USE OF THESES

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OBJECTIVITY AND MORAL JUDGMENTS

a thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Australian National University

by

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January 1972
This thesis is my own work, and as far as I know all sources have been acknowledged.

[Signature]

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

SENSES OF 'OBJECTIVITY'

H.D. Aiken has written a paper called 'The Concept of Moral Objectivity'. ¹ As the title suggests, it seems to be written on the understanding that there is only one such concept, waiting to be clarified by the first man who can give it accurate expression. But one cannot expect any single answer to the question whether moral judgments are objective; their objectivity has been affirmed and denied in a variety of related and unrelated senses. I want to illustrate this variety by outlining some of the meanings which have been given to the word in these contexts, and to point briefly to some of the connections and distinctions between them, with a view then to isolating the sense of the question with which this thesis is mainly concerned, and indicating my general strategy in approaching it.

Disputes over the objectivity of moral judgments have sometimes been about whether they ascribe to the objects of judgment, properties which are independent of attitudes and feelings. Thus Ross writes:

I have examined whether what may broadly be called the objective or what may be called the subjective view of obligations and values is the true one—whether they are rooted in the nature of things or are names expressive merely of human preferences, emotions, or opinions. 1

To defend the objectivity of moral evaluations in this sense is to deny that they can be analysed in terms of the attitudes or reactions of anyone, real or hypothetical. Moral properties are out there in the world like the shapes and sizes of physical things, and would be so whether or not anyone had any apprehension of them.

There has been some tendency to associate the defence of moral objectivity in this sense, exclusively with that unfashionable school of ethics according to which the basic evaluative term refers to an indefinable 'non-natural' property. For example A.C. Ewing writes:

Both sides in the controversy which we have been discussing (for and against non-natural properties) have generally assumed that ethical and evaluative judgements can only be objective if there are 'non-natural' qualities or relations. 2

But the objectivity of moral judgments in this sense could be defended by ethical theorists of very different leanings. A moral naturalist who held, for example, that 'right' meant 'productive of as much happiness as possible', would agree that moral judgments ascribe properties which are independent of the attitudes or reactions of anybody. The view that the properties in the world to which moral terms refer are natural


empirical properties is accommodated, as well as the view that they are 'non-natural'.

A variation of this first account of objectivity is to be found in Edwards' *The Logic of Moral Discourse*. He writes: 'The sentences in which ['good'] is used as a predicate are, frequently at any rate, objective claims and their meaning tends to vary with the person ... who employs them'. ¹ He illustrates this by pointing out that in one person's mouth the statement 'X is a good person' may express in brief that X is gentle and loving, in another person's that X is devout, chaste, and a strict disciplinarian. Both have made objective claims (about empirical matters) but quite different claims.

A second major way of taking the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity is set out in this passage:

The deepest issue, and the most violent controversy, in contemporary moral philosophy is between those who assert, and those who deny, that moral judgments can be true or false. This difference can indeed be taken as the simplest way of defining the meaning of the pair of correlative terms 'objective' and 'subjective'. What is objective is capable of being true or false, of being a statement, a belief or opinion; what is subjective is not capable of a truth-value, but is an expression of some psychological state.

Of course statements and expressions of psychological states are not mutually exclusive, but this does not obscure the distinction made here.

This is very different from the first major way of taking the distinction, according to which any ethical theory reducing moral judgments to assertions about the emotions of the utterer would represent morality as subjective. The statement


that an action horrifies me is no less true or false than any other. On Mayo's account moral utterances are subjective only if they are not statements about anything, but another form of utterance such as command or exclamation.

These seem to be the two most common senses in which the objectivity of ethics has been asserted and denied. They are not by any means, however, the only senses. Maurice Mandelbaum in *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience*, writing about moral attitudes rather than judgments, denies that they are subjective, and means by this merely that they cannot be described without mentioning their objects.

Attitudes, in our usage, are simply modes of experiencing. As such, they belong to the experiencing subject. However, they are not to be conceived of as merely 'subjective' states, for they contain a relational element. To speak of an attitude is to say something about the relation in which a person stands to an object which he experiences. 1

Thus disapproval of abortion is not merely subjective, because one cannot even mention it without referring to something, namely abortion, which is distinct from the subject to whom the attitude belongs. According to this usage, the only states of mind which could be called merely subjective would be moods, say of sadness or elation, which were not directed towards any object at all. No doubt moral attitudes are not like that. But people who deny the objectivity of morality would scarcely claim that they are.

According to the main senses of 'objective' so far discussed, objectivity is a feature which can be ascribed either to all moral judgments or to none of them. However, it is also possible to take the word as a term of approbation, discriminating among moral judgments, and applicable only to those which meet certain standards. Roy Wood Sellars writes

that, as applied to value judgments in general, objectivity 'is a doing justice to what is involved. Moral objectivity, for instance, consists in setting aside private involvements and stressing reciprocity and long-run consequences'.

Not all moral judgments are objective in this sense.

This, of the various senses of the word, has most foundation in common use. It is in this sense that one would criticise a legal decision for lacking objectivity, or call for an objective enquiry into a scandal. It is worth examining this sense of the word as applied to morality, and considering its relations with the sense which is a matter of truth or falsity. However I shall return to this in the third chapter, so it will not be explored here.

Of the accounts of moral objectivity which I have encountered, the least ambitious is that developed by Aiken. He begins by criticising other ways of understanding the concept:

Why ... should it be assumed in advance of analysis that moral judgments cannot be objective unless such words as 'right' and 'good' are terms of 'objective reference' or unless such judgments are true or false statements about something called 'objective reality'? ... Why should we assume that the proper application of the concept of objectivity in all contexts involves the notion of a consensus of 'competent' 'rational', or 'ideal' observers? And if not, why must we assume that meaningful application of the concept involves definitive disciplinary procedures or rules to which anyone who sets up for a moralist is logically bound to submit?


One inevitably begins to wonder what there will be remaining for objectivity to mean. The answer is given in this passage:

The ordinary principle of objectivity thus prescribes, not that we look beyond the moral life itself for a ground of criticism, but only that we search within it for the soberest and steadiest judgment of which, in the light of all relevant obligations, we are capable .... The only principle of objectivity in morals is, then, essentially a principle of reconsideration. 1

As Aiken uses the word, objectivity is a property not of all moral judgments, but only of those which meet a standard. But the requirements are not very stringent; an objective judgment is one which has been reconsidered and is open to further consideration. However there are no canons governing what a person must consider in his reconsideration. On the related subject of moral truth Aiken writes:

To say, then, that a moral statement is true is simply: (1) to reaffirm it and (2) to avow that it meets whatever tests of objectivity are deemed proper by the moral judge himself. He who affirms that a moral proposition is true when it will not abide such tests, speaks falsely. No moral judge, in affirming the truth of a particular judgment, presupposes that anyone else must agree with him, regardless of his own moral obligations. For in morals there can be no guarantee that all objective judges will acknowledge the same principles of moral obligation. 2

True or objective moral judgments are those to which the utterers are prepared to adhere after reconsideration, during which they have taken into account such considerations as they themselves think appropriate.

1 Ibid., p.97.
2 Ibid., p.103.
This must be the minimal content which could be given to the concepts. The claim of the ethical objectivist is usually taken as much more substantial.

THE AIMS OF THE THESIS

I have shown some of the variety of ways of understanding the objectivity of moral judgments. Amid this richness, perhaps confusion of meanings, attention will be focussed on one; I shall take it that a class of statements, identified by their using predicate-terms of a distinctive kind, are objective if there are ways of settling disputes about them. F.N. Sibley uses the word similarly in discussing the related topic of objectivity and aesthetic judgments: 'With objective matters there must be proofs, decision procedures, ways of establishing truth and falsity. Where proof is impossible, there is no objectivity'. ¹

A strong method of settlement would establish that one of a group of conflicting statements was correct and the others mistaken. A weaker test might be able to rule out some as mistaken, but unable to isolate one as uniquely correct; some disputes would still be open to settlement, and hence a degree of objectivity would exist.

A satisfactory way of settling disputes must be public and impersonal, not open to acceptance or rejection according to private taste or feeling, or cultural background. The claim must be that this is the test for

questions of the type, not merely that it is the test used or proposed by an individual or group. Scheffler writes similarly of the concept of objectivity in scientific thought:

A fundamental feature of science is its ideal of objectivity, an ideal that subjects all scientific statements to the test of independent and impartial criteria, recognising no authority of persons in the realm of cognition. ¹

There is a further restriction, a breach of which will be pointed out in the third chapter. The method of deciding questions within the area must not depend on the acceptance of a statement or principle which is itself within the area the objectivity of which is under consideration. There must be no circularity involved in the test.

Of course such procedures might exist without it being possible in practice to employ them in satisfactory settlements of all, or even of most questions in a particular class. The impossibility of measuring the temperature at the centre of the planet Mars casts no doubt on the objectivity of statements about temperature in general. However it would be odd to claim that there was an appropriate test for settling questions of a certain sort, if no such questions were in fact successfully settled by it.

In insisting that a criterion of truth or falsity must be effective in settling some disputes, it is important not to insist on too much. If settlement is identified

with complete consensus, it would be impossible to regard any but the most trivial issues as settled. There are still a few people who, although aware of the evidence and, seemingly, capable of appreciating its significance, insist that the earth is flat; but if any substantial disputes could be regarded as settled, this is one. Settlement requires general agreement, but not complete consensus.

The public among whom this agreement must hold is not necessarily the general public. Tests for roundness or flatness, particularly when applied to objects more easily measured than the earth, would be understood and accepted by a very wide public and, when applied, could be expected to produce a very extensive consensus about the result. but other sorts of objective questions are in a very different position. Consider a question about the structure and composition of quasars. The vast majority of normal rational people, presented with the available evidence on such a question, would not appreciate the links between the evidence and alternative conclusions, and would have no idea whether or not to agree with the answer allegedly supported by the facts. The agreement which the tests could be expected to elicit would be an agreement among a tiny fraction of the population.

One might still say that such a question is an objective matter because if certain conditions were fulfilled any rational person would agree on how to find an answer, and would agree on the answer given certain evidence. But in difficult technical areas one's
conditions must become very stringent and specific. It is not sufficient to be rational and aware of the evidence. One must also be intelligent enough, and at home in the field of knowledge within which the question arises; conditions which only a small minority could meet. But nobody would conclude from this that statements on such issues cannot be shown to be correct or mistaken. The objectivity of a set of issues depends on agreement only among those competent to have opinions on the subject, about criteria and the results of applying them.

How broad an agreement about moral issues and modes of settlement would one expect, considering the nature of the field, before regarding moral judgments objective? A. Phillips Griffiths takes a strong line on this:

Obviously, we can speak of objective matters only in respect of matters which are publicly determinable, where we can talk of what would be judged by any reasonable and careful observer rather than what appears to be the case to some individual because of peculiarities of his own. ... The demand of objectivity in ethics may then be put ... as the demand that the truth of any moral judgment ... shall be determinable by any rational observer who is apprised of the facts.

Concerning objective matters in general this is too strong. Whether it is too strong concerning moral issues is another question. A few moral problems arise out of technical backgrounds, but on the whole they occur to everyone, not only to experts in a specialised field, and they arise out of ordinary life without any complex framework of theory. No special capacities or long training are needed to

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come to grips with them. I think, therefore, that if moral judgments can be called objective there should be a method of settling disputes which would be very widely acknowledged and which, when applied, could produce wide agreement about conclusions.

We would not expect that all, or even most disagreements in an area could in practice be settled, before regarding those statements as objective. It is more important that there be general agreement on what sort of evidence counts towards an answer. One should, I think, be content in morality, as Sibley is in aesthetics, with a test procedure which would in practice dispose conclusively of only a minority of disputes:

The existence of a procedure might suffice for objectivity even though (a) it was complex and hard to apply, (b) it was seldom pursued and applied, and (c) it would settle only some proportion of cases conclusively. Then disagreements might conceivably abound, some genuinely irresolvable, many others in fact often unresolved; but a realm of objectivity might be made possible by some limited (not widespread) actual agreement including some settled and virtually indisputable cases, together with a perhaps elaborate and hard to describe procedure that offers the possibility ... of attaining wider agreement. 1

Disagreements on specific issues are not especially significant, as they can arise from many causes. The agreement which is most vital is about the tests; it must be recognised that if certain procedures were carried out, with certain results, the disputed question would be settled. Thus the question whether colonialism was beneficial or harmful could be an objective question, regardless of the

passion and confused evidence surrounding it, as long as one could get a consensus about what was a benefit and what was a harm, and on the weighting of benefits and harms.

The need for a basis of agreement for objectivity must not be given the wrong emphasis; there might be a uniformity of response without objectivity. If people used the words 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' only to express their own personal reactions (in fact the words have other uses), and if everyone found a certain wallpaper pattern pleasant, this agreement would not make the pleasantness of the wallpaper an objective fact. Given this usage, anyone who thought differently about it could not be regarded as mistaken; he would just have unusual tastes. Questions about the objective pleasantness of the pattern, and of the erroneousness of conflicting opinions, could arise only if the word 'pleasant' were used in a different way, for example to ascribe a disposition to please most people, which would allow for the settlement of disputes about what is pleasant.

The core of a subjectivist position in ethics is the opinion that no moral belief can be shown to be correct or mistaken. Thus Ayer writes: 'If now I ... say, "Stealing is wrong", I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning - that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false'.

Denials that such statements are objective most commonly amount to denials that test procedures are available:

'We can now see why it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgments. It is .. because they have no objective validity whatsoever! 1

One can reasonably discard the verificationist account of meaning which flavours Ayer's discussion of this topic, while retaining the identification of testability and objectivity, as in this more recent statement of the position of the moral sceptic:

It would be impossible to prove that anything was immoral, even if it were, whereas if you recommend something to a man as being to his interest ... one at least knows how to set about showing him that it is. 2

Such assertions as those which I have quoted suggest a comparison between moral judgments and other types of statement which are taken to be unquestionably objective. The obvious candidates for selection as paradigms of objectivity are empirical assertions of one type or another. The subjectivists' claim must be that examination of such a comparison reveals that analogous procedures to those which are used to settle the paradigmatically objective questions are simply not applicable to moral disputes. The objectivist, if he is to meet this challenge directly, must attempt to show that if one really explores such a comparison one finds that moral judgments do not suffer by it: that disagreements over them are open to settlement.

1 Ibid., p.108.

to an extent and in a way comparable to disagreements over empirical statements of a certain type.

I take as the models for comparison, various classes of statements of empirical fact, rather than conclusions which are derivable from a deductive system such as a branch of mathematics. For Descartes and Spinoza mathematical systems provided the paradigms of objectivity, but now they would be more usually seen as explorations of what may be deduced from chosen sets of definitions and axioms, rather than as articulations of eternal and self-evident truth.

There have been a number of attempts, by no means ended, as the following chapters will illustrate, to argue that moral judgments have as strong a claim to objectivity as empirical assertions of one sort or another. This is one major approach to the defence of the cognitive status of morality. It can take a number of forms, depending on the class of empirical assertions which is chosen for comparison. The argument can also take either of two directions. Positively, it can attempt to show, taking a certain class of empirical statements, that moral disputes are open to settlement by methods analogous to those used for disputes within that class, and so that morality is equally well off as regards objectivity. A negative argument is designed to show that the chosen class of empirical assertions are open to scepticism to the same extent as moral judgments are, so that the latter are no worse off as regards objectivity.

My plan in this thesis is to survey a range of comparisons, on various levels of generality, between
classes of moral and empirical statements, to determine whether they give support to the objectivist or the subjectivist position. The second and third chapters are devoted to examining two possible ways of drawing an analogy between judgments such as 'That action is wrong' and statements which ascribe simple sensory properties to things, such as 'That book is red'. I shall consider the plausibility of the claim that there is a test of the truth of statements of the former type, analogous to tests for statements of the latter sort.

In the fourth chapter I shall examine the comparison between moral judgments and empirical assertions such as 'This is a table', which differ from the perceptual judgments discussed in the previous chapters in that the predicate terms are governed by criteria; they are correctly used only of things which possess certain more elementary properties. Again my interest is in the claim that moral judgments can be shown to be correct or mistaken no less conclusively than statements of the latter type, and in much the same way.

The fifth chapter is devoted to exploring a comparison on a different level. Those examined in the previous chapters might be seen as misconceived; it is the possibility of showing a moral principle to be correct or mistaken with which one should be concerned, rather than staying on the level of statements about particular cases. It might be argued that disputes about moral principles are at least no less open to settlement than disputes about empirical principles and theories. This suggestion gains most of its interest and its support from recent attempts
to weaken the claim of scientific theories and principles to objectivity; I shall consider whether, in spite of these attempts, they retain a claim to objectivity which moral principles and normative theories cannot have.

The last two chapters are concerned with an analogy on another level again. I shall examine the comparison between basic moral generalisations considered as principles of reasoning, and principles governing inductive reasoning to empirical conclusions. Again my aim is to consider whether disputes in these two areas are equally open to settlement: whether moral principles can be shown to be correct or mistaken to whatever extent inductive principles can, and by similar methods.

I do not aim, of course, to survey all possible types of argument for the objectivity of moral judgments; such arguments do not necessarily take the form of an analogy with some kind of empirical assertion. This is, however, one important style of defence for the objectivity of moral judgments, and my intention is to examine it, in its various forms, with a view to seeing how sound a defence it is.
CHAPTER II

THE NORMAL OBSERVER

THE ANALOGY WITH PERCEPTUAL JUDGMENTS

What reasons might one use in arguing against the objectivity of moral judgments? The persistence of disagreements is one. The mere existence of moral disputes is not very significant, as many unquestionably objective matters have been disputed. However moral disputes about such issues as abortion are not readily explainable by the existence of evidence known to one party but not the other; they can persist among equally well-informed people to an extent that factual disagreements do not. There are other indications of the inconclusiveness of the facts. We, who disapprove of slavery, could not know as much about its effects as slave-owners would have done. We would not on this account defer to their judgments on the issue.

A second (and related) reason is this. The meanings of moral terms do not allow one to show that a dissenter is mistaken by referring to empirical features of the object of judgment, and to a rule of meaning. By contrast we can show that a certain figure is a quadrilateral by pointing out that it is a plane figure bounded by four straight lines, and that 'quadrilateral' means 'plane figure bounded by four straight lines'.

A third fact which might be seen as telling against the objectivity of moral judgments is this. (It applies
in an area such as aesthetics also). It seems necessary, in defining at least some of the special terms used ('despicable', 'elegant') to refer to experiencing subjects of a certain type. That is, the sense of these judgments is subject-dependent in a way that is not true of a judgment that an object is a quadrilateral.

However these features have parallels with certain types of perceptual judgments: statements ascribing simple sensory properties to things; the obvious examples are colour-descriptions. Here also there is a kind of persistent disagreement: some people are colour-blind and cannot be brought to see all the colours that most people see. Secondly it is not possible to show that a dissenter is mistaken in identifying a colour by referring to more elementary properties and to a rule of meaning linking a colour term to those properties. Thirdly colour terms are subject-dependent; unlike terms for shape or size they depend for their sense on reference to observers with a certain sort of visual ability.

There are, of course, awkward intermediate cases where no colour term is clearly applicable, but as a class colour judgments are undoubtedly objective. The features mentioned in the last paragraph do nothing to prevent many disputes about colours from being eminently open to settlement. In this chapter I want to consider whether there is any hope of developing this analogy and arguing that disputes about morality can be settled in a way not basically very different from the way used for settling disagreements about colours.
I shall begin by considering briefly what constitutes an adequate proof that a statement ascribing a colour to an object is true or false. Colour terms have a much longer history than the wave theory of light, or spectrometers, and statements in which they are employed were surely not granted the benefit of verifiability by developments in physics. Let us therefore initially leave out of consideration the possibility of testing colours by means of instruments, and ask what other means are, and always have been, available. The only other possible test of the colour of a surface or a light depends on the way it appears to people. This does not, however, exclude the possibility of a distinction between what only looks red and what really is red; that is, it does not prevent colour judgments from being objective. The real colour of a surface is related to the way it appears under particular conditions: at reasonably close range in ordinary daylight. This makes it possible to say that it was a mistake to describe a wall as red; it only looked red in the firelight, and it can be seen now that its real colour is white. But not just anybody's impressions at close range in clear sunlight will serve as an adequate test of the real colour of a surface. We would

1 What would count as a reasonably close range varies with the object in question; one does not inspect gemstones and mountains from the same distance.
mistrust the reactions of anyone who was dazzled, drugged or drunk, and there are some people, colour-blind in various ways, whose reactions are always discounted. The final test of the truth of a colour description, then, involves consulting the reactions, under standard conditions, of the normal observer.

Identifying members of the class of normal observers is not an impossibly complicated matter. Apart from establishing that an individual whose reactions we are to consult is not suffering any temporary disabilities, we must ensure that he is not colour-blind. The standard way of settling this is not by conducting a physical examination of his retina to determine whether he has all the necessary receptors, but to test his performance in distinguishing between surfaces on the basis of colour. This must be the ultimate test, even if more convenient techniques were discovered for screening people for colour-blindness by physical examination. To decide that such physiological tests were reliable, one would need to be able to compare their results with those of a performance test, in order to determine whether a particular retinal structure was always associated with defective colour vision; thus one must assume an independent test for colour blindness in identifying some structures rather than others as defective. People with defective colour vision are those who consistently fail to distinguish by colour certain things which other people, those of the normal group, can consistently distinguish by colour.

The group with normal colour vision, those whose
distinctions are acknowledged as correct, can be specified in two different ways. They are the majority, and they are the group whose members can distinguish by colour more different categories of things than the remainder can. The world might, of course, have been arranged otherwise: those whom we class as suffering from red-green colour-blindness might have been in the majority.

F.N. Sibley, writing on colours and on possible analogies between them and aesthetic properties, discusses the constitution of the group with normal colour vision, and emphasises the importance of its having the latter qualification, rather than its being in the majority:

'The fully colour-sighted are those exhibiting the maximum or most detailed discrimination-agreement. That is, the "is" of colour attribution, in our language, is linked to this group'. 1 He suggests that this is no mere convention, and that the same group would be regarded by common consent as providing the test of the truth of colour-descriptions, even if they were a small minority, the rest being colour-blind in one way or another.

There would then be patchy areas of agreement, separate groups and sub-groups, but one small nucleus regularly, at their best, making more detailed agreed discriminations than any other. The partly colour-blind majority might even find a more extensive agreement among themselves, though a less finely discriminated one; but none of this need cast doubt on the objectivity of colours... It is not the majority being colour-sighted that permits a property language for colours, but the existence of a nucleus (large or small) making regular, detailed and closely identical distinctions. 2

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2 Sibley, 'Objectivity and Aesthetics', ibid. supp. vol. XLII, pp. 41-42.
It is clearly true that under these circumstances people need not give up regarding colour judgments as true or false, provided that there is one group whose judgments are generally acknowledged as the test of their correctness. Whether the group so acknowledged would inevitably be the most discriminating group, rather than the less discriminating majority, is another question. Sibley’s reason for thinking this is based on the practical importance of distinguishing things by colour. He allows that for some perceptual properties ‘the accepted language of attribution, and hence the acknowledged properties of things, might be linked to less than maximum discrimination’, but asserts that such a situation ‘can occur only where finer discrimination has little practical utility and the majority are consequently not forced to recognize their limited capacities’, 1 and that this situation could not occur in the case of colours.

This seems questionable. As matters stand it is of great importance to be able to distinguish, for example, between red and green; difficulties in dealing with traffic lights, among other things, force the few without this ability to recognize their limitations and to acknowledge that those who can perceive this colour distinction are correct. However if only a few could distinguish these colours, the ability to make this distinction would have to be of much less importance in ordinary life; those unable to make it would be much less aware of this as a deficiency.

1 Sibley, 'Colours', ibid. vol. LXVIII, p.163.
It seems quite possible that the language of colour attribution would be tied to the distinctions made by a large enough majority, even though some other people could distinguish more colours. Indeed this appears to me the more plausible guess about the way in which colour terms would be used under the conditions imagined, for a reason which I shall explain several pages later.

The objectivity of colour judgments is guaranteed, not by the congruence of everyone's colour perceptions, but by agreement, reflected in the general use of colour terms, about whose perceptions are definitive. With this type of test for statements about them, colour properties must be regarded as dispositional. A red surface is one which, under standard conditions, would give to normal observers a certain kind of sense impression, on the basis of which they would class it with tomatoes, not grass, bluebells and so on.

This account of colours, it seems, does not satisfy everyone. Some want to construe colours as physical properties of things, definable without mentioning observers of any sort. An example of this may be found in a paper by D.M. Armstrong, in which the urge to give colours an observer-independent status is very prominent: 'For surely the colour of a surface is an intrinsic, as opposed to a relational, property of the surface?' 1

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As a consequence he construes colour statements in such a way that the ultimate test of their accuracy must be the reactions not of a normal observer, but of a spectrometer:

The real colour of a surface is determined by the nature of the light-waves emitted from that surface. If a surface looks red, and is emitting light-waves of a sort or sorts characteristic of red surfaces, it is red. If it looks red, but is not emitting such a sort or sorts of light-waves, it only looks red. 1

He distinguishes between a transient sense of 'red', in which an object is red only while it is actually emitting light in the appropriate wavelength range, and a standing sense of 'red', in which an object is red if it would emit such wavelengths under standard illumination. The spectrometer readings remain the final test in both cases; no observer, normal or otherwise, perceives light wavelengths.

Now it is obvious that one would need to rely initially on another test of colours (presumably the reactions of the normal observer) in order to discover that a certain range of light wavelengths was associated with the colour red. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the reactions of the normal observer would have to remain the final criterion; we might come to regard the instrument as providing the final test, and to correct the normal observer occasionally by its readings. This has happened with the pitch of sounds. Initially it must have been necessary to rely on some other test of pitch (ultimately the judgment of listeners with good pitch discrimination) in order to arrive at the conclusion that there is a correlation between particular pitches

1 Ibid., p. 124.
and particular frequencies of vibration. This has not prevented us from moving on to consider instrumental readings of vibration frequency as the ultimate test of the pitch of sounds; people would be happy to say on the evidence of such readings that one note really had a slightly higher pitch than another, even though nobody could detect the difference. Indeed, a particular pitch is normally defined in terms of a frequency of vibration, the listener with a good ear for music being left out of consideration. Armstrong's suggestion is that for definition and for testing we omit reference to the normal observer of colours also, and regard the real colour of a surface as determined by (indeed as constituted by) the wavelength of the light emitted from it, so that colours may be treated as physical, observer-independent, intrinsic properties of surfaces.

It is, of course, conceivable that people should come to use colour words in this way; the question is whether such a change as Armstrong proposes offers any advantages. In fact it would have some highly unwelcome results, which I shall indicate briefly.

What is heard as a note of the same pitch by the normal listener is always a sound with the same, or nearly the same, predominant vibration frequency. For this reason it is possible to use as one's test of pitch an instrumental reading instead of the judgment of reliable listeners, and still retain the same pitch distinctions which had been made before the introduction of this test; it simply becomes possible to make finer pitch distinctions over a wider frequency range, with greater consistency. The situation with colours is quite different. There is no one wavelength
or combination of wavelengths associated with the normal observer's impression of a particular colour. A certain shade of red, which may be associated with light of a certain pure wavelength, can be matched exactly by mixing light of several other wavelengths; there is, in fact, an indefinite number of such combinations which give to the normal observer indistinguishable colour impressions. 1

If we take a selection of the objects which, under standard conditions, are seen as sharing this colour, and analyse the light reflected from their surfaces, some might, improbably, be reflecting the pure wavelength, others will be reflecting various combinations of different wavelengths. What shall we do with these results, if we are to adopt Armstrong's suggestion that the real colours of surfaces be regarded as depending directly on the wavelengths of the light emitted from them?

We could conclude that the normal observer is simply mistaken about the colours of these things; they seem the same, but the instrument shows that they are really different. However if real colour distinctions are construed in this way they will be of little practical value. Consider some of the situations in which we want to pick out two colours as the same or different: matching shades of paint, deciding which socks to wear with which tie, or which curtains to hang with the carpet, choosing different colours for files as a sorting device in a filing system, and so on. These are all cases which will involve people looking at the surfaces in question and seeing them

1 See Keith Campbell, 'Colours', ibid., pp. 136-138.
as matching or contrasting. The 'real colour distinctions' as revealed by the spectrometer will be of little use in these circumstances since, while they will never have us saying that two things have the same colour which look different to most people, they would often class as different two colours which to most people look the same. When the practical point of classifying things by colour was to select things which will look the same or different to most people, as it usually would be, we would have to reject the instrumental classification and fall back on the 'apparent colour distinctions' based on the reactions of the normal observer. Colour classifications based on similarity of light wavelength would not serve most of the purposes for which we employ colour terms.

For similar reasons it seems to me far more likely, if the situation imagined by Sibley had occurred, in which a group now considered defective in colour vision were in the majority, that the vocabulary of colours would be tied to the distinctions made by that less discriminating majority. It is no mere convention that the most numerous group is regarded as normal.

One could, of course, try to avoid this problem created by reliance on an instrumental test. One could identify as having the same shade not only those surfaces reflecting one single wavelength, but also those reflecting any from a list of combinations of wavelengths which give normal observers similar impressions. But a determinate list could not be made. It would need to conclude with the addition, 'and any other combination which gives the same impression'. But this addition would involve restoring the reactions of the normal observer as the final test of the truth of colour judgments.
SIMILAR TESTS FOR MORAL JUDGMENTS?

I want now to move on to the question with which this chapter is mainly concerned: can the objectivity of moral judgments be defended by developing an analogy with perceptual judgments? This would involve showing that there is a procedure for settling moral disputes similar to that available for settling disagreements about colours.

The example of an analogy of this kind which comes most readily to mind (although it was preceded by the work of the 18th century moral sense theorists) is G.E. Moore's comparison of the status of the terms 'good' and 'yellow'. He did not develop the analogy to describe the test for the truth of moral judgments which it would require, but it is clearly to a procedure like that applicable to disputes about colours that he would be committed; so would be anyone who wished to regard moral judgments as objective while construing moral terms as dispositional, concerning the reactions of people, and so as related to terms such as 'exciting' and 'boring'.

According to any such account one should be able to verify or falsify a moral judgment about a particular case directly, without using any normative principles. Just as one establishes that a leaf is green by noting the normal observer's reaction to it, not by reasoning from the rule that all leaves are green, so one could show that a specific cruel action was wrong without needing to use the rule that all cruelty is wrong. This direct procedure would enable one to pass by some well-known problems in the defence
of a moral judgment. Sibley, in exploring the analogies between perceptual and aesthetic judgments, writes:

Many philosophers, when discussing aesthetics (or ethics), speak of colours as properties, while denying that there are aesthetic properties with anything like the same status; their opponents would be content to establish that aesthetic 'properties' approached whatever degree of objectivity colours have.

No doubt many defenders of the objectivity of moral judgments would be satisfied with a similar conclusion.

Sibley addresses himself to this question:

If people deny an objectivity, a possibility of truth and error, to aesthetic descriptions which they allow to colour judgments, it is worth trying to see whether the differences warrant drawing such a sharp and crucial line.

He concludes that the sharp distinction is not justified: that in principle a picture can be shown to be really graceful or garish as conclusively and in much the same way as a leaf is shown to be really green:

The 'is' of attribution (for colours) is tied, for obvious reasons, to the group ... able to agree regularly on the maximum of distinctions. ... We do this with aesthetic terms too. Some people, I called them the 'nucleus' or 'elite' - tend ... to agree on many more detailed discriminations ... than others ever do. Just as we do not select the colour-sighted by physiological examination, so we do not select critics by 'ideal spectator' criteria: we select both by performance.

He suggests that aesthetic descriptions can be correct or mistaken, the test being the agreement of those who work consistently with the most elaborate set of categories, as the colour-sighted are those who work with the most

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 47.
elaborate set of colour categories. In discussing the
tenability of a similar view about morality I shall consider
in passing some of the points which Sibley makes in
arguing for his conclusion.

The analogy can be clarified in this way. An object
is really red if it gives to normal observers a certain sort
of sense impression, on the basis of which they class it with
ripe tomatoes. Similarly, so it is suggested, a work of art
is really graceful if it gives to the appropriate observers
a certain sort of satisfaction, on the basis of which they
class it with a model of grace such as Mozart's fortieth
symphony. We are considering the suggestion that an action
is established as despicable if it elicits the right
unfavourable response from the right observers, and on the
basis of that response they class it with Judas' profitable
venture.

What differences between moral and colour judgments
might support the view that there is no test for the
former analogous to the test used for the latter? One
disanalogy is discussed by Sibley, as it arises for
aesthetic descriptions as well. When we judge an object to
be red the conclusion is not reached on the basis of other
features which we have seen; the colour is simply perceived.
But moral and aesthetic properties are not like that. If a
picture is graceful this is because of some of its more
directly observable features. An action is judged despicable
on the grounds of its having certain empirical features.
For this reason there is something initially implausible
in the suggestion that the ultimate proof of a moral or
aesthetic judgment depends on the agreement of any group,
however qualified. If a judgment backed by reasons is to be correct or mistaken, this must be because the reasons are sound or unsound, not because the right people agree or disagree. Collecting opinions may provide a useful test, but not a final proof, any more than it provides a proof that the earth is spherical.

There is some force in this objection, but not a great deal. Moral terms are not like 'red' in every way, but they are not in every way like 'spherical' either. The relation between sphericalness and adequate evidence for it may be stated as a simple rule of meaning. But there is no one set of features an action must have in order to be despicable; although one would justify using the word by reference to some of the action's features, one cannot go on to say that 'despicable' means having these features.

