we were not determined by the past, and not only that we were not aware of being so. It is more plausible to say that we are immediately aware of our freedom in the sense of being immediately aware that we cause something by our choices or volitions, but this is perfectly compatible with determinism.

So let us now turn to the ethical objections to determinism.[1] This mode of argument is not one to be rejected on principle. What is inconsistent with a true proposition must be pronounced false, and while many ethical judgements are doubtful and disputed we can hardly deny that some are certain.[2] I could list thousands of acts which it is certain that I ought not to do in the present situation (whether there are any possible situations in which I ought to do them or not). So if indeterminism were found to be entailed by the very possibility of ethics, indeterminism would thereby be proved true. But we may admit that there is at least a reasonable case for the view that determinism is incompatible with ethics and yet repudiate as confused many of the popular arguments which have been used to support this conclusion. We cannot, for instance, allow as valid any argument which implies that, if determinism were true, it would be useless trying to do anything because the future would be fixed whatever we did. This argument has been repeatedly refuted. The answer to it is that determinism does not imply that our volitions are not causes, only that they are effects. Among the causes which result in the preservation of somebody's life and without which he would die may be volitions of ours, and if our volitions have these effects they may be very well worth making even if determinism be true. Their efficacy as causes cannot be affected by their being themselves the effects of previous causes.

[1] By 'determinism' I understand a view which, while asserting that all human actions follow according to causal laws from the past, admits that there is such a thing as mental causation. Views such as behaviourism and epiphenomenalism which admit only of physical causes certainly seem to me quite irreconcilable with ethics.

[2] I do not see how it can make any difference to the question of the relation between ethics and determinism or indeterminism whether we call ethical judgements true or merely 'valid'.

Nor is determinism necessarily incompatible with a man going against what we usually call his character, i.e. his previous habits of action, thought and feeling. Causation is certainly compatible with change, and we must in any case distinguish between first and second order dispositions, the latter being dispositions to change the first order dispositions if certain circumstances arise. For a time a man may have had a dominant disposition 'to sow his wild oats', but he may also be the sort of man who will only be content with this kind of life for a limited period, or the balance between conflicting desires may be turned in favour of the better by such an occurrence as the sudden realization of the harm he has done. There are many causes which might make a man very strongly desire to alter his previous 'character'.

But the classic argument against determinism is that 'ought' implies 'can', supported by the contention that we are blameworthy only in so far as we could have avoided the acts for which we are blamed. And if the application of this most fundamental concept of ethics would really be rendered illegitimate by determinism, this would be a most serious objection to the latter. But it is useless for the indeterminist just to say that 'ought' implies 'can'. The determinist will also admit that 'ought' implies 'can' in some sense, but proceed to produce a sense of 'can' which may be reconciled with determinism. On his success or failure in doing this the strength of his case largely depends. So I shall now state what seems to me the most plausible determinist account of 'could have acted differently' and of 'blameworthy' and see how far this carries us. Even if determinism turns out quite wrong, it is our duty as philosophers to make the best case possible for it before we reject it.

Suppose then the determinist says that 'A could have acted differently' when and only when it is possible to specify a difference in his volition which without any other difference in the situation not consequent causally on the difference in his volition would have resulted in a different act.[1] The term 'difference in

[1] This is plainly not the only possible sense of 'could', but then all theories will have to recognize that the word is used in more senses than one. E.g. very frequently a man will say 'I could not have acted differently' meaning 'I could not rationally' or 'I could not morally have acted differently'. Here he is plainly not asserting the

volition' covers (1) deciding to do something else, (2) deciding instead of not making any decision at all or vice versa, (3) exercising more or less effort in carrying out your decision. This would be in line with the usual determinist account of freedom, but the phrasing is my own. I think indeed one qualification at least should be added. A man cannot be said to have been free to do B rather than A if he had never thought of doing B, even though it be true that he would have done B if he had chosen. In such cases, I think (whether determinism or indeterminism be true) the man is not to blame for omitting to do B then, though he may well be to blame for earlier actions or omissions, e.g. for neglecting to obtain relevant information beforehand or to form better habits. The same, I think, applies in the rarer cases where a man does something, e.g. in a passion or absent-mindedly, without the possibility of refraining having even occurred to him.

It does seem that, in the sense described at least, we could have acted differently whenever we do anything which is worth calling an act. Modern philosophers are often offended by talk about volition, but I at any rate do not see how we can speak of freedom, whether we are determinists or indeterminists, if there is not a will, or if statements involving the will are to be translated entirely in terms of physical events without reference to consciousness. It seems to me that, if we are to be empiricists in any reasonable sense, we must recognize as empirical facts two kinds of phenomena which are generally both put under the heading of 'volition': (1) deciding or choosing to do something, (2) making an effort to do it. Who can really deny that they are part not merely of physical behaviour but of human experience? I certainly give up the attempt to discuss moral philosophy if they are not. And we

absence of free will in the indeterminist sense, though most indeterminists would probably say that most such cases were not cases of the exercise of free will. Nor does he mean that he would not have acted differently if he had willed differently. He means that the considerations against acting differently were so strong that it would have been senseless or patently wrong to do so. I have simply selected a sense of 'could' in regard to which a determinist could plausibly (and indeed generally does) maintain that it is both one presupposed by any moral praise or blame and one in which people could commonly have acted differently compatibly with determinism being true. There is also another sense of freedom in which the good man, or at least the consistently and rationally self-controlled man, can alone be free, but we are not discussing this here.

throughout our social intercourse assume that, if a person decides to do something, he can do it, except in very rare cases of overwhelming contrary desire, unless there are physical obstacles or the action requires special skill. We must not indeed speak as if there were a distinct psychological state of volition accompanying or preceding every voluntary act (e.g. every step in a walk or every distinguishable sound in a speech), but if an action is to be described as voluntary at all, if not the result of an actual volition itself, it must surely at least be preventible by a contrary volition.