An analogy might be found in a legal decision which is based on evidence but not entailed by it. To support calling the judgment correct or mistaken we would refer to certain features of the evidence. But it is hard to see how to produce a final proof except by showing that this is or is not the conclusion reached on the evidence by rational fair-minded people. Such an analogue makes it easier to accept the suggestion that the ultimate test of moral judgments involves not simply an appeal to the facts, but to the way in which they are assessed by the appropriate people.

The next disanalogy to be considered poses a more serious problem for any attempt to put moral judgments and colour judgments on the same level as regards objectivity. The colour distinctions which a man makes are controlled
by the physical characteristics of his eyes and related structures. His moral distinctions are notoriously affected by another type of factor: the social climate in which he lives. New Guinea headhunters see nothing wrong with what we would see as a particularly outrageous form of murder, and many societies have regarded infanticide as needing little or no excuse. Cultural variation in moral opinions is too obvious to need emphasis, and has no parallel with colours.

This is a problem for anyone who wants to refer moral disputes for settlement to a group of standard judges. If one claims that headhunting is objectively wrong, one is committed to claiming that dissenters are mistaken. What is to be done with the whole societies who have seen nothing wrong in it? They must be ruled out, as the colour-blind are ruled out; but on what grounds? We are tempted to say that their moral reactions have been distorted by the society in which they live.

But this is open to criticism. To use the 'distortion' metaphor of the moral education of cannibals is to suggest that there is a set of moral beliefs or reactions which is natural and universal. This would be a very shaky claim. It

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1 In The Mind of Primitive Man, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 210, Franz Boas comments on colour terms in different languages, pointing out that various societies have various sets of terms, some much less rich than ours, some involving classifications which cut across ours. However these linguistic differences do nothing to prevent people from sorting objects for colour in the same way, any more than we are prevented from sorting objects into various shades of yellow by the lack of a special term for each of the shade-categories we are using.
would look especially dubious because one would inevitably think of 'normal' moral reactions as very similar to one's own. The headhunter may agree that his moral attitudes are shaped by his society, but he can point out with justice that our own are in the same position. People are not to be excluded as incompetent judges on the ground that their attitudes have been moulded by social education, or there would be no normal group left.

There is a problem, then, about identifying the members of the standard group, which does not exist in the case of colour judgments. There are not whole societies who see ripe tomatoes and grass as similar in colour because they have been brought up to do so. A decision to recognise as authoritative the agreement of one's own group is an arbitrary choice which other people will make in favour of their own.

The influence of culture and experience on evaluation is not all of one sort. I want to point out two ways in which this influence can operate, without implying that these are the only two ways, or that they are separated by a clear-cut distinction. Let us begin with aesthetic rather than moral judgment. Certain sorts of experience and knowledge are needed even to come to grips with certain sorts of artistic performance, an essential preliminary step to finding them graceful or clumsy, moving or superficial. In defending the objectivity of aesthetic judgments, Sibley considers and rejects the argument that, because they are affected by this type of influence, their claim to objectivity is weakened:

As jokes and humour depend on all sorts of knowledge of human nature and customs, so does the realization that passages in Lear and Othello are particularly moving. One could not expect this recognition from
a child or a person lacking certain broadly specifiable experience and development. It is odd therefore that this relevance of one's mental condition should be cited as a main reason why they cannot be objective matters. 1

A person whose experience had provided him with no understanding of sexual jealousy would have a thoroughly defective grasp of what some sections of Othello are about, and so would be in a poor position to evaluate them. In general, anyone who is poorly equipped to realise what an artist is attempting to do will be equally poorly equipped to gauge his success. It seems reasonable, as Sibley's remarks suggest, to regard deviant opinions expressed by such people as irrelevant.

Another type of cultural influence on aesthetic judgments manifests itself in changing fashions. Melodramas which Victorian audiences found deeply moving are sometimes now staged as comedies. It is not that we fail to understand the conventions or intentions of the minor Victorian dramatists; we just have no taste for that sort of thing. Cultural influences of this sort, and resulting variations in opinion, are obviously relevant to the objectivity of aesthetic judgments, and Sibley makes no attempt to deny this. An acknowledgement of their relevance is implicit in his insistence that a final proof of the truth of an aesthetic judgment must be an agreement among the most discriminating group which spans a long period, and so has shown itself able to survive changes of taste. One might add that the agreement which

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verifies an aesthetic appraisal should span cultures as well as time.

There are parallels in the case of moral judgments to the two types of cultural influence on aesthetic judgments which I have mentioned. Consider first the influence which results in non-comprehension. A person brought up where land, housing and food are held in common might find initial difficulty in grasping the concept of private property and its importance in our sort of society, comparable to the difficulty which most westerners find in coming to grips with Japanese music, or a child with Othello. Any deviant judgments made by such a person about stealing may reasonably be ignored without prejudice to the objectivity of moral judgments. One might say that under the circumstances in question, stealing is nevertheless wrong, and that the dissenters would see this if they had a proper grasp of the social and physical conditions of life of the people involved. This would be like insisting that a section of Othello is really powerful, and that a child who does not see this would do so if he were sufficiently mature and experienced to know what sexual jealousy is.

But not all the adverse judgments passed by one group or age about another, can be represented as arising from such lack of comprehension. There are also parallels to variation in aesthetic taste. Take as a single example the practice of slavery, of which we disapprove, but which people in the many slave-owning societies have considered quite justified. This difference in evaluation cannot rest wholly, or mainly, on one side's inadequate grasp of what slavery involves. No doubt some people appreciate
the causes and effects of slavery in a particular society better than others, but we would dispute the morality of the practice, not primarily because we grasp these facts better (or worse) than the slave-owners do, but because we assess their importance differently.

Just as, if changes in taste left no aesthetic judgments (or scarcely any) standing from generation to generation, the defence of aesthetic judgments as objective would seem impossible, so moral objectivity requires that this type of influence should not produce cultural variations in moral attitudes over too wide a range of moral issues which are similarly understood on both sides. While it would be foolish to ignore cultural variations in morality, it would also be foolish to exaggerate them, particularly as they can often be accounted for as due to different circumstances of life, or different beliefs about the facts. No doubt some agreement on moral issues could be found which spanned times and cultures; people could be found in any time or place, who would have similar favourable and unfavourable reactions to at least part of the range of moral issues, if their relevant factual beliefs were similar. One would not expect to find a society whose members all approved of torturing children for fun (or, for that matter, a society whose members all found the last act of King Lear amusing.) Cultural variation in these matters is not unlimited.

But congruence of reactions, even of most people over a wide range of moral issues, is not enough to establish the objectivity of moral judgments. If a position on morality similar to Sibley's position about
aesthetics is tenable, it would have to be possible to select by their agreement on moral distinctions a group of normal moral judges who, like the normally colour-sighted, span generations and societies; but the vital requirement, if the analogy with perceptual judgments is to stand up, is that the distinctions made by this group must be universally recognised as the correct distinctions, and the test of moral truth, and that this recognition be reflected in the general use of moral terms.

That the criterion of the truth of colour judgments depends on the reactions of those with normal colour vision is accepted, not only by members of that group, but by the colour-blind. There is no analogue to this in the case of moral judgments: no general acknowledgement that a correct moral assessment is one that would be made by members of a certain identifiable group. People can, of course, follow a moral authority slavishly, seeing all and only those actions as wrong which, for example, the Pope declares to be so. Or, again, people can be shaken in their moral opinions by the disagreement of others, and be driven to reconsider, perhaps to change them. But the case of a man who concurs with another's moral judgment, either slavishly or on consideration, is quite different from the case of the colour-blind person who continues, as always, to see grass and fire-trucks as similar in colour, but who recognises that he is wrong about this. The latter person retains his erroneous sense impressions, no matter how clearly he realises that his vision is defective. But people do not recognise their moral perceptions as erroneous. A man may of course admit to a past mistake, say about the legitimacy of certain cases of abortion,
but only because he has abandoned that opinion for another; his current assessment of the issue he would inevitably regard as correct.

While there is not a universal congruence of people's colour perceptions, there is general acknowledgment that certain people's colour perceptions are veridical, and that their reactions constitute the proper test of colours. In the case of morality, all we have is the initial disagreement, without the further agreement that the people who see moral issues in a certain way are the people who see them accurately.

One can with a little more plausibility claim the propriety of referring aesthetic judgments to such a test, because people would be more prepared to acknowledge their own insensitivity in an artistic field, and to defer to the judgment of a qualified group as the test of real aesthetic distinctions. But I doubt that there is sufficiently general agreement about who are the authorities on artistic matters, to make Sibley's case for the objectivity of aesthetics very plausible.

In case it might be thought that I have exaggerated this difference between statements about colours and about morality, let us consider some possible ways of specifying the normal moral observer. We have, let us say, sorted people, past and present, into groups whose members agree among themselves about a range of moral problems. Could any such group be expected to gain general recognition as correct? The qualification which Sibley emphasises for assessing colours and artistic productions, agreement in making the maximum number of distinctions, certainly will not do for morals; we often regard a
multiplication of moral distinctions as morally pernicious.

What other group, selected by agreement on moral questions, might be regarded by everyone as providing the test of truth about morality: the largest group? I do not think that many people would be happy to allow moral disputes to be finally settled by majority vote, any more than to submit aesthetic questions to the same test.

It is hardly necessary to consider more possibilities. No doubt some people are respected by others as having sound moral judgment, and they achieve this reputation on the basis of past performance. However, we do not think of a man in this way because his moral judgments have been observed to correspond with those of the majority, or because they employ a more elaborate set of categories than those of most people; it is because whenever in the past we have considered an issue about which he has expressed a moral opinion, it has seemed to us on consideration that he was right. Consequently when two people disagree on a wide range of moral issues they will disagree also about who are the people of sound moral judgment to whom a question might be referred for settlement, looking to individuals as different as Bertrand Russell and Pope Pius XII.

There is no one set of properly qualified observers whose agreement in judgment would be recognised on all sides as settling disputed questions: a problem which arises in aesthetic disagreements also. But it is precisely the existence of such a group, recognised as normal even by those who are outside it, which allows for the objectivity of colour judgments in spite of the existence of colour blindness. Consequently it seems impossible to defend the
objectivity of moral judgments by arguing that they are open to testing in a way closely analogous to perceptual judgments of this kind.
CHAPTER II

THE IDEAL OBSERVER

OBJECTIVITY AS IMPARTIALITY

In this chapter I examine a second account of a test procedure for moral judgments which would give them a status similar to that of perceptual judgments.

The difference between this and the previous comparison is that in this case the observers whose reactions are taken to prove the truth or falsity of moral judgments, are selected not on the ground of past performance in making moral distinctions, but on the ground of their possessing certain ideal qualifications. An action is really (objectively) wrong, according to such a suggestion, if any ideally equipped observer (let us begin with the simple specifications that he be perfectly well-informed and perfectly impartial) would react unfavourably to it.

This is a much more interesting and more promising approach to the problem of the test of moral truth than any attempt to indicate a group of normal moral observers, tested by performance, since it brings out some important features of moral discourse. For the moment I point out merely that it is in accordance with the ideal observer account of ethics that we criticise a man's moral judgment as unreliable because of his ignorance or self-interested motives, and that when embroiled in a moral
argument we appeal sometimes to the judgment of an uninvolved bystander.

However, although the ideal observer theory of ethics provides an apt way of making some points about moral thought which are both true and important, I shall argue in this chapter that it does not, and cannot, provide a test for the truth of moral judgments, of the sort which it has been claimed to provide. I shall approach my examination of this moral theory via a discussion of one sense of objectivity which was mentioned very briefly in the introduction.

The word 'objective', and even more so the word 'subjective', are largely the semi-technical terms of philosophers, and they share with their proprietors the short-coming of having few uses in ordinary life. According to the best-entrenched application of 'objective' in ordinary language, it would be odd to ask whether or not it can be used of the whole class of moral judgments. Consider some analogous questions. Are opinions about the relative intelligence of caucasians and Australian aborigines objective or not? Are magistrates' judgments in cases involving student demonstrators objective or not? One would give no categorical answer; some opinions and decisions are objective, others are not. An opinion that aboriginal intelligence is lower than caucasian would be regarded as lacking objectivity under certain conditions, for example if its holder expressed it vehemently but had little evidence to offer, and if he never referred to aborigines except in derogatory terms. But we call his opinion non-objective by contrast with other opinions on the same subject, held by other people,
which are objective. We suspect a magistrate of lacking the objectivity needed to hear a case arising from a student demonstration if he is given to expressing certain opinions about students. But again, his decisions on these cases are criticised as lacking objectivity by comparison with those of other real or possible magistrates which would be considered objective. Legal verdicts, all of them as such, are neither objective nor non-objective.

What do we mean by saying that an opinion or decision lacks objectivity in the sense which I have just outlined? We certainly do not mean that there is no way of settling disputes about it. An opinion about the inferiority of aboriginal intelligence, whether objective or not, is verifiable or falsifiable, and in exactly the same way. When we categorise an opinion as lacking objectivity, what we mean to say is likely to have something to do with its truth or falsity. But our intention would be not to state that it is neither true or false, but to issue a warning not to rely on its being true.

Equally obviously when we call such judgments as these non-objective we do not mean to suggest that they are autobiographical, about the thoughts and feelings of the speaker. An opinion about the intelligence of aborigines is about aboriginal intelligence whether it is an objective opinion or not. In some contexts we might well say that the opinion did nothing but express the prejudices of its holder. But we would not deny that it remained nevertheless an opinion about aborigines. This is indeed the whole ground of our complaint that it was not objective: if the person had refrained from making any such assertions
and had restricted himself to declarations of his personal attitudes (subjective utterances in another sense), we would not have the same occasion to criticise him for his lack of objectivity; we might even admire him for his honesty. An account of one's own attitudes is not essentially non-objective, in the sense under discussion. Such accounts may themselves be either objective or not.

What do we mean, then, when we describe an opinion or a decision as in this sense lacking objectivity? Our intention is to criticise, to warn that the person's judgment on this issue is unreliable, falls short of an expected standard. But in supporting the criticism we would not draw attention to anything about the content or form of the judgment itself. A particular person's opinion that aboriginal intelligence is lower than caucasian intelligence may not be an objective opinion, but it is quite conceivable that an objective investigation of the matter might produce the same conclusion, identical in content and form. We are making a point rather about the way in which that person arrived at it, and we would support our criticism by pointing out certain sorts of facts about the person himself and his approach to the topic in question.

What sorts of facts about the individual or his approach to a question would ordinarily be taken to support a charge of non-objectivity, rather than criticism couched in different terms? I am not sure that ordinary language provides a completely clear demarcation of the concept, but its boundaries can be roughly mapped. It would not be natural to say that a man's opinion on a subject was not objective, on the ground that he lacked the intelligence needed to make
an adequate assessment of the facts. Would it be appropriate to describe a magistrate's decision as lacking objectivity on the ground that he arrived at it by consulting the week's horoscopes, after paying no attention to the evidence? The term seems more appropriate here; an objective judgment must rest on adequate consideration of the facts. But, perhaps more typically, another sort of evidence would support the charge of non-objectivity: evidence that a person's judgment was affected by personal interest or feeling.

An objective opinion, estimate or decision is, roughly, one which is founded on adequate consideration of the facts, and which is unaffected by personal interest or emotion, the former requirement being perhaps so much taken for granted that it springs to mind less readily than the latter.

The use of this distinction of objective and non-objective carries the implication that there is some judgment which is appropriate to the facts. The test to decide which judgment is appropriate depends on the type of judgment. An opinion about comparative aboriginal and caucasian intelligence is appropriate to the facts if it is true, and we have methods of settling this which do not involve finding whether others hold the same opinion.

Not always, however, do we have a way to identify the correct judgment, independent of anyone's judgment on the issue. We might criticise a magistrate for lacking objectivity, over a harsh sentence passed on a criminal. Some penalty (or none at all) is presumed appropriate to the facts. But one can hardly suggest any test of whether it is appropriate (within the limits set by the law) except whether it would be considered just by all or most well-
informed unbiased people.

The point of criticizing an opinion or decision for lack of objectivity is not to declare it mistaken; a belief influenced by personal spite may yet be true. One suggests rather that it is influenced by factors which are not relevant to the correctness of such judgments, and to imply that if it is correct by the appropriate criteria this is wholly or partly an accident. This criticism would be out of place unless one assumed that some judgment was appropriate, and that there was, at least in principle, a way of finding it.

THE IDEAL OBSERVER ACCOUNT OF MORALITY

We sometimes use the word 'objective' when discussing people's moral opinions. We discount someone's judgment on a moral issue if we think it is influenced by private interest or personal feeling, in the same way that we would discount his factual beliefs for the same reason. The ideal observer theory of ethics is founded on the fact that we criticize moral judgments on these grounds.

A hint of this account of morality may be found in Hume's remarks about the point of view involved in authentic moral attitudes and judgments:

Nor is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from character and actions, of that peculiar kind, which makes us praise or condemn. The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us; but may still command our esteem and respect. 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling
or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil. Presumably he did not mean to deny that people's praise and blame are often in fact affected by their particular interest; his point is that nobody would consider this properly relevant to moral judgment.

Adam Smith took up and developed this suggestion of Hume, stating that the appropriate moral attitude is the one which would be taken by an uninvolved spectator of the action in question:

We either approve or disapprove of the conduct of another man according as we feel that, when we bring his case home to ourselves, we either can or cannot entirely sympathize with the sentiments and motives which directed it. And, in the same manner, we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his station, we either can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments which influenced it. ... We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it.

To do justice to our institution of moral discourse, which dictates the grounds on which moral judgments are open to criticism, it is clearly necessary to distinguish the personal from the moral point of view, and Smith's concept of the impartial spectator provides an apt way of making the distinction. The concept has been taken up and elaborated in the present century, notably by F.C. Sharp.


3 Frank Chapman Sharp, Ethics (New York: Century, 1928), especially chapter VII.
and Roderick Firth. There are substantial differences between the positions developed by these philosophers and those of Smith and Hume. I shall concentrate my discussion on Firth's account, partly because it is the most systematic exposition of an ideal observer theory, and partly because he emphasises the claim which I shall question, that it provides for the objectivity of moral judgments.

Firth takes it that there is implicit in ordinary thought about morality an ideal of the perfectly objective moral observer. One section of his paper is devoted to describing the essential qualifications of this ideal figure. In summary they are these:

1. He is omniscient with respect to non-ethical facts.
2. He is omnipercipient (able to imagine all states of affairs with equal and extreme vividness).
3. He is disinterested.
4. He is dispassionate.
5. In other respects he is normal.

The following meta-ethical theory is proposed: moral evaluations are to be analysed as assertions that any such ideal observer would react in some special way, favourably or unfavourably, to the objects of evaluation. I am interested primarily in the verification procedure which is proposed for moral judgments on this account of them.

It is stressed in Firth's paper that the ideal observer

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theory of ethics 'implies that ethical statements are true or false ... without special reference to the people who happen to be asserting them'; ¹ that is, it involves a defence of their objectivity in the sense with which we are concerned. The method of settling whether a moral judgment was true would be to consult the reactions of an ideal observer. Firth describes one of his tasks as to state the conditions under which 'the reactions of an ideal observer determine the truth or falsity of ethical statements'. ²

This settlement procedure is obviously similar to that used for perceptual disputes. The analogy is pointed out specifically in the paper. ³ Adam Smith also made the same point that he provided a test for moral judgments similar to the perceptual test:

Every sense is supreme over its own objects. There is no appeal from the eye with regard to the beauty of colours, nor from the ear with regard to the harmony of sounds, nor from the taste with regard to the agreeableness of flavours ... . What is agreeable to our moral faculties is fit, right, and proper to be done; the contrary wrong, unfit, and improper. ⁴

He meant, presumably, not that mistakes are never made in these matters, but that mistakes are detected only by a further appeal to people's perceptions.

The ideal observer theory of ethics as expounded by Firth offers a method of settlement for moral

¹ Ibid., p. 319.
² Ibid., p. 329.
³ Ibid., p. 324.
disputes. There is an obvious initial objection to it: the test can never be applied. The qualifications required of the ideal observer are very stringent; he must, for example, be omniscient. Firth has a reason for setting the requirement so high. If we were to recognise that a person was in an ideal position to consider a moral question, we would certainly expect him to know some facts, but only those relevant to the moral issue in question. However if the reactions of the ideal spectator are to constitute the criterion of moral truth, they must also constitute the final criterion of the relevance of facts: those facts are relevant which would affect the reactions of any ideal observer. It is thus necessary to be able to identify ideal observers before one can be sure which facts are relevant to any moral issue. Therefore one cannot include in the specifications of the ideal observer the requirement that he know all the relevant facts; a circularity would be involved. But, to do justice to our expectations, it is necessary to include some specification which will ensure that there is no possible relevant fact of which the ideal observer is unaware. 1

The problem is that no omniscient observers are available, for us to refer moral problems to the test of their reactions. An assertion that moral judgments are true or false, and that a certain procedure provides the appropriate way of verifying or falsifying them, must seem

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1 Richard B. Brandt, discussing Firth's paper ('The Definition of an "Ideal Observer" Theory in Ethics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol. XV (1954-5), pp. 401-410, and 'Some Comments on Professor Firth's Reply', *ibid.*, pp. 422-423) expresses concern about specifications which make the ideal observer into such an utterly superhuman figure, and suggests a way of avoiding the necessity of making him omniscient. (continued over)
very unhelpful if it appears on investigation that the proposed verification procedure can never be applied. It is impossible, not because of our technical limitations, but necessarily.

One might ask how an utterly inapplicable criterion differs from no criterion at all. An analogy with colours is mentioned, but there are innumerable colour judgments which can be conclusively verified; Sibley, in defending the objectivity of aesthetics, commits himself, and I think must commit himself, to the opinion that there are some aesthetic judgments which can be known with certainty to be true or false. If, under a careful exposition of the ideal observer theory of ethics, it appears that not one moral judgment can attain such a secure status, this conclusion seems to be all that the moral sceptic needs.

I have made this point employing as my example the requirement of omniscience, but it could be made also using other qualifications which Firth mentions, such as disinterest. The impartial observer must be free of particular interests (which are, roughly speaking, those concerning himself and other specific individuals or groups). We would in fact regard a man as impartial on a particular issue if he were free of special interests relevant to the issue to be judged. However there is a problem similar to the problem mentioned in connection with

(continued) However the suggestion involves giving him equally superhuman powers of complete introspective self-knowledge, and hence gives no advantage.
omniscience, in employing a criterion of the relevance of an interest which will not itself depend on the possibility of identifying the ideal observer. Thus, if the specifications are at the same time to do justice to our ideal of the perfectly impartial moral judge, and to avoid an internal circularity, they must require complete freedom from particular interests. But where would we look for a person without any special interest, for example, in his own welfare? Again a careful statement of the essential qualifications of the ideal observer must set them at an impossibly superhuman (perhaps inhuman) level, with the same unfortunate consequences.

This objection has some force, I think, against the claim that the ideal observer theory provides for the settlement of moral questions. However it is not conclusive; there is at least a partial defence against it which may be developed from some suggestions of F.C.Sharp. He approached the problem 'What volitions - if any- are valid or really right?' 1 and arrived at the conclusion that the final test of rightness is the judgment which would be reached by a completely objective, impartial judge: 'The valid judgment, obtained by the elimination of these influences [special interests, personal feelings and so on] is thus that which is based on an objective valuation of the interests concerned!' 2 He considered the objection that this test of validity is inapplicable and in answering it mentioned such events as that recounted in the old-testament story of David and Bathsheba 3 as examples of

1 Sharp, Ethics, p.115.
2 Ibid., p.125
3 II Samuel, XII
cases in which 'at least some men have been able to view a situation with sufficient objectivity to pass a valid judgment'. He went on to say: 'The attainment of objectivity of vision is like drawing circles. No one ever drew a perfect one; but there are various degrees of approximation; and many are perfect for all practical purposes'.

In the biblical story David was brought to see his action in a different light by looking at it from the points of view of the other people involved as well as from his own. While he was not freed from all particular interests and feelings, he took a large step in the direction of that ideal, at least in his consideration of this one action. It is a reasonable conclusion that his later opinion about it, rather than his earlier, would match the judgment of a perfectly objective observer, even though no such ideal judge is available to provide a direct test.

The objection that the ideal observer test can never be applied can, then, be answered. Admittedly the ultimate test is never available. But some people on some issues are better informed and less personally involved than others. If on a particular issue those who approached nearest to the ideal agreed in their moral assessment, if the only dissenters either lacked information or had personal interests or emotions which would incline them towards dissent, this might constitute a proof of the one opinion which was in the spirit of the ideal observer theory, and which might still be acceptable as conclusive. I shall turn now to another problem for the theory which

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is less easy to solve.

THE CIRCULARITY OF THE IDEAL OBSERVER TEST

At first glance this account of ethics seems to have an advantage in the defence of the objectivity of moral judgments which is not shared by some other moral theories. Let us compare it, for example, with a form of utilitarianism according to which moral disputes are to be settled by comparing the contributions made by alternative actions to general human happiness. This test itself rests on a moral assumption, that whatever makes for human happiness is right, which, needless to say, is open to question. This moral question can hardly be settled by the utilitarian criterion, since it forms the foundation of that criterion. The defence of this basic principle must be the central problem for any utilitarian attempt to show that moral judgments are objective.

The ideal observer theory promises to avoid this problem by proposing a test for the truth of moral judgments, the reactions of a certain group, which does not itself depend on any moral assumptions. If any acceptable account of the ideal observer test would show that it too rests on a basic moral principle, then it has no special advantage in this respect. The theory must, I think, become enmeshed in this difficulty.

Examining the qualifications which Firth specifies for the ideal observer, and asking why these and not other qualities would be expected, one sees at the same time why this account has something important to say
about moral thought, and how this problem must arise. Consider first the property of omniscience. We would certainly expect of a person, before regarding him as ideally situated to perceive moral distinctions, that he know all relevant facts. Why is this? It is not that it is morally desirable to be well-informed; in this respect we would expect of the ideal moral observer nothing different from what we would expect of a person if he was to be perfectly equipped to arrive at any other type of judgment or decision. Even an expression of purely personal taste may be open to criticism on the ground of inadequate information. There is, then, no specifically moral assumption involved in holding that a correct moral judgment be the one that would be arrived at on complete evidence.

Consider now Firth's requirements that the ideal observer be completely disinterested and dispassionate. The interests of which he must be free are all particular interests, which are defined in this way:

A person has a particular interest in x if (1) he desires x, (2) he believes that x has a certain essentially particular property P, and (3) he would not desire x, or would desire it less intensely, if, his other beliefs remaining constant, he did not believe that x had this property P.

An essentially particular property is one which cannot be defined without using proper names or ego-centric words such as 'I', 'here', 'now', 'this'. Thus I have a particular interest in an event if I want it because I believe it will benefit me, or my children, or the inhabitants of Australia. The ideal observer is to be allowed non-particular interests,

such as in the happiness of people in general, or, presumably, in their misery. Similarly he is to be dispassionate, free of particular emotions, these being explained as any feelings which have as their objects particular individuals or particular groups. Whether he would feel non-particular emotions such as love for people generally, or horror at suffering, is left open.

Impartiality is the most obvious requirement of the ideal moral judge, and freedom from particular interests and emotions is a great deal of what we mean by impartiality. If we ask why we would expect freedom from these influences we find, as with omniscience, that no peculiarly moral assumption is involved. The effect of these influences is to produce inconsistent judgments. If I blame a teacher for punishing one of my children, and my criticism is influenced by personal affection, a particular emotion, it is likely that, if the incident had been the same in all respects except the identity of the child, I would have objected less strongly or not at all.

In counting this as inconsistency we make certain assumptions about what counts as a relevant difference between two cases. However they are not specifically moral assumptions, as discrimination on the ground that one child is mine but not the other would count as inconsistent in non-moral situations, such as when I was describing their appearance or behaviour. This expectation of consistency is an important respect in which moral discourse is similar to ordinary description, and very different from the expression of personal taste or feeling. Moral judgments, as Hume observed, are expected to be made
from a point of view in which one's own situation is disregarded, so that the features which make one action right would make any similar action right, regardless of time, place and persons involved.

None of the requirements listed in Firth's description seems to rest on an assumption about what is morally desirable. Has he, then, described a test to which we all would submit moral disputes, which itself takes no moral belief for granted? I think not, because his specifications are not sufficient to describe a person who would be generally recognised as an ideal moral observer. Further, when his description is modified to include what we would expect, it must include one feature the point of which can only be seen in moral terms.

The ideal observer is forbidden only particular emotions and interests; but this must be an inadequate restriction. Consider a person who wants to promote anything which will advance the position of the white race, and who feels strong antagonism towards black people. Neither this interest nor this emotion is particular on Firth's account; they can both be explained without the use of proper names or substitute expressions. Therefore they must be allowed to the ideal observer. ¹

¹ In fact nobody is likely to be interested in white supremacy unless he were white; in practice this would be a particular interest in advancing one's own race. But one can give a consistent description of an interest in white supremacy which is not particular, and which Firth must allow to the ideal observer. Whether actual racists are likely to have just this interest is not important to the argument.
This is a remarkable conclusion to reach. Such interests and feelings are absolutely central examples of characteristics which we would regard as disqualifying a man from considering a range of moral issues in an impartial manner. I conclude that Firth's way of specifying the sense in which the ideal observer must be disinterested and dispassionate is not satisfactory, because it does not reflect, as it is intended to do, the ordinary image of the ideal moral judge.

One can see how the account needs to be modified by considering another example. Generalised benevolence, a disposition to want whatever gives anyone pleasure and not to want whatever makes anyone suffer, is a non-particular interest, and so would be allowed to the ideal observer according to Firth's specifications. But generalised malevolence, a disposition to want whatever makes anyone suffer and not to want whatever gives anyone pleasure, is also a non-particular interest, and so it also would be allowed to the ideal observer. It might be claimed that this could never exist; a man might be pleased to see other people suffer, but for himself he would always, and necessarily, want pleasure and the absence of pain. Thus the interest would be particular: it would be a desire for anything which caused anyone except me to suffer. This contention might be defended by reference to the meanings of the words 'pleasure' and 'pain'. Such an objection would be a piece of very naive psychology, whether or not it masqueraded as conceptual analysis. People can and do want themselves to suffer. A genuine ascetic, a whole-hearted puritan, is not a man
who desires only that the flesh of other people be
mortified; his attitudes are directed also, indeed
primarily, to his own pleasures and pains.

This impartial malevolence would not be reflexive.
It could be defined as a disposition to be pleased in a
particular way by whatever gave anyone displeasure, and
displeased by whatever pleased anyone. But if a man was
thus displeased by whatever gave this special sort of
pleasure to himself, the disposition would be self-destroying.
A coherent description of our impartially malevolent man
must distinguish between a special category of satisfactions
and dissatisfactions (call them moral) and all other
pleasures of body and mind. The ideally malevolent man
is one who gets moral satisfaction from whatever displeases
anyone (including himself) in any but the moral way, and
moral dissatisfaction from whatever non-morally pleases
anyone.

But we would surely not be prepared to think of the
ideal spectator as having this characteristic. Such a
misanthropic interest would be generally regarded as
likely to distort moral judgment on almost any issue which
could be imagined.

Why would we not allow this disposition of general
malevolence to the ideal observer? It is not that,
because of particularity, it would lead to inconsistency.
The malevolent man could be as impartial in his
malevolence as the benevolent man could be in his
benevolence. Neither can it affect moral judgments by
restricting the evidence on which they are based. I can
see no reason for excluding this characteristic except
that malevolence influences judgments in a morally undesirable direction. 1

F.C. Sharp, in expounding his variation of the ideal observer criterion, discussed the possibility of allowing malevolence as an influence on an acceptable moral reaction, in particular connection with judgments about the legitimacy of punishment, in which desires that people suffer sometimes operate. His conclusion was that malevolence must be rejected as likely to distort moral judgments; his reason is the thoroughly moral one that this disposition is in conflict with the whole spirit of morality:

The ideal of benevolence commands: Injure no one solely for the sake of injuring him. The ideal of malevolence commands: Injure everyone you want to see suffer ... Which shall it be? We can not give up the eudemonic ideal: it is the source of almost the whole of our moral life, and its roots go down to the uttermost depths of our being ... Consequently it is the dysdemonic ideal that must give way. Its demands, then, must be declared to be everywhere and always without validity. 2

He also held that indifference to people's welfare, as well as actual malevolence, could not be allowable because of its anti-moral tendency:

Partial indifference affects the moral judgment by warping the benevolence of the judge, so that the resulting judgment represents a one-sided valuation... Where this indifference to the good of others is complete or approximately complete we have the 'moral imbecile'. 3

Thus Sharp's ideal moral observer is a person who is

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1 C.F.H.D. Aiken, 'The Concept of Moral Objectivity', Castaneda and Nakhnikian (ed), Morality and the Language of Conduct, pp.88-90, where he argues for a similar conclusion, using as an example a rather different type of interest which would normally be taken to be morally neutral. See also A.C. Ewing, Ethics (London: English Universities Press, 1953), p.94, where a similar objection to the ideal observer theory is urged, though not argued in detail.

2 Sharp, Ethics, p.137.

3 Ibid., p.128.
impartially benevolent, not just impartial. R.B. Brandt gives a similar account of the requirement: 'A person is impartial if and only if he has a strong and equal concern about the welfare of all persons ... and if he is free of prejudices for and against persons on account of social affiliation or status'.

This addition is surely needed in a satisfactory description of the sort of person to whom most of us might be prepared to refer moral questions. But there is no plausible reason for demanding benevolence rather than malevolence or indifference, except that benevolence is a morally good quality, or that human welfare, to which benevolence is directed, is morally valuable. There is thus a basic moral assumption behind our image of the ideal moral judge, so that anyone who offers the reactions of such an observer as the final test of moral truth risks a charge that his test is circular. I want now to consider how the charge could be made out, and whether it could be countered.

Firth offered a reductive analysis of sentences using words such as 'good' and 'wrong', by which such words are eliminated in favour of descriptions of the reactions of observers of a certain sort. He was aware of the danger of circularity: it is not helpful to define a morally good action as one which would please any morally good observer. He allowed that it might be necessary to give the ideal observer certain virtues, such as universal love, if ordinary moral thought would require this. But he claimed

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that 'virtues may be attributed to the ideal observer without circularity, of course, provided that we do not have to justify their attribution by reference to the fact that they are virtues'. ¹ He would be able to justify this, not in terms of the moral worth of benevolence, but by showing that this requirement is implicit in the way people speak and think about morality. Thus no circularity would be involved.

There seems to be a confusion here between two different levels of justification for elements in the description of the ideal observer. Firstly there is the justification required within the limits of that aspect of Firth's project, to present in detail the picture of the perfectly objective moral observer which ordinary people are supposed to have in mind when they try to settle moral questions. Here the philosopher would be answering the question 'Why did you include benevolence, (or omniscience) in your list of the essential qualifications?' Here the only justification for attributing any quality is the agreement of most people that this is what they would require. At this level only the crudest and most obvious circularity could arise: 'A good action is one which would please any good person'.

There is another level of justification: the sort of explanation which users of moral discourse would give when explaining the point of demanding one quality of the ideal observer and not another. It is on this level that

¹ Firth, 'Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer', Philosophy and Phenomenological Research vol.XII, p. 341.
different types of justification, including some expressed in moral terms, might arise. One would not give a moral justification for demanding knowledge of the facts, or freedom from particular interests and emotions, but it is hard to see any but a moral justification for demanding benevolence.

This generates a circularity, although one which is a little less crude and obvious. If a man says that an action is good, he means that it would please any observer who is, say, omniscient and impartially benevolent. Asked why it is appropriate to refer moral issues to the judgment of a benevolent observer, he replies that this is because benevolence is a morally good quality, its alternatives bad. How, on the ideal observer theory, are we to construe his statement that benevolence is good? If it is to be construed according to the suggested model for all moral judgments, then it means that benevolence would please any observer who was benevolent and otherwise qualified. Thus a proof that benevolence was good would involve a test, adoption of which itself rests on that very assumption. Besides, of course the impartially benevolent man will be pleased by benevolence since he, by definition, wants anything likely to contribute to human happiness, and benevolence involves a desire to do exactly that. So construed, the statement that benevolence is good becomes a thoroughly obvious triviality. And if one wants to put benevolence at the heart of morality, which any acceptable statement of an ideal observer theory must do, one will not be eager to see this assertion reduced to a triviality.
The ideal observer theorist cannot escape from acknowledging that the goodness of benevolence, or alternatively the goodness of that to which benevolence is directed, human happiness, is a principle on which all other moral judgments rest, but which his analysis is unable to analyse away.

Proponents of the theory, even when they recognise the necessity of ascribing benevolence to the ideal observer, tend not to acknowledge an assumption that benevolence is good; they rather assume that it is in some sense natural. Consider the following passage from F.C. Sharp's *Ethics* on indifference to other people's happiness and misery:

> Partial indifference] is more likely than not to be due to special depressants of benevolence, though it can be sometimes traced to inborn or acquired 'blind spots'. [Total indifference] may have its source in either. The depressants can be divided into two classes. The first consists of such agencies as habituation, fatigue and inattention. The second is dislike of some sort for one or the other of the parties who make up the situation. ¹

The language of this passage, suggestive of a medical text's list of possible causes of under-activity of a gland, implies that impartial benevolence is the normal or natural disposition of man, which, like good health, calls for no explanation; it is when we find any different disposition that we are to look for an explanation, and it will be found in the disturbing influence of some abnormal condition.

Adam Smith also wrote about the moral sentiments as an outcome of a basic human characteristic, sympathy (not the same as benevolence, since according to his account sympathy can sometimes move us to approve of non-benevolent actions of retribution):

> The characters and conduct of a Nero, or a Claudius, are what no custom will ever reconcile us to, what no fashion will ever render agreeable. ... The sentiments of moral approbation and disapprobation are founded on the strongest and most vigorous passions of human nature; and though they may be somewhat warped, cannot be entirely perverted. 1

Again there is the suggestion that the authentic moral responses are natural growths, not the results of a good moral education, though perhaps open to a degree of distortion by a bad moral education. This effort to give to the source of moral sentiments a more secure position as a basic constituent of human nature than any of the aberrations which might interfere with it, could perhaps be an attempt to avoid acknowledging any assumption that this disposition is good. The assumption is rather that universal benevolence is so natural and fundamental in human nature that there is no occasion to argue for its being desirable.

But I see nothing to recommend the assumption that universal benevolence is a natural growth. Anyone who has much contact with small children must be often aware of the need to cultivate their consideration of other people's feelings, and of the difficulty which this sometimes involves. This does not suggest that one needs only to exclude distorting influences, in order to allow

impartial benevolence to flourish. It is not obvious that benevolence has any stronger a claim to being a basic natural disposition of human beings than, say, aggression. If a special position is to be given to benevolence among the ideal observer's characteristics, this calls for justification, and as I have argued, a moral justification seems to be the only one available.

It has been claimed that the ideal observer theory of ethics has some special advantage over other moral theories, such as utilitarianism, in granting moral judgments objectivity:

If values are to have cognitive status, they must be conceived as causes of responses in the consciousness of a hypothetical individual. Such an individual may be called an ideal observer. 1

But the theory has no special advantage. It adds nothing to a utilitarian greatest-happiness test, except perhaps a method of measuring the comparative values and disvalues of various benefits and harms. If we are entitled to assume that the goodness of benevolence is the central moral truth, then the ideal observer test will seem almost redundant in most cases, rather than being the essential ultimate criterion. We might as well try directly to determine whether an action is calculated to make the greatest possible contribution to happiness, as try to determine whether it is the action which would most please

any observer who, by definition, is disposed to be most pleased by such an action. Significantly, F.C. Sharp, who insisted, as I have done, on the necessity of generalised benevolence in an ideal moral observer, offered the ideal observer test and an explicitly utilitarian criterion, apparently as equivalent alternatives:

A benevolence consistently (always) determined by the requirements of an objective i.e. impartial valuation thus affords the sole standard of valid eudemonic judgments. ¹

That volition is right, and that volition only, which aims to bring into existence the greatest amount of good attainable under the conditions. ²

The assumption about benevolence must have the same vital role in underpinning the test procedure and its conclusions, as a fundamental utilitarian assumption that the promotion of happiness and the prevention of pain are the sole moral values, has in supporting a utilitarian system. If the assumption is granted, then the propriety of the test procedure and the truth of certain sorts of conclusions follow clearly enough; but if the assumption is questioned, the whole system totters.

Let us turn back finally to the analogy between moral and perceptual judgments. The ideal observer theory is an attempt to maintain such an analogy, while acknowledging that there is not, as there is, for example, with colour descriptions, an actual group whose reactions are generally recognised as the test of moral truth. It is argued that one can extract from ordinary moral thought a concept of an ideal moral observer, and that

¹ Sharp, Ethics, p.140.
² Ibid., pp.130-1.
the reactions of such a person would be generally accepted as settling moral questions. But there is a substantial moral assumption underlying an acceptable account of the ideal observer test, for which it can provide no non-circular defence. There is no problem like this in the procedure for settling questions about colours. The acknowledgment of a certain group as having normal colour vision does not rest on any assumption about the colour of anything.

In this chapter and the previous one two different forms of analogy between moral and perceptual judgments have been examined, which would show disputes about the former as open to settlement by tests similar to those used for disputes about the latter. Both arguments have been seen to fail, for quite different reasons.
After being out of fashion for a period, it is now not uncommon again to ascribe to moral judgments the cognitive status shared by non-evaluative descriptive statements. Mrs. Foot, who played a considerable part in this change of direction in moral philosophy, wrote:

I think it will be agreed that in the wide sense in which philosophers speak of evaluation, 'rude' is an evaluative word ... It expresses disapproval, is meant to be used when action is to be discouraged... (Also) it can only be used where certain descriptions apply. The right account of the situation in which it is correct to say that a piece of behaviour is rude is, I think, that this kind of behaviour causes offence by indicating lack of respect.

Thus, so the argument goes, while describing an action as rude necessarily involves (other things being equal) mild moral condemnation, the question whether that description is accurate can be settled by criteria as public and objective as those governing the use of ordinary descriptive terms.

Mrs. Foot did not expand much on this brief suggestion. However, it seemed to sketch the outlines of a powerful counter-argument against accounts of moral judgments as

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expressive of attitudes, and so non-cognitive, with a view to vindicating their objectivity. The argument so suggested is developed in some detail in Kovesi's Moral Notions, 1 a book which, in elaborating the analogy between moral terms and ordinary criterial descriptive terms, performs a valuable function: it makes possible a clear assessment of the support one can expect to draw from this analogy for the defence of the objectivity of moral judgments. My aim in this chapter is to examine the argument presented in that book for the equivalence in status of the two classes of terms, and to show that it breaks down at crucial points, thus failing to support the objectivist ethical position which it is used to defend.

This position is rather different from those examined in the previous two chapters. In them a statement applying a moral term to an action is seen as similar in status to a descriptive statement ascribing a simple sensory property to an object. Here we are concerned with an argument that it is similar in status to a statement applying to an object a descriptive term which is applicable by virtue of the thing's possessing certain more elementary observable characteristics. The analogy is with statements, not like 'That is red', but like 'That is a quadrilateral' or 'That is a house'.

Opponents of ethical naturalism are sometimes inclined to concentrate on the comparison with terms like 'quadrilateral', which are closely tied to tightly defined criteria. 2 There is no gap to be bridged between knowing

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that a shape is a plane figure bounded by four straight lines, and knowing that it is a quadrilateral, as any dictionary would show. However moral terms are not closely tied to specific sets of criteria; a word such as 'right', 'wrong', 'blameworthy', 'admirable', cannot be shown by reference to linguistic conventions to be applicable to actions or people on the ground that they possess a particular set of features, in the same unarguable way. One might assume that, having pointed out this disanalogy, one has exposed a gross difference between moral judgments and all empirical assertions made on the basis of criteria, such that the former can never be shown to be objective by analogy with the latter.

This assumption would be unjustified. There is a difference between moral judgments and statements about geometrical diagrams, but these are not fair and typical samples of empirical assertions the truth or falsity of which depends on the objects' possessing certain properties. Compare a statement identifying a shape as a quadrilateral or a triangle with a statement identifying an object as a house, a hat or a table. One would make the latter on the basis of certain observable properties of the object. However there is not, as in the case of geometrical diagrams, a single set of properties (or a determinate disjunctive set of sets) which a thing must have, to be a house. Although some things are clearly outside the range, houses can come in an indefinite range of shapes, sizes and materials. Although it is difficult to state the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a house, nobody would conclude from this, however, that
statements about houses are not objective, that a person can never be shown to be correct or mistaken in identifying an object as one.

In examining the possibility of drawing an analogy between moral judgments and criteria-governed empirical assertions, I shall concentrate on the comparison with assertions about physical objects such as tables, chairs and so on, rather than with assertions about geometrical diagrams, partly because the former are more typical examples of empirical statements, and partly because they share with moral judgments the characteristic of employing predicates which, while applied on the basis of possession of certain other observable properties, are tied to these in a much looser fashion than the term 'quadrilateral' is tied to its defining properties. For this reason any hope of arguing plausibly that moral judgments and criteria-governed empirical assertions are on an equal footing as regards objectivity depends on the selection of this type of example.

Among the concepts which are used in Kovesi's book as typical examples of moral notions are concepts such as murder, stealing and cheating. The examples of moral judgments suggested by this selection of moral notions are identifications of actions as instances of murder or some such class, rather than 'Murder is wrong', or 'You ought not to have told that lie'. This choice of the central examples of the class of judgments to be justified follows a suggestion made by Miss Anscombe:

It would be a great improvement if, instead of 'morally wrong', one always named a genus such as 'untruthful', 'unchaste', 'unjust'. We should no
longer ask whether doing something was 'wrong', passing directly from some description of an action to this notion; we should ask whether, e.g. it was unjust; and the answer would sometimes be clear at once. 1

The terms 'matter' and 'form' used in distinctive senses play an important part in Kovesi's exposition. The matter of a table comprises 'any characteristics in which the object may vary without ceasing to be a table'. 2 Thus it may be square, four-legged and made of pine, but these are all non-essential; it might have been circular, three-legged and made of steel, but still be a table.

'An answer to the question why we call a large variety of objects "tables" and refuse the word to other objects gives what I want to call the "form" of a table'. 3 The formal element in this case is not a matter of shape or size, but of the range of functions tables are made to fulfil. But of course the form sets limits to the variation in the material elements. Tables can come in a variety of shapes, sizes and materials, but they cannot be seventy feet high and two inches across, or made of beer.

The notion 'murder' presents the same distinction of matter and form. Any characteristics in which an action might have varied while remaining an instance of murder, such as that it involved a knife or a gun or a dose of arsenic, are material elements. The form

2 Kovesi, Moral Notions, p.4.
3 Ibid.
of murder is given by an answer to the question what makes some actions murders and not others: in Kovesi's words, 'that we intentionally take the life of someone who is innocent with the aim of personal gain or satisfaction'.

We cannot define a concept such as 'table' or 'murder' by giving a complete list of the possible material elements (e.g. a table is a thing with a level upper surface square or circular or rectangular, etc., made of wood or steel or glass, etc., or a murder is shooting someone or stabbing or administering arsenic, etc.). No such complete list can be made. An organic chemist may synthesise a new plastic tomorrow, and make something out of it which we shall want to call a table, or an ingenious villain may think of a completely novel method of putting a person out of the way which is unquestionably murder. And so Kovesi writes: 'The formal and not the material element makes a thing or act to be what it is'.

He accepts the fact-value distinction to the extent of agreeing that one could give an accurate description of a man's action couched in non-moral terms ('He is pushing a length of sharp steel attached to a piece of wood into the space occupied by another man',) and that this would not entail the moral conclusion that the action is murder. But he would want to argue also that one can give a description of an object, ('It has four legs and a level surface two and a half feet above the floor and three feet square',) which would not entail that it is a table. In

1Ibid., p.5.
2Ibid., p.15.
neither case does one begin with a mass of perceptual data, and put them together to arrive at the conclusion that this is a table or a murder. Such notions are not abstractions from the observed similarities of a number of things or actions. One must begin with the notion, a grasp of the formal element, in order to see that a case falls under it.

Thus conclusions involving moral concepts are no less securely grounded in the observable facts than conclusions involving other sorts of concepts: 'We know that certain acts are acts of murder in the same way as we know that certain objects are tables.' The way involves seeing that the action or object has certain features, and knowing that these are the significant features:

In the case of all our terms we can follow a rule in using a word 'x' only if we know what features of the world ... are reasons for saying that something is an x. Whether we make a judgment by using a descriptive or a moral term, i.e. whether we make a judgment like 'this is a table' or 'this is murder', the justification for our judgment lies in the presence or absence of certain relevant facts. 2

There is, it seems, a necessarily indeterminate class of sets of features such that the possession of one set by an object or action is a sufficient condition for the correct application to it of a term like 'table' or 'murder'. The observable features must meet some necessary conditions; in the case of tables, although shape and size may vary to some extent, the object must have a level surface raised some distance above the floor. For murder

1 Ibid., p. 19.
2 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
a gun need not be involved, but the victim's pulse and breathing must stop. For these features necessary for the correct application of a term Kovesi uses the word 'recognitor': "Roughly speaking, "recognitors" are the defining characteristics of the material elements of a thing or act or situation or any phenomenon". ¹

It is because we grasp the form of tables (that they are made and used to serve a certain range of purposes) that we see which features are recognitors and which are not essential. Murder is in this respect just the same. We judge an act to be murder because, grasping the formal element of murder, we know that among the act's features are the recognitors of murder.

This analogy suggests a method of settling moral questions. Among people familiar with the concept of a table, the question whether a thing is a table is settled by an inspection of it in search of the appropriate recognitors. A test more like that used for perceptual judgments, finding whether the word 'table' is applied to it by competent speakers of English, would be used only in special situations, such as if one disputant did not speak the language well, or if the case were a marginal one.

The moral status of what Macbeth did to Duncan should be open to settlement in a similar way. For those familiar with the word 'murder' it would be a completely adequate test, to see that the action had all the features needed to identify it as a central instance of murder. Again, an appeal to a consensus of speakers of English would be

¹ Ibid., p.41.
considered only if there were special reasons for doubt.

There is an obvious preliminary objection to the position which I have been expounding. This procedure might be a conclusive way of showing that what Macbeth did to Duncan was murder. But to describe an action as murder, lying or stealing is not a typical moral judgment; in fact it is not necessarily a moral judgment at all, nor does it commit one to a moral judgment. Morality is nothing if not evaluative. But the statements in question do not have to carry a fixed evaluative force. One can say, 'That was a lie, but quite justifiable', without falling into self-contradiction or nonsense. Therefore, while there might be strong analogies between identifying an action as murder or lying and identifying an object as a table, and no reason to suppose the one any less objective than the other, to reach a distinctively moral conclusion about the action requires another step, and nothing has been done to show that this step rests on foundations as firm as the recognition of tables.

Kovesi's account of what he calls complete moral notions provides his defence against this objection. The concept is introduced in this passage:

When a notion is not formed completely from the moral point of view (e.g. 'killing') then it includes both morally right and wrong acts ... When a type of act selected completely from the moral point of view receives its own term (e.g. 'murder') then the words 'right', 'wrong' are used only as reminders; they remind us what was the point of forming such notions. I would like to call such notions complete notions.

1 Ibid., p. 109.
Exactly what distinguishes the moral point of view is a question which Kovesi does not undertake to examine in any detail, but he has a little to say about it. All notions are formed from some point of view: that is, there is some point in having them, linking them with needs or wants which some people feel. One sees the point of the notion of a table by seeing how it is linked with the need which some people feel to have level surfaces some distance above the floor, on which various objects can be rested and at which people can sit. The moral point of view is linked with human needs, but of a different sort.

If, on the other hand, the point of having a term in our language is not that we want to identify, buy or sell something but because we want to avoid or promote something, excuse or blame people for certain happenings or acts, then we have a different type of formal element shaping the life and use of our term. 1 We recognise moral notions by seeing that the point of having them arises from people's wanting to encourage or discourage actions of a certain kind. We recognise a notion as a complete moral notion because people so use the word that it can always be assumed, when they apply it to an action or person, that they intend it to carry the force of praise or blame. In the case of a complete moral action notion, as murder is supposed to be, the favourable or unfavourable evaluation is not an extra step over and above recognising the action as an instance of the notion, but is bound up in the recognition: 'If someone understands the notion of murder or stealing, to say that they are wrong does not give him any more information'. 2 The idea

1 Ibid., p.15.
that actions of this sort are wrong, to be discouraged, is the very point of the concept of murder: 'We selected certain features that need to be present for an act to be an act of murder, because we recognised that the presence of these would render someone liable to blame - and we need to blame and to discourage certain sorts of acts'.

Thus to say that murder is wrong, or that a particular murder is wrong, is tautological; the man who denies it does not grasp the notion of murder.

Lying, it is recognised, is not a complete moral notion. We classify lies into those which are wrong and those which are not, the lie told to put the murderer off the scent being in the latter category. If this were a complete moral notion, such a classification would not make sense; it would demonstrate incompetence in the language to describe an action as lying, and go on to say that it was justifiable. Lying might become a complete moral notion by the introduction of a special term, 'saving-deceit', applicable to those cases which we now call justifiable lies, and the abandonment of the practice of applying the word 'lie' to cases of this sort. Statements such as 'Lying is wrong' and 'This lie is wrong' would then be tautologies, because any feature of an action which would justify it, such as its being intended to save a person's life, would serve also to exclude it from the class of lies. 'In this case "lie" would function as a complete term like "prejudice", that is, we could no longer say: "this is an act of lying but go ahead and do it".'

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1 Ibid., p.21.
2 Ibid., pp.106-107.
3 Ibid., p.128
analogous to saying, 'This is a chair, but it has nothing to do with people's need to sit down'; it would be an attempt to use a term while denying the whole point of the concept. The fact that 'lying' had become a complete moral term would be a linguistic fact: that is, one would find it out by noticing how competent English-speakers used the term. If they used it to carry this consistently derogatory evaluative implication, that would settle the matter. To say that a term is a complete moral term is not to utter a moral judgment, but to give information about the language.

When we ask by the help of a term describing an act whether the act that falls under that description is right or wrong ... we are asking a question about the way in which the term specifies the act, whether it specifies the act from the moral point of view and if so to what extent. This is why judgments like 'x is always (or sometimes) good' do not further evaluate the act but say something about the logical features of our term.  

Here, then, is the answer to the preliminary objection that to identify an action as murder or lying is not necessarily, and does not necessarily involve, a moral judgment. This would be admitted when the term used is one for what is called an incomplete moral notion. But, it is claimed, there are other terms for complete moral notions. In these cases the application of the identifying term is a moral judgment, and it can be justified in a manner closely similar to the justification for applying a term such as 'table' to an object. So there are at least some moral judgments with the same objective status as non-moral descriptions:

1 Ibid., p.122.
When one makes a moral decision one does not choose the good instance of an act that falls under a certain description but works out the proper description of the situation ... and understands the significance of the description ... . If the proper description of a situation involves moral notions ... evaluation is redundant. ¹

Not much weight should be put on the use of the definite article, suggesting that there is only one correct description of a situation. It would be agreed that other correct descriptions, appropriate to other purposes, might exclude moral terms; it is sufficient that a correct description should involve a complete moral notion. The question whether it must be the only correct description from the moral point of view will be deferred until later.

We have some words which seem to meet the requirements for complete moral terms; 'cruelty' is perhaps a clearer example than 'murder'. However there are some basic weaknesses in this position, and any similar position, arising from the general approach to the justification of moral judgments. I shall bring these out in the remainder of the chapter.

UNDERSTANDING A MORAL NOTION

Kovesi wants to maintain two assertions about the notion 'murder', which, for the sake of argument, let us accept as a complete moral notion: firstly it is similar to 'table' in that the questions whether an object is a

¹ Ibid., pp. 157-158.
table and an action murder can be settled with equal certainty and on equally public empirical grounds; secondly, it is a logical feature of the term that its application involves an unfavourable assessment. It seems to me that these statements, if not actually incompatible, are far from being harmonious bedfellows. I shall explain why, by considering the process of coming to grasp an unfamiliar concept.

An object may undoubtedly be a table, but a given person may not recognise it as such. He may be a member of a primitive nomadic group who do not make or use any special things for the purposes for which we have tables. This man not only lacks the English word 'table'; he lacks the notion of a table. When he sees one for the first time he may be utterly puzzled by it, or he may mistake it for a small, draughty shelter.

We could, given enough time, clear up his confusion or correct his error. It is not enough to teach him to utter the complex sound 'table' when confronted with this particular object. He must be introduced to a substantial area of our way of life, so that he can get experience of the variety of purposes for which tables are made and used. When he has seen enough tables, and what people do with them, he will presumably have the notion of a table. We would test his grasp of the concept not only by his performance in identifying the right range of objects as tables, but also by his answers to questions about the standard expectations concerning the uses to which they would be put. If he identifies the right things, and gives the right answers, then he undoubtedly has the notion of a table.
To grasp the notion of a table the tribesman must know what the standard uses for tables are, but he need not put them to these uses himself. No doubt the concept of a table arises from the need which people feel for raised level surfaces suitable for certain purposes. But as long as one understands that this is so, one may have a thoroughly adequate grasp of the concept, without sharing this need: one may simply not feel it, or even utterly repudiate it, but nevertheless know what a table is as well as the most avid of table-users and table-fanciers.

Let us now consider a parallel situation involving the learning of an unfamiliar moral notion. For an analogous case, imagine one of us barbarians transported in time and place to Aristotle's Athens. After finding his way through the rudiments of the language he begins to hear people and actions described as examples of \( \epsilon_{\gamma}a\lambda\nu \xi \) or greatness of soul. Our barbarian representative quickly gains the impression that when a man or action is described as great-souled this is universally taken to express praise or commendation. But at first he does not grasp what the term means. He casts around among his own stock of terms of commendation, and does not find one that fits anything like the same range of instances to which the Athenians apply this term. He lacks the concept of greatness of soul.

So he works at mastering the notion, both by noting when it is used, and by attending Aristotle's lectures on ethics, which conveniently are dealing with this very topic just now. Gradually he pieces together the criteria according to which the term is used, and builds up that

When our barbarian has familiarised himself with the criteria he should have no difficulty in applying the term to the correct range of people and actions. He has long realised that the Athenians use it as a term of commendation. In this respect, however, he differs from them. While they regard greatness of soul as a virtue, in fact as the crown of all the virtues, the more examples of the characteristic he sees the more offensive he finds them.

Has he understood the notion of greatness of soul? Let us assume that for the Athenians this is a complete moral notion. Kovesi must say that he does not understand it. Questioning the evaluation betrays a failure to grasp the whole point of picking out as a class the cases falling under the notion. When an action is identified as murder (or greatness of soul) to go on and say that it is wrong (or admirable) is to utter a tautology; the further evaluation is redundant because it only repeats part of the basic significance of the term already used. For this

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1 I assume that Aristotle was articulating a moral notion generally held in his society, not merely displaying a personal attitude. I assume also that his description was written without irony; there seems little reason to suggest (see H.H. Joachim, Aristotle: the Nichomachean Ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 125) that the description of the great-souled man was meant to be humorously exaggerated. No doubt none of us, with our moral attitudes, could write such a description without ironical intentions, but without the very dubious assumption that Aristotle must have had just our moral attitudes, the more natural conclusion is that he simply regarded the quality described as admirable.
reason Kovesi writes of another complete moral notion: 'If I did not also disapprove of the child's murdering his father I would not understand the notion of parricide.'

Others might say that the barbarian already has an adequate grasp of the concept of greatness of soul, as is shown by the accuracy with which he uses the term; one's attitude towards examples falling under a concept is a different matter from one's understanding of the concept.

There is more to be said for the latter opinion. It can no doubt be claimed that a normative concept arises from a need, as do other concepts: that if some individuals had not felt a need to discourage certain sorts of killing, the notion of murder as we have it would not exist, and that the notion of a table would not have been formed unless individuals had felt a need for such things. But why must the conditions needed for an individual's understanding a concept parallel the conditions needed for the concept's original formation?

I think that one is helped to see why there is a temptation to deny that such a man understands the notion, by considering a distinction between two of the various senses of the word 'understand'. In the first of these senses it is roughly synonymous with 'know the meaning of'. Its object is a verbal expression or a person's utterance of one; thus one can understand the word 'insipid' or the sentence 'amor vincit omnia', fail to understand a word of Greek, or what the speaker meant when he said that there is an inverse correlation between fecundity and income. In

1 Ibid., p. 72.
the second of the senses (these are by no means the only two), to understand is not to perform a cognitive feat; it is to exercise imagination and empathy, to be an understanding person. Its objects are people, emotions, attitudes, actions, motives, desires, ambitions. Thus one can say 'I'll never understand you Mabel', one can claim to understand just how Napoleon felt on Elba, to be unable to understand someone's motive for committing a repulsive crime, to find it quite incomprehensible that a grown woman should be so upset over the death of a canary. To understand in these contexts is to be able to put oneself in the other person's place and imagine thinking, feeling, wanting as he does.

It is not necessary to emphasise at length how distinct a sense this is from the former. One can understand how a person is feeling without his uttering a word the meaning of which one might or might not grasp. If we fail to understand the woman's grief for her dead pet, it is not because her verbal expressions of it are beyond our intellectual grasp. When she speaks we know what she means; what we cannot appreciate is how a canary could mean so much to her.

The newcomer to Athens, if he acquires a thorough grasp of the criteria according to which the word 'great-souled' is applied, and if he knows that the Athenians use it to carry a fixed commendatory force, has nothing more to do to understand greatness of soul in the first sense: to know the meaning of the expression. If he is nevertheless described as failing to understand, on the ground that he finds this characteristic objectionable,
then the sense of 'understand' employed appears to be the second one: he cannot understand the Athenians' attitude to this quality, that is, imagine feeling about it as they do, and being similarly disposed to praise and encourage it. But this failure involves no inability to follow what the Athenians mean when they use this expression.

When these two radically different senses of 'understand' are clearly distinguished it becomes much harder to accept the conclusion that to understand a moral notion one must share the attitude which it embodies: a conclusion in which the two senses appear to be conflated. However it does not matter greatly whether or not one says that the barbarian understands this moral notion; his case still exposes at least an awkwardness in the position under discussion. The other outsider, the nomad unfamiliar with tables, would be said to have the notion when he understands that tables are things which people make, buy or steal to fill a certain sort of need, and hence knows what sorts of features a thing must have to be a table. The second primitive certainly knows what sorts of features a person or act must have to be great-souled. For him to feel the need from which this notion arises, to encourage great-souled behaviour, is a further step beyond the steps which the nomad has to take in coming to understand the concept of a table. One may

a. agree with Kovesi that this further step must be taken before the man can be said to grasp the moral notion of greatness of soul, or

b. disagree, and say that he understands the notion whether he admires great-souled behaviour or not.
If one takes the first then one must say that coming to understand a moral notion is another matter entirely from coming to understand a notion like 'table', involving a step of a quite different sort. Further, this extra step, coming to approve or disapprove, makes just the difference which would go some way towards justifying the type of fact-value distinction which is criticised in the book. One can scarcely admit such a difference without casting a shadow on the attempt to put these two sorts of concepts on the same footing in relation to the observable facts.

If one takes the second line one will want to abandon a central part of Kovesi's position, and acknowledge that a man may have learned a moral concept such as greatness of soul, and may correctly identify a case as an instance of it, without being committed by this description to any sort of evaluation of it. Both of these conclusions seem damaging.

Is there any possibility of maintaining that this problem does not arise, because understanding a non-moral notion such as 'table' also involves taking up a certain attitude towards tables? I do not see how this could be maintained with any degree of plausibility. No doubt most people who know what tables are would have a favourable attitude towards them; they would see tables as convenient means of achieving some of their purposes. For a person to understand the notion of a table he would have to realise that anyone, including himself, who had such purposes, would find tables convenient. Does such a realisation involve taking up a favourable attitude towards tables, analogous to the attitude needed, according to
Kove, for an understanding of a moral notion?

There is no necessary connection. If one has no sympathy for the purposes which certain things are designed to serve, then one's realisation that they are convenient for those purposes involves no trace of a favourable attitude. The Pope knows well that contraceptives are useful means for achieving certain ends, but, being thoroughly opposed to the ends, he is thoroughly opposed to contraceptives. Yet, whatever else he may be accused of failing to understand, it is not of a failure to grasp what contraceptives are. I conclude, then, that a descriptivist who maintains that having a favourable or unfavourable attitude is essential for an understanding of a moral notion is committed to a distinction between evaluative and non-evaluative concepts which must be embarrassing to him.

I want now to argue on more general grounds that this doctrine that understanding a moral notion necessarily involves taking up the appropriate attitude, if it is to be acceptable, must be qualified almost out of existence, and reduced to a triviality.

SHARING A MORAL NOTION

'Kindness' is as convincing an example of a complete moral notion as one is likely to find. Virtually anyone would agree that once an action is identified by the appropriate recognitors as an instance of kindness, there is no need to take a further step and evaluate it; it has already been favourably evaluated in being described
as kind. However, although it is highly eccentric, it is not impossible to regard kindness with disfavour, as the case of Nietzsche shows. What must the descriptivist say about this? Nietzsche identified as instances of kindness, let us assume, exactly the same actions as the rest of us would select, on exactly the same grounds; the difference is that his attitude to them was one of scorn, while ours is one of admiration or approval.

Kovesi is committed to say that it is essential to the complete notion of kindness that kindness is a good thing. Nietzsche, who thought it a bad thing, did not have the concept, or at least not our concept; he must be either confused about kindness, or operating with a different notion.

Nobody would claim that what Nietzsche said about sympathy and consideration is merely confused. It is too lucid and coherent for this to be anything but an impertinence. So if one is determined to assert that he did not understand the 'normal' notion of kindness, one must say that although he used the same words he had a different and peculiar notion. But anyone who wants to make this assertion must hedge it around with enough qualifications to conceal it from view. To show this, let us compare Nietzsche's situation with another situation in which we

would want to say that two people are using the same word but operating with different concepts.

A child being introduced to geometry meets the statement that a line has no width. He objects that this must be false; a line is no doubt narrow, but if it has no width how can it be drawn or seen? The teacher must try to overcome this problem by explaining that two different concepts of a line are at work here, one of a visible mark on a surface, the other an abstract notion. If he succeeds in clarifying the two concepts, the pupil will see that what he said about lines is not incompatible with what the geometry text-book says about them. As the criteria for counting as a line are different, the subject-terms of the two statements do not refer to the same things.

Nietzsche's opinion that kindness is blameworthy is certainly in conflict with our opinion that it is admirable. The conflict cannot be dissolved in the same way by showing a difference between two notions of kindness. This is because he would have used the same criteria to pick out cases of kindness; he used the word to refer to the same range of instances.

In one way his moral beliefs were out of touch with those which he was attacking, rather than incompatible with them. He criticised Christian morality for holding up for admiration the sort of man who is safe, harmless, good for other people, rather than the man who is, considered in isolation, a fine specimen. Accepting this account, when the Christian says that it is good for Jones to be kind, he means that it is advantageous for other people, especially weak inferior people, that Jones should
be kind; when Nietzsche says that it is not good, he means primarily that it will inhibit Jones' development into a noble, creative individual, if he concerns himself with other people's welfare.

These assertions are not incompatible. It is not because Nietzsche had a different notion of kindness; rather he had a different notion of goodness: he evaluated people from a different point of view. However the two statements are in conflict in a way that the two statements about lines are not. One can allow that from the one point of view kindness is a good thing, from the other a bad thing; but having adopted one of the points of view, one cannot consistently accept the other judgment as well. A personal commitment to what one takes to be the moral point of view is involved. 1 This conflict exists because the actions referred to as kind are just the same actions; two such people must be said to disagree in their evaluations of kindness.