Now what about 'blame'? It seems reasonable to say that 'A is to be blamed (morally) for an act' entails that the character of the act is due to and therefore displays a volitional fault (positive or negative) in A. Now obviously 'A is to blame for act a' will in that case entail that A could have acted differently in the above sense, for the character of the act could not be due to a volitional fault if no difference in his volition would have made any difference to the act, i.e. if whatever he decided and however hard he tried, he would still have acted in the way he did. (If no volition would have made a difference to it, we should indeed hardly call it an act.) But the converse does not hold in all cases where the act is a wrong one. Apart from the qualification which I added that the man must have thought of doing what he is blamed for not doing, there is the common case where the wrongness is due to an intellectual and not to a volitional fault. Suppose the man in question thought of the right thing to do but through a mistake as to empirical facts (including under this a mistaken forecast of the likely consequences) took the view that it was not the right thing to do. Most people would admit that he *could* have done it and a determinist who accepted my definition of 'could' might agree with this, but we should all admit that he was not to blame (morally) for having omitted to do it, just because it was a case of a genuine mistake, unless we ascribed the mistake to previous blameworthy acts or omissions, or thought the man had made up his mind with culpable haste.

But the indeterminist will say that I am still evading the main issue, which is whether, granting that a man could have acted differently if he had willed, he could have willed differently. The 'could' here is interpreted by the indeterminist as 'an absolute

could', i.e. as meaning that the man might have chosen differently, everything else up to that moment, including his character, being what it was. What can 'could have willed differently' mean on a determinist view? If the analysis I suggested above be applied to 'could' in this instance, 'he could have willed differently' becomes 'it is possible to specify a difference in his volition which would have resulted in a different volition'. But either this would make 'he could have willed differently' a tautology, or it must refer to another volition preceding the one which he made, a 'choosing to choose'. This might be a decision sometime beforehand as to what he would do when the need for an action arose or again perhaps an effort to make himself decide. But it is plain that all free acts do not require a previous act of willing to will or choosing to choose, however this be interpreted. If they did we should be confronted with an infinite regress, and the determinist may well say that it is not necessary to go back to any previous possible act of choosing to choose in order to justify blame, as the bad qualities are already present in the volition which directly results in the act blamed. But the indeterminist may claim that he has gained the advantage in that he can say in a quite clear sense that we could have chosen differently and distinguish this from the cases where we could have acted differently if we had chosen, but could not have chosen differently. However his advantage is not so decisive as he thinks. For it is not clear that the meaning of 'could' in the phrase 'could have willed' or 'could have chosen' should be analysed in the same way as that of 'could' in the phrase 'could have acted', and it is only if this is assumed that the difficulty in question arises for the determinist. It seems to me that the latter may plausibly reply that to say that a man could have chosen differently from the way in which he did choose is just to say that it depended on him that he chose in the way in which he did.

However, let us go into the question further. Under what circumstances could it be said that someone would have acted differently if he had chosen and yet denied that he could have chosen differently?

(1) Obviously it could be said (though without much point) even of an animal which was hungry and had nothing to deter it from eating that it would have refrained from eating *if* it had

chosen, but we should refuse to say that the animal was free to do so on the ground that animals cannot make choices or at least choices to act against their strongest desire. This the determinist could well admit. To say that a being could do something which it was not in the nature of any member of its species to do would be silly, alike on the indeterminist and the determinist view. Similarly we could not reasonably say that a man was free to choose differently if his intelligence was so defective as to be only slightly above that of an animal.

(2) It might be the case that a man would have done A if he had chosen but was not able to choose to do A because it did not occur to him to think of A as a possible alternative. This is excluded by my account of the meaning of 'could have acted differently', but all determinists have not been equally careful to exclude it. It is however not a very helpful case for the indeterminist, for to deny that a man was always free to do whatever he could have done if he had chosen, merely on the ground that a man could not choose what he did not think of choosing (though correct), is obviously no argument for undetermined free will.

(3) There are the cases where a proposed action is in conflict with such a strong desire that we doubt the agent's ability to overcome the latter and yet have no doubt that, if he exercised his will sufficiently, he could do so.[1] I suppose, *if* I exercised my will *sufficiently*, I could face any tortures rather than tell a lie, but I very much doubt whether I could display such strength of will. A drug addict could presumably always stop taking drugs immediately *if* he willed with *sufficient* force and persistence, but in cases where the habit was very far advanced it would still be doubted whether he could will with sufficient force and persistence and he would on this account be said probably not to be free to stop.[2] In such cases the agent would have acted differently if there had been a difference in his volition of a certain kind, and yet if it were

[1] This is indeed in itself an analytic proposition, though there are no doubt many cases in which the condition expressed by the protasis could not be realized in fact. But it at least 'contextually implies' that any act to which it refers is one that a certain degree of willing would effect.

[2] This case is taken by Broad as decisive against the possibility of reconciling ultimate moral responsibility with determinism. (*Ethics and the History of Philosophy*, p. 200 ff.)

thought also that he could not have changed his volition in this way most people would say he was not free. Yet I think that within determinism itself distinctions can still be made to meet the situation. It might be that the desire was so strong that no effort of will of a type or degree ever made by human beings would overcome it, or it might be that physical causes or psychological causes other than volitions had made the concentration needed for even a moderate effort of will impossible in the same sense as it might be impossible for you to concentrate on this book if you were an idiot or were in agonizing pain or had just heard that you were to be shot. In such cases it seems to me that even a determinist might very sensibly say that the agent could not have chosen differently. Perhaps neither determinist nor indeterminist could ever be quite sure in a particular case that such a situation had arisen, but at any rate both may consistently recognize at least a diminution in blameworthiness in proportion as this condition is approached, and since blame is usually not directed to all defects but only to defects which involve a falling below the average in a certain respect or at least defects far from universal, we should often deny blameworthiness in cases where there remained the abstract possibility of a different action. If the drug addict could now change his habit only by showing the qualities of a hero, we should indeed blame him for his former actions which had brought him to such a pass, but we should not blame him any longer for not abstaining. Degrees of freedom dependent on the greater or less difficulty of carrying one's choice into effect must be recognized by both determinist and indeterminist.