In view of this a group of qualifications must be attached to the assertion that Nietzsche had a different notion of kindness: it is not such a difference as to involve him in using different criteria for kindness, so that his judgments about it can stand in relations such as agreement and disagreement with our judgments.

1 Cf.: 'We must distinguish between saying, from the Y point of view, "This is a good thing" and saying,"This is a good thing from the Y point of view". In the former case I have adopted the point of view and speak from it; in the latter case I need not, though I may, identify myself with the point of view'. J.O. Urmson, The Emotive Theory of Ethics (London: Hutchinson, 1968), pp. 107-108.
These qualifications would normally be taken as sufficient for the rejection of the claim that Nietzsche had a different notion of kindness. However there is no objection to anyone's making the claim in this emasculated form, as long as the emasculation is publicly performed. We would still need to distinguish a hard sense of 'different notions', according to which two people have different notions of x only if they use different criteria to pick out instances of x. In this hard sense Nietzsche's notion of kindness is certainly the same as ours.

The weaker statement that he had a different notion has no significant implications. It does not follow that Nietzsche's attack on kindness can be dismissed on the ground that, as it involves a misunderstanding, it does not conflict with our opinions, in the way that one could dismiss the child's objection about the width of a line.

CONFLICTING MORAL NOTIONS

On the whole, Kovesi writes as if there were one stable and unquestioned set of moral norms, the moral philosopher's problem being only to decide what to say about them. Notoriously this is not the case. My aim in the rest of this chapter will be to consider what impact is made by the facts of cultural differences in morality on this account of the justification of moral judgments.

Consider the following incident. A man finds that
his wife is having an affair with another man. He quietly investigates, and discovers that she is going to meet her lover the following day. He buys a rifle and ammunition and practises target-shooting during the afternoon. On the following day he goes to the place of assignation, finds the pair in compromising circumstances, and calmly shoots them both. How can we settle the question whether what he did was right or wrong?

An easy test is suggested by Kovesi's argument. We have a notion, 'murder', of which this action is an instance. It is not a doubtful or marginal case, but falls clearly in the centre. Furthermore, 'murder' is a complete moral notion: 'If someone understands the notion of murder or stealing, to say that they are wrong does not give him any more information'. ¹ The judgment that this action is murder, which is a moral judgment, is open to the same sort of proof as a statement that an object is a member of a class of physical objects: 'We know that certain acts are acts of murder in the same way as we know that certain objects are tables'. ² Thus an adverse moral judgment about the action described is as readily demonstrable as the judgment that the thing at which I eat my breakfast is a table. It all seems too easy.

The problem is that another group of people might have a moral notion of a very different flavour, of which this action is an equally central instance. One need not go to a very exotic culture to exemplify this; Sicilians

² Ibid., p. 19.
of a traditional turn of mind have such a notion of honour that the same features which would support our calling this action murder, would support their calling it an instance, indeed a definitive paradigm, of honourable behaviour. Further, 'honour' is a complete moral notion; to identify an action as honourable is to express approval of it; to deny that honourable actions are to be admired is as odd as to deny that murder is wrong.

Making use of the account given of our notion of murder one can construct without difficulty a proof that the action is wrong. But making similar use of a Sicilian notion of honour one can construct an equally sound demonstration that the same action is not only justified, but admirable. In general Kovesi writes as if it is sufficient that an action be a clear instance of a moral notion (a complete one) for its moral evaluation to be settled. And so it must seem to anyone who is firmly wedded to a particular set of fairly clear-cut moral notions, and who does not look beyond them. But there are competing sets of moral notions, and hence many actions for one group of people fall clearly and unambiguously under one moral notion, and for another group fall equally clearly and unambiguously under a conflicting notion. (I mean by this, one that is understood by its holders to involve a conflicting evaluation.)

One is reminded of a remark by MacIntyre about what he regards as the state of moral confusion in our contemporary society, with its complex mixture of moral traditions:
For those who speak from within a given morality, the connection between fact and valuation is established in virtue of the meanings of the words they use. To those who speak from without, those who speak from within appear merely to be uttering imperatives which express their own liking and their personal choices. 1

Kovesi is clearly among the first of MacIntyre's two groups. Even so it is strange that, having recognised that the ancient Romans had a somewhat different notion of a table from ours, 2 he pays virtually no heed to the fact of cultural variation in moral notions, when this fact constitutes a crucial difficulty for any position of this sort. MacIntyre provides further and more general illustrations of the problem by listing some concepts which in different moral traditions are given opposing but equally unquestioned evaluative loadings:

For Aristotelianism, to sell all you have and give to the poor would be absurd and mean-spirited; for primitive Christianity, the great-souled man is unlikely to pass through that eye of the needle which is the gateway to heaven. A conservative Catholicism would treat obedience to established authority as a virtue; a democratic socialism such as Marx's labels the same attitude servility and sees it as the worst of vices. For puritanism, thrift is a major virtue, laziness a major vice; for the traditional aristocrat, thrift is a vice; and so on. 3

There are, then, competing sets of moral notions of the sort which Kovesi describes. How can he meet this problem? There are in the book hints which may be developed into two different and incompatible answers, both in sharp conflict with some of the central doctrines

2 Kovesi, Moral Notions, p.5.
3 MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, p.226.
which are defended.

The first possible answer is suggested by the previously quoted assertion that if the proper description of an action involves moral notions, evaluation is redundant. The satisfaction of this condition clearly depends on the existence in a language of terms which are used in a certain way. If there is a term such that, according to the criteria for its correct application (a matter of linguistic convention) the action is properly described by it, and if furthermore it is a complete moral term, that is people applying it would be understood as praising, blaming, excusing (and this also is a matter of usage), then the evaluative question is settled. But if one begins from a conventionalist position, when faced with variations in conventions one can scarcely avoid moving towards some form of relativism, and concluding that for people with our notion of murder, this action is wrong, while for people with the Sicilian notion of honour it is admirable. Conventionalism provides no way of choosing between different conventions.

But this relativist position would be quite foreign to the book. Assertions that a person arriving at a moral conclusion 'works out the proper description of the situation on the basis of the relevant facts, and understands the significance of the description', 1 that 'we know that certain acts are acts of murder in the same way as we know that certain objects are tables', 2 and that 'if someone

1 Kovesi, Moral Notions, p. 157.
2 Ibid., p. 19.
understands the notion of murder or stealing, to say that they are wrong does not give him any more information. 1 It seem intended to suggest that there are some actions, those which stand under complete moral notions, for which their observable features settle their evaluation without qualification, not merely for anyone who happens to have the moral notions in question. As the problem of conflicting moral notions shows, the argument as so far discussed does not support any such absolutist conclusions.

Significantly, other recent writers who have given accounts of the relation between moral conclusions and empirical grounds which are similar to Kovesi's, but who take note of cultural variation in morality, take a relativist view of the settling of moral questions. The similarity of this passage from Beardsmore's *Moral Reasoning* to some passages from Kovesi's *Moral Notions* is obvious:

Now 'honesty is good' is in many ways similar [to 'one is a number' and 'yellow is a colour']. Unlike, e.g., 'It always pays to tell the truth', it says nothing about honesty. Rather it shows us the role which 2 the concept of honesty plays in a morality.

The relativism suggested by the reference to a morality is subsequently brought out explicitly:

I criticised the view that there is some kind of accepted technique by which universal moral agreement can be obtained. My own thesis is quite different. I have tried to show that it is within a particular moral code that we find the framework of agreement. 3

Phillips and Mounce, in their recent book *Moral*...

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Practices, take up similar positions about the nature of moral generalisations and the inseparability of evaluative significance from a concept such as that of lying. They argue that a statement such as 'Lying is wrong' may be compared in this respect with a necessary proposition such as 'Red is a colour'. Someone who uttered this latter statement would not be making an assertion of fact, but stating a necessary truth. The phrase 'Lying is wrong' is also a necessary statement which, if it tells us anything at all, tells us about the meaning of 'morally wrong'. We only learn to pick out acts of lying, in the course of learning the use of a term like 'wrong'. From the outset, therefore, an act of lying has moral import for us. There can be no gap between determining that man (sic) has lied and concluding that he has done wrong.

Thus these authors write about premises which show that a man has lied as entailing the conclusion that he has acted wrongly. However they recognise that as in different moral cultures different moral generalisations may have the status of 'necessary truths', the moral conclusions which will be entailed by a given set of premises may vary from time to time and from place to place:

To maintain that within a certain moral practice certain facts will entail certain moral conclusions does not preclude the possibility of there being different moral practices within which the same facts entail different conclusions.

One might well question the propriety of using the word 'entail' after recognising the cultural variability of the relation in question. But this is a side issue. My intention

2 Ibid., p.10.
3 Ibid., p.15.
was only to point out that these writers, beginning, like Kovesi, by emphasising linguistic facts, that certain terms carry unquestioned evaluative significance as well as being governed in their application by descriptive criteria, face the fact of cultural variation and adopt a relativist position.

Kovesi wants rather to maintain an objectivist or absolutist position. However I have tried to show how relativism follows naturally on an application of some of his assertions to cultural variations in moral norms.

It might be asked whether a similar difficulty in defending a single unique conclusion might not also arise in the case of identifying physical objects, and whether, if a moral judgment can be shown to be no less objective than a judgment that an object is a table, this is not objectivity enough. A situation analogous to the situation involving the double shooting may be imagined for a physical object, although the imagination must be stretched a little. Suppose that a tribe of pygmies made objects very similar in all observable features to our dining-tables, but put them to a very different use: say as stages for public performances of dances. The supposition is improbable, but not quite outrageous.

Now imagine an argument between one of the pygmies and one of us, about whether a certain object was a table or a stage. There is a quite close analogy with an argument between one of us and a traditional Sicilian about whether the husband's action was murder or honourable behaviour; as in that case, the very features to which we would point in support of the judgment that it was a table would be cited by the pygmy in support of the judgment that it was
a stage. If the real kernel of the dispute was who made
the object it might be settled. But if the argument is
simply about the proper term to use in referring to it,
there is ex hypothesi no way of settling it. Does not this
provide another illustration of the general point that in
respect of objectivity moral judgments do not suffer by
comparison with criterial empirical judgments?

On this possible argument I have two comments. In
the first place the existence of competing moral notions
applying to the same cases is an established and notorious
fact, while to find a parallel in the case of notions of
classes of physical objects one must construct an imaginary
and highly artificial example; the problem does not arise
in fact.

But even if the problem did arise, the cases differ
in a second way. The impossibility of showing the unique
correctness of a single description matters in the moral
case as it does not matter in the other. We can without
loss agree that the pygmies have as good reasons for
calling this thing a stage as we have for calling it a
table. Both terms can stand as correct descriptions
without any necessary harm to the aims or activity of
either party. But the two descriptions of the husband's
action are in different and sharper conflict. If people
of one group talk about killings of this sort in such a
way as to praise and foster them, others in such a way
as to blame and discourage them, the policies of the two
groups are in direct conflict. The person who calls this
action 'murder' cannot allow that 'honourable behaviour'
is also an appropriate description. There is a real
dispute to be settled.

It has by now become obvious that if one wants to say that moral questions can be settled absolutely in this way, one needs a criterion to apply to moral notions themselves, with a view to deciding, in cases where a single action falls under competing notions, which of them is valid.

Just as some of Kovesi's arguments, when applied to cultural variations in morality, point not towards the objective and absolute correctness of some moral judgments, but towards a not very interesting relativism, so other sections of the book seem to suggest the existence of a criterion to use in evaluating competing moral notions. I have in mind some of the references to the point of view from which these notions are formed, linking that point of view with human interests and needs.

This line of thought is not developed very far; here are some brief remarks on the topic:

Just as if we had not needed flat surfaces relative to our height when sitting we would not have begun to form the notion of a table,... so if we had not had the need to blame or excuse ourselves and others, we would not have begun to form the notion of an inadvertent act.

The formation of any concept, moral or otherwise, is governed by human interests of some sort:

As in the case of scientific notions, they initiate and guide the selection of the recognitors - though these interests are not that of wanting to predict or manipulate but of wanting to promote or avoid certain things.

1 Kovesi, Moral Notions, pp. 15-16.
2 Ibid., p. 54.
The relevant needs are not just those of the agent or the utterer of a moral judgment, but those of any human being.

What we should say is that only those wants, etc., that are anybody's wants are incorporated in our social and moral notions, and the function and purpose of these notions in our lives must be such that anybody should be able to and should want to use them in the same way and for the same purpose. 1

So we are supposed to form an unfavourable moral notion such as 'murder' believing that anybody has an interest in preventing actions of this sort; we form a favourable notion such as 'kindness' because it is in anybody's interests to encourage actions of this sort.

Kovesi's sketches for a picture of the moral point of view seem to suggest a criterion by which to judge, criticise and perhaps invalidate moral notions. One might elaborate them and argue that an unfavourable moral notion is valid only if it really is the case that any person has a need for or an interest in discouraging actions of the type in question. One would then have a way of coping with the problem posed by the double shooting. Although this would be seen as an admirable action by anyone who has the Sicilian notion of honour, this is an invalid notion, because it is not really in the interests of us all to encourage people to make a practice of shooting their unfaithful spouses and their partners in sin. And this would not be an unreasonable thing to say. 2

1 Ibid., p. 111.

2 At this point Kovesi's position differs markedly from one set out in the articles of Mrs. Foot with which some of his ideas are closely related. Mrs. Foot also thought it reasonable to ask why terms such as 'courageous' and 'just' ought to be commendatory, rather than neutral or unfavourable. (continued over)
What I have written in the previous paragraph goes beyond anything in the book which is under discussion. However, some passages lend themselves to development in this direction, and these developments seem to open an avenue of escape from relativism: a possibility of showing that one moral judgment about, say, the husband's actions is really the appropriate judgment.

But Kovessi could use this line of argument only at great cost to other aspects of his position. Much of what he writes seems intended to argue that one can adequately defend a moral judgment by showing that there exists an appropriate moral notion such that the action in question clearly falls under it. If he wanted to make use of such an argument as I have just outlined as an alternative to relativism, he would be forced to say that showing the existence of the appropriate moral notion is not an adequate defence of a moral conclusion; it is only the first step; it would be necessary to go on and prove that the notion, for example of murder, which was applied to the action was a valid or correct moral notion, and conflicting notions such as 'honour' were not. This would involve doing irreparable damage to the analogy between moral notions and notions such as 'table', and to the conclusion that we know some moral judgments to be true.

(continued) But she thought that the answer would need to show that it is in the interests of anyone to be courageous or just, not that it is in the interests of anyone to encourage and promote these dispositions. (See Philippa Foot, 'Moral Beliefs', Aristotelian Society Proceedings, supp. vol. LIX (1958-9), p. 99). She has subsequently abandoned this opinion (see Philippa Foot, Theories of Ethics (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 9.)
in just the same way as we know that certain objects are tables. After establishing that the rules for the use of the word 'table' are such that a certain object is a typical instance of a table, one need not validate the notion of a table by comparison with possible competing notions before concluding that this ought really to be classed as a table rather than something else.

A further inconvenience of this second line of argument is that it would involve one in the problem of justifying the criteria used in the validation of moral notions; one can hardly just take it for granted that general human needs and interests provide the sole criterion to be employed in evaluating moral notions, when alternative standards have been proposed.

Searle's attempt to demonstrate the absence of any fact-value gap in the case of judgments about promise-keeping ¹ can perhaps be described in Kovesi's terminology as an analysis of a single moral notion. It could no doubt be argued that our concept of promising is such that the assertion 'Promises ought (other things being equal) to be kept' gives information only about the meanings of the terms employed, and that the evidence that someone made a promise, and that other things are equal, fully justifies the conclusion that he ought to keep his promise, for anyone who has this notion of promising. But this is all that such an argument can support, and outrageous and mutually contradictory evaluative conclusions could be similarly

defended in terms of the moral notions which various groups of people have. If one wants to show that doing as one has promised is (unlike shooting erring wives and eating prisoners of war) absolutely, objectively right, not merely right to anyone who has certain evaluative notions, then one must go further than analysing a concept, and take up the question which Searle expresses as why we have the institution of promising, and which emerges in the present discussion as why our notion of promising is valid.

One sees the necessity of a criterion for the validation of moral notions if relativism is to be avoided, by considering cases which different groups of people would classify under conflicting notions. But once such a criterion had been introduced in this type of case, one would have acknowledged that to settle a moral question it is not sufficient to demonstrate that people have a moral notion of the requisite sort even if everyone has it. It would be necessary to show that this moral notion which everyone has is not mistaken.
The previous three chapters have been concerned primarily with comparisons between moral and empirical judgments about particular actions and situations. They suggested the conclusion that if moral judgments are to be defended as objective by analogy with empirical judgments it is a mistake to develop the analogy on the level of statements about particular instances. Comparisons on that level served only to emphasise the need to defend certain moral generalisations. The more interesting and promising analogy with tests for perceptual judgments, the ideal observer procedure for settling moral disputes, was seen to be dependent on a broad moral assumption. The analogy with criteria-governed empirical statements breaks down in the same way, as the procedure which it suggests for deciding whether a moral judgment is correct or mistaken is founded on a basic norm which can be used to validate moral notions. Again the attempt to provide a settlement procedure for moral disputes about particular cases brings out the prior need for a way of settling disputes about general moral laws.

This is perhaps not a surprising conclusion. One might think of general moral rules as more obvious instances of clear truth or falsity than judgments about particular
actions ordinarily are, partly because of the impossibility of getting complete knowledge of any specific situation, and partly because the specific judgment might be seen as logically dependent on a moral generalisation.

In the present chapter my aim is to compare moral laws with empirical laws. The purpose of the comparison, as before, is to determine whether there are crucial disanalogies between the two classes, which would justify denying objectivity of general moral judgments if it is granted that it can not reasonably be denied of empirical generalisations. I hope to show that there are such crucial disanalogies. In the first section of this chapter I shall examine the comparison with relatively low-level empirical generalisations, moving on in the second section to examine the comparison with scientific theories on a higher level of generality.

LOW-LEVEL GENERALISATIONS

Let us begin by clarifying the terms of the comparison: in the first place, what type of moral generalisation is to be compared with empirical generalisations to determine whether any analogous settlement procedures exist? There are two sorts of moral rule, or rather two ways of looking at them, since the same rule may be regarded in two different ways. Consider the rule 'Promise-breaking is wrong'. It may be regarded in either of these ways:

a. as a rule of thumb, a useful generalisation to keep in mind, because as a matter of fact, learned from the collective experience of generations, breaking a promise is always (or usually) wrong (and wrong for some reason
b. as a principle of judgment and action: the fact that an action is the breaking of a promise is in itself a reason to blame it in others and to avoid it oneself. The distinction is familiar from debates between act utilitarian and their opponents, intuitionist, rule utilitarian and others. The extreme utilitarian attitude to such a generalisation is succinctly stated by J.J.C. Smart:

'General rules, like "keep promises", are mere rules of thumb which we use only to avoid the necessity of estimating the probable consequences of our actions at every step'.

Ross outlines the other attitude to the same rule in this way, endorsing, as always, his common man's convictions:

What makes [a plain man with a promise to keep] think it right to act in a certain way is the fact that he has promised to do so - that and, usually, nothing more. That his act will promote the best possible consequences is not his reason for calling it right.

In setting out to examine the objectivity or otherwise of moral generalisations, one must concentrate attention on generalisations seen as principles of judgment and decision, rather than as rules of thumb. If someone considers the maxim concerning promise-keeping as a rule of thumb and a reliable one, it is because of his belief in a close correlation between promise-breaking and something else, for example avoidable damage to human happiness, and


in another moral rule which he regards as a principle of judgment, for example that any action causing such damage is wrong. It is the objectivity of the latter rule which is in need of defence if either generalisation is to be established as correct or mistaken.

With what type of empirical generalisation would it be appropriate to compare basic moral rules with regard to objectivity? Consider the distinction between accidental generalisations concerning the members of a closed class (for example 'All the men who live in this street are clean-shaven'), and law-like generalisations (for example 'All men are mortal'). While from both of them one can deduce indicative conditionals, counterfactual or subjunctive conditionals can be deduced only from the latter.

A moral generalisation regarded as a rule of thumb, like an accidental empirical generalisation, can support no more than indicative conditionals. An act-utilitarian, even if he thinks that breaking promises in fact always causes avoidable harm to people's interests and so is always wrong, while he might conclude that if Smith broke a promise he acted wrongly, must agree that the connection is contingent. A case of promise-breaking which has, on balance, the best possible consequences, might in principle occur. And he would have to admit that if such a case occurred, the fact that it was promise-breaking would not count against it.

The situation is different for a man who regards the rule about promises as a principle of judgment. If the mere fact that an act is an instance of promise-breaking
is a point against it, this must be so in any conceivable case. (It may be, in a pluralist moral system such as that of Ross, that there are other and weightier reasons in favour of the action. However, the point against it remains, even though overridden by other considerations. If any action were to be an instance of promise-breaking, that would count against it.) For the sake of simplicity, however, I shall consider as the central examples of moral laws, rules such as the utilitarian principle as it is regarded by a devout utilitarian, or a rule about lying as regarded by many of the less flexible moralists, that is a law which is seen as not open to being overridden by other conflicting laws.

If one is looking for an empirical analogy for such moral principles, the law-like generalisation is the most obvious one to choose. This is the comparison which I now want to examine, with a view to deciding whether there is any more difficulty in establishing the objective status of moral laws, than there is in the case of scientific laws.

Someone might accept the impossibility of demonstrating the truth of a moral generalisation, but point out that it is not possible to demonstrate the truth of a law-like empirical generalisation either. The reasons are familiar. A general statement of this sort says something about all the members of a class of things or events, of which there are some possible future members not yet in existence, and some past or present members not yet inspected. The evidence which supports the generalisation consists of the results of observation of some members of the class. But this evidence is necessarily incomplete. Therefore such a law can never be demonstrated to be true. But this does not
prevent us from regarding many such generalisations as well-founded, and some as indubitable; does anyone really consider 'All men are mortal' as a rash claim? Why, then, should the acknowledged difficulty about proving a moral principle prevent us from regarding some such principles as equally well-founded, even indubitable?

But the analogy will not hold up so far; moral laws must suffer by this comparison. Consider a law-like empirical generalisation such as 'All men have life spans shorter than three centuries', and the observations which constitute the evidence for it. No doubt, as it is not possible to get information about the life spans of all men, actual or possible, the evidence cannot constitute complete verification. Nevertheless the general statement stands in a relation to the facts which I shall argue cannot exist in the case of a moral generalisation. To be acceptable it must be compatible with the known facts, and it may be overthrown by counter-examples. While one can be persuaded to agree that no empirical generalisation of this kind should be accepted without a degree of tentativeness (in some cases it is surely a very small degree) the fact remains that the reason for acceptance is compatibility with the observations, and incompatibility with observations provides the ground for rejection.

Of course one may be so much attached to a previously useful generalisation, because of sheer inertia or commitment to a more general theoretical background, that one would rather believe that an inconvenient report can be explained away in some fashion, than reject the law as inaccurate. And this is no doubt reasonable enough in the
case of an isolated putative counter-example; the particular result might be inaccurate for any number of reasons, and presumably the law is well confirmed. But if the awkward result is repeated, and if plausible explanations are not forthcoming, a point is reached at which the law is indefensible in the face of the facts.

It is vulnerability to counter-examples which allows the objectivity of law-like empirical generalisations. The facts establish some of them as clearly mistaken, others as acceptable, although complete verification is precluded by the open-ended nature of the claim.

COUNTER-EXAMPLES IN ETHICS

Let us compare with this the status of a moral rule, taking as example a utilitarian law that all actions are right which produce the greatest possible general happiness. Counter-examples have a place in moral reasoning as well as in science. One recent writer on utilitarianism mentions this as the standard form for criticism of a normative moral system to take:

The usual way to criticize utilitarian positions is to offer counter-examples - that is, instances of actions which are clearly right but which on utilitarian grounds would have to be judged to be wrong, or instances which are clearly wrong, but which on utilitarian grounds would have to be judged to be right.

Examples of the argument come readily to mind, including such well-worn cases as this. According to act-utilitarian morality it would be right to hang a man known to be

innocent, if this would prevent much otherwise unavoidable suffering for enough people. But this could not be right, and so the law must be rejected. The form of argument is most familiar from discussions of utilitarianism, but of course it can be directed against other moral systems, such as ethical egoism, or one which employs more than one principle of judgment. But when pluralism in ethics reaches the point to which Ross took it, with his six types of prima facie duties, the number of openings for counter-example attacks is reduced to vanishing point; it is hard to think of anything one might regard as a moral consideration, which is not covered by one of the principles. Hence one thinks of this form of argument mainly as a move against a monistic morality such as utilitarianism. It is this use of it which I want primarily to examine.

This is a familiar move, and might appear to have the same logic, the same function in falsifying a moral law, as a counter-instance has in falsifying an empirical law. If this were so the two types of generalisation would have the same sort of objectivity, being open to similar falsification checks.

It has been argued, along these lines, that the epistemological status of moral and empirical laws is much the same. Morton White writes:

Snell's law, even though it contains no words like 'ought', functions in an explanation of a specific physical fact as a premise of a deductive argument, just as the general principle 'One ought to do whatever he promises to do' does in [an] ethical argument for singular conclusions.

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In both cases he sees the same kind of test of the rule by reference to the singular conclusions which may be derived from it, which in the one case will be empirical statements, in the other moral judgments about particular situations:

Our conclusion [in reasoning from a moral law] is one in which we assert that an action is right ... But now what if the conclusion is unacceptable? The pattern of surrendering a moral principle is very similar to the surrender of an isolated physical principle when everything else is held constant. One exception after another eats away at the principle, and the same commitment to logical consistency forces its rejection as forces us to reject physical theories that go against observation. 2

Carl Wellman has recently argued on the same grounds that moral and empirical laws have just the same claim to objectivity, being open to checking against particular data:

Ethical theories, just like scientific ones, have specific consequences for particular cases. If these consequences are found to be true, this confirms the theories. If they are found to be false, the theories are disconfirmed.

But the status of a moral generalisation is quite different; the counter-example argument cannot have this force in ethics. Before showing the difference I want to indicate a symptom of it. A counter-instance to an empirical generalisation must be an actual case. One would make no impression on a man who claimed that all humans have life spans of less than three centuries, by asking what he would say if a certain Armenian now alive were shown to have been born in 1650. He could reply that he will worry about this problem when it is shown to exist.

1 Ibid., p. 255.
2 Ibid., p. 257.
But a counter-example to a moral generalisation need not be an actual case. Consider the case of hanging an innocent man for the general good, used as a counter-example to the act-utilitarian rule. Perhaps no such hanging ever has produced the best consequences, and never will.

It will nevertheless serve as a counter-example, as long as it is a logical possibility. It is not open to the utilitarian to reply that he will worry about such a case when an actual instance is pointed out. He must take seriously examples which are conceivable but merely hypothetical, even highly improbable. And if he agrees that such an action under such circumstances would be wrong, then the counter-instance has served its purpose, no matter how empirically unlikely its occurrence might be.

What exactly constitutes a counter-example to a moral principle? The principle (of the categorical type which I am considering for the sake of simplicity) is a general judgment that all actions which have certain properties are, say, right. What conflicts with this generalisation must be not simply the occurrence of a certain action or situation, but another judgment: the judgment that a certain action, which has the appropriate properties, is not right. But this judgment does not exist independently in the world, as does the aged Armenian; it must be made by someone. Who is to make it?

Intuitionists such as Ross, who used arguments of this sort, took up a distinctive position about the logic and force of this form of attack. For Ross the convictions of the plain man are the data of moral philosophy, and the task of the moral philosopher is to find and set out as
systematically as possible the more general principles which underlie them: 'The main moral convictions of the plain man seem to me to be, not opinions which it is for philosophy to prove or disprove, but knowledge from the start'.

He puts forward a case involving a secret promise to a man now dead, as a refutation of utilitarianism:

Is it not clear that this utilitarian way of considering such a case is not the way in which honest men actually would consider it? We should, in fact, regard the breaking of this promise as an outrageous breach of trust.

This judgment, being a moral conviction of the plain man, is regarded as beyond question. Utilitarianism is thus inconsistent with some of the data of ethics, and so is unacceptable:

But it is more important that our theory fit the facts than that it be simple, and the account we have given above corresponds (it seems to me) better than either of the simpler theories with what we really think, viz. that normally promise-keeping, for example, should come before benevolence.

The strategy of the argument used in this way is plain. The relation between the utilitarian principle and the judgment about the example is exactly parallel to the relation between a false empirical generalisation and one of the facts which falsifies it.

Whether or not one shares Ross' faith in the convictions of the plain man, in using counter-examples to refute a moral law as they are used to refute scientific laws, one must rely on the objectivity of the judgments about the

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1 Ross, The Right and the Good, p. 21.
3 Ross, The Right and the Good, p. 19.
particular cases used. Just as it must be possible to settle disputes about what is an accurate account of a thing or event before it can count as a confirmation of or counter-example to an empirical law, so there must be a test, independent of the principle under scrutiny, for deciding what is a correct judgment about a particular action, before that case could be cited as confirming or disconfirming a moral law in the same impersonal manner.

But I have argued in the previous three chapters that there are no procedures for settling moral disputes about particular cases, analogous to procedures for deciding what is a correct description of a thing or event. The assumption needed by Ross is unjustified. Without a way of settling disputes about a particular moral issue there is no way to determine impersonally whether that case is a counter-example to a certain principle.

What force is left to this form of argument in ethics, if it cannot provide the same impersonal falsification procedure which it provides for empirical generalisations? In particular, who is to make the judgment about the case which must conflict with the rule if the argument is to succeed? If the example is to make any impression on the rule the conflicting judgment must be one which the defender of the rule makes himself. The strategy of the argument is thus *ad hominem*; it is pointed out to the utilitarian, for example, that his general rule entails that it would be right to hang an innocent man for the general good; surely he cannot stomach that conclusion. If this challenge shakes him, it can only be because he is disposed to pass the judgment about this case which
clashes with his principle. But the stomachs of moral philosophers are not equally sensitive. If his feelings about the case are quite consistent with his principle the attack has collapsed; for him the example is no counter-example.

Criticism in this form would probably have made little impression on Nietzsche, a philosopher with unusually tough moral digestion. In objecting to his opinion that one ought to stand back and leave the suffering and unfortunate to their natural fate, one might confront him with a case of children facing starvation; surely, one might say, he cannot maintain that we ought to watch them starve from our pantry windows. But he might reply that he both can and does maintain it.

This retort must cause the attack to collapse, without a method of showing that Nietzsche is mistaken about this case. The critic can say no more about his example except that the majority of people would judge otherwise, a fact of which his opponent is well aware. The morality which a man defends may be monstrous, but if he holds it consistently he remains untouched. The counter-example argument in ethics can do no more than expose inconsistencies between the principles which a man states and those which underlie his thinking about specific cases.

An example of this failure of the argument is to be found in Kant's comments on the suggestion that lying is

right when it prevents great harm. It might be thought that anybody would see such a situation as providing a counter-example to an utterly unqualified generalisation that lying is wrong. But the expectation is disappointed; Kant rejects the example without any apparent qualms: 'Truth in utterances that cannot be avoided is the formal duty of a man to everyone, however great the disadvantage that may arise from it to him or any other'. Again we would need a method of settling what is the correct judgment about the particular case, independently of general rules, to be able to claim that Kant was mistaken in not seeing this as a counter-instance.

The counter-example argument is ad hominem, but there is nothing illegitimate about it. A man's position is certainly untenable if he defends a moral generalisation but rejects a more specific judgment which is clearly entailed by it. And the counter-example argument is a perfectly reasonable way of exposing such incoherencies, and thereby showing a man that he must reconsider, and perhaps abandon or modify, the principles which he has been putting forward. But if the moralist under attack is quite happy to pass a judgment about a particular case which is consistent with his professed principles the example is not, for him, a counter-example. He need not be moved by the fact that other people see it in this light, unless, like Ross, he set out to systematise the moral convictions of those other people.

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In short, a moral law cannot be impersonally borne out by or falsified by the cases to which it is applied, in any way analogous to the way empirical laws are borne out or falsified.

There is no case which the proponent of a moral principle is bound to accept as a counter-instance to his principle. It does not follow that he is entitled to reject, in advance and unheard, all arguments of this form which critics might want to direct against his position, as J.J.C. Smart, in defending act-utilitarian morality, has wanted to do:

It is also necessary to remember that a criticism of act utilitarianism should criticise it as a normative system. Some writers seem to think that to refute utilitarianism it is sufficient to show that it conflicts with some of our particular moral intuitions and feelings. ... A false analogy with science seems to operate. In science we certainly must correct our general principles in the light of particular observations. But in ethics our particular statements are not observation reports but recommendations. It therefore seems to me that the matter is the other way round. Our general principle, resting on something so simple and natural as generalized benevolence, seems to me to be more securely grounded than our particular feelings. ... If, of course, act utilitarianism were put forward as a descriptive systematization of how the ordinary man, or even we ourselves in our unreflective and uncritical moments, actually thinks about ethics, then of course it is easy to refute and I have no wish to defend it. 1

There is more than one point in this passage which calls for comment. Smart can reasonably reject any appeal to what the ordinary man would say about a particular case; unlike Ross, he aimed not to set out systematically the moral convictions of the plain man, but to improve them. But he claims that in morals the general principle

is more securely grounded than the particular judgment, so that he can reject the latter even when it is his own.

This seems an impossible position to maintain. If one finds oneself generalising that all actions of a certain sort are right, and judging that one such action is wrong, one of these judgments must give way, but it is not obvious which one would, or should.

Sometimes an aversion to doing an action need not tell against a general judgment that actions of that class are right. A supporter of capital punishment is not committed to performing or witnessing executions without a qualm. What matters is whether he sees his qualms as merely emotional reactions, without moral significance, or whether he associates with them a judgment that this ought not be done. It is in the latter case that an inconsistency arises, and the reaction to the particular case cannot reasonably be ignored.

I do not mean to imply that there is a clear-cut distinction between non-moral emotional dispositions on the one hand, and moral attitudes on the other. One's attitude to an action might occupy a hazy region between the two. This situation is not uncommon when a person who has been brought up with a set of moral beliefs is examining these critically, and in the process feeling his way towards a different set of convictions which, when properly formed, will be in a fuller sense his own. He may continue to feel aversion to actions which he was taught to consider wicked, and guilt after performing them, but be unable to make it clear, even to himself, whether he regards these as mere emotional reactions, or whether
they express his current convictions.

But the existence of difficult intermediate cases does not alter the fact that, nearer to the two extremes, there are aversions which one may without any hesitation identify as mere aversions, and others which one must regard as morally relevant. One may hold to a moral principle such as that of utility, acknowledging that one's emotional responses are not always in harmony with it, but maintaining that the conflicting feelings are only of the former type, perhaps describing them as irrational, but difficult to eradicate. No doubt when Smart declared that he could maintain an act-utilitarian moral position in spite of the production by critics of difficult cases about which he himself had conflicting feelings, he was looking at his anti-utilitarian feelings in this light.

However it is one thing to allow that a person may reasonably dismiss a favourable or unfavourable emotional response which he feels towards an action, as of no moral relevance; it is quite another thing to allow that he may reasonably reject all counter-examples unheard, claiming that no such argument can make any impression on his principles. The claim involves predicting that no matter what cases one presents to him, any conflicting emotional responses which he feels to them will be mere emotional responses, unconnected with any disposition to make a similarly conflicting moral judgment. It is rather rash to commit oneself confidently to such a prediction. One can scarcely deny the logical possibility that some case as yet unthought of may elicit not merely a non-utilitarian emotional response, but a non-utilitarian judgment that such an action ought or ought not be performed: a judgment
which one cannot sincerely abandon. In such a situation
the counter-example argument has achieved its purpose,
showing to the proponent of a systematic morality that he
is not able consistently to follow through all the
implications of his professed principles.

Indeed this form of argument, far from being illegitimate,
must be an absolutely central mode of moral reasoning. How
could one give any rational consideration to the acceptability
of a moral principle, if not by examining cases about which
it entails judgments which seem dubious and disturbing at
first glance, and considering whether or not one is able to
endorse those judgments? If one is unable to endorse them,
this must make some impression on one's acceptance of the
normative theory.

In a later article Smart has reconsidered his position
on the use of the counter-example argument against act-
utilitarianism, having obviously felt the force of one such
argument. He writes as follows about the case of inflicting
suffering on an innocent man to achieve benefits for others:

Surely if it is shown that, in certain circumstances
(which we may hope will never in fact occur) a
utilitarian ought, on his own principles, to commit
a serious injustice, such as punishing an innocent man,
then it seems that this does and should weaken the
appeal of utilitarianism. And yet one can be made to
vacillate back again. We also reflect that the serious
injustice would ex hypothesi be the only possible
alternative to an even greater total misery than would
be caused by the injustice. ¹

It seems that this case involves a special difficulty for
him because it evokes not merely a non-utilitarian emotional
response, but an inclination to pass a conflicting moral

¹ J.J.C. Smart, 'The Methods of Ethics and the Methods of
judgment for a non-utilitarian reason: a response which he can hardly dismiss as morally irrelevant. The counterexample argument has drawn blood, putting the defender of a tidy monistic morality into the position of wanting to make about the same action two different judgments for two different reasons. According to utilitarianism there are no such moral dilemmas, only difficulties in calculation, and the feeling that for some situations there are no satisfactory solutions has no right to exist in a pure utilitarian soul.

This example illustrates an important difference between moral and empirical arguments in this form. A man who maintains that all swans are white may be presented with a black swan. He cannot deny that this specimen is a counter-example to his generalisation, but it may be an apparently solitary freak. He can no longer defend his generalisation, but he may merely write in an exception: all swans are white except this one.

A moralist presented with a worrying case cannot do the same. The counter-instance to his law need not be an actual action like the actual swan; it may be fictional. The case is difficult because some of its features prompt a judgment in conflict with the principle. With some consideration he should be able to isolate the features; it is clear from Smart's remarks quoted above that his misgivings arise from the injustice of the action. The full effect of this form of argument, then, is to bring home to a moralist, that he regards as providing grounds for moral judgment features of actions which are not acknowledged in the morality which he propounds.
This form of argument about morality, then, is very different from the raising of counter-examples to empirical laws. In morality the argument is *ad hominem*. It is not simply a fact that the unmerited punishment case is a counter-instance to act-utilitarianism, in the way that it is simply a fact that a black swan is a counter-instance to the generalisation that all swans are white. One might put the case to a moralist expecting him to see it as a counter-example, but he is not bound to do so in the absence of a way to settle disputes about particular cases. The argument is designed to show an inconsistency between a principle which a man propounds and what he himself thinks about the case described, not between a principle and a particular fact the status of which is independent of what any individual thinks.

Therefore, while we say that the discovery of black swans falsified the generalisation that all swans are white, we cannot speak in the same way of the impersonal falsification of a moral principle by the discovery of counter-examples. We can only say that consideration of a certain case drove a certain person to abandon or qualify his principles. The idea of a falsification by the facts which is objective, that is, which has a status independent of particular individuals, is not applicable to moral rules. For this reason it is quite out of the question to regard moral and empirical

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1 It is more similar in some ways to the reasoning involved in Einstein's use of thought-experiments to criticise other theoretical views. (See, for example, Albert Einstein, Relativity: the Special and the General Theory, trans. R.W. Lawson, 74th ed. (London: Methuen, 1945), pp. 25 ff. (continued over)
laws as on a similar footing with regard to objectivity.

**MORAL THEORIES AND SCIENTIFIC THEORIES**

But perhaps one should not expect a close analogy between a moral principle such as one which constitutes the foundation of some form of utilitarianism, and a low-level law-like empirical generalisation. Perhaps a more reasonable comparison would be with a scientific theory on a much higher level of generality, for instance Copernican or Ptolemaic astronomy. A systematic morality such as utilitarianism is often referred to as a moral theory, suggesting such a comparison. Besides, utilitarianism, like Copernican astronomy, is very extensive in its implications, and controls an adherent's view of an enormous range of phenomena, unlike a simple generalisation.

Over the last few years much effort has been devoted to showing that scientific theories are not the solidly-founded bodies of objective truth, and scientific theorising is not the objective fact-guided activity, which they are supposed to have been mistaken for. These developments open up an interesting avenue of argument for anyone who wants to counter the moral sceptic's assertion that no moral theory may be shown to be true or false. He may try to argue that theories in the empirical domain are not

(continued) He brought forward, not actual events, but a description of a possible situation, and his argument rests on the assumption that rival theorists will accept a statement about the situation which is incompatible with their principles. But his appeal is to agreement about what would happen under the described circumstances, and it is possible at least to imagine a test to show that this would in fact happen.
in a radically different position, that any point which can be made against the objectivity of moral thinking can be matched by a point against the objectivity of scientific thinking, so that there is no room for scepticism which is specifically about morality.

Feigl has suggested that the desire to show moral convictions as in no worse an epistemological position than scientific theories has provided some of the incentive for efforts to weaken the claim of the latter to objectivity:

Perhaps part of the motivation of the obscurantists is connected with their concern for moral value judgments. Once it is suspected that basic moral value judgments cannot be derived from factual scientific information alone, and hence that all matters of ethics ultimately are grounded in personal commitments, the obscurantists feel impelled to issue a *tu quoque* to the scientist. 1

This may well be so, although the comparisons explicitly suggested are more commonly between science and religion than between science and morality. In the remainder of this chapter my aim is to examine the relative status of moral theories and scientific theories, to show that the latter have a claim to objectivity which the former have not.

A number of different types of reason are brought forward for denying the objectivity of scientific theories and theorising. I want first to show that, taking the sense of the word 'objective' with which I am primarily concerned, the sense in which a class of statements is objective if there is, in principle, a way of settling disputes about them, one group of related arguments against

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the objectivity of scientific theories is almost entirely beside the point. I shall then go on to examine others which are more relevant to my purposes.

THEORISING AND EMOTION

One reason for rejecting the traditional image of scientific objectivity is illustrated in the following passage:

We cannot truly account for our acceptance of such theories without endorsing our acknowledgment of a beauty that exhilarates and a profundity that entrances us. Yet the prevailing conception of science, based on the disjunction of subjectivity and objectivity, seeks - and must seek at all costs - to eliminate from science such passionate, personal, human appraisals of theories, or at least to minimize their function to that of a negligible by-play. 1

It is stressed that the image of the scientist which exists in the minds of some people, as a bloodless calculating machine, does not correspond to the reality. Innovators with the right personal qualities (Kepler is admirably suited to the role) can be quoted to provide illustrations of how passionately the scientist can be involved in his research and its conclusions. 2 However, although no doubt this point provides a useful corrective to a certain popular image of the scientist and his work, it is not important to my sense of 'objective', connected


2 Kepler freely expresses what he felt at finally making sense of the observations over which he had puzzled for so long. He writes: 'O qui lumine Naturae deciderium in nobis promoves luminis Gratiae, ut per id transferas nos in lumen Gloriae; gratias ago tibi Creator Domine, quia delectasti me in factura tua, et in operibus manuum tuarum exultavi'. (Harmonices Mundi (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1968) Book V Chapter 9.) This is certainly not the language of a dispassionate collector and digester of facts.
with settlement procedures. A conclusion may be expected with any degree of excitement, arrived at with any degree of delight and defended with any degree of belligerence, but nevertheless be open to proof or refutation. It does not follow from the fact that scientific discoverers do not have an objective (dispassionate) approach to their research, that their conclusions cannot be objective (able to be shown to be true or false).

Several other closely related points are made about the way in which a scientific theory gains its adherents: points which are taken as telling against the objectivity of scientific theories, but which are similarly beside the point in relation to the sense of 'objective' on which I have concentrated my attention. One of these is the suggestion that adopting a new theory in a certain area of empirical knowledge has something in common with committing oneself to a system of religious beliefs, in that it is not a step which can be taken on purely factual grounds, but requires a leap in the dark:

The transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced. 1

A man who embraces a new paradigm at an early stage must often do so in defiance of the evidence provided by problem-solving. He must, that is, have faith that the new paradigm will succeed with the many large problems that confront it, knowing only that the older paradigm has failed with a few. A decision of that kind can only be made on faith. 2

A belief which must be accepted on faith is presumably one for which the available factual evidence is not enough

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2 Ibid., p.157.
to compel assent. The argument is that people who abandon an established scientific theory to follow an innovator (for example those who rejected Ptolemaic astronomy in favour of the Copernican theory) are (frequently or always) taking such a step, analogous to undergoing a religious conversion.

The analogy suggested by the words 'faith' and 'conversion', is between belief in a scientific theory and religious belief, but a similar analogy with moral convictions might be drawn. A moral sceptic, let us say, argues that moral theories are not objective: a system such as utilitarianism is not a conclusion which its adherents derive from the facts, but a set of convictions to which they are simply committed. One might accept this, but try to counter it by arguing that this is not a special defect of moral systems, pointing out, as Kuhn does, that the decision to adopt a novel scientific theory is in a similar position.

I think that such an argument would be confused. Any type of statement may be accepted on faith (that is, believed by a person who is not in possession of factual evidence which would establish the truth of what he believes). Some of the beliefs which a person accepts on faith may be expressible as perfectly objective (verifiable or falsifiable) statements. Thus a man may have faith that the world will come to an end at noon tomorrow or that his son did not break the window which he is accused of breaking. To say that these beliefs are for him matters of faith is not to deny that they are open to proof or disproof. He may accept on faith a religious belief which commits him to no expectations that are different from those of an atheist or a sceptic. No sequence of events could verify or falsify this
belief; but this is because of its content (rather, perhaps, its lack of content), not because it is accepted on faith.

Therefore the leap in the dark involved in acceptance of a new scientific theory really has no bearing on the objectivity of the theory; this depends on the content of the belief which is accepted. Like faith in a person's honesty or in the coming of the millennium, faith in a scientific theory can be shown to be misplaced, if it involves commitment to predictions which may or may not be fulfilled. Polanyi, who emphasises the personal commitment which is involved in adherence to a new theory, also implies that there is a possibility of an objective check on the accuracy of what the adherent is committed to:

Those who wholeheartedly embraced the Copernican system at an early stage committed themselves thereby to the expectation of an indefinite range of possible future confirmations of the theory, and this expectation was essential to their belief in the superior rationality and objective validity of the system. 1

But clearly such expectations can be disappointed, and such beliefs falsified.

Some theories, to be sure, are such that it is hard to see how events might show faith in them to have been misplaced. An example is the theory of the psychotherapist Carl Rogers, that the fundamental motive force underlying human behaviour is the drive towards self-actualisation: 'Whether one calls it a growth tendency, a drive toward self-actualisation, or a forward-moving directional tendency, it is the mainspring of life'. 2 Although it will affect the treatment which he offers, it is not clear that this

1Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p.5.
theory commits an adherent to expecting some events rather than others. Such a therapist is ready for all the forms of behaviour which a Freudian looks for. Perhaps this theory must be accepted or rejected on faith, without the possibility of a check on whether the commitment is warranted. But it is just this lack of a possible test which would many to deny this theory the name 'science': 'A theory which is not refutable by any conceivable event is non-scientific'.

Polanyi stresses the point that scientists are selective in their interests. They are concerned with theories, and will not investigate a range of phenomena without some idea of how to fit the results into a theoretical background. The scientist's selection of the facts which seem of scientific interest is guided, not by the facts themselves, but by his interest in systems, an interest referred to as scientific passion:

The function which I attribute here to scientific passion is that of distinguishing between demonstrable facts which are of scientific interest, and those which are not. ... I want to show that this appreciation depends ultimately on a sense of intellectual beauty; that it is an emotional response which can never be dispassionately defined, any more than ... the beauty of a work of art or the excellence of a noble action. 2

There is an interesting hint of a parallel between scientific thought and aesthetic and moral feeling.

While something like an aesthetic passion for order


2 Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p. 135.
may govern the scientist's selection of areas for investigation, it does not follow that any theory about the area of investigation which he may construct is not in principle testable by reference to the facts. Polanyi points out, no doubt correctly, that adherents of theories are often resistant to allowing a mere collection of apparently unassimilable facts to falsify them; the attraction of the system is such that they are ready, in fact eager, to assume either that the problematical results are not accurate, or that they can be explained away:

Today, only very few scientists consider it worthwhile to test the facts of extra-sensory perception or of psychokinesis, since most of them would regard this as a waste of time and an improper use of their professional facilities. It is the normal practice of science to ignore evidence which appears incompatible with the accepted system of scientific knowledge, in the hope that it will eventually prove false or irrelevant. ¹

Referring to some experimental results which, although there is no special reason to believe them inaccurate, make no sense in the context of modern chemical theory, he writes:

Our attitude towards these experiments is now similar to that of Azande towards Evans-Pritchard's suggestion of trying out the effects of oracle-poison without an accompanying incantation. We shrug our shoulders and refuse to waste our time on such obviously fruitless enquiries. The process of selecting facts for our attention is indeed the same in science as among Azande. ²

However the disposition of scientists to set awkward alleged facts aside in order to save a systematic view of a wide range of phenomena is not unlimited. If it were there would be no modification of theories in the light of new facts.

² Ibid., p.294.
Polanyi allows that subsequent developments may show that it was a mistake to reject or ignore certain observations, and, presumably, that it is the theory which must be rejected. He concludes the former of the two passages quoted above by writing: 'But there is, unfortunately, no rule by which to avoid the risk of occasionally disregarding thereby true evidence', and the latter passage continues: 'But I believe that science is often right in its application of [the process of selecting facts], while Azande are quite wrong when using it for protecting their superstitions'. The possibility of a subsequent check on whether certain alleged facts were wrongly disregarded is all that is required for objectivity in my sense.

THEORIES AND PERCEPTIONS

I want to turn now to another slightly different aspect of the case against the objectivity of scientific theories, an aspect developed in some detail by Kuhn. The argument is that when a scientist develops or adopts a new theory about a certain range of phenomena there is a corresponding difference in his perception of those phenomena: something like a gestalt shift, like the difference between seeing the duck-rabbit picture as a duck and seeing it as a rabbit. Thus, it is argued, the worlds experienced by two people whose perceptions are filtered through different theories are somewhat different worlds:

1 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, pp. 110-134.
Paradigm changes do cause scientists to see the world of their research-engagement differently. In so far as their only recourse to that world is through what they see and do, we may want to say that after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world. 1

The implication is that it is not possible to settle an issue between two competing scientific theories by reference to the facts, since the disputants' perception of the facts is altered by the differing theories which they hold:

Therefore, at times of revolution, when the normal-scientific tradition changes, the scientist's perception of his environment must be re-educated - in some familiar situations he must learn to see a new gestalt. After he has done so the world of his research will seem, here and there, incommensurable with the one he had inhabited before. This is another reason why schools guided by different paradigms are always slightly at cross-purposes. 2

One might suggest here an analogy with adherents of conflicting moral theories, who do not seem to inhabit the same moral universe. The facts which are seen as morally relevant by, for example, Bentham and Ross, an ancient Greek and a modern Christian, are not the same facts.

The use of the word 'incommensurable' for two scientific views of the same phenomena is interesting, because the same word has often been used in discussing the sets of norms and ideals of different societies, carrying the same suggestion that no set can be shown to be mistaken or correct. Ruth Benedict wrote about three sharply contrasting cultures:

They are travelling along different roads in pursuit of different ends, and these ends and these means in one society cannot be judged in terms of those of another society, because essentially they are incommensurable. 3

1 Ibid., p.110.
2 Ibid., p.111.
Two questions about gestalt shifts accompanying scientific change need careful separation. One is whether the birth of a new theory is experienced in this way, as a sudden unstructured event, after which the facts are seen in a new way. Much of what Kuhn writes is about this:

Scientists then often speak of 'the scales falling from the eyes' or of the 'lightning flash' that 'inundates' a previously obscure puzzle, enabling its components to be seen in a new way that for the first time permits its solution. 1

Such descriptions suggest a similarity between scientific and artistic inspiration, which has sometimes been described in similar terms:

The fine delight that fathers thought; the strong Spur, live and lancing like the blowpipe flame Breathes once and, quenched faster than it came, Leaves yet the mind a mother of immortal song. 2

However, given that events are suddenly seen anew, it is another question whether there is a way of showing that one way of perceiving them is mistaken. The duck-rabbit diagram is a misleading example here. In that case there is no question of one way of seeing it being erroneous. But that is not a typical case of 'seeing as'; we also see shapes as trees or people, dark areas as shadows or patches of spilt paint, and we may experience a sudden shift from seeing the thing in one way to seeing it in the other. But in these cases we can obviously check on which way of seeing the phenomena is accurate.

One of Kuhn's own examples of a theory-governed gestalt shift provides a good illustration of this testability.

1 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 121.

2 Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'To R.B.'.
He mentions the difference in perception between a Ptolemaic astronomer who sees the moon as a planet, and a Copernican who sees it as an earth satellite. ¹ But, if not for Copernicus, certainly for us, it is possible to show that it is simply a mistake to see the moon as moving, relative to the earth, in the same way as Mercury, Venus, and the others. When holders of competing theories perceive phenomena in different ways it is often possible to expose one of the ways as mistaken.

The arguments against the objectivity of scientific theories discussed over the past few pages have concerned the development and appreciation of new theories. I have tried to show that they have little bearing on objectivity in the sense I have taken as central, which is a matter of testability rather than nature of origin. Scheffler makes the same point:

In general, therefore, if a given interpretation of objectivity ... accords ill with the generation of scientific ideas we have as yet no reason to condemn the attribution of objectivity to science. For such attribution may well purport to characterize not the generation of theories, but their manner of justification, criticism and control. ²

Any attempt to show that scientific and moral theories are not in radically different positions as regards objectivity must concentrate on methods of testing and criticising in the two areas.

If the grounds for justifying and criticising scientific theories had no greater claim to objectivity than those applied to moral theories, this would weaken the position

¹ Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, p. 114.
² Scheffler, Science and Subjectivity, p. 72.
of the moral sceptic who did not want his scepticism to extend so far. I want now to examine two arguments to see how far they support such a conclusion. The first is that the objective test of the facts is not sufficient for choice between theories, and that one must employ other criteria which have much in common with aesthetic and moral standards. The second seems to show that even the facts of observation do not provide an objective test.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING A THEORY

Let us consider the first of these arguments:

One and the same set of observational data is compatible with very different and mutually inconsistent theories. This is possible for two reasons: first because theories, which are universal, always go beyond any set of observations ...; second, because the truth of an observation statement can always be asserted within a certain margin of error only. ...

Now it is very important to realize that this freedom which experience grants the theoretician is nearly always restricted by conditions of an altogether different character. These additional conditions are neither universally valid, nor objective. 1

Not only might unconsidered alternatives fit the facts equally well, but there are always problems about fitting the accepted theory to phenomena:

No paradigm that provides a basis for scientific research ever completely resolves all its problems.

... Every problem that normal science sees as a puzzle can be seen, from another viewpoint, as a counter-instance and thus as a source of crisis. 2


2 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, p. 79.
Further, all the facts are not known; a set of embarrassing phenomena may always come to light: a far more real danger for a high-level theory with ramifications over a wide area, than for a simple generalisation. Thus another writer concludes: 'If we consider this point, it is obvious that such a theory cannot be "the truth"'. It can never be uniquely and conclusively borne out by the facts.

If truth-claims are inappropriate, we can only make comparative judgments about theories, and scientists are urged to proceed accordingly:

Verification is like natural selection: it picks out the most viable among the actual alternatives in a particular historical situation. Whether that choice is the best that could have been made if still other alternatives had been available, or if the data had been of another sort is not a question that can usefully be asked. The more general our knowledge gets the more important it will be to carry out tests ... not by comparing a single theory with experience, but by staging crucial experiments between theories.

But for a choice between theories the facts provide an inadequate test which must be supplemented. The most obvious of the other criteria is simplicity or elegance:

'Agreement with observed facts' does not single out one individual theory. We never have one theory that is in full agreement but several theories that are in partial agreement ... . The final theory has to be in fair agreement with observations and also has to be sufficiently simple to be usable.

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2 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, p. 145.
One might suggest that no real compromise between simplicity and compatibility with observations is involved, since the latter criterion would always take precedence, the former being employed only to discriminate between theories that fit the facts with equal precision. This is not the case, as consideration of an example will show. Few are likely to reject Newton's principle for a modified principle of gravity which had it that the force is inversely proportional to the distance between the two objects to the power of 1.997 or 2.003, on the ground that the best available measurements averaged out at that figure. One would think it reasonable to assume that the simple distance-squared law applies, being grateful, perhaps, that the empirical results came so close, and assuming that the discrepancy is due to some inaccuracy in the measurement. This would be a case in which the criterion of simplicity was allowed to take precedence over compatibility with the known facts.

The ground for this preference for simplicity is not clear. It looks at the same time similar to an aesthetic taste for order and a pragmatic desire for a formula which is easily manipulated. If neither of these is the primary foundation for the criterion, then perhaps it is to be put down to an assumption that, in spite of the somewhat untidy appearances, the facts must be reducible to a simple elegant system: the 'intuition of rationality in nature', which, according to Polanyi, is 'a justifiable and indeed essential part of scientific theory'.¹ But any of these grounds for the preference for simplicity is independent of what the facts are, and indeed the application of this criterion involves turning one's back, to a certain extent, on the facts as they are known.

¹ Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p.16.
The preference for simplicity, then, could hardly be regarded as an objective basis for choice between scientific theories, any more than a preference for strict forms is an objective basis for choice between pieces of music, or a preference for kindness an objective basis for choice between actions.

When grounds for preference of this sort are employed, and must be employed, in deciding in favour of a scientific theory, there is room for an argument that this decision is not radically different in status from a decision in favour of one moral theory rather than another. What does it matter, it might be argued, that the facts could never provide sufficient reason for adopting, say, a utilitarian approach to morality, when the facts alone do not provide sufficient reason for accepting the best-founded of scientific theories?

But can this close analogy be defended? It is not possible to maintain that there is a complete rift between scientific and moral thinking: that the type of reasoning which results in the adoption of one theory rather than another to describe and account for a certain range of empirical phenomena, is, or ideally can be, a totally fact-governed activity, affected by no factors in any way similar to the factors which might cause us to be attracted to a particular approach to moral questions, or to an artistic style. However it does not follow that there is not a radical distinction to be made, or that there is no point in characterising moral theories as lacking objectivity by comparison with scientific theories.

Accepting all that can be said about the variety of reasons for choice among scientific theories, the objective
test of compatibility with the facts is one of those grounds. Further, although it is not enough to select one theory as 'the truth' about the area of phenomena to which it applies, it does not follow that it cannot by itself falsify any number of theories. Perhaps astronomers needed the criteria of elegance as well as the test of observation, to justify the choice of a heliocentric rather than a geocentric description of the solar system. However the test of compatibility with the facts is quite sufficient to justify the rejection of some possible theories, such as that the sun and planets are stationary relative to each other, or, (less absurdly) that the other planets and the sun revolve in circular orbits which have the earth as their centre. Other criteria such as simplicity could play a part only in a choice between two theories which were both at least reasonably satisfactory as far as compatibility with the known facts was concerned. In the case of a gross discrepancy with observations, as with the stationary planet theory, nobody would see the simplicity of the theory as a point in its favour, even though for simplicity it could hardly be improved.

Some philosophers have wanted to question the propriety of talking about high-level theories and principles as either true or false, as Toulmin does in this passage:

The discovery of diffraction does not prove that it is untrue that light travels in straight lines, for such a principle, as we shall see, cannot be spoken of as true or untrue in any simple sense. No more did Einstein's work prove that Newton's Laws of Motion were untrue. It accounted for some limits, which had hitherto been unexplained, to the accuracy with which Newton's mechanics can be used to calculate the motions of the planets; but it superseded Newton's mechanics only for the most refined theoretical purposes, and could only
whimsically be said to prove the older laws of motion untrue. 1

But this can be made to seem plausible only by a careful choice of illustrations. Newton's mechanics provides an example convenient for the purpose, since, as Toulmin observes, his laws of motion can still be employed for virtually all purposes. But there is nothing whimsical about saying that the theory that all the heavenly bodies move in circular orbits with the earth as their centre has been proved untrue. There is a perfectly simple sense in which this and many other theories and principles are false: they are clearly incompatible with what is known to be the case.

The argument for the non-objectivity of scientific theories from the unavoidable variety of grounds for choice between theories, and from the possibility of other equally satisfactory theories is, then, not a complete case. It may be inappropriate to talk about observed facts verifying a theory, but they can still falsify a theory. The argument then leaves high-level theories and principles in the same position as lower-level law-like empirical generalisations, in relation to objectivity: they are open at least to objective falsification, and whether a certain phenomenon confirms or disconfirms a theory is not a question for personal decision or taste.

But, as was argued earlier in this chapter, a moral theory is in a very different position. There is no procedure for deciding whether a particular case tells for or against it, analogous to settlement procedures for particular factual

disputes. Hence there can be no question of submitting even the most outrageous normative theory to anything analogous to the test of falsification by the facts, which can certainly falsify an outrageous empirical theory. In the moral case the only test available is the entirely personal test of what judgment about the action or state of affairs one is prepared to endorse.

In the final section of this chapter I want to give some consideration to a thesis about scientific theories which has some bearing on their claim to objectivity, though it is radically different from those previously discussed. It is the doctrine that when one theory is exchanged for another there are inevitably changes in the descriptions of what is observed; even if the same terms are employed in reporting the results of observation and measurement, they will have changed their meanings, because they are used in a different theoretical setting. If the observational statements made against the background of one theory do not mean the same as the observational statements made against the background of a competing theory, then one seems driven to the conclusion that it is impossible to confront both of two conflicting high-level theories with the same set of observed facts, with a view to deciding whether one theory fitted those facts better or worse than the other. The doctrine seems to involve a denial of any objective ground for choice between theories.

I shall discuss the position as it is set out by P.K. Feyerabend, who has defended it in some detail, \(^1\) beginning

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\(^1\) In 'Problems of Microphysics', Robert G. Colodny (ed.), Frontiers of Science and Philosophy (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962); 'Problems of Empiricism', Robert G. Colodny (ed.), Beyond the Edge of Certainty (Englewood Cliffs: (continued over)
by presenting the central thesis baldly, without any of the examples employed to explain, illustrate and defend it:

Words do not 'mean' something in isolation; they obtain their meanings by being part of a theoretical system. 1 Introducing a new theory involves changes of outlook both with respect to the observable and with respect to the unobservable features of the world, and corresponding changes in the meanings of even the most 'fundamental' terms of the language employed. 2 According to the point of view I am advocating, the meaning of observation sentences is determined by the theories with which they are connected. 3

Before considering what this doctrine amounts to I want to point out the bearing which it has on the objectivity of scientific theories. The objectivity of a choice between two competing theories which purport to explain, say, planetary motion, depends on the assumption that both theories can be confronted by the same set of facts, those set out in the available results of observations of planetary positions. Only then can it be said that the predictions made from one theory are compatible with the facts at some point while predictions made from the other theory are wide of the mark.

But if under theory A one set of observational statements


3 Feyerabend, 'Problems of Empiricism', Colodny (ed.), Beyond the Edge of Certainty, p.213.
would be used to describe what is observed, and under theory B a different set; (where the same words occur they have different meanings) then the two theories can never be compared to decide which is a better match for what is common ground to the two, the facts of experience. Thus Feyerabend writes:

> Each theory will have its own experience and there will be no overlap between these experiences and it is bound to happen, then, at some stage, that the alternatives do not share a single (theoretical) statement with the theory they criticize. The idea of observation that we are defending here implies that they will not share a single observation statement either. ... Clearly, a crucial experiment is now impossible, ... because there is no universally accepted statement capable of expressing what emerges from observation. 2

This is a surprising conclusion; it appears to rule out the possibility of saying that one of two radically different theories gives better predictions of a set of phenomena, which would make theorising pointless. Further, Feyerabend recommends that scientists allow their work to be guided by more than one theory. He suggests

an activity which consists in the invention of theories for the purpose of explanation, in the criticism of these theories with the help of strong alternatives, and in the replacement of refuted theories by the rivals which brought about their downfall. 3

But it is not clear how this could happen if there are no common observation statements with which the predictions from one theory can be compatible, those from the other incompatible. The meaning-change thesis seems intended to

1 Ibid., p. 214.
2 Ibid.
declare something impossible between radically conflicting theories, but it is not clear what.

Although this is not Feyerabend's intention, it seems clear that his arguments, if successful, would show that the facts can provide no grounds for a choice between high-level theories. Empirical theories would then be in the position in which I have argued that moral theories are. It is essential to consider his arguments, then, in defending the contention that the status of a normative theory is radically different.

Much of the obscurity of Feyerabend's intentions arises from his vague use of the term 'meaning', a problem which other critics have pointed out: 'We are given no way of deciding either what counts as a part of the "meaning" of a term or what counts as a "change of meaning" of a term'. It seems to me that there is in his use of the word not only a lack of clarity, but a positive confusion; I shall try to bring this out while considering why his thesis does not constitute a case against the objectivity of scientific theories.

He explains and defends his doctrine of meaning change mainly through examples, and I shall approach it by

considering some of those examples. I shall show that two very different types of illustration are offered, without any apparent realisation that they illustrate very different things, as well as showing that in neither case can the change which is involved prevent a choice between conflicting theories by reference to the facts.

One example offered is this:

Nobody would ever dream of asserting that the way in which we interpret the movements of, say, the hand of a voltmeter is uniquely determined either by the character of this movement itself or by the processes inside the instrument; a person who can see and understand only these processes will be unable to infer that what is indicated is voltage, and he will be equally unable to understand what voltage is. Taken by themselves the indications of instruments do not mean anything unless we possess a theory which teaches us what situations we are to expect in the world, and which guarantees that there exists a reliable correlation between the indications of the instrument and such a particular situation.

Nobody would dream of demanding that the meanings of observation statements as obtained with the help of measuring instruments remain invariant with respect to the change and progress of knowledge.

This is presented as an obvious case of the meaning of an observation statement changing with its theoretical background. Perhaps when a voltmeter is connected to a circuit its hand points to the number twelve. Anyone ignorant of electrical theory will be unable to say what this means. With some knowledge of standard theory one is able to say that it means that there is a potential difference across the two terminals of twelve volts.

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2 Ibid., p. 37.
But a man from a different scientific tradition, based, say, in an isolated Mount Athos monastery where the two-fluid theory of electricity has been elaborated to provide an account in other terms of the operation of the instruments we call voltmeters, will give a different explanation of what the instrument reading means.

It is clear from the last passage quoted above that this is supposed to provide an unarguable case of a change in the meaning of an observation statement. This reasoning is confused, and I shall try to show why.

Grice's distinction between natural and non-natural meaning is too well-known to call for detailed exposition here. ¹ When we ask about natural meaning we refer to a state of affairs or event ('What is the meaning of this mess in the living-room? 'What does that knocking noise in the engine mean?') An answer will provide a causal explanation of the state of affairs or event, thus showing it as evidence for something else ('It means that the children came home while I was out shopping'; 'It means that the main bearings are badly worn'). Non-natural meaning belongs to utterances (usually, though not necessarily, verbal), and Grice's analysis of it is in terms of the utterer's intention to influence hearers or readers or, in the case of the utterance type, in terms of the intention to influence which utterers of utterances of this type standardly have.