(4) There remains a fourth kind of case, and here it seems to me that the way in which we normally use the word 'could' is more in accord with the determinist than with the usual indeterminist view. There are a vast number of things which I could do if I chose but which I have no motive for doing. Now most philosophical indeterminists would say that I am not free to do these things. Since I do not desire to do them and I do not recognize a duty to do them, I could not do them by an act of free will. For example, it is raining and dark, I am interested in my work and do not want or think it right to interrupt it now, and I have nobody on whom I particularly want to call or whom I am under any

obligation to visit now. Most indeterminists would say that under these conditions I could not go out. But this seems to me very unnatural: what I should wish to say and what I think a man uninfluenced by philosophical theory would always say is that I can go out but do not want to go. He would here agree with the determinists who say that 'I could' means 'I should if I chose' or like myself give a similar but rather more complex analysis in terms of hypothetical differences in volition. The indeterminist however must say that I could not have gone out unless he is prepared to admit (as few indeterminists are) that we can will to do something without a motive. So there are cases where the plain man uses 'can' and 'could' in the way of the determinist rather than of the indeterminist, and since in these cases we feel and are according to the ordinary usage of words perfectly free, we cannot deny that determinism is compatible with freedom in a very real sense of the term. It seems perfectly reasonable to say that it is no restriction at all on my freedom that I cannot choose to go out unless I come to want to do so; it would be much more of a restriction on my freedom if I might any time find myself going out without wanting to. We certainly do not feel genuinely free only in the very small proportion of our acts which are supposed to be undetermined, and it would be very odd to say 'I am *not able* to go to Blackpool for my holidays because I like other places better'. I admit, however, that this does not settle the case in favour of the determinist, for the indeterminist can reply that, though there is a good sense of the word 'free' in which I am free to do whatever I could do if I chose, this is not the particular sense of 'free' implied in moral responsibility.

Indeterminists often talk as if there would be nothing left of ethics if determinism were true. In fact there would be at least a very great deal. There is no doubt that some things would still be better than others. The fact that the pain he is suffering was caused by earlier events does not make anybody hesitate to say that it is an evil. Our judgements as to what kinds of thing are intrinsically good and evil should be, mostly at least, unaffected if we accept determinism. It is indeed maintained by most indeterminists that one particular group of judgements as to what is intrinsically good or bad, i.e. judgements as to the intrinsic goodness or badness of

moral or immoral actions and character, would be all falsified, but even as regards this particular kind I do not see that they have given any reasons for saying so beyond an appeal to intuition which the determinist may dispute. And in any case certain actions will remain highly desirable to perform and others to avoid because they produce good or evil. It is not clear that our decisions as to which particular acts these are need be affected at all. We shall still be free sometimes in at least one extremely important and desirable sense, namely, that we can do as we please. We shall still be aware of obligations, and we can admit that the existence of an obligation entails that one can fulfil it in an important sense in which 'can' is constantly employed in ordinary speech, i.e. it depends only on our choice whether we fulfil it or not. On the determinist view what we shall do is indeed fixed by our character and our circumstances, but in so far as it is due to the latter we are not free even on the indeterminist view, and in so far as it is due to the former the determinist can contend that the character is the man and it is not slavery to be determined by oneself. People who are doing what they want to do just because they want to and they think that it really will satisfy them ultimately do not usually complain that they are enslaved. Or if they do so later, it will be because they come to realize that they were in error as to what would satisfy them, but this error will enslave men on an indeterminist as well as on a determinist view. The determinist can even, like the indeterminist, make a distinction between deliberate wrongdoing and other faults or failures, because the former alone involves a bad will, and he may agree with most indeterminists in holding this to be the greatest of intrinsic evils. On the determinist view indeterminism can easily be explained as a muddle due to confusing 'could' in the relative and 'could' in the absolute sense and to the other confusions which have led to the anti-determinist arguments I reject in this chapter.

But what on the determinist view is to become of praise and blame (in the moral sense)? It is here that the indeterminist is at his strongest, backed by the argument that we cannot be to blame for our wrong acts if it was settled that they would occur before we were born. And it would be impossible to maintain that we can regard men as responsible *in exactly the same sense if* deter-

minism is true. This does not however necessarily prove that determinism is false. The divergence from common sense is a *prima facie* argument against determinism, and the degree of its strength depends on the degree to which we shall have to remodel our ethical beliefs if determinism is accepted. A slight discrepancy from common sense is not a serious objection.

Now, as has been repeatedly pointed out, there can be no doubt that praise and blame have an important social function even for the determinist. Determinism has been associated with the view that moral badness is a kind of disease, but at any rate it requires a very different kind of treatment from any other disease. The social function of praise and blame depends on the fact that a person is more likely to repeat an action if he is praised and less likely if he is blamed for it, and this will be the case even if determinism is true. The same applies to reward and punishment. And obviously this function can only be fulfilled if the kind of things for which a man is praised or blamed depend on his volition or at least are alterable by it, i.e. if he could act differently at least in the determinist sense of 'could'. Similarly any utility possessed by punishment as deterrent and reformatory will not be impaired.

But the determinist can admit more. Blame need not be even for him merely a way of inducing people not to repeat the actions for which they are blamed. He need not deny that certain actions are really wrong, and to blame a man for them is to say that they are wrong. Moral badness is a real evil, at least instrumentally, and as I have said, the determinist may still hold also intrinsically, however the man acquired it. But at this point the indeterminist will object that it is unjust to blame or punish people for what they cannot help doing. Here the old difficulty about different senses of 'could' reappears. It is quite impossible to deny that the determinist can find a non-paradoxical sense of 'could' in which he may admit that we could have helped doing what we do. If to blame is to say that a certain act or course of action is the result of a bad will and it really is the result of a bad will, how is it unjust to blame the man for it? Perhaps we may even say the same about punishment. Punishment, except in so far as it merely appeals to fear or is preventive in a literal physical sense, is essentially a more emphatic form of blame, and verbal blame, at least

if it achieves its object, is a kind of punishment. It seems to me that there is no justification for supposing that the pain of punishment in abstraction from this purpose can be anything but evil in itself, though it may sometimes be justified by its good results on a determinist as well as an indeterminist view.[1] If to blame a man is indeed not merely to say that he has shown a bad will but also that he could have willed differently in an absolute sense of 'could', his character and circumstances being what they were, then it is wrong to blame him if he could not have done so, but is this more than to say that, if we blame a man in the indeterminist sense and indeterminism is not true, we are saying something false?