The movement of the hand of a voltmeter, Feyerabend writes, by itself means nothing, and two people with

different theories about electricity may give different meanings to it, derived from their theoretical backgrounds. This can only refer to the meaning of the state of affairs, the instrument's hand pointing to the number twelve. If we ascribe a meaning to this state of affairs it can only be natural meaning in Grice's terms: we provide a causal explanation for it, showing it as an indication of some other event or state of affairs behind the scenes. That it should have non-natural meaning is out of the question; the voltmeter did not intend to convey anything by moving its hand. An interpretation is given of the event in the same sense as the mechanic gave an interpretation of the knock in the engine.

It is quite another thing to talk about the (non-natural) meaning of a statement about that state of affairs. The last two passages which I have quoted above show Feyerabend slipping from the one construction to the other as if they amounted to the same thing. The state of affairs observed is that the hand of the instrument pointed to the number twelve. The observation statement is: 'The hand of the instrument pointed to the number twelve'. It is clearly possible for two people to put different natural meanings on the state of affairs, and the same non-natural meaning on the statement. In just the same way we have the distinction between the state of affairs, the engine of my car running with a knock, and the statement: 'The engine of that car runs with a knock'. Two mechanics might disagree on the diagnosis, one interpreting the sound as an indication that the main bearings are worn, the other maintaining that it sounds more like the big-end bearings. It obviously
does not follow that they put different non-natural meanings on the observation statement. Indeed I myself may have reported the disturbing symptom to the experts, meaning by my statement just what they would mean by it, even though I may have no idea what the knock is a symptom of: what it means in the natural sense. This distinction seems to be completely ignored in Feyerabend's case for theory-governed changes in the meanings of observation terms and statements, with no consequent improvement to its intelligibility.

In his own example I have argued that the fact that the movement of the hand of the instrument might be differently interpreted by two different theorists, and not interpreted at all by a third person ignorant of electrical theory, is quite compatible with the utterance of the observation statement 'The hand pointed to the number twelve' by all three with the same non-natural meaning. And this is surely all that is needed for a crucial experiment to be possible. The Mount Athos scientist may have a theory from which it is predicted that under certain circumstances the hand of such an instrument will point to the number one, while according to his opponent's theory it is predicted that it will point to the number twelve. The hand points to the number twelve. This counts against theory A and in favour of theory B, because the former prediction is incompatible, while the latter prediction is in agreement, with the statement describing what happened. These relations of incompatibility and agreement are surely entirely unaffected by the fact that, according to the two theories, different natural meanings would be put on the state of affairs, the hand pointing to the number twelve.
Apart from indicating some confusion which is involved in this illustration of Feyerabend's meaning-change thesis, I have tried to show why the change exemplified here cannot tell against the possibility of checking two competing theories against the facts. I want to turn now to another illustration which Feyerabend uses, and to point out firstly that this is by no means an illustration of the same thing as the instrument-reading case exemplified, secondly that, on Feyerabend's own admission, what he says about this example does nothing to undermine the possibility of an objective test between two theories by checking their predictions against the facts, and thirdly that if he did deny this his position would be implausible in the extreme.

This is his second example of theory-governed meaning change which I want to discuss:

Thus in classical, prerelativistic physics the concept of mass (and, for that matter, the concept of length and the concept of time duration) was absolute in the sense that the mass of a system was not influenced (except, perhaps, causally) by its motion in the coordinate system chosen. Within relativity, however, mass has become a relational concept whose specification is incomplete without indication of the coordinate system to which the spatio-temporal descriptions are all to be referred.¹

This seems to be put forward as another illustration of the same thing as was exemplified by the instrument-reading example. In fact this is a very different case. What we have here are not theory-governed changes in the natural meanings put on states of affairs, but theory-governed changes in the definitions of terms, including terms which would be used in expressing the results of observations of the movements of bodies.

This type of change is obviously more relevant to the meanings of statements than is the previous type. Let us consider briefly some of its implications. Newtonian and relativist mechanics can both provide predictions of the position of a particular planet at a particular time, given statements about its mass, previous positions, velocity, and so on. But different concepts of position, time and mass are used in the two theories and any predictions they generate. Now the actual position observed will be reported by a statement using terms for position and time either with their Newtonian or their relativist meaning, but not both, and there is no central neutral sense. But an observation statement in the Newtonian language cannot be in agreement or conflict with a relativist prediction, nor a relativist observation with a Newtonian prediction. Hence, at least when theories are so different conceptually, we cannot say that the observed facts agree with the predictions from one, but are incompatible with the other's predictions. 'A crucial experiment is now impossible'.

But surely it is not being denied that observations of the orbit of the planet Mercury support relativist against classical mechanics; or, if this conclusion was a mistake, one would like to have the mistake pointed out. Besides, as other critics have remarked, if predictions made from radically different theories cannot be incompatible, there is no need to choose between them; both can be held at once, unless one cares to choose on

such criteria as elegance or emotional appeal. 1

But Feyerabend does write about such theories as inconsistent, as in his methodological injunction: 'Invent, and elaborate theories which are inconsistent with the established point of view.' 2 He stresses the need to face competing theories with the facts to see which of the competitors explains them most comprehensively and exactly, a procedure which makes no sense unless there is a way of stating the facts which allows for comparing them with predictions from different theories.

I want to examine briefly one way in which he claims to make room for choosing between high-level theories on the basis of observation. He writes:

Both theories may be able to reproduce the 'local grammar' of sentences which are directly connected with observational procedures. In this case the utterance of one of the sentences in question in accordance with the rules of the local grammar, ... can be connected with two 'theoretical' statements, one of T, and one T' respectively ... We may now say that the empirical content of T' > the empirical content of T, if for every associated statement of T there is an associated statement provided by T' but not vice versa. And we may also say that T' has been confirmed by the very same evidence that refutes T if there is a local statement S whose associated statement in T' confirms T' while its associated statement in T refutes T. 3

A 'local' statement is one expressed in ordinary, non-technical language. I want to apply this to the example of a pair of 'incommensurable' theories under discussion,

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3 Ibid., p. 233.
Newtonian and relativist mechanics, to see how this procedure might work out in practice. Feyerabend acknowledges the possibility of deducing from the prediction and observation statements of both theories, other prediction and observation statements expressed in ordinary language, which has no exclusive commitments to either theory. This might work in the following way. There might follow from the Newtonian prediction the 'local' or ordinary-language statement that if one stands on such and such a spot at 12 midnight on Oct. 15th 1971, the planet Mercury will be visible just to the left of that flagstaff, while from the relativist prediction it follows that under the same circumstances the planet will be visible just to the right of the flagstaff. The result of observation, let us assume (again expressed as a 'local' statement) is that the planet is seen to the right. In such a case, says Feyerabend, 'T' has been confirmed by the very same evidence that refutes T! He concludes that, as such examples as this show, 'it is possible to use incommensurable theories for the purpose of mutual criticism.'

Clearly unless some such translation of prediction statements and observation statements into terms which are common currency in two theoretical backgrounds can be made, the theories cannot be in conflict, and there can be no way of determining that one theory but not the other is compatible with certain facts. What Feyerabend does not explain is how, having allowed for the possibility of this sort of translation, he can legitimately continue to call the theories incommensurable. Incommensurable theories supposedly share no common observation statements. But the ordinary-language or 'local' statements of the results of observation,

1 Ibid., p.234.
which can be linked or matched with statements employing the theoretical terms of both of the two competing theories, fulfil the function of common observation statements in a crucial experiment.

It is not my main intention here to criticise or to attempt to illuminate Feyerabend's doctrine about theory-governed changes in the meanings of observation statements. My primary concern is merely to point out that his arguments do not show the impossibility of choosing between theories, even those which are very different conceptually, on the basis of observed facts, by concluding that the same set of facts confirm one theory and falsify its competitor. Indeed the arguments are not intended to support this conclusion, although if they succeeded they would surely do so. When one sees that he does not wish to deny this possibility it becomes very difficult to see just what he does wish to deny, but I do not want to pursue this question any further here.

Over the second half of this chapter I have been examining various considerations which might be regarded as telling against the objectivity of high-level scientific theories. I have tried to argue that none of them precludes the possibility of falsification of a theory by observation or experiment. But a normative moral theory must be in a radically different position. As I have argued earlier in the chapter there is no way in which one might hope to show that one moral theory rather than another is borne out or falsified by any sequence of events. The point needs no further emphasis. In spite of what can be said against the objectivity of empirical theories, they can be open to testing against the facts of experience in a way that is out of the question for a moral theory.
CHAPTER VI

MORAL REASONING AND INDUCTIVE REASONING

THE COMPARISON ON THE LEVEL OF BASIC PRINCIPLES

In the previous chapter some consideration was given to the status of law-like empirical generalisations such as 'All men are mortal', which make claims extending into the future. Unlike moral laws, these are falsifiable by counter-examples. However our confidence in this law is not adequately expressed by the observation that it has not been falsified yet; we regard it as receiving positive support from the universal mortality of men in the past. This confidence can obviously be traced to its source in a principle of induction which can be stated as a very general factual assumption: if a type of event has occurred consistently in certain circumstances in the past, it will probably occur in similar circumstances in the future.

In this chapter and the one which follows it my aim is to compare the status of this principle and that of basic principles of moral thought, for example: 'If an action would bring about the greatest possible general happiness it would be right'. This might be considered the most reasonable analogue for fundamental moral principles in the general area of thought about empirical matters, rather than scientific laws and theories. It is worth exploring some arguments which have been used in defending the principles of induction, to see how adequate a defence
they provide, and whether similar arguments can be used with equal success in the justification of fundamental principles of morality.

It is easy to suggest reasons for regarding the two types of principles as having the same status as regards justification. It seems impossible to support either by reference to experience, and equally impossible to defend either deductively, without using another principle of the same type, which is then exposed as genuinely fundamental. Furthermore, just as no example need be seen as telling against a moral principle, so the failure of particular predictions need not be, and is not, seen as undermining the inductive assumption on which they were based. One might try to counter ethical scepticism by arguing that there are no greater problems in defending the objectivity of moral principles than in defending that of inductive principles, concerning which nobody is really doubtful:

The 'irrationality' of value-precises cannot be squared with the rationally necessary relations into which they can enter. Some philosophers have held, accordingly, that only those value-statements are 'irrational' which serve as axioms of implicative relations, i.e. as statements of final ends or ultimate commitments. But so, one should think, do all ultimate assumptions. 1

But this would be an unsatisfactory defence of the objectivity of moral thought. It would rest on the assumption that the objectivity of inductive thinking is accepted and beyond argument, whereas there is a long tradition of scepticism about its foundations. It would

be possible to agree that the assumptions underlying moral and inductive reasoning are indeed in the same position, entirely without rational justification, and totally deficient in comparison with the only paradigms of objectivity, specific factual assertions. If one wished to develop the comparison between moral and inductive principles in the hope of defending the objectivity of the former, it would be necessary to show that, in spite of the sceptic's misgivings, some mistake would be involved in rejecting the inductive assumptions, and then to show by similar arguments that certain moral principles also cannot be rationally rejected. The two following chapters explore arguments for this conclusion.

If it could be shown that moral and inductive principles were on the same footing, whether equally justifiable or equally without justification, it would not follow that the conclusions of moral and inductive arguments were on the same footing as regards objectivity. Among the conclusions of inductive reasoning are predictions of particular events. We make these predictions relying on an assumption about the uniformity of nature, but we have a way of testing their accuracy which depends on no such assumption: we can wait for the expected event to occur. The conclusion of a moral argument is in a very different position. It is derived by reasoning from moral principles, but it cannot be submitted to any analogous test independent of those principles.

However it is worth asking whether the reasoning which leads us to a moral conclusion is based on principles any more difficult to justify than the principles which underpin our confidence in some empirical predictions and generalisations.
I hope to show that there are obstacles to the defence of moral reasoning which do not arise for the defence of induction.

This chapter and the one which follows it are closely linked, each being concerned with examining one form of justification which might be offered for induction, and considering whether it is equally applicable to moral principles. Before discussing the mode of justification which is the central subject of this chapter, however, I want to give some attention to the suggestion that it is a mistake to ask for any justification of inductive reasoning, and to a somewhat similar position about morality.

DO PRINCIPLES NEED JUSTIFICATION?

Strawson, in *Introduction to Logical Theory*, tried to dissolve sceptical doubt about induction by showing that it has its source in linguistic confusion. He wrote:

> If a man asked what grounds there were for thinking it reasonable to hold beliefs arrived at inductively, one might at first answer that there were good and bad inductive arguments, that sometimes it was reasonable to hold a belief arrived at inductively and sometimes it was not. If ... he wanted to know whether induction in general was a reasonable method of inference, then we might well think his question senseless in the same way as the question whether deduction is in general valid; for to call a particular belief reasonable or unreasonable is to apply inductive standards, just as to call a particular argument valid or invalid is to apply deductive standards. 1

It is not necessary to defend the conviction that it is reasonable to base predictions on evidence that similar events have occurred in similar circumstances in the past,

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because 'doing this is what "being reasonable" means in such a context'.

There have been somewhat similar attempts to dissolve sceptical doubts about a basic approach to moral questions by appealing to the ordinary meanings of words: generally the word moral. For example, Mrs Foot produced an account of morality as 'about' a certain area of subject-matter by virtue of the meaning of the word: 'It is surely clear that moral virtues must be connected with human good and harm, and that it is quite impossible to call anything you like good or harm'. This assertion was bolstered with analogies: fear, by definition, is about what is seen as a possible danger, pride about what is seen as an advantage or achievement; so morality is about what benefits or harms people. G.J.Warnock has more recently presented a similar doctrine, making it clear that it is supposed to rest on the meaning of the word moral, presumably as it is discovered from the common use of the word:

Not just anything can function as a criterion of moral evaluation ... Could we say, perhaps, ... that the limits are set somewhere within the general area of concern for the welfare of human beings? ... We do not choose that this should be so; it is so, simply because of what 'moral' means. 3

Thus it would be unnecessary to defend the conviction that it is reasonable to base conclusions about what is morally

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1 Ibid., p.257.


right and wrong on evidence about benefit and harm to people, since what we mean by moral reasoning is reasoning from this sort of evidence. The position is clearly similar in some ways to Strawson's about induction, in spite of some disanalogies.

Whatever one might think about the adequacy of the Strawsonian reply to the sceptic about induction, it is certain that everyone bases predictions on past patterns of events, and considers it reasonable to do so. It is not clear what alternative predictive policies one might adopt. Even those who rely on omens or crystal balls for guidance about the future are involved in inductive reasoning; as I shall return to this point in the following chapter I shall leave the assertion undefended here.

However it is not the case that reasoning to moral conclusions always is and has been from evidence about human good and harm. This is such an obvious fact that it is hardly necessary to list some of the fundamentally non-utilitarian principles which some people have been and are disposed to defend. As a non-utilitarian principle can perfectly properly be called a moral principle, it is clearly a false statement about linguistic usage that, because of what 'moral' means, only reasoning about what makes for human good and harm counts as moral reasoning. And one would not expect to derive from a false statement about linguistic usage the substantial conclusion that reasoning from what makes for human good and harm to what actions are morally right and wrong, is in no need of justification. The line of argument here, which has at least some plausibility when applied to inductive reasoning, lacks foundation when
applied to morality.

I wish now to turn from attempts to argue that justifications of principles of inductive and moral reasoning are unnecessary, to examine one form of justification which has been proposed for fundamental assumptions. The object is to determine whether it is as effective in defence of morality as in defence of induction.

PRAGMATIC JUSTIFICATIONS

Feigl's discussion of the justification of fundamental principles made less impact on ethics than on the discussion of induction, although it was concerned with principles in the former area at least as much as in the latter. He distinguished between a justificatio cognitionis and a justificatio actionis. The former involves showing by reference to the appropriate evidence and principles that a statement is true, a prediction well-founded, an inference valid. The latter involves showing that an action or policy is a sensible one to adopt as a means to a certain end. Feigl's strategy is to accept the sceptic's conclusion that fundamental principles (of moral evaluation, induction, deductive logic and so on), are not open to justification of the former type, but to argue that the

policy of adopting and employing them is open to justification of the latter type:

The ultimate principles of logic, semantics, methodology and axiology are (as justicificantes) not susceptible to cognitive justification. But if the question be raised why we should adopt those, rather than some alternative principles, then this obviously concerns not the validity of the principles but the justifiability of our attitude to them. This question, he thinks, can be answered.

The inductive assumption, regarded as an assertion, is recognised as not open to proof. But one can hope to justify the practice of adopting it as a principle for use in predicting. Similarly the task of proving a moral principle true is rejected as impossible, in favour of the task of justifying pragmatically the policy of adopting it for use in moral reasoning. If this could be done it would be no more true of morality than of prediction that basic principles are matters for non-rational commitment. My aim is to set out briefly the pragmatic vindication of induction, and to show that, while this argument faces its own difficulties, the attempt to achieve a similar result for moral principles is doomed from the start.

THE PRAGMATIC JUSTIFICATION OF INDUCTION

This defence of induction is very simple in basic form. I shall sketch its outlines as presented by Reichenbach, its best-known proponent, to whose work Feigl refers. It is assumed that we want to have true beliefs about the future. It is allowed that we do not, and cannot, know that nature is stable enough for any

1 Feigl, 'De Principiis Non Disputandum...?', Black (ed.), Philosophical Analysis, p. 151.
method of prediction to succeed consistently. The argument seeks merely to show that if the world is so constituted that consistent success in prediction is possible by any method, then it must be attainable by the inductive method. The principle of induction is set out by Reichenbach as follows:

We assume a series of events $A$ and $\bar{A}$ (non-$A$); let $n$ be the number of events, $m$ the number of events of the type $A$ among them. We have then the relative frequency $h^n = \frac{m}{n}$. The assumption of the determination a posteriori may now be expressed:

For any further prolongation of the series as far as $s$ events ($s > n$) the relative frequency will remain within a small interval around $h^n$.

He states the aim of induction as 'to find series of events whose frequency of occurrence converges towards a limit'.

A limit is defined in this way: 'A frequency $h^n$ has a limit at $p$, if for any given $e$ there is an $n$ such that $h^n$ is within $p \pm e$ and remains within this interval for all the rest of the series'. A series within which there is a limit of frequency of occurrence of events of a certain type is, then, one with a degree of consistency: one which is not utterly unpredictable.

The pragmatic vindication of the inductive principle is very simple. If the occurrence of events of a certain kind in a series has a limit of frequency, sooner or later $h^n$ must approximate to it and remain close to it subsequently; it follows from the definition of a limit that if we adopt the practice of estimating that the limit


2 Ibid., p.350

3 Ibid., p.351.
of frequency is close to \( h^n \), then we will be estimating accurately, which was our aim, sooner or later. It is more likely that our immediate aim is to assign a probability to a single future event, or a limited number of them, rather than to estimate a limit of frequency over an infinite series, but for Reichenbach this is not a separate problem, since he defines probability as the limit of a frequency within an infinite sequence. ¹ The conclusion of the argument is: 'The rule of induction is justified as an instrument of positing because it is a method of which we know that if is possible to make statements about the future we shall find them by means of this method.'² This is a modest conclusion, since it is allowed that (a) we do not know that any series with which we are concerned has any limits of frequency, and (b) even if a series does have such limits there is no way of knowing whether we are far enough through it for the observed relative frequencies to be, and subsequently to remain, close approximations to the limits. But these restrictions do not mean that the argument establishes nothing. As Reichenbach insists:

> The assumption that there is a limit of the frequency must be true if the inductive procedure is to be successful. But we need not know whether it is true when we merely ask whether the inductive procedure is justified. It is justified as an attempt at finding the limit... If there is none, we shall certainly not find one - but then all other methods will break down also."³

A more serious restriction, which Reichenbach himself mentions, is that the argument similarly justifies the adoption of any of an infinite range of quasi-inductive prediction policies. Instead of estimating that the limit of frequency approximates to $h^n$ we could make it our practice to estimate that it approximates to $h^n + \frac{1}{n}$, or use any other such formula including a correction which approaches 0 as $n$ approaches infinity. In all such cases it follows from the definition of a limit of frequency that if there is a limit the formulae must sooner or later produce answers which are close to that limit, and subsequently remain close to it. Why, in the absence of special knowledge about a series, we should prefer the straight rule of induction to any of the others is not a question to which Reichenbach claimed to provide an answer, except in terms of a preference for simplicity. 1

It is clear that the pragmatic vindication of induction does not guarantee very much. Even Feigl, who sometimes states the conclusion with a strength not warranted by the argument, observes: 'The conclusion reached may seem only infinitesimally removed from Hume's scepticism. Philosophers do not seem grateful for small mercies.' 2 However, although a small mercy, it is not nothing.

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My main concern is not with the details of the pragmatic justification for adopting inductive principles of prediction but with the suggestion that the adoption of basic moral principles is open to the same form of justification:

Recent investigations of the notion of justification in general have held: If the ultimate principles of ethics can be only 'pragmatically' justified, this is not peculiar to ethics but is true of the ultimate principles of knowledge as well.  

I want now to consider what would be involved in using this form of argument to support the foundations of moral reasoning, to see whether it is as effective in this area. The two obvious questions to raise are what are the goals by reference to which one is to vindicate moral principles, and what is involved in their adoption. I shall consider the second of these questions first.

Let us take a goal arbitrarily, say the greatest happiness of the greatest number, as the aim to be used in vindicating a moral practice, as the goal of getting true beliefs about the future was used to vindicate the inductive practice of prediction. A set of moral principles is vindicated if adopting it can be shown to be a good means of achieving that goal. But what sort of practice is to be vindicated? Some think of a set of moral principles primarily as a statement of a private policy which a man adopts towards his own actions, others primarily as a public policy, a set of norms shared by

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a community. Let us take it at first that we are considering the vindication of a personal policy.

At first glance it seems evident that only a single principle is so vindicated, namely: 'If an action would maximise general happiness it would be right'. But on consideration it is not so clear that this is the best principle to adopt. It depends on what one means by 'adopting'. If it meant 'always acting in accordance with' then the connection is clear. I might, for convenience, operate with a secondary set of rules, forbidding types of actions, such as lying and cheating, which generally damage people's happiness. But if my use of these rules is to be maximally beneficial I must use them as rules of thumb, building into each the proviso: 'unless breaking the rule would make a greater contribution to the general happiness'. As David Lyons points out, such a set of rules is extensionally equivalent to the basic principle on which it is founded, that is, it classes just the same actions right and wrong. It is not, then, a genuine alternative to the basic principle, especially as, when applying a rule, one ought in theory to refer every decision to the basic principle to make sure that the case is not an exception.

However we are considering the vindication of a practical policy. Always acting in accordance with any principle is not a policy which I might in practice carry out. My policy might be always to try to act accordingly, but my best efforts will fail sometimes.

The results of some actions are unpredictable, and there are limits to my intelligence and altruism. A genuine description of a private moral policy must state the rules which I respect and try to apply, not the rules to which my actions always conform.

Therefore the private principles my adoption of which would be vindicated, given the aim of achieving the greatest happiness of the greatest number, are the principles which, if I hold them in a rather vague sense which involves respecting them, and acting accordingly as often as may be expected in view of my personal qualities, would bring about at least as much general happiness as any other set of rules which I might hold in the same way.

It is not self-evident that the utilitarian principle must be so vindicated. Perhaps if I operated with this single rule my decisions would be often unfortunate and sometimes disastrous; the general happiness might be much better served if I did not consider it in practical deliberation, but referred instead to a set of rules forbidding adultery, stealing, and so on. This is a very familiar point. If the dangers arising from my inability to apply the happiness principle are to be avoided, I would have to regard adultery as wrong even when my estimate of the consequences would be that adultery would produce more happiness than any alternative.

Two different policies might be suggested in these circumstances. One is a thorough-going rule-utilitarianism which could be stated in this way: 'In the name of the greatest general happiness I shall refrain from adultery, stealing and so on, even when as far as I can see I would
produce more general happiness by breaking the rule'. But this policy could not be rationally adopted, as it involves repudiation in practical deliberation of the very aim which it is supposed I have in mind as the end to be served by my deliberation. It would be formally self-defeating, even though I may be such a poor predictor or good rationaliser that it would be better for everyone if I followed it. ¹

There is a rather different policy, designed to avoid the same dangers, suggested by some of J.S.Mill's remarks on the application of utilitarianism in ordinary life. He acknowledges that in many cases it would not be a good thing for people to apply the utilitarian principle in deciding what to do:

Human happiness, even one's own, is in general more successfully pursued by acting on general rules than by measuring the consequences of each act; and this is still more the case with the general happiness ...; rights and obligations must, as you say, be recognised. ²

Where one of these rights or obligations is involved the utilitarian is not to act according to his assessment of the consequences. But what else, as a utilitarian, can he rationally do? Mill suggests another course:

But the case may be ... that he recoils from the very thought of committing the act; the idea of placing himself in such a position is so painful, that he cannot dwell upon it long enough to have even the physical power of perpetrating the crime. ... Not


only may this be so, but unless it be so, the man is not really virtuous. 1

The virtuous man, then, should have such respect for certain vital rules, that he cannot bring himself to gauge the relative merits of obeying a rule or breaking it in a particular situation; he recoils automatically. A utilitarian might cultivate this sort of virtue, fostering his reverence for the rules, and not allowing himself to make a utilitarian calculation whenever one of them applied. Although perhaps a difficult policy, it would not be self-defeating, as it would involve not making the utilitarian estimate, rather than making it and then repudiating its result.

What private principles are vindicated for a person, given the goal of the greatest general happiness, is a question which must be settled by experience of his and other people's behaviour. One could not expect to produce a deductive argument to justify the adoption of a set of moral norms, as is done for induction. This would not, however, invalidate the argument.

I have been discussing the pragmatic vindication of private moral principles. But one might think of morality as a much more public matter, involving shared social norms. The question what public moral policy is justified given the utilitarian goal is a different question. Adopting a set of principles in this public way would include praising and blaming in accordance with them, teaching them to one's children, in general trying to get the

community to adhere to them, apart from, even instead of, using them in one's own decisions. Such a policy would be vindicated if it served the general happiness at least as well as trying to get the community to adopt any other set of rules.

Feigl accused the utilitarians of being unclear about the distinctions drawn in his account of the status of basic principles:

The usual formulations of utilitarianism, for example, are logically questionable because they attempt to combine validation and vindication by telescoping together rules (such as 'Only kindly acts are right') with goals (such as 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'). 1

The charge is unjustified. Mill was far from unaware of the distinction, and Sidgwick in particular discussed it acutely in considering the question whether the utilitarian, who takes the greatest general happiness as the goal of morality, is committed to publicly applying and teaching the principle: 'If an act would make the best contribution to the general happiness it would be right', in place of the conventional rules of commonsense morality:

The consideration of this question, therefore, from a utilitarian point of view, resolves itself into a comparison between the total amounts of pleasure and pain that may be expected to result respectively from maintaining any given rule as at present established, and from endeavouring to introduce that which is proposed in its stead. 2

There is much more to be considered than the results of universal conformity to the rules:

1 Feigl 'De Principiis Non Disputandum ...?', Black (ed.), Philosophical Analysis, p. 146.

It is possible that the new rule, though it would be more felicific than the old one, if it could get itself equally established, may not be so likely to be adopted, or if adopted not so likely to be obeyed, by the mass of the community in which it is proposed to innovate. 1

For such reasons he concluded that the utilitarian, to achieve the greatest general happiness, probably ought to adopt the public policy of supporting existing commonsense principles rather than persuading the mass of the community to adopt the utilitarian principle. His reasons turn mainly on the stupidity and selfishness of people; but he allowed for the fact that these are not gifts granted in equal degrees to all. His final suggestion is that the utilitarian goal vindicates two levels of morality: one, act-utilitarianism, for the enlightened to adopt as their private policies, and the other, a set of conventional rules, to be recommended publicly to the vulgar. 2

Over the past few pages I have been considering how a pragmatic vindication of a set of moral principles might proceed, given the utilitarian goal. It would clearly be a much more complex matter than the vindication of induction. The argument need not justify a single set of principles, because there are various things which one does with moral principles, and it is not self-evident that the same set of rules is best for all applications. However this greater complexity does not rule out the possibility of a sound argument, given a reasonably clear-cut aim.

1 Ibid., p. 481.
2 Ibid., pp. 489-490.
THE GOAL OF MORALITY

The serious disanalogy, which precludes a justification of a moral policy on the model of the pragmatic defence of induction, arises when one asks what is the aim by reference to which the moral practice is to be vindicated. As Paul Taylor writes, in a book influenced by Feigl's work on justification:

A vindicated value system is one that 'works' in practical life. But to decide whether something 'works', we must specify the ends which are to be achieved in the successful 'working' of the thing.1

One can arbitrarily assume the most bizarre aims, and go on to argue soundly that some remarkable policies are justified as means to those ends. The practice of buying shoes two sizes too small is justified for anyone who wants to have bunions. This is not, however, a general justification of this shoe-buying policy, with the force of the pragmatic vindication of induction. 2 A general vindication of a practice must refer to an aim which it would be reasonable for anyone to have, as the aim of anticipating the future no doubt is.

But there is another question about the aim which must be settled. One would not necessarily regard a policy as vindicated by a proof that it serves an aim which one shares, even an aim which one regards as universal and


reasonable. Consider the proverb 'Honesty is the best policy', taken in a narrow sense as meaning that it is financially the most profitable. A man might accept this as true, regard money-making as a universal and reasonable aim, and yet deny that this provides a justification for adopting honesty as a moral policy. He might argue that one can not decide between moral policies by their money-making potential, because this is neither the point nor part of the point of morality. In fact people tend to reject the reasoning of the proverb even when it is more broadly understood, if they take the attitude that it is not the point of morality to secure any prudential goals.

This seems a reasonable objection. I conclude, therefore, that a general vindication (for everyone) of a policy would need to show it as a sensible means to a goal the achieving of which is universally recognised as the point of policies of the type to be justified. Here again induction is in a favourable position, since the aim by which it is vindicated, anticipating future events, is not only universal and reasonable, but it clearly provides the point of the practice in question.

To provide an analogous defence of the adoption of a set of moral principles, one must show that this is a good means to an end which is universally accepted as the point of moral policies. This seems an impossible task, because of the lack of any one generally-acknowledged goal of morality.

On a very general level, it would be uncontroversial
to ascribe to moral principles the function of guiding decision and the assessment of actions. But these purposes are far too abstract to support the adoption of one set of principles against alternatives. One would need to refer to a more concrete and specific goal of the sort that a teleological moral theory such as utilitarianism ascribes to morality. Baier maintains a position of the required type when he writes: 'The very raison d'être of a morality is to yield reasons which overrule the reasons of self-interest in those cases where everyone's following self-interest would be harmful to everyone,' ¹ and Toulmin when he states: 'The function of ethics is to reconcile the independent aims and wills of a community of people'. ²

Given this aim of the reduction of social conflict, one can argue that the adoption of some principles, such as 'Every man for himself', is less likely to further the aim than, for example, the adoption of social norms setting value on honesty and kindness. The problem is to defend the assertion that the function of morality is the promotion of social harmony.

We must distinguish two senses in which functions are ascribed to things. The function of eyes is seeing, the function of birdnests is as places for hatching eggs and raising young. This is not taken to imply that people acquire eyes with a view to seeing, or that birds build nests having in mind their intention to raise a

family. One means merely that these are the vital parts played by eyes and nests in the lives of people and birds. In other sorts of cases talk about function would be taken to involve reference to intention. If someone said that the function of the camshaft is to control the opening and closing of the valves, he would hardly mean merely that it has this important effect in the operation of the internal combustion engine; he would mean that this is what the camshaft is designed to do.

The statement that the function of moral rules is the promotion of social harmony could be meant in either of these ways. Made by an anthropologist or sociologist it would probably have the former sense. Durkheim defined the sociologist's interest in morality in this way:

The science of morals and rights should be based on ... rules of conduct that have received sanction. The problems to be solved in this field of study are:
(1) How these rules were established in the course of time: that is, what were the causes that gave rise to them and the useful ends they serve.
(2) The way in which they operate in society; that is, how they are applied by individuals. 1

As is suggested by this separation of the useful ends served by moral rules from the way people apply them, one might conclude that the function of morality is promoting social harmony, meaning merely that this is the vital difference which it makes to a society, without implying that this is what people see as the point of obedience to their code. One might, on the other hand, claim that promoting social harmony is the function of morality meaning that this is the aim which people intend to achieve

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when they adopt, modify and apply moral principles.

To provide a vindication of a moral policy with the general force of the pragmatic justification of induction, one must be able to claim that achieving a certain goal is the function of morality in the second sense: that it is seen, or would be seen on reflection, by everyone, as the point of morality. The project is to justify the moral practice to people, presumably to all people, and this can hardly be done by reference to a function which is not generally recognised, even on consideration, as the purpose which moral policies are meant to serve.

Toulmin and Baier both intended to claim that promoting social harmony is the function of morality in this second sense. This is clear in their defences of the claim. Baier states that this function is central to our concept of morality: 'But by "the moral point of view" we mean a point of view which is a court of appeal for conflicts of interest.' ¹ Toulmin similarly appeals to the way in which we all think about morality, rather than to speculations about the results of a society's abandoning a moral code: 'What makes us call a judgement "ethical" is the fact that it is used to harmonize people's actions.' ² They make this claim about function, then, in the sense needed if this aim, social harmony, is to be used in a pragmatic vindication of the adoption of a set of moral principles.

¹ Baier, The Moral Point of View, p. 190.
² Toulmin, The Place of Reason in Ethics, p. 145.
Toulmin, to be sure, does not undertake to justify any moral codes. His stated purpose is restricted to describing to us the way in which we all think about morality. ¹ Baier strikes a more didactic note, arguing from the goal of morality to a conclusion about what rules a society ought to adopt as means to that end:

If the behaviour in question is such that (i) the consequences would be undesirable if everyone did it, (ii) all are equally entitled to engage in it, and (iii) engaging in this sort of behaviour is an indulgence not a sacrifice, then such behaviour should be prohibited by the morality of the group. ²

His reasoning here has the form of a pragmatic vindication of the adoption or retention of a moral rule, relying on an assumption about the goal of morality.