It has been argued against determinism that a man who has had a bad heredity and environment deserves less blame for his wrong acts than a man who has been fortunate in these respects, this being taken to imply that we are not to blame at all in so far as we are determined by our character and our character is determined by heredity and environment. But the determinist can well offer an explanation of this attitude, at least as regards environment. He can readily admit that it is rational and right to blame A more than B for the same act if A has been brought up well and has had every advantage on his side while B has had bad parents and lived under conditions which subjected him to far greater temptations. For in that case it is plain that we should have good reason for thinking that the act showed more moral (volitional) evil in A than it did in B. B's ideas as to right and wrong would be likely to be less clear and his desire to do the wrong act stronger than that of A. Or if the moral states of A and B as regards the particular act in question were equally bad, we should still be entitled to think that A was more to blame for it because it would be reasonable to suppose that, in order to account for his degraded state, he must have been guilty of a long series of very bad acts performed with a fuller consciousness of right and wrong and less temptation than the wrong acts of B. That these are the relevant circumstances

[1] If I have changed substantially the views on ethics I held when I wrote *The Definition of Good*, I think I should still subscribe to almost everything I said about punishment in my earlier work *The Morality of Punishment* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1929).

in our relative appraisal seems to be shown by the fact that, if it were to turn out on investigation that A had always been subject to quite abnormally strong desires for certain things, so that what would only be a slight temptation or none at all for most men was a very strong temptation to him, or that he had always been lacking gravely in the capacity to understand ethical issues, we should no longer have much inclination to blame him more than B. But the indeterminist may reply that this is only because it would be evidence that, even if his environment was very good, there must have been some bad streak in his heredity (even if we could not trace it down to any of his known ancestors) and that it only shows that, in so far as a man's acts are determined by his character and his character by heredity, he is not subject to blame. On the determinist view it is just not possible that a man with both good heredity and good environment could be or become bad,[1] unless indeed the determinist believes in pre-existence, in which case the innate character of the man would be determined not, or not wholly, by heredity but by his previous lives. But is it clear, unless we already assume the indeterminist view, that we ought to blame a man more for similar courses of action under similar circumstances if his heredity was good than if it was bad? And if it is not clear unless we already assume the indeterminist view, does not the argument become circular? It does not seem to me a valid argument against a particular theory that we should make judgements incompatible with the theory in a situation which could not arise at all if the theory were correct. The moral philosopher is certainly not bound to accept what present themselves as 'common-sense judgements' if these are due to the influence of a theory which he thinks erroneous. Are these judgements about heredity to be regarded as direct insights and not rather as inferences from a theory already assumed? Only in the former case have they any independent authority as arguments for indeterminism. At the same time the determinist can, as we have seen, from his own point of view quite easily justify and explain the

[1] Of course what morally is a good environment is relative to the man and is not necessarily identical with a good environment materially. For many people to be born heir to a large fortune may be morally a more detrimental factor than it would have been to be born in a slum. And a morally good parent might give his child a morally harmful environment through folly.

common judgement that a man's badness is partly excused by a bad environment. And he could easily explain the point I have mentioned above that we should blame a man less for his bad acts if he were tempted by abnormally strong desires or if his ideas as to what is wrong were persistently confused. Even on a determinist view it obviously involves a less serious volitional fault to act against what you believe to be right as the result of very strong (keenly felt) desires than as the result of weak ones, and to do so under circumstances where at least part of the wrongness can be traced to intellectual confusion, than to do so when you are quite clear about the wickedness of what you are doing.

Similarly a determinist can easily explain and justify our judgement that a man can claim much more credit for doing what is right against a strong desire by a hard effort of will than for doing it when it came very easy to him. The former kind of action is stronger evidence of a good will than the latter. And I think that he can also explain and justify our judgement that a man is not free if he is acting under post-hypnotic suggestion, because such action springs not from his but another's will and he does not know what is the real reason for it (though I suppose he might exercise his freedom in resisting the desire to do whatever it has been suggested he should, so it seems rather a case of a lesser degree than of an absolute loss of freedom).

A case where I feel it harder to reconcile our natural attitude with determinism is that of a man whose character is changed for the worse as the result of disease, but might not the determinist defend himself even here by saying that, in so far as the man's bad actions were after-effects of the disease, they were due to physical causes and so did not show a bad will at all, or only in a lesser degree in so far as the man, if he had chosen, could have fought against his temptations despite the increased difficulty of doing so? The indeterminist may then retort that, if the man is excused on these grounds, everybody ought equally to be excused on the determinist view, because everybody's character is then ultimately determined simply by physical causes, or at least causes outside himself, and to this the only answer that I can see open to the determinist is to distinguish sharply between immediate and ultimate causes. Even if I was ultimately made what I am by physical

causes, my moral badness is now mine and is still bad, but if and in so far as my acts or states of mind are directly caused by physical disease, then they do not show a bad will and, however deplorable, are not morally bad.

Even the experience of remorse, often taken as the strongest argument against determinism, would still, I think, not lose most of its point if interpreted as a realization that our self was very bad and that certain disasters for ourselves or others would have been avoided if we had not been so bad. It has been said that on the determinist view remorse would be a childish crying for the moon, but there is a very important difference. If I work myself into a state of distress because I cannot have the moon, this will not, even in these days of 'sputniks', in any way help me to acquire the moon, and it would hardly seem to be worth anything to me even if I could acquire it, but if I am distressed as to my own bad conduct this should urge me to improve on it and it is very well worth while trying to improve. (Even an indeterminist should admit that remorse in the sense of mere distress at the past without any real attempt to do better is worthless, and that the feeling may easily be carried to a pitch which hinders rather than furthers moral progress.) Certainly remorse involves a consciousness that I could have acted differently, but in what sense of 'could'? At the same time it would be silly to deny that, except with those who are much more thoroughly imbued with determinism than most people ever are with philosophical theories, the attitudes of remorse and blame are liable to include a belief that oneself or the person blamed could have acted differently in the absolute sense of 'could', everything up to the present including his character being the same, and I too feel so in ordinary practical life. It is very hard to say how much weight to lay on this. It could not stand against any very strong argument for determinism, and if determinism is accepted the general belief in indeterminism could be explained as the result of confusion. The discussion has already brought out various ways in which people may be prejudiced unreasonably against the determinist view because it is misunderstood, whether there are also valid arguments against it or not, and the confusion underlying these prejudices might well account for the widespread belief in indeterminism even if that belief is

false. But are there very strong arguments for determinism? Or is determinism self-evident? Few philosophers would now give the confident answers to these questions that have so often been given in the past.

It is very commonly thought both by determinists[1] and indeterminists that determinism necessarily involves the view that we can only act in accord with the desire or group of desires[2] that we feel as the strongest at the time of action, and if this were so it would be a serious objection to determinism, since the view in question seems quite incompatible with the experience of moral struggle, but I cannot see any reason to suppose either that this view is true or that it need be entailed by determinism. Determinism is the view that all our acts are caused by the past and does not commit one to any particular theory as to how they are caused. That the effect of a desire on volition is always in proportion to its felt strength would be a particular causal law and as such dependent for its establishment on empirical evidence, but without producing the masses of empirical evidence that would be needed to establish this, many have proceeded in argument as if it were true *a priori* either that it was a universal law or that its universality would be entailed by determinism. It seems to me that there were two causes for this mistake. Firstly, by the 'strongest desire' may be meant simply the desire which prevails, and some have argued that this is the only way of measuring the strength of desires. If so it follows that, if our actions are determined by our desires, as determinists commonly assume, it is an analytic proposition that we shall act according to the strongest desire. This seems to have been confused with the causal proposition that we must act in accordance with the 'strongest desire' in the sense of the desire felt most keenly or the desire which it costs most felt effort to oppose.[3]

[1] Hume (Treatise II, 3–4 beginning) is a noteworthy exception.

[2] The phrase 'group of desires' is inserted to cover the case where a particular desire is felt more strongly than any other but does not lead to action because it is felt less strongly than a number of desires taken all together which support an alternative course of action, though more strongly than any one of these desires taken by itself. I admit that the way I have formulated the principle is not quite satisfactory, but I think it is clear what is meant and a fully adequate formulation would raise too many complications.

[3] That these two properties of desire (being felt most keenly and being such that

The second cause lies in the idea that, if our choice is not explicable by means of the relative felt strength of our desires, there is no way of explaining it causally at all. But need the causal efficacy of a desire be always in proportion to just this particular characteristic? It is not the only characteristic of desires. If it is asked what other characteristics there are which could be relevant, it might be suggested that the causal efficacy of a desire can be affected not only by its felt strength but by the number and duration of the habits of thought and conduct with which it is linked, even if these habits do not give rise to felt desires. Again, how do we know that desires for some objects (not necessarily the same for everybody) have not more causal efficacy than others even where their felt strength is equal? And is desire the sole psychological cause of action? Even the proposition that the apprehension that something is right or good can only affect action not directly but by first arousing a desire does not seem to me empirically true and has certainly not been established if by 'desire' is meant felt desire. If 'desire' is being used dispositionally, there is a sense in which it is true, but then I doubt whether in this sense it is more than the tautology that a thought cannot affect our action unless it arouses a tendency to (or against) certain actions. Further, even a determinist must admit the occurrence of experiences of choice as a psychological fact. While determinists do hold that we can judge between our desires, probably most of them would hold that this judgement or choice can only affect action through altering the relative felt strength of our desires, and in that case we shall still always do what we want most at the time, though what we want most now may be different from what we wanted most before we were influenced by the reflection which culminated in the judgement. But I do not see why determinism should be supposed incompatible with holding that choice might result directly in the agent acting differently without changing the relative balance of his desires.

In fact it seems to me that a desire is likely to be felt most strongly just after one has decided to go against it. If I am doing

it costs most felt effort to oppose it) always go together seems to be commonly assumed, but I do not think it true. However, what I have said applies to the strongest desire in both senses.

something and have a felt desire to do something else but decide to go on with what I am doing, after the decision any desire I had to continue with my present occupation will be likely to be weakened by the mere fact that it is now sure to be gratified while the opposing desire will be strengthened by having the possibility of its gratification cut off, especially as this is the result of my own action. This state of affairs may not last long, the desire more often than not soon fading from consciousness, but it is surely likely to occur for at least a short time very commonly after such decisions, and consequently if we did always act according to the desire we felt most strongly at the moment we should be always reversing our decisions to an extent to which even weak-minded people rarely do so.

But there is a sense of 'strongest desire' in which the indeterminist may claim that he alone and not the determinist is in a position to say that we can act against the strongest desire. He will contend that in a free act of moral choice we are confronted with a desire which, if left to the natural play of causes, would determine us to act wrongly but can be prevented from doing so only by an undetermined act of free will. He may then define 'the strongest desire' not indeed as the desire which will prevail, but as the desire which would prevail but for this intervention of our free will. In that sense of 'strongest desire', obviously the determinist will and the indeterminist will not admit that we must act in accordance with the strongest desire. But it is by no means clear that moral struggle could not be explained adequately in terms of the sense or senses of 'strongest desire' previously mentioned.

Most indeterminists would limit action against the strongest desire to cases where a man acts from a moral motive under temptation. For this limitation I do not see any adequate ground, whether we are using 'strongest desire' in the last-mentioned sense or in the sense of the desire which it costs most effort to resist or in the sense of the desire felt most strongly. Lady Macbeth is depicted as having shrunk back from murdering Duncan because he resembled her father as he slept, but is it not quite conceivable that she might by a strong act of will have stifled her scruples and compassion and murdered him all the same? Surely a man may commit crimes as well as do good works although at the moment

he feels the desire to avoid the risk more strongly than the desire for the anticipated gain. If not, I do not see how anybody who has not completely 'cast-iron nerves' could carry out a burglary or murder requiring long planning and not done on impulse. Indeterminists defend the view in question by saying that action in accord with the strongest desire can be explained by desire but action against it cannot be explained by anything except a free choice to follow the moral motive, but this presupposes the dogma that action determined by desire is necessarily action from the strongest desire in the sense of the one felt most keenly or the one resistance to which carries with it the most sense of effort.