But that assumption seems quite indefensible. While the existence of a shared moral code may in fact make for social harmony, it is clearly false that this, or any other single aim, is universally recognised, or would be so on reflection, as the purpose which the application of the moral code is meant to serve. Numerous examples to the contrary are available, falling into two categories: (a) moralists who have ascribed conflicting functions to moral rules, and (b) societies whose moral codes could not be seen as having their point in harmonious interest-satisfaction.

Calvin's observations on morality provide an instance of the former type. On the function of the moral law he writes:

¹ See ibid., p. 160.
² Baier, *The Moral Point of View*, p. 211.
As there are two classes of men so the office of the law is double. ... Its effect on unbelievers is nothing but to exclude them from all excuse before God. This is what Paul means when he calls it the ministry of death and condemnation. For believers ... first, while they learn from it that they are unable to obtain righteousness from works, they are thus instructed in humility. ... Second, as it exacts much more of them than they are able to offer, it moves them to seek strength from the Lord, and at the same time reminds them of their perpetual guilt, lest they presume to be proud. Finally, it is a kind of curb upon them, holding them in fear of God.

These are, of course, the functions of the moral code from God's point of view: his reasons for giving it to people.

Taking the point of view of humanity, what is the point of accepting those principles? It is not to merit salvation, which for Calvin comes solely by inexplicable divine choice. But it is not the point that following the moral law makes for happiness in this life either. What makes the code binding is simply the will of God, and if this happens to correspond with what makes for social harmony, it seems that this is an unimportant coincidence; he might have commanded something else:

For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it.

The point of adopting the principles of the law, then, is merely that it is fitting for creatures to obey the will of the creator. Anyone who followed them because this makes for social harmony would be missing their

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whole point:

Therefore we call the worship of God the beginning and foundation of righteousness. When it is removed, whatever equity, continence or temperance men practice among themselves is in God's sight empty and worthless. 1

Clearly, one could not hope to give a pragmatic vindication of the adoption of a moral rule to Calvin by showing that this would improve social harmony; he saw the goal of morality in an entirely different direction. One might tend to brush away this view rather impatiently, with the thought that no sane man could regard a society's norms in this way. But Calvin was no solitary eccentric; he profoundly influenced the moral outlook of millions of people. It would be fruitless to appeal to anyone with a Calvinist concept of morality to examine that concept, and to agree that what makes us call a judgment 'ethical' is the fact that it is used to harmonize people's actions. And without some such agreement a pragmatic vindication cannot begin.

It is instructive to confront with these remarks of Calvin the following passage on theological ethics, written in defence of the view that morality is by definition concerned with human welfare:

I suspect that religious views differ from 'humanist' views, not by denying the essential moral relevance of human benefit and harm, but rather by incorporating very different beliefs as to what really is good or bad for human beings. The religious believer finds in a supernatural order a whole extra dimension of pre-eminently important gains and losses, benefits and harm. 2

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1 Ibid., Book II Chapt. 8 Section 11.

This does little except to illustrate the lack of real appreciation in some contemporary moral philosophers of the range of moral views different from their own.

For another illustration of how arbitrary statements about the function of morality are, I turn to a society whose ideals of behaviour were such that they could not be seen as having their point in the promotion of social harmony or any similar utilitarian end. The plains Indians of North America, with their remarkable emphasis on personal courage in war, provide one of numerous possible examples:

From infancy a Plains Indian boy had it dinned into his ears that bravery was the path to distinction, that old age was an evil, while it was a fine thing to die young in battle. ... Every lad was conditioned to emulate the example of eminent warriors. 1

It is tempting to force this ideal into a utilitarian mould by arguing that, where the community is likely to be threatened at any time by hostile groups, such security as anyone could have depends on his being among people who will be courageous in the group's defence. But they did not set store by defensive exploits, or even on ruthless attacks designed to wipe out enemy groups and so to forestall trouble. The style of courage most admired was displayed in daring, provocative attacks, and, during such raids, in individual exploits which might almost have been designed to goad the enemy to retaliate without much affecting his power to do so:

The Crow ...[recognised]four categories of exploit: ... leading a successful party; the genuine coup [touching one of the enemy]; the theft of a picketed horse; and the snatching of a bow (or gun) in a hand-to-hand encounter. 1

These people were not so remarkably lacking in foresight as not to realise that the security of the group would be better served by a more prudent style of courage which does not provoke needless trouble but, when a fight is inevitable, shoots from behind cover. They were well aware that the behaviour they so much admired could be actually dangerous to the security of the group, and it was sometimes restrained for this reason: 'Chiefs did not always favour such expeditions and might order the police to prevent them on grounds of safety'. 2 It could not be argued, then, that they adopted norms of this sort because they believed that this policy would further the harmonious interest-satisfaction of the group. This must surely be seen as a non-utilitarian ideal of nobility related to some ideals in our own moral tradition.

What follows if the Indians of the plains would not see the point of their code of behaviour in its consequences for harmonious general satisfaction? One could not hope to justify to them the adoption of a moral rule by showing that this would have beneficial effects, or criticise another conclusively by showing that it does not. They seem not to have thought that the adoption of their norms either would or should have beneficial results.

Then there is the doubtless vast number of ordinary

1 Ibid., p. 108.
2 Ibid., p. 105.
people who do not see in morality a social institution with any particular point or function, but simply a set of rules to be followed: these and their philosophical representatives such as Sir David Ross. But perhaps I have already multiplied examples beyond necessity; the range of opinion, articulate and inarticulate, about whether morality has any point, and, if so, what it is, is wide. To deny this would call for either a sweeping unawareness of other moral viewpoints, or a blatant determination to define out of the field anyone whose norms are not founded on social welfare considerations, as expressing something different from morality. But any definition of morality which would exclude the principles articulated by Calvin, Nietzsche and Ross would be an absurdity.

Moral thinking is not directed towards any particular goal. Therefore one of the necessities for the construction of a general pragmatic vindication of the adoption of a moral code, a general agreement on what aim policies of the type in question are supposed to achieve, does not exist.

One might achieve something with such an argument when addressing it even to a man for whom the point of following his moral code lies in the fittingness of the creature's obeying the will of the creator. If we can show him that following the rules also makes for social harmony, and if he sets some value on that end, we have given him an extra reason for adhering to the code. But this is a much weaker result than a genuine pragmatic vindication. To see the argument as an adequate
justification for either maintaining the current rules or replacing them with others, he must regard social harmony as not merely a desirable result which following the code happens to have, but as the goal which it is the function of moral codes to promote. Vast numbers of people have had various conceptions of what morality is about, radically different from this.

A man might say that social harmony is the point of morality meaning to claim, as Sidgwick did, that if we look at the component principles of our code, asking what they have in common, and what purpose might be postulated for the whole which would account for our having just those rules, this can all be explained most plausibly on the hypothesis that 'Common Sense is unconsciously utilitarian'. ¹ The suggestion would be more or less reasonable depending on what moral code one had in mind. But even if this were a reasonable claim about all moral codes seen in their own environments, it would not support a universal vindication of the retention of those codes. Such an argument depends on everyone's regarding this goal as the explicit point of morality, not on its being an aim which can be discerned lurking, obscure and generally unrecognised, behind ordinary moral thought.

The pragmatic vindication of induction has at least a sound foundation, since the aim of anticipating the future is undeniably what inductive reasoning is meant to achieve. But in the absence of any such consensus about the end to be achieved by moral thinking, one lacks

¹ Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics, p. 453.
any foundation on which to build an analogous general vindication of a moral policy. One can argue that the adoption of certain principles is justified as a means to a certain end, for anyone who wants to achieve that end and who sees this as the function of moral practices. But it has been seen that one can provide similar hypothetical justifications for any courses of action. Different goals vindicate different policies:

If a particular moral system bids us all to mortify the flesh to the point of seeking an early grave, and if as a result of the application of such a system the race speedily dies out, it cannot be said that the system has not worked; from its own point of view it has worked admirably. 1

Feigl argued for an analogy between forms of justification in moral thought and in other areas such as inductive reasoning. But he acknowledged by implication that, because of this lack of a single generally acknowledged goal, ethical principles are in a peculiar position:

Now just what does a vindication here amount to? It consists in showing that adoption of the norms of a given moral system fulfills a purpose. Well, then, what is the purpose that is fulfilled by adoption of, e.g., the golden rule, or a principle of impartiality? The answer clearly depends on the individual's personality. Perhaps he obeys the golden rule because of sheer prudence and 'enlightened egoism'. Perhaps he ... holds the ideal of the greatest satisfaction for the greatest number. Generally, no vindication will prove convincing unless it appeals to the needs, interests, or aspirations of the individual concerned. 2

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2 Feigl, 'De Principiis Non Disputandum ...?', Black (ed.), Philosophical Analysis, p. 145.
But to anyone who expects a moral code to contribute to a fiercely competitive society in which the strong will succeed and the weak will go to the wall, the golden rule could not be justified at all. The vindication of induction depends on no such individual variations. The lack of a single universal function for morality gives it a seriously different status, and frustrates from the outset any attempt to construct a general pragmatic vindication of any moral principle.
CHAPTER VII

THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF DECISION AND PREDICTION

UNAVOIDABLE PRESUPPOSITIONS

The previous chapter was devoted to examining one way in which one might try to provide the same form of justification for fundamental principles of morality and of inductive reasoning. In the present chapter my aim is to consider another way of defending a similar conclusion, resting on a different form of justification. I shall begin by sketching very briefly the comparison which I have in mind.

Inductive and moral thought are both governed by principles specifying what is a reason relevant to the type of question raised in each form of thought: for example the principles that if A has always been followed by B in the past, that is a reason to predict that this pattern will continue, and that if an action would cause avoidable harm to anyone's interests, that is a reason why it ought not be done. One might accept the conclusion that these principles are not open to any direct proof: that they are presuppositions of reasoning rather than conclusions from it, but go on to argue that commitment to them is inescapable, because they must, logically, be assumed if one is to engage in modes of thought essential to any rational human life.

Such an argument seeks to show that everyone is
inevitably committed to the principles in question, rather than that they are true. However it would be relevant to the issue of moral objectivity in the sense under consideration, as it argues that the adoption of certain moral and inductive principles is not a result of mere social convention, or a free personal decision, or reactions which people simply happen to have: that a mistake is involved in either propounding conflicting principles or repudiating those justified, while continuing to use the form of thought and discourse in question.

Discussions of the presuppositions of a mode of discourse have obviously developed under the influence of Collingwood's account of the relation between questions and presuppositions; I shall turn to him now for a brief exposition of this relation. He writes:

Directly or immediately, any given question involves one presupposition and only one, namely, that from which it directly and immediately rises. This immediate presupposition, however, has in turn other presuppositions, which are thus indirectly presupposed by the original question. Unless this immediate presupposition were made, the question to which it is logically immediately prior could not be logically asked.

Thus if anyone raises the question, of a mark on an ancient inscription, what it means, he presupposes that it means something, rather than being perhaps the result of accidental damage. This is, in Collingwood's terms, a relative presupposition, as one could and would raise the question whether it is correct: 'By a relative presupposition I mean one which stands relatively to one question as its presupposition and relatively to another

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question as its answer'. 1

On the other hand there are absolute presuppositions: 'An absolute presupposition is one which stands, relatively to all questions to which it is related, as a presupposition, never as an answer'. 2 The example which he offers is of a pathologist who, discussing the cause of a certain feature in the development of a disease, presupposes that such features are always caused by something, and does not regard this presupposition as itself open to question.

To raise a question is to be logically committed to its presuppositions, direct and indirect. To attempt to raise a question while repudiating any of its presuppositions is to talk nonsense:

To say that a question 'does not arise' is the ordinary English way of saying that it involves a presupposition which is not in fact being made. A question that 'does not arise' is thus a nonsense question: not intrinsically nonsensical, but nonsensical in relation to its context, and specifically to its presuppositions. 3

It seems that for Collingwood, just as a question is not intrinsically nonsensical, so a presupposition is not intrinsically absolute; it may be absolute in relation to the patterns of thought of a certain person or group, but in relation to a different pattern of thought it may be relative. He remarks that the assumption that all events have causes was, but is not now, an absolute presupposition

1 Ibid., p. 29.
2 Ibid., p. 31.
of all branches of science. He seems to maintain a sweeping cultural relativism in absolute presuppositions.

Whether one sees any link between the notion of an absolute presupposition and the objectivity of the principles of moral thought depends on whether one sees a possibility that some absolute presuppositions might be justified. Collingwood did not see the philosopher's function as including justification; he represented metaphysics as a factual investigation of the absolute presuppositions underlying the thought, primarily the scientific thought, of a culture or period. But another function is possible if one abandons Collingwood's relativist assumptions. If one could show of a certain mode of thought and discourse, both that any rational person would need to engage in it, and that it required a certain presupposition, the argument would constitute a form of justification of that presupposition.

Moral decisions and judgments about particular cases, and specific empirical predictions, are justified in terms of the appropriate principles, so that the problem of justification is thrown back on those principles. A presuppositional justification would show that one was committed to those principles by raising and considering a certain range of questions. How adequate a defence this could provide clearly depends on whether the range of questions is one which rational people could or would leave out of consideration.

1 Ibid., p. 32.
2 Ibid., chapters VI and VII.
There is a problem here parallel to one mentioned in the previous chapter for pragmatic justifications. One could show that any statement is a presupposition of some question or set of them. The question 'Which devil is possessing that madman?' presupposes that madmen are possessed by devils. But this does not justify that presupposition, except to people committed to asking and discussing questions like that. Most of us would be happy to repudiate questions and presupposition together. As R.S. Peters remarks in the course of developing an argument of this sort:

Of course, it would be open to anyone to say that he is not so committed because he does not use this form of discourse or because he will give it up now that he realizes its presuppositions. This would be quite a feasible position to adopt in relation, for instance, to the discourse of witchcraft or astrology. 1

A satisfactory presuppositional argument must have a base much broader than that.

This problem of the possible repudiation of the form of discourse and thought on which the argument is founded should not, however, be exaggerated. Some writers have argued from this problem towards pessimism about the possibility of achieving much with arguments of this form. For example B. Stroud reasons that an argument designed to show that a certain proposition or principle is an inescapable presupposition cannot rest on its necessity to one particular form of discourse, but must show it as necessary to any discourse at all:

A successful anti-skeptical argument will therefore have to be completely general, and deal with the necessary conditions of anything's making sense, not just with the meaningfulness of this or that restricted class of propositions. 1

His reason is that if the argument is founded on any restricted form of discourse, it is possible to reply that this form of discourse is indeed senseless, thereby putting oneself in a position to reject its presuppositions. For a successful presuppositional argument, Stroud requires that this reply be unavailable: there must be no possibility of uttering a meaningful statement which rejects the assumption in question, because it is a presupposition of any use of language:

Suppose we have a proof that the truth of a particular proposition S is a necessary condition of there being any meaningful language .... We would know that S cannot be denied truly because it cannot be denied truly that there is some language. 2

Thus one is committed to acknowledging that some utterances are meaningful by making any use of language. To deny it is to use language in making a meaningful utterance, providing a counter-instance refuting the very statement made. It is not that the statement 'There are no meaningful utterances' is necessarily false. It is contingently false of the present time, contingently true of the time of the dinosaurs. It is not a self-refuting statement; the refutation is provided by the call utterance of it, which we might a self-refuting performance.

According to this criterion, a successful presuppositional

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2 Ibid., p. 252.
argument must show that there is an inconsistency, not between denying the statement in question and using a specific form of discourse, but between denying it and saying anything at all.

If this is the goal, one is justified in some doubt about whether arguments of this form can successfully defend any assumptions much more significant than the example mentioned. One could certainly deny that past patterns of events provide any grounds for prediction, and that human welfare provides any grounds for the worth of actions, without one's utterance of the denial being a self-refuting performance in this way.

As usual, pessimism here follows excessive expectations. If one hopes to use arguments of this form to defend statements or principles which anyone might see a need to question or support, one must settle for a weaker result than Stroud requires. In general those who seek to use arguments of this type in ethics make more modest claims for their force. For example Phillips Griffiths writes:

I characterize a transcendental argument as one to the conclusion that the truth of some principle is necessary to the possibility of the successful employment of a specified sphere of discourse. Its use will be to show the necessity either of accepting the principle on the part of anyone who claims seriously to employ locutions of the relevant sphere of discourse, or of abandoning such a claim. 1

On this account it would always be possible consistently to deny the principle; the inconsistency arises only from denying it and going on using the sphere of discourse

in question. 1 He goes on to say of such arguments that they 'are all "ad hominem" in a sense, since their force will depend on how difficult it is for someone to abandon a whole sphere of discourse in this way'. 2 Peters' claim for the force of his presuppositional arguments for moral principles is expressed in similar terms. 3 Such an argument could have considerable justificatory force, if founded on a mode of thought and discourse which no reasonable person would repudiate, even though a repudiation of it and its presuppositions could be uttered coherently.

In this chapter my aim is to see how satisfactorily this form of argument can be used to defend inductive principles, going on then to consider whether it may be

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1 His claims for the force of the argument have not always been so modest. In an article outlining several such arguments in defence of moral principles, he writes: 'A principle can be shown to be objectively true, ... if it can be shown that the form of discourse of which the principle is an example is impossible without presupposing the principle'. ('Ultimate Moral Principles: Their Justification', Paul Edwards (ed.), Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1967), vol. VIII, p. 180.) This strong claim is open to Stroud's objections as his later, weaker claim is not.


used with equal force in defence of some principles of morality, or whether the latter must suffer by the comparison.

ONE PRESUPPOSITION OF PREDICTION

Those philosophers who have presented presuppositional accounts of the foundations of inductive reasoning have generally taken the discourse of science as the basis of the argument. Thus Russell, who adopted a point of view of this sort at one time, sought 'the postulates required to validate scientific method', and Arthur W. Burks outlines this account of inductive principles in this way:

Starting from the assumption that science is possible (in our terms: that the standard inductive method is the correct one) we seek an explanation of this assumption (in our terms: a fundamental factual proposition from which the correctness of the standard inductive method follows on logical grounds.)

If one's aim is to justify a fundamental inductive principle, there are reasons against beginning with scientific discourse, and asking what presuppositions it rests on. In the first place, unless one takes an intolerably wide view of science, the principles of inductive reasoning govern much that is beyond its limits. They govern the every-day expectations guiding one's every conscious movement, which would be inappropriately dignified with the title of scientific conclusions. The scope of induction is wider, then, than that of scientific


reasoning, and the need to found a presuppositional justification on as widely-conceived a form of discourse as possible has already been mentioned. There is a second reason. Let us assume that some standard instances of scientific reasoning can be shown to rest on presuppositions with the right content. This need not carry much weight with the sceptic who questions the foundations of inductive reasoning, since he would no doubt question those standard instances of scientific reasoning also.

For these reasons it is better to found an argument of this form in defence of an inductive principle on a form of discourse broad enough to include any thought about the future, whether it is concerned with predicting particular events, or classes of events, or with generalisations about events which span past and future. 2

1 Some, of course, would question whether induction plays any significant role in scientific thought.

2 I am concerned with what is needed for a presuppositional justification of an inductive principle. Burks' main aim is less to justify than simply to investigate the factual question of what presuppositions underlie scientific thought. Russell makes more effort to extract some justificatory force from the procedure, for the principles which he sets out: I think, therefore, that we may be said to 'know' what is necessary for scientific inference, given that it fulfils the following conditions: (1) it is true, (2) we believe it, (3) it leads to no conclusions which experience confutes, (4) it is logically necessary if any occurrence or set of occurrences is ever to offer evidence in favour of any other occurrence. (Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits, p. 515).

But how could one show that all these conditions obtain?
It would include every-day planning and half-considered expectation as well as systematic scientific thought, and would not have built in from the start any of the rules of predictive inference which we in fact regard as sound.

This broadening of the base of the argument reduces to vanishing point the likelihood of anyone's dissociating himself from the form of thought involved; who could sincerely repudiate all thinking and talking about what will happen? We can safely assume that any rational person is involved in this, and go on to ask what presuppositions this involvement commits him to.

One conclusion is reached without difficulty. If a man seriously raises and considers questions about what will happen, he is committed to assuming that something would be a reason for predicting one event rather than another, otherwise there could be no content for his deliberation. Without this assumption he could wonder what will happen, but, although the future may be of great concern to him, he could not raise predictive questions purposefully, with a view to finding answers, because he has no way of seeking answers. To consider such a question seriously, as distinct from idle speculation or letting predictions spring unbidden from the thickets of the subconscious, requires some idea of what would be a plausible or an outrageous prediction; and this calls for the acknowledgment of reasons, considerations for and against reasonable prediction.

This is a modest commitment. It falls far short of any principle of induction, which would state that a particular sort of consideration counts as a reason for
predicting. I shall leave on one side the problem of extending the argument to bridge this further gap, and consider whether a similar modest point may be made about morality.

ONE PRESUPPOSITION OF PRACTICAL DISCOURSE

The moral principles for which one might hope to provide presuppositional justification specify grounds for the rightness and wrongness of actions. They function in the general area of practical discourse, which I take to include any talk and thought about what ought to be done, whether directed towards decision or assessment of action. On some such form of discourse the argument must be founded.

The specification of the form of discourse is a crucial matter. One must find a base for the argument which is defined in the broadest possible terms, to minimise the possibility of anyone's repudiating that base. However, when one's aim is to defend principles with substantive moral content, there is inevitably a temptation to base the argument on a form of discourse defined in rather specific terms, to improve one's chances of showing that those principles must be presupposed.

Three arguments for moral principles, built on a foundation of this latter restricted type, are outlined by A. Phillips Griffiths in an article on the justification of moral principles. His arguments proceed from the conception of a special form of practical discourse, called moral discourse, which, apart from being practical, is
given the properties of autonomy and objectivity. Autonomy is defined as meaning that 'a moral judgment or principle is never deducible from any set of premises which contain no moral judgment or principle'.\(^1\) Objectivity is variously defined, as meaning that 'the truth of any moral judgment shall not depend on the peculiarities of the person making it but, rather, that it shall be determinable by any rational observer who is apprised of the facts',\(^2\) and that 'the relevance and force of any consideration is dependent on its content and not on the will or status of whoever puts it forward'.\(^3\) His approach to the problem of justification is then set out in this way:

The only kind of solution which seems possible is one that shows that certain moral principles must be regarded as correct if moral discourse is to be possible at all, at least as an autonomous and objective form of practical discourse.

This approach is crippled from the start. Let it be shown however convincingly that anyone who uses this special mode of practical discourse is committed to certain moral presuppositions, a problem still remains. It has to be shown why everyone must use just such a type of practical discourse. The more narrowly the type has been specified, the greater this problem must be; in


\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 180.

\(^4\) Ibid.
this case many people would claim to make do without any such form of discourse. They raise questions about what ought to be done, but not from exactly that point of view. This problem will be discussed later in the chapter, when one argument sketched by Griffiths will be examined; however it must affect all presuppositional arguments raised on the foundation of such special forms of practical discourse. I shall therefore not select arguments such as Griffiths suggests as those with which this chapter is mainly concerned.

R.S. Peters, in presenting a similar set of arguments for moral principles, is more keenly aware of the need to avoid this difficulty. He aims to put forward 'arguments pointing to what any individual must presuppose in so far as he uses a public form of discourse in seriously discussing with others or with himself what he ought to do'. ¹ He sets out to expose the presuppositions of any practical discourse, not merely those of a particular form, with specialised properties. He sometimes refers to this foundation of his arguments as moral discourse, but it is really practical discourse conceived in the broadest possible way, to include any deliberation about what ought to be done. Recognising the danger that a sceptic might repudiate the mode of thought and discourse on which a presuppositional argument is based, he points out that this

would be a very difficult position to adopt in relation to moral discourse. For it would entail a resolute

refusal to talk or think about what ought to be done, which would constitute an abdication from a form of thought into which all in our society are initiated in varying degrees. No adducing of reasons for the guidance of conduct would be permissible thereafter. It is difficult to conceive of the sort of life to which such a moral sceptic would condemn himself. 1

This would be hard to dispute. We have here a foundation broad enough for presuppositional arguments with ample justificatory force, and we shall now consider what moral principles, if any, are presupposed by it.

To what assumptions is one committed by raising questions about what ought to be done? I mean a thoughtful activity aimed at reaching a conclusion, not idle wondering or passively waiting for an impulse to take its grip. A point can be made here, parallel to the point made about predictive thought; to engage seriously in this activity commits one to recognising that something would constitute a reason for or against certain actions, otherwise the deliberation could have no content; there could be no way of deciding on an answer.

This is a very modest conclusion. It is no more than Hare points out when, discussing what one must do in justifying a decision, he argues that a full defence must state the results of the action, and the principles on which the decision was reached, and the general effects of acting on those principles, so that it would blossom into a description of the whole style of life which those principles dictate:

1 Ibid., pp. 115-116.
If the inquirer still goes on asking 'But why should I live like that?' then there is no further answer to give him, because we have already, ex hypothesi, said everything that could be included in this further answer. We can only ask him to make up his own mind which way he ought to live, for in the end everything rests on such a decision of principle. He has to decide whether to accept that way of life or not; if he accepts it, then we can proceed to justify the decisions that are based upon it; if he does not accept it, then let him accept some other, and try to live by it. 1

Just as the assumption that something would be a reason for a prediction is far short of any principle of induction, so the assumption that something would be a reason in favour of an action is far short of a substantive practical principle, moral or not. Such principles state what sort of considerations are reasons for actions, while this presupposition sets no limits to what they might be. Hare represents the choice among imaginable principles as a matter for personal decision, implying only that some styles of life are more difficult than others to carry through.

I emphasise the total vacuousness of this presupposition of practical discourse because some have tried to extract substantive content from it. An attempt can be seen in R.S. Peters' argument for a principle of justice or equality. His basic argument is the one which has been outlined:

The principle of justice is a presupposition of any attempt to justify conduct or to ask seriously the question 'What ought I to do?' For ... no answer which is better or worse than any other could be given to this question unless there were principles for accepting or rejecting reasons on grounds of relevance. ... Once the necessity for general rules is admitted the principle of justice follows; for it is an explication of what is built into the concept of 'general rule'. 2

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1 Hare, The Language of Morals, p. 69.
2 Peters, Ethics and Education, pp. 124-125.
Special forms of the principle (e.g. 'Other things being equal ... all people's claims should be equally considered',\(^1\) and 'What ought to be done in any particular situation or by any particular person ought to be done in any other situation or by any other person unless there is some relevant difference in the situation or person'\(^2\)) can be seen to follow from its most general statement, that if there are actions which ought and ought not be done, there must be general reasons why this is so.

But when one considers what this principle can allow it becomes inappropriate to call it a principle of justice, even of the most general kind. It is reminiscent of the Sellar and Yeatman article of Magna Carta: 'that no one was to be put to death, save for some reason'.\(^3\) A rule like this makes no distinction between acceptable and unacceptable reasons; that the prisoner has red hair will serve as well as any other, provided that it can be stated as a general rule, that having red hair is a reason, other things being equal, for executing anyone. The joke is a joke because what we mean by a standard of justice is not simply a demand for reasons (any reasons) but a criterion separating good reasons from bad. The 'principle of justice' under consideration gives no grounds for condemning the execution of people for such reasons, although this would be a paradigmatic case of injustice: a more obvious example than acting without

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being able to offer any reason at all, which we would call impulsive or mindless, rather than unjust.

Peters allows that his principle of justice is a formal principle, that if one wonders what its practical implications are in some field of possible action, 'it can be inferred in advance that very little of a substantive sort is implied',\(^1\) because while the principle implies that moral distinctions between cases must be based on relevant differences, 'the considerations which make a difference relevant cannot be determined by the principle of justice itself'.\(^2\) However he seems to suggest that some practical guidance is implied:

The principle of justice prescribes the making of general rules for distinctive forms of action where there are relevant differences.\(^3\) Far from it being an arbitrary principle it is the very principle that condemns arbitrariness. For 'arbitrariness' involves either acting without searching for reasons or making rules which are not based on relevant differences.\(^4\)

There is a suggestion that acknowledgment of the principle which has been shown as presupposed by practical discourse commits one to a certain approach to decisions: consciously thinking out general principles of action and actively trying to apply them in particular situations rather than allowing one's decisions in particular situations to be dictated by impulse.

Is it really the case that unless one acknowledges a commitment to this rather cerebral approach to action, one

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2 Ibid., p.123.
3 Ibid., p.125.
4 Ibid., pp.125-126.
is not entitled logically to consider any questions about what ought to be done? I think not; one could meet the demands of Peters' formal principle while adopting an impulse-guided approach to particular decision situations, and prescribing it for others.

Two such positions both seem perfectly coherent. A man might regard the supreme value in human life as spontaneity, thus holding that there is one consideration in favour of an action: the fact that it is impulsive, spontaneous. He can obviously discuss what ought to be done, since he has a principle which allows him to discriminate between actions which ought and actions which ought not to be done, on the basis of relevant reasons. However he is not thereby committed to the policy of approaching all decision situations in a deliberative principle-guided way; on the contrary, if he thinks about which course of action is the one towards which his spontaneous impulses drive him most strongly, he has already lost that first fine careless rapture which he values above everything else.

There is another situation in which a person might consistently acknowledge Peters' formal principle without being committed to Peters' deliberative approach to decisions. He might acknowledge a more familiar set of principles about reasons for and against actions (principles perhaps concerning human interests) but hold the belief that people have been endowed by a beneficent creator with so little intelligence, and with such fortunate spontaneous urges, that their actions will be much more frequently those that ought to be done, if they always follow their unconsidered impulses in the particular decision-situation, rather than actively formulating the principles and trying to apply them. This
man too recognises principles of the type required to make practical thought and discourse possible, but he should adopt and recommend a thoroughly undeliberative approach to decisions in practical situations.

I mention these two quite coherent, though doubtless uncommon positions,¹ not to defend them, but to show by means of them that Peters' 'formal principle of justice' provides no support even for these extremely generalised practical conclusions which he tries to derive from it.

A moral principle must separate acceptable (relevant) reasons for action from unacceptable (irrelevant) reasons. Peters recognises that, while his formal principle states that there must be some reasons recognised as supporting distinctions between right and wrong actions, 'the considerations which make a difference relevant cannot be determined by the principle of justice itself'.² Discussing what would be a just or fair principle for assigning voting rights or fixing wages, he writes:

In both cases talk of 'fairness' remains vacuous until more is said about what is at stake. What sort of activity, for instance, is voting and what is the point of it in a society? What is 'earning a wage'? What function does it have in a society? In the absence of a rationale of this sort further discussion is impossible. For how can the 'relevance' of grounds for making exceptions or for creating general categories be determined without reference to such wider considerations which give point to the activity? ³

¹ These would be uncommon positions in relation to human actions in general, but many people would probably approve of allowing one's actions to be dictated by feeling and impulse, at least to a large extent, in the special field of personal relations, particularly with the opposite sex. This is partly, perhaps, because in this area we are disposed to value spontaneity for its own sake, partly because, although there are other values which we look for in personal relations, there is a widespread belief that it is by allowing ourselves to be moved by impulse that we have our best chance of securing those values, and not by keeping the values in mind and trying to make rational decisions in their light.

² Ibid., p.123.

³ Ibid., p.127.
His claim is that, while the 'formal principle of justice' alone gives no guidance about which considerations are relevant to justification in a certain sphere of action and which are not, it needs no support from moral principles to do so. Given that rules of relevance must be recognised, the question which rules are acceptable as just in a given sphere can be settled by considering nothing but the social point or function of the activity or institution within which the question is raised. Thus he goes on to claim that there is no possibility of making out a connection between the property of being female and the function of the institution of elections, so that if anyone wanted to maintain that it was just to deny the vote to women, he would have to justify this distinction by looking to other properties which he claimed that women possessed, and which were linked with the point of elections: perhaps ignorance, or over-susceptibility to emotional influences. The standards of relevance are internal to the social institution involved, being set by its point or function, and it is a matter of fact, not of morality, what that social function is.

I think that we would not be willing to let questions about the justice of making a distinction based on a certain reason be settled by reference to the function of the social practice within which the distinction is made. I shall illustrate this by an example with more contemporary force than the issue of voting rights for women.

Why would one claim that it was unjust to penalise people legally, for expressing radical political opinions, as occurs in countries such as South Africa? According to Peters, what is a consideration relevant to whether legal punishment is justified, must be settled by considering the
function of the legal system in the society in question. It is often observed by critics that much of South African law has the function of maintaining the position of the dominant group of the population. The dissemination of radical political ideas is closely relevant to that function, and therefore, on Peters' reasoning, it is an acceptable ground for administering legal punishment.

This is an argument which nobody would accept. But Peters' argument leaves no grounds for rejecting it. In fact, surely, we would not submit such questions to criteria internal to a social practice because we want to be able to raise questions about the justice of the practice itself and the purposes it serves. In this case, while we might agree that maintaining a sectional dominance is a central function of that legal system, we are likely to add that it ought not be, and no conclusions about what is just can follow from the deplorable fact that it is. Asked why it ought not be, we would no doubt reply that it is unjust for a legal system to be designed around this function, thereby showing that we are applying a general, but substantive, conception of just treatment of people to the whole social order under discussion. This conception cannot be defended by reference to the function of any social institution, since we would use it in critically examining any social institution.

A conception of this sort lies behind any judgment about justice in a particular case. Sometimes it receives no explicit consideration, and it might seem that a question about what considerations may justly be
counted as making a difference, is settled merely by the point of the social practice within which the question arises. However this could only happen when the practice and its function were entirely acceptable according to our background standards of justice, as in Peters' case, with the welfare of all as the function of elections.