But is responsibility compatible with *indeterminism*? The determinist after repelling his opponents' attacks often launches a counter-attack himself and argues that it is not determinism but indeterminism which is incompatible with responsibility on the ground that I can be responsible for an action only if it follows from my character. Only then, it may be claimed, is the action a sign of goodness or badness in me, for only then does it result from good or evil qualities in me. Now, as I made clear at the start, I agree with the determinist so far at least as to admit that, if an act were not caused at all (by myself), I should not be responsible for it any more than if somebody else had caused it. Further, if it is partly, but not completely, determined, I cannot be responsible for it in those respects in which it is not determined (by me). On the other hand it seems difficult to believe that we can be ethically responsible if everything we do is fixed by what happened before we were born, so the indeterminist while implying that our acts are determined by our self denies that they are determined entirely by the past, i.e. by our previous character and circumstances. The self decides what it does in free acts but how it is to decide is not determined completely by even its own past characteristics. Indeterminists normally state their views in terms of what has been called the Pure Ego theory of the self, i.e. the view of the self as a substance over and above its experiences. I do not know whether or how indeterminism could be stated plausibly in terms of an event theory of the self. And what it is really saying I should express not as a denial of causation but as an assertion that the causation involved is of a kind different from that recog-

nized in physical science. In any other instance of causation a cause can only determine its effects by virtue of certain characteristics existing in it prior to the production of the effect, but it is held that in the case of free human action the self may decide what is done to some extent irrespectively of its previous character. The past experiences and pre-existing qualities of the self as well as external circumstances must be conceived as having some influence on what happens, at least in limiting alternatives, but it still may be held that they do not determine it altogether.

My interpretation of indeterminism suggests what Professor Broad called 'Libertarianism',[1] but it differs from Broad's account of this in one important respect. He regards 'Libertarianism' as implying that the self as substance is the whole cause of certain events in abstraction from its pre-existing qualities and from all past events. For he criticises 'Libertarianism' on the ground that it is obvious that any event in time must, if it has a cause at all, include in its cause previous events to fix its beginning in time. I should have thought that most libertarians would have admitted this and merely maintained that such previous events and pre-existing qualities did not constitute the whole cause, but when I mentioned this orally to him Broad replied that, if libertarianism merely meant that the occurrence of free acts depends on the substance[2] in which they occur as well as on previous events, it would be impossible to distinguish it from any determinist view. For on any view it is relevant to the causal determination of any event not only that previous events of a certain kind occurred and certain characteristics were present, but that they occurred or were present in one substance rather than in another. For instance on any view it is relevant to the event describable as my remembering something not only that a previous event describable as the learning or experiencing of it occurred but that it occurred to me, it is relevant to an event describable as breaking not only that there was an event describable as falling but that this event

[1] C. D. Broad, *Determinism, Indeterminism and Libertarianism*, pp. 47–8, as reprinted in his *Ethics and History of Philosophy*, pp. 216–7.

[2] 'Substance' is here being used in a sense in which it does not necessarily imply that the substance is something over and above its characteristics or even that it is more than a closely related series of events. On the other hand the libertarian view does seem to make these assumptions about substance.

occurred to the particular thing which was broken. And similarly with characteristics: the fact that there are hot-tempered people in the world is not directly causally relevant to a particular man's getting angry unless he himself has this characteristic, and one article will not tend to break because other articles are fragile. This certainly raises difficulties about the formulation of the libertarian view, and it seems possible to distinguish it from determinism only if a very sharp distinction is made between the substance and its characteristics, at least in the case of the self. Substance as such may then figure in causation in a sense different from any in which it is understood to do on an ordinary determinist view, according to which all the causal factors may be stated in terms of characteristics provided we state also what substances or events these qualify. (It would have to be admitted to be equally true that they could be stated in terms of substances, provided we gave the causally relevant characteristics of the substances, unless there are some events or other entities which are neither themselves substances nor reducible to characteristics of substances, as is *prima facie* the case with snakes seen in delirium, or flashes of lightning.) For the libertarian view holds there to be in free acts a causal factor which could only be stated in terms of substance. When we had enumerated all the characteristics that could conceivably be enumerated, we should still have not completely accounted for the action. In order to account for it completely we should have to refer it to the self as a substance not exercising causation through or only through any of its characteristics but simply *qua* substance. On the determinist view when a man is tempted to lie, whether or not he yields to the temptation is decided completely by past events in his life and environment acting on a character which is itself wholly the fruit of past causes; on the libertarian view the past factors do not determine exactly what he will do but leave more than one alternative open. Which is adopted will be determined by the self, but it will not be determined by any pre-existing characteristics, though these constantly restrict alternatives and may make the adoption of some more probable than that of others.

It seems to me that this kind of libertarianism is what the indeterminist usually has in mind. He holds that the self decides

how it shall act and therefore presumably that it determines its acts, but he denies that they are determined completely by character and circumstances, so he is clearly asserting that the free causality of the self is a causality which is not dependent on the characteristics of the self. It is hard to see how a substance can act as cause or determine anything except through its characteristics, but at any rate this position is one to which the indeterminist seems committed. It is commonly the possibility or impossibility of prediction which is regarded as the acid test for distinguishing between determinism and indeterminism, and if free acts were determined by past characteristics and events it would seem that they had to be on principle predictable from these characteristics and events. Thus understood the indeterminist view does not really involve the denial of the principle of universal causation. Everything could be caused, but not everything would be caused in such a way that it was predictable.

This view has the advantage of doing justice to our natural conviction that we can, except in pathological or at least highly exceptional cases, always go against our character and antecedents. It is also in accordance with our feeling that free action involves in some sense the intervention of the self as a whole to decide between the actions prompted by different motives. But it involves difficult metaphysical conceptions that have never yet adequately been worked out.

I think, however, it at least escapes the determinist argument[1] that indeterminism is incompatible with responsibility on the ground that a man cannot be responsible for his actions unless they flow from good or evil qualities in his character. This argument overlooks one point, namely that we cannot form any idea of qualities of character apart from their manifestations in actions and in mental states. If we are just thinking of outward acts, it is certainly true that the agent can only be blamed for them if they follow from (are caused by) something evil in him, i.e. wrong volitions or states of mind in which he does not bother to make the right volition. But indeterminists will admit that the outward acts are determined by mental states. It is not the action caused by

[1] For an admirable statement of this type of argument *vide* Hobart in *Mind* 1934, pp. 1–27.

a volition but the volition itself which is said to be undetermined. Now it seems plausible to say that the volition is evil only in so far as it follows from a bad character, but what is there in 'character' save a set of dispositions and what are dispositions apart from the actions and states of mind in which they are manifested? If they are anything more, we certainly have no intelligible idea of what that is. Character is indeed not to be regarded as just an aggregate of dispositions but rather as a somewhat roughly organized system of them connected by causal laws, but this is not to say that the system must be sufficiently rigid to determine unequivocally all its members. And it does not involve saying that volitions and states of mind are determined by something over and above themselves, character. When we say that a man's character is admirable, we are saying that his purposes, volitions and mental states are on the whole admirable, not that some qualities over and beyond them which cause them are admirable. Merely hypothetical properties are not intrinsically good or evil, and in so far as a man's character is something over and above his mental states and actions we can conceive it only as a set of hypothetical properties. There *may* indeed be some actual qualities behind the dispositions which make the hypothetical propositions about the latter true, but if there are such qualities it is hardly possible that we are calling them admirable since we have no idea what they are. We might even admit that the determinist is right in saying that a man could not have acted otherwise than he did his character and circumstances being what they were, and yet at the same time deny that his present acts were completely determined by the past. The first proposition would follow because a man's character must be regarded as including all the ways in which he acts under different circumstances and if they were not all specified the account of his character would not be complete, but this is not causal determination. Character thus conceived might still be regarded as the sum of a man's acts of undetermined free will. As even Nowell-Smith, a determinist, admits, the only sense in which character as such can be said to be a cause of conduct is that of 'formal cause'.[1] If A is cowardly, it follows that he will fail to do his duty when this is dangerous, but

[1] *Mind* 1954, p. 335.

only because that is what cowardice means. And even this logical connection, as Nowell-Smith adds, admits of exceptions because, when we ascribe a quality of character to a man, we are not saying that he always behaves in the way suggested but that he often does so. It is only if a man's character is thought of as a set of properties actually existing prior to the actions for which they account that thinking in terms of character leads to determinism, meaning by 'determinism' the view that our acts are all determined entirely by the past.

In spite of all that I have said with a view to reconciling determinism with ethics I think most readers will feel that determinism cannot do justice to the concept of responsibility as present in our ordinary ethical thought. And I admit that, when we blame morally other people or ourselves, we are ordinarily really thinking in an indeterminist (or at least libertarian) rather than in a determinist fashion. But is this an adequate refutation of the determinist? It seems to me a matter of degree. We cannot suppose that all our common-sense ideas are right exactly as they stand, at least in the field of ethics, if only because the common-sense ethics of different communities is not always the same. If a view contradicted the very foundations of ethical thought, as does in my opinion unadulterated naturalism or subjectivism, this would be a most serious objection to it, but if it merely involved a slight variation from our normal way of regarding some ethical concepts the objection would wear a very different guise. Now a view which attacks the indeterminist notion of responsibility seems to lie somewhere in between these two extremes, I think myself nearer the latter than the former, though very many would disagree with me.[1] Considerable weight must be attached to this indeterminist view of responsibility, especially if it should be found common to all societies except when these have been influenced by explicit philosophical or theological arguments to the contrary and if the philosopher cannot get rid of it himself in his everyday thinking about ethical matters, but the determinist may

[1] I agree that I should not be responsible in any important ethical sense if the strength of my desires were fixed by another person irrespective of my previous character and there were a causal law such that I had always to act according to the strongest desire (Wisdom, *Mind and Matter*, p. 116). But neither of these conditions is necessarily involved in determinism.

argue reasonably that he can leave a place for most of what the plain man means by responsibility, and perhaps even all in what he means that is really intelligible.

However, those who feel that the ethical case against determinism is very strong should certainly be indeterminists, since there is no very strong argument on the other side. Personally the chief consideration which inclines me to determinism is that it seems required if the universe is to be a rational system, but this is not an argument which will appeal to many today. Most philosophers do not believe and do not even want to believe that reality constitutes a rational system, and even within the rationalist line of thought the reply may be made that all that the postulate of rationality requires is that everything should have a reason except what is in its nature incapable of having one and that it is not in the nature of the decisions of free will to have a complete reason. It may be added that rationality requires coherence between all the different parts of our thought and that therefore coherence in the scientific sphere might be purchased too dearly at the expense of incoherence with our ethics. And for those who are inclined to think religiously indeterminism has the great advantage over determinism of making it less difficult to reconcile the existence of evil with theism. But it also seems to me that determinism is not *sufficiently* at variance with the way in which we cannot help thinking about ethics in our best and most rational moments to make the discrepancy with common-sense ethics a conclusive argument for indeterminism.

The non-ethical arguments which have recently been advanced against determinism do not impress me as successful. It has recently been argued that the prediction of all events is impossible on principle because the predictive processes could not all be completed before the event predicted or would alter the event that it was intended to predict, but even if these arguments are right, this is not incompatible with the complete causal explanation of all events by what went before, although the explanation could not be given actually or at least published before the occurrence predicted. All that would follow is, as Professor Gallie has suggested,[1] that it would be better to make the crucial issue 'in-

[1] *Free Will and Determinism, Yet Again* (p. 15).

ferability' (from what has happened before) than 'predictability'. The points which worry the indeterminist would be unaffected provided all events could on principle be inferred otherwise than as mere probabilities from the past, even if the inference could never be carried out before they happened. For it would still be the case that they were all fixed by what happened before the agent was born. If A is to justify a certain inference to B, it is settled that B will occur once A has done so. Mr. Mayo[1] has argued that it is logically impossible to give a complete specification and therefore a complete prediction (or I suppose inference of) a particular event, but it seems to me that this argument is open to the following objection. It presupposes that each event has an infinite number of characteristics and then argues that, since we cannot describe an infinite number, we could not predict the event exactly, since only what is describable is predictable. Now this argument depends on all events actually having an infinite number of properties. If an event has only a finite number, it can on principle be described. But we certainly are unable to enumerate an infinite number, therefore the fact that we could not on principle describe them all cannot entail that they could not exist objectively if the central premiss is not to collapse. But if so, why should the fact that we could not predict them all entail that they are not all really determined? If they can exist at all though they are not all describable, why can they not be determined though they are not all describable? Mayo also argues that at least human action must always contain an indescribable element on the ground that, if we set out to record all the events in, say, our own life, we must fail because we could not always record the act of recording but would be involved in an infinite regress. But it seems to me that all this argument shows is not that the events that actually occur in our life are unrecordable but only that, if we recorded them all, we should thereby produce new events beyond them, and if we recorded these, new events *ad infinitum*. But new events will be produced *ad infinitum* in any case if life goes on for ever, and I do not think Mayo would want to say that it was logically impossible that it could go on for ever. There would never be an infinite number of recordings, only a finite number in-

[1] *Ethics and the Moral Life*, pp. 228–30

creasing continually, and nobody supposes this self-contradictory.

But while I cannot rule out at least the possibility of determinism, I think it must be admitted that no determinist can form an idea even in outline of any way in which the complete deduction of a man's future actions from the past could be carried out, although this does not prove that it could not be. We can make a vast number of more or less probable predictions, but for us to be able not only to say that a man will probably give way to a temptation but to predict with certainty that he will it would not be sufficient to know what desires he had, we should need a formula for predicting the intensity of each on a given occasion, and it may be doubted whether this is even conceivable. Whether intensive quantity is something that is on principle capable of being *per se* adequately represented numerically is dubious. Further, if all effects are to be predictable with complete precision in any way that we can envisage, the total effect must always be divisible into a number of isolable factors, each of these factors must be connected according to general causal laws with a factor in an earlier event so that it could be predicted from it, and the results of all the factors must be capable of summation so as to make it possible to deduce the total effect from them. It is not clear whether it is even conceivable that these conditions could be fulfilled in the case of the self, and we have certainly no idea even in outline how the division and prediction could be carried out. But this is not necessarily to say that some superior mind to ours could not discover a way of making the predictions, and after all it is ultimately determination by the past and not predictability, except as a sign of this determination, which presents difficulty to the indeterminist. If all that we do is really settled by what came before, we could never have acted differently in the indeterminist sense, whether what we did could have been on principle predicted by means of causal laws in all instances or not. However it cannot be denied that what I have said considerably weakens the case for determinism, since we cannot conceive causation clearly except in terms of general laws.

But the difficulties are by no means only on one side. We must not slur over the metaphysical difficulties of the indeterminist or libertarian solution, and I should like to make a special appeal to

holders of the view to look whether they can discover a way of removing or lessening these. We shall not have a really plausible statement of indeterminism till this has been done. Metaphysics as an attempt to make statements about what transcends human experience is, rightly or wrongly, in ill repute today, but freedom is a human experience, and there is therefore no *a priori* reason to think that it should be beyond human capacity to produce reasonable and illuminating theories about the relative roles of causation and indeterminism in this experience. The *a priori* reason that Kant had, i.e. that the real self was timeless and therefore unknowable, is rarely accepted today. Yet indeterminists have usually contented themselves with refuting the determinists and have done very little in the way of giving a positive account of just how indeterminism comes in. Two difficulties in particular arise.

(1) The indeterminist has to hold that the self determines how it is to act but does so without determining the action entirely through previously existing characteristics of itself. But does this not involve an illegitimate separation of the self from its properties? A bare substance existing without properties, it is generally admitted, is an impossible abstraction; if so, how can the self as substance apart from its qualities produce any effects at all?

(2) The indeterminist must admit that, while the past does not determine completely what is going to happen, it at least makes more or less probable the occurrence of certain free actions. Free actions, even if they are not completely determined by past causes, must have some causal relation with the past, and if this relation does not make the occurrence of a particular kind of free action certain, it must at least affect its probability. E.g. the more frequently a man gives way to a temptation, the more probable it becomes that he will succumb next time, other things being equal. Therefore, if indeterminism is true, since free acts are affected by causes but not completely determined by them, they should, without being certain, have a degree of probability quite objectively when all the past events relevant to them have occurred. Yet it would be difficult to find students of probability theory today who would admit probability in such a purely objective sense. According to any view of probability accepted by

logicians, as far as I know, at a given time a possible future event is never either probable or improbable except relatively to certain data.

I have thus felt constrained to leave open the important issue between determinism and indeterminism, but I have included a chapter on it because I feel that I have still something to say about the matter which is not without importance. I consider that the indeterminists have commonly been guilty of confusions which make determinism seem a less tolerable theory than it is, but I do not know whether, if all vestiges of confusion were removed, it would still not appear ethically objectionable. At the same time I am sure that the determinist need not, as he too often does, think of action as necessarily determined by the desire felt most strongly, of sin merely as a disease, and blame merely as a social device for preventing actions which have harmful effects.

On the other issues of this book I have taken a firmer line, though the fact that I have refrained from making my work stylistically tiresome by the constant addition of phrases such as 'I think' must not be taken as indicating an undue dogmatism. I am well aware that philosophical theories are highly fallible, but a philosophical writer cannot do anything save express the view which after due consideration he cannot help holding on its merits, and he is only obliged to express uncertainty if he feels doubts more specific than the general ones derived from the liability to error in this field of himself and other men. I think it of very great importance that a view should be developed which does adequate justice both to the practical character and to the rational bases of ethics, and I cannot help feeling that I am on essentially the right lines, whatever the defects of my presentation and whatever the errors in detail.

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