Peters derives from his formal principle this rule: 'Other things being equal ... all people's claims should be equally considered'.¹ He seeks to make out a presumption in favour of equality, throwing onto anyone who would treat people differently the onus of justification. But even if this rule about onus of proof follows from the formal principle, which might be questioned, it supports no substantive moral conclusions. The burden of justification has no weight, since something is always true of one person but not of another, and the formal principle sets no limits to the differences which might justify the distinction.

The principle so far shown to be presupposed by practical discourse is, then, not a moral principle, nor indeed a substantive practical principle of any sort, nor will it father any out of any set of sociological facts.

What point has been reached in comparing the status of the principles of inductive and moral reasoning? So far no disanalogy has come to light. Whether one engages in predictive or in practical discourse, one must assume that some considerations would be reasons for or against

¹ Ibid., p. 122.
predictions or actions. But so far the arguments have supported neither a moral nor an inductive principle, and the question to be pursued is whether further arguments can be developed to show that substantive principles, of the type being sought, are similarly inescapable. My aim is now to outline an argument for commitment to a principle of induction, moving on then to consider what substantive practical principles, if any, are open to a similar defence.

ALTERNATIVE ASSUMPTIONS FOR PREDICTION

In discussing whether engaging in prediction involves commitment to inductive principles, one must ask what other assumptions prediction might be founded on. One person might predict the weather from meteorological data, another by gazing into a crystal ball, another by consulting a seer. Do we have here one inductive and two alternative non-inductive methods? These procedures are all equally compatible with any principle of inductive reasoning, which bids us only to look to past patterns of events, and to predict on the assumption that those patterns will continue. It gives no hint whether we should expect to find rain consistently correlated with a fall in barometric pressure, or with an image of rain in a crystal ball. Thus these men are all equally entitled to defend their methods by referring to their past record of accurate prediction. Such a defence rests just as firmly on inductive assumptions whether used by a seer or by a meteorologist. No doubt we are suspicious of
predicting rain with crystal balls, but it is not because
this is necessarily non-inductive; it is because of our
beliefs about the sorts of phenomena likely to be
correlated with rainy weather.

So far I have argued only that users of the more
exotic predictive methods can be following the same forms
of inductive reasoning as a user of more conventional
procedures. Not only can they, but we find it natural to
assume that they would in fact do so. Thus Shakespeare
puts these lines into the mouth of Calpurnia when she
warns Caesar of danger to his life:

When beggars die there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.¹

The implicit reasoning suggested is unexceptionably
inductive: past comets have always been followed by the
deaths of princes; a comet has appeared, so Caesar, a
prince, must beware. But the question which I raised is
not whether the user of any predictive method can, or is
likely to, look to past patterns of events to justify his
predictions, but whether he is committed to do so.

I think that there is such a commitment. Take for
example the man whose predictions are based on images in
his crystal ball. I assume that he has an established
practice of using this method; it is not an idea which
has suddenly entered his head. I assume also that he uses
the technique in a rational, reflective manner, believing
it to be a good and reliable method.

He is committed to claiming that his method is reliable,

¹ William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act II Scene 2.
that is, that predictions made by it are always or usually correct. This claim is made about a series of applications of the method, of which some are still to come, but some are in the past, so that we have an initial record of success or failure. That record must have some bearing on whether the claim is justified. The bearing which it has depends on how sweeping the claim is. If the forecaster rashly claims that his method is completely reliable, and his critics can point to any failures in his record, his assertion is simply falsified. He may, of course, provide ad hoc explanations for the failures, designed to show that they were not proper applications of the method, and so not members of the class of predictions for which his claim of complete reliability was made. But his very eagerness to explain away past failures is a recognition that he is committed to showing an unmixed record of success. Such a man, while he may not have arrived at his method by reflection on its past success, is certainly committed to looking back at the record in defending it. He cannot consistently acknowledge failures in the record and deny that they count against his claims for the method.

But he may claim, less rashly, that this is a usually reliable method, but not necessarily successful in every case. He need not now be embarrassed by an isolated failure. However the record may be disastrously unsuccessful; can he regard that record as irrelevant because he claimed only that the method is generally reliable? Two points should be made about this situation. Firstly there is, admittedly, no self-contradiction
involved in agreeing that the method has failed in most past applications, and insisting that it is, in the long run, a generally reliable technique; the long run provides ample opportunity to make up the leeway. But the second point is this. We have here in confrontation the assertion that in the long run most such predictions will be accurate, and the fact that as far as our experience of them extends, very few are. If that fact, which sums up all our knowledge about the predictions for which the claim was made, does not constitute a reason against confidence in the assertion, it is not clear what could constitute a reason.

The situation is exactly parallel to that of a man who has a completely unsupported general belief, for example that most Americans have German names, and who then begins to build up some knowledge of particular Americans, by personal experience and reliable hearsay. This knowledge covers only a small minority of Americans; however it is all the relevant information that he has. If he is not to regard a predominance of German names, or the reverse, in the only sample of the population of which he has any knowledge, as a reason for or against confidence in the assertion, then he could not regard anything as a reason, since he has excluded everything which he knows about the members of the class about which the belief is held.

Unless, therefore, one agrees that nothing is a reason for predicting any event, one must acknowledge past patterns of events in similar situations as giving reasons. And this is a very broadly-stated principle
of inductive reasoning.

Let us consider a possible way of evading this conclusion. The argument assumes a man who has an established practice of predicting in a certain way, and is thereby committed to a claim about the reliability of his method which spans its past and future applications. Could he object that he is committed by his now relying on this technique, only to the claim that it will be reliable now, or from now on? What has happened in the past would then be irrelevant to the claim. Nobody is likely to adopt this strategy, but it is another question whether it is open to criticism.

Each time this man uses his crystal ball for predicting he is committed to a different claim: that only from that time on his method gives a reliable indication of the future. He uses the same prediction technique in the sense that he uses the same piece of apparatus, but each time what he does is dictated by a different principle: that from the time and date in question, seeing an image in his crystal ball is a reason for predicting a similar event. Relying on no consistent rule, he has no stable method of prediction.

This man can raise questions about what will happen. But he must create a new predictive technique to deal with every such question which is raised; only by this remarkable procedure can he escape the force of my argument. The commitment to recognising past patterns of events as relevant to prediction is unavoidable if one claims to work consistently with one predictive method.

An extension has now been provided to the
presuppositional argument previously outlined, to show that a person who engages consistently in prediction is thereby committed to a substantive principle of inductive reasoning. My aim is now to turn to practical discourse, and to consider whether a similar argument can show that if anything is to count as a reason in favour of an action, a particular type of consideration must count.

AN INESCAPABLE PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE

There is one practical principle which has the same inevitability. If a person did not regard the fact that an action would benefit him as a reason in its favour, he would have rejected such a central and paradigmatic instance that he could not be said to have the concept of a practical reason. There is a cluster of concepts, including 'benefit', 'interest', 'reason', 'rational', which one would define in terms of each other: a benefit is something which one has reason to pursue; what is in one's interest is what it would be rational to try to get; a rational act, in one restricted sense, is the one which would most benefit the agent.

The statement that one has no real reason to do what most benefits him is similar to the statement that a block of granite is not really solid. Just as one would explain the concept of solidity by reference to central examples such as blocks of granite, and if these are not to be called solid then the concept cannot be used either in affirmations or denials, so the fact that an action
would benefit oneself is so close to the centre of the concept of a reason for doing it, that if one denies that this is a reason the concept of a reason for acting crumbles.

In making this point I do not defend the more extreme opinion that this consideration is the only fundamental reason for a man's doing anything. This doctrine forms the foundation of G.R. Grice's account of moral reasoning:

The only propositions which are properly understood as reasons for acting - as reasons for A's doing x - are propositions which state either that x is in some way in accordance with A's interests or that x conduces to A's aims. 1

He observes that this will seem a dogmatic assertion to some, a truism to others: a danger-sign that what is presented as a conceptual point is really a substantive evaluative opinion. He tries to defend it conceptually:

I can establish any proposition I like which does not state that an action is in his interest and he can always intelligibly reply, 'You have not yet given me a reason for acting'. It is only when I have established that it is in his interest to act in a certain way that he cannot make this reply. 'It is in my interest to do x, but that is no reason for my doing x' is self-contradictory. 2

But some would apply the same argument to other concepts, holding, for example, that it is self-contradictory to agree that one has promised to do x, but to deny that this is any reason to do it. All I should want to maintain is that the concept of interest or benefit has an absolutely central position among practical reasons. If a man accepts anything as a reason for acting, he must accept this.

2 Ibid., p. 19.
The presuppositional argument founded on what is required for practical discourse to have point has now been extended to provide a justification for a substantive practical principle. But has a moral principle been defended? An egoistic moralist would maintain that this is the whole foundation of morality, and that a normative moral theory consists in giving a systematic account of what is in any agent's interest.

The attraction of ethical egoism, from a logical point of view, is that it rests morality on a class of reasons so central to the concept of a reason for acting that repudiation of it is out of the question. This source of its attraction emerges very clearly in the following remarks of Mrs. Foot on the giving of reasons for adopting policies: 'The crucial question is: "Can we give anyone, strong or weak, a reason why he should be just?". She observes of some reasons that might be offered, such as that being just serves the happiness of the greatest number, that many people do not care a jot for the happiness of the greatest number,

so that if justice is only to be recommended on these grounds a thousand tough characters will be able to say that they have been given no reason for practising justice, and many more would say the same if they were not too timid or too stupid to ask questions about the code of behaviour which they have been taught. 2

But a type of reason which nobody could reject while keeping any concept of a reason for acting, is that acting justly, or whatever, would benefit him.

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2 Ibid., p. 102.
But not everyone is satisfied to found moral decision and judgment ultimately on an egoistic principle. The objection, in outline, is this: the assumption that a man has reason to do what is in his own interest is indeed one to which any rational person is committed, but it is something different from morality; it is prudence. These bare bones of an objection are fleshed out with two points. Firstly, the actions classed as right and wrong by this criterion simply do not correspond, in spite of a large overlap, with the actions which are morally right and wrong. Thus Phillips and Mounce, criticising the paper from which the above passages are quoted, write as follows about the case of a ruler who is in such a strong position that he can expect to mistreat most of his subjects with impunity, and even profit:

What is Mrs Foot to say about such a situation? If she wishes to be consistent she must say that since such a ruler is strong enough to get away with injustice, injustice and its profits are a sufficient reason for holding that the life the ruler leads is the best life he could lead. On the other hand, many people would want to say ... despite the fact that he found injustice profitable, he ought to deal justly with his subjects. 1

Secondly, even when the action dictated by self-interest is the same as that dictated by morality, to behave as morality would require from a self-interested motive is not the same as to act morally, since morality requires actions done from certain distinctive motives:

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1 Phillips and Mounce, Moral Practices, p. 23.
'We do not see how Mrs Foot can distinguish between the man who loves justice, and the man who performs "just" actions because it pays to do so'. To replace moral motivation with self-interest, so it is argued, destroys what is peculiar to morality, making nonsense, for instance, of that distinctively moral notion, 'remorse'.

The force of these objections depends, obviously, on whether one has standards of behaviour, different from the prudential standard in these ways, which one regards as one's moral principles. I should have thought that most people, at least in modern Western societies, do. Asked how our notion of morality differs from prudence, we are likely to begin by replying that a morally good man must be moved by everyone's welfare, not just his own, without necessarily implying that this is the whole of morality.

A person who is happy with a morality founded on self-interest can survey the arguments presented so far in this chapter, and conclude that they provide for moral reasoning exactly the same justification as for inductive reasoning. In both cases one is committed to a principle with the right content, by engaging in an inescapably broad form of thought and discourse. But anyone with a conception of morality as distinct from

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2 Phillips and Mounce would deny that this too, or any other purposive motive, is properly described as moral (see Moral Practices pp. 39-40). But here they would have less support from ordinary moral thought.
prudence must say that so far no moral principle has been shown as presupposed by practical discourse. For all that the arguments have shown, a man may raise questions about what he ought to do, recognising only prudential reasons as relevant, and rejecting any distinctively moral considerations, without being open to any criticism from a logical point of view.

But this is just what some recent writers deny, arguing that a man who regards his own interest as generating reasons for him is also committed to acknowledge the interests of everyone as generating reasons for him. If a presuppositional argument could be extended so far it would have justified a principle which would be recognised by most people as moral. For non-egoistic moralists as well as for egoists, this form of argument could then provide for at least one moral principle the same sort of support as it can for a general principle of inductive reasoning. I want now to examine two arguments for this conclusion.

CONSIDERING THE INTERESTS OF ALL

The first argument is put forward by R.S. Peters. Like his other presuppositional arguments, it is based on practical reasoning broadly conceived, a procedure which has the virtue of ensuring that nobody could reasonably repudiate the ground of the argument. He raises the following question, and offers the following answer to it:
Why ... should not a man who asks the question 'Why do this rather than that?' limit consideration of possible ends of action to those that effect [sic] only himself? ... The answer is surely that consideration of the interests of others is a presupposition of asking the question 'Why do this rather than that?' This question ... is a question in public discourse. It presupposes a situation in which men are concerned with finding answers to questions of practical policy, in which they need the help of other men. In entering into such a discussion any rational man must assume not only that there are worthwhile things to do but also that he might want to engage in such worthwhile things. If he thought that, having discussed such matters with his fellows, his stake in such a worthwhile life was going to be completely ignored, it is difficult to conceive how he would ever take the step of engaging in such a public discussion. As a rational man he must see, too, that what applies to him applies to any other man engaging in such a discussion; for how could he think that he alone has any claims? ... If men generally thought that no consideration was going to be given to their desire to engage in such activities, this form of discourse would lack point. As a public activity it could never get off the ground.

The argument hinges on the fact that, in raising questions about what he ought to do, a man is inevitably using a public language. If public practical discourse could exist only on the assumption that everyone's interests count in every question, and one is committed to that assumption by using that form of discourse, ethical egoism is logically indefensible.

Egoistic moral systems outline modes of practical discourse in which many questions about what anyone ought to do can arise, and anyone can discuss them, but only the interests of the agent are relevant to a particular question. Spinoza's moral philosophy provides an example. Why could not a functioning form of public discourse actually exist, along these lines? Peters'

1 Peters, Ethics and Education, pp. 171-172.
answer is that no rational person would engage in a form of discourse that required him, when discussing questions about what other people ought to do, to leave his own interests out of consideration. A public form of discourse based on this egoistic principle could never become established in use, because of the lack of interlocutors.

I intend at this point to look briefly at some features of Spinoza's moral system, to see whether, in spite of Peters, an ethical egoist can make room for one person's rationally entering a discussion of what another ought to do.

Spinoza did not regard self-interest as the only possible motive. He recognised a natural disposition to sympathy, and a natural benevolence arising out of it. However sympathy is an emotion, and as such can be no part of morality, which is precisely a matter of living under the guidance of reason rather than emotion; and for Spinoza reason in practice is wholly self-interested:

To act absolutely according to virtue is nothing else in us than to act under the guidance of reason, to live so, and to preserve one's being ... on the basis of seeking what is useful to oneself.

Thus, while concern for oneself is not the only feeling which can move a person to act, the only reasons relevant to whether he should act in some way are based on his own interest. Spinoza presents an egoistic moral system mounted on a non-egoistic psychology of natural motives.

1 See Ethics Book III, prop. 27 and its corollaries and notes.

Is it conceivable that a society might operate with a mode of practical discourse embodying a Spinozistic assumption about practical reasons? Peters reasons that there must be some point for a person in engaging in discussion of what someone else should do, and if the rules specify that only the agent's interests count there could be no such point.

This conclusion rests on the further but unstated assumption that Jones' acting in his own interest would be either a matter of indifference to Smith, or actually to his disadvantage, so that, to put it crudely, there would be nothing in it for Smith if he persuaded Jones to do what is for his own advantage. This assumption might strike us as very plausible, accustomed as we are to thinking of self-interest and the good of others as generally in opposition. However Spinoza explicitly rejects it, insisting that it is precisely when a man is doing what is in his own best interest that his actions will be most beneficial to others: 'Men are most useful one to the other when each one most seeks out what is useful to himself'. ¹

If a community accepted this belief rather than the opposite, it would be perfectly rational for a member to discuss what another ought to do, purely on the basis of the agent's interest, since he assumes that getting the agent to do what is in his own interest would be in the interests of all. Peters' statement that an egoistic

¹ Ibid., prop. 35, corollary 2.
form of practical discourse could not get off the ground because rational people would not engage in it, is thus far too simple. A community of Spinozists would each see it as most rational to engage in a mode of discourse which would rule out his own interest as irrelevant to all practical questions except those about his own actions. If he appealed to his own interest in discussing what another person ought to do, he would be encouraging the agent to act out of sympathy instead of reason, and the Spinozist must see this as disadvantageous to everyone, including himself.

Spinoza's moral system is not an actual form of practical discourse of the type which Peters' argument declares impossible; it is a philosopher's proposal for such a form of discourse. However we have a description of a moral code actually held and applied by a society, which is very similar in its formal characteristics, though rather different in its substantive content, because it gives a much more materialistic filling to the notion of human good. This is the morality of the Navaho Indians, as described by Ladd. ¹ Ladd presents evidence that for the Navahos, as for Spinoza, the only form of argument recognised as relevant to what a man ought to do is one which appeals to his own advantage: 'Every prescription in the Navaho moral code is personal, in that it receives its ultimate justification by

reference to the welfare of the agent'. 1

The Navahos, far from feeling any tension between egoism and the use of public practical discourse, seem to have placed much more importance on public discussion of what ought to be done than we would do:

Any philosopher who visits the Navahos cannot fail to be impressed by the extent to which 'talking it over' and 'thinking hard' are prized and practiced by these people.... Every decision made must first be discussed by all who happen to be around, and it is thought desirable to consult everyone, especially the older and wiser members of the family, before any course of action is decided upon. 2

Any difference between Western and Navaho people in the degree of rationality of their approach to practical questions seems to be in favour of the Navahos, who would never rest a moral prescription on an unquestionable divine command or a non-natural property.

The suggestion that it would be irrational for anyone who was asked for advice to enter a Navaho moral discussion, because he could not put his own interests forward as relevant, is without foundation, since these people assume, with Spinoza, that one can only profit by persuading someone to do what is most advantageous to himself. They believe that 'the welfare of each individual is dependent upon that of every other individual in the group. What is good for the individual is good for everyone else'. 3 The appearance of irrationality depends on the alternative assumption of general conflict between

1 Ibid., p. 252. See pp. 292 ff. for a general account of their egoism, and pp. 305 ff. for a comparison with Western egoistic moral theorists.

2 Ibid., p. 203.

3 Ibid., p. 304.
the good of an individual and that of others. Ladd writes:

In Western thought the exclusive devotion to promoting one's own welfare is often thought to be incompatible with the welfare of others. ... This belief is, of course, quite foreign to Navaho thought. Consequently there is nothing anomalous in a speaker employing arguments appealing to the self-interest of the listener to induce him to do something which he himself is also obviously interested in. ... The moralist's interest per se is irrelevant to the cogency of the argument. 1

This book, assuming it to be a generally accurate account of Navaho morality, describes an actual example of what Peters declares impossible, a form of public practical discourse in which the interest of the agent, but not the interest of any other possible interlocutor, is counted in deciding what ought to be done. It therefore presents a refutation of Peters' argument, as the existence of anything must destroy any argument purporting to show that such a thing could not exist. 2

Possibly rational people would not engage in such a form of discourse unless they held the related belief about the general congruence of the interests of the interlocutors. Without this belief it certainly seems unlikely that a society would have this as their only mode of practical discourse, as apparently the Navaho people have done. And this belief is neither an eternal truth nor an eternal falsehood. Its plausibility for a certain time and place depends partly on whether the things one sees as contributing to a man's welfare are mainly

1 Ibid., p. 294.

2 I should maintain that the practice in our society of giving disinterested prudential advice also constitutes a refutation. I have referred to the Navaho people because they have used this form of practical discourse and no other.
commodities which are in short supply and competed for, or mainly things such as intellectual understanding and social harmony, in which one cannot (logically) corner the market. Even given a common, and fairly materialistic, conception of what makes for human welfare, which the Navahos seem largely to share with modern Western people, the plausibility of the belief in congruence of interests would vary with the social and economic structure of the society. In a closely-knit co-operative community, where a person's chances of getting the good things of life depended largely on his having friends able and willing to help him with tasks such as house-building and crop-planting, the belief would have much more justification than in a society where success came rather from individual effort or cunning. One cannot rationally choose at will whether to assume congruence or conflict of interests. All that I set out to show is that it is possible for a society to operate rationally with a mode of practical discourse in which everyone's interests are not recognised as relevant to every question about what ought to be done. That is, it is not possible to construct, as Peters tries to do, a presuppositional argument for the principle of the consideration of everyone's interests which is based broadly on what is required for any form of practical discourse and thought.

The alternative is to reduce the base of the argument, and try to show that this principle is required for the existence of a certain specialised form of practical discourse. The weakness inherent in this alternative has already been indicated in general terms. I shall now
illustrate this weakness by examining a narrower argument for the consideration of the interests of all. The same argument in substance is outlined briefly by A. Phillips Griffiths, and expanded and elaborated by Thomas Nagel. I shall begin by considering Griffiths' outline.

He describes his project as to seek, not the presuppositions of practical discourse in general, but those of moral discourse, which he characterises as practical, objective, and autonomous. The argument to be examined rests on the property of objectivity, initially explained in this way:

The truth of any moral judgment shall not depend on the peculiarities of the person making it but, rather, ... shall be determinable by any rational observer who is apprised of the facts. 1

In preparing for the argument for the principle of the consideration of all interests, Griffiths gives the following supplementary account of the property of objectivity:

This requires that moral discourse should be a form of public discourse, in which the relevance and force of any consideration is dependent on its content and not on the will or status of whoever puts it forward. 2

It is on this latter definition, which by no means amounts to the same thing as the former, that the argument seems to rest.

It is clear that if a form of practical discourse has the property of objectivity thus defined, given that some interests are acknowledged within it as providing

2 Ibid., p. 180.
reasons relevant to a particular question, then all interests must be relevant. Imagine one party to a discussion saying of a proposed course of action, 'It would damage my interests'. The force of this remark as a reason against the action's being done must not depend on the status of the utterer. If he regards the truth of the statement spoken by himself as a reason against his doing something, he must regard the truth of the same statement spoken by anyone else as a reason against his doing it.

However one must bear in mind the limitations of the presuppositional argument as a form of justification. One must accept this conclusion only if one is committed to using a mode of practical discourse which is objective according to Griffiths' more stringent definition. Perhaps the moral discourse with which most people in our culture operate is objective in this sense; but this is a form of discourse which, at least under some conditions, could be repudiated without great loss. The egoistic tradition of moral philosophy is a proposal to dispense with it, and at least one culture seems to have done without it quite successfully. The cost of this repudiation would depend on the extent of the non-overlap of what makes for an individual's welfare, and what makes for the welfare of other people. Even in our own highly individualistic society, one must take a very crudely materialistic view of human interests to deny that they are largely interdependent. Butler thought it reasonable to say of the private and the public interest: 'These ends do indeed perfectly coincide; and to aim at public and
private good are so far from being inconsistent, that they mutually promote each other'. With such a belief one might view the repudiation of an objective form of practical discourse with equanimity, since an appeal to the agent's prudence would justify all the actions which anyone would have an interest in justifying.

The approaches of Peters and Griffiths to the defence of the principle of the consideration of all interests provide an apt illustration of the general dilemma facing those who seek to provide presuppositional justifications for substantive moral principles. Peters rests his argument on practical discourse conceived in the broadest possible terms, thus ensuring that the cost of repudiating this foundation of the argument is impossibly high. But he fails to make out the necessity of that presupposition to this broad field of discourse. Griffiths avoids this latter problem, but only by founding his argument on a form of discourse so narrowly specified as to be repudiated, at least in some conditions, without great loss. Whether there is any clear water between these two hazards, through which one could steer an argument to justify a moral principle, is a question which seems impossible to answer on a priori grounds; one would need to consider arguments which are presented, on their merits. Unless one considers prudence as a part or the whole of morality, I do not think that a survey of arguments suggested would support high hopes.

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However, although I see no room for a generalised a priori refutation, the fact that at least one society, eminently rational in its approach to norms of behaviour, has succeeded in operating with a mode of practical discourse recognising none but prudential reasons, provides the best possible empirical evidence that any effort to prove that any non-prudential practical principle is rationally required, must be fallacious.

THE POSSIBILITY OF EGOISM

In The Possibility of Altruism, Thomas Nagel develops at greater length an argument for the principle of considering the interests of all, which is very similar to that outlined by Griffiths: if one uses a mode of practical discourse in which reasons for action are required to be objective, one is logically committed to acknowledging that if a man's interest generates reasons for him, it generates reasons for all. An objective reason, on his account, is one based on the assignment of objective value to something: that is, not value to some particular person, but to anyone. Thus an objective practical reason cannot be a reason for a certain person only to do something; it must be a reason for anyone to promote whatever has objective value. 1

If practical reasons are objective as defined, the conclusion about considering the interests of all can hardly be rejected. The question is why one must use

a form of practical discourse in which reasons are required to be objective. It is a question with force, since while no doubt many people have used such a form of discourse, others have not, and have recognised no rational commitment to do so.

I intend over the next few pages to examine a part of Nagel's argument in which he seeks to show that we are in fact committed to acknowledging that practical reasons must be objective, the cost of doing otherwise being not an inferior standard of social behaviour, but a loss of coherence of thought. The argument is ingenious but unsuccessful.

Nagel assumes that his reader is not a solipsist: that he has a view of himself as just one among many people.¹ This view, so it is argued, requires that one be able to apply the words used in first-person psychological ascriptions to other people too, in the same sense; one must be able to say 'I have a headache' and 'He has a headache', using the word 'headache' with the same meaning. If this were not possible, 'the supposition that there are other people like oneself would be unintelligible'.² This requirement of interpersonal constancy of meaning is expanded into the following claim. If the word is to have the same sense in first-person and third-person applications, it must be possible to translate both forms into an impersonal statement ('Someone has a headache'), together with a specification of who that someone is

¹ Ibid., p. 106.
² Ibid.
('and I am the one', 'and he is the one') and the impersonal statement must have a standard meaning regardless of the person-specification added to it.¹

The argument for the objectivity of practical reasons rests on an insistence that the same requirement must apply to practical judgments, unless one's practical reasoning is to be dissociated from the view of oneself as just one among many people. It must be possible to speak about what others ought to do, or have reasons to do, meaning the same by 'ought' and 'reason' as when making similar judgments about oneself:

The avoidance of dissociation therefore requires the acceptance of universal practical principles which apply in the same sense to everyone, and which are impersonally formulable, so that one can arrive at any true conclusion about what the persons in a situation should do, or have reason to do, without knowing what one's own place in the situation is, or indeed whether one occupies a place in it at all.²

The conclusions supported by the argument so far seem compatible with an egoistic moral theory, under which the basic principle is the impersonal principle that any person should do what is to his own greatest advantage. This appears to allow me to draw a conclusion about what anyone ought to do, without knowing who that person is, and to mean the same by 'ought' in all contexts, while maintaining that what is a reason for me is of no direct concern to Smith, and vice versa.

However Nagel holds that first-person practical judgments have motivational content. That is, if one

¹ Ibid., pp. 102 ff.
² Ibid., p. 108.
accepts a judgment that one ought to, or has reason to do something, this acceptance is by itself sufficient to explain action or desire in accordance with it ... I have referred to this motivational content as the acceptance of a justification for doing or wanting something.

I would not dispute this. No doubt we see it as a sufficient explanation of an action that the agent thought he ought to do it, in a way that we do not see it as an explanation that he thought it would decrease his weight or make the grass grow. Now the rejection of solipsism commits one to using words such as 'ought' and 'reason' with the same meaning, whether speaking about oneself, a specified third person, or anyone indefinitely:

The first-person acknowledgment of such a reason has significant motivational content. Unless, therefore, some version of this motivational content can also be found in an impersonal practical judgment about the same situation, the principles which yield the first-person conclusion can be employed only at the cost of dissociation from the impersonal standpoint.

The incoherence supposedly involved in using an egoistic form of practical reasoning can be explained in this way. In such a form of discourse, when I conclude that I ought to do x, my judgment has motivational content: in accepting it I acknowledge a justification for my doing x or wanting x done. But when I conclude that Smith, or someone unspecified, ought to do x, I acknowledge no justification for my doing or wanting anything. Thus there is a vital change in the meaning of the key term of the practical judgment, between when

1 Ibid., p. 109.
2 Ibid., p. 111.
it concerns me and when it concerns others. Egoism 'entails an inability to extend to others ... the types of practical judgment which one can make in the first person.' 1

Egoism involves one, then, in making practical judgments about oneself and others in different senses, contrary to the anti-solipsist rule that terms must be applicable to oneself and others with the same meaning. It is possible to escape this incoherence between one's practical reasoning and the view of oneself as a person among others, only by operating with a form of practical discourse in which reasons are objective, that is, not reasons for particular people, but for anyone at all. In such a form of discourse, if I conclude that Smith has a reason to do x, this can explain my acting in the matter; I acknowledge that I too have a justification for doing something about getting x done. Only thus will my judgments about what other people ought to do have the same sort of motivational content as my judgments about what I ought to do, or the other people's judgments about themselves: 'It is not enough merely to be able to say of others, on impersonal grounds, what they should do. One must be able to mean by it what they would mean when they make the same assertion.' 2

The word 'meaning', with its variety of meanings, is the downfall of this argument, as it has been for many another. It is easy enough to agree that the rejection

1 Ibid., p. 123.
2 Ibid., p. 109.
of solipsism requires the use of the same terms in statements about oneself and others with the same meanings. But what is included in 'meaning' here? If I judge that I am about to be injured, this is sufficient to explain my being afraid, and involves acknowledging a justification for my fear. But if I judge that someone else is about to be injured, I acknowledge no justification and provide no explanation for my being afraid. It is not my injury, and that makes all the difference. No degree of fervour in my rejection of solipsism could commit me to fearing other people's injuries as I fear my own. Judgments about prospective injuries have, then, a force in first-person forms which they cannot have in other forms; I should not have said that the word 'injury' was ambiguous, but if this does constitute an ambiguity, then ambiguous the word is, and inevitably so.

It is possible to use words such as 'ought' and 'reason' in a similar way, so that explanation of action and acknowledgment of a justification for one's doing something is a force peculiar to their first-person applications. This way of using the practical terms would involve no more concessions to solipsism than the equivalent way of using the word 'injury'. I conclude that nobody is logically committed to acknowledging that all practical reasons must ultimately be objective in Nagel's sense; the use of an egoistic form of practical discourse is perfectly compatible with a view of oneself as only one person among others. No doubt something is lacking in a man who recognises that there are other people with needs and interests, but considers only his
own in deciding what to do. However what he lacks, surely, is moral sensitivity, not logical consistency.¹

Thus Nagel's argument for the rational necessity of acknowledging the objectivity of practical reasons is a failure. What remains is a very weak presuppositional argument: if a person uses a mode of practical reasoning in which reasons are objective, then he is committed to accepting other people's interests as providing him with reasons for action, by his regarding his own interests in this way. But people both could succeed and have succeeded in living a rational life without using any such mode of discourse and reasoning. Repudiating it certainly would not have the vast effects of repudiating a much more broadly-conceived form of thought and discourse, such as prediction in general, or practical reasoning in general.

The aim of this chapter was to examine the possibility of providing parallel justifications of inductive and moral principles as necessary presuppositions of predictive and practical discourse respectively. It was seen that parallel arguments can be constructed part of the way. Just as the raising of any predictive questions commits one to the purely formal assumption that something is a reason for prediction, so the raising of any practical

¹ In Kant's argument for considering the interests of other people, the irrationality of egoism arises only on the assumption that, however egoistic a man may be when all goes well, he will think that others ought to help him when he is in trouble. (See The Moral Law, or Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, trans. H.J. Paton 3rd ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1955), pp. 90-91). But it should be possible for a really determined and austere egoist to avoid this inconsistency.
questions commits one to the purely formal assumption that something is a reason for an action. And just as if one regards anything as providing reasons for a prediction one must regard past patterns of events as doing so, so a man who regards anything as providing reasons for actions must see his own welfare in that light.

The predictive principle so justified has the right sort of content to count as an inductive principle. About the practical principle there must be some dispute. Egoists will regard it as a moral principle. Those who have a non-prudential conception of morality must look for a further argument to show a distinctively moral principle as similarly inescapable. I have examined some attempts to provide a further argument, and concluded that success has been achieved only at the cost of basing the reasoning, not on practical discourse generally, but on a specialised and dispensible form of it.

I should want to maintain that the principle of self-interest is the only practical principle which has the inevitability that presuppositional justifications seek to demonstrate. Admittedly one does not show this merely by exposing weaknesses in some of the attempts to justify non-prudential principles in this way. However that undertaking must be seen as impossible when one takes account, not only of purely egoistic moral philosophers, but of at least one society, rational by any standards in its approach to its members' actions, which has worked successfully with a form of practical discourse and thought based entirely on prudential considerations.
It is only if a prudential principle counts as moral, then, that any moral principle can be claimed to have this inescapable hold on any rational person's thought.
CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

In the first chapter, after outlining various senses of 'objectivity', I fixed on one sense in which a class of statements is objective if there are satisfactory ways of settling disputes about them. Taking empirical assertions as the paradigms of objectivity, I set out to examine a series of comparisons between moral judgments and various classes of empirical statements. My aim was to determine whether moral judgments are open to proof or refutation in a way analogous to some class of empirical statements, or alternatively whether some such class can be shown to be equally open to the sort of doubt the moral sceptic throws on moral beliefs.

In the second and third chapters I considered two different comparisons between moral judgments and perceptual statements such as those ascribing colours to objects: comparisons which seek to show that they are open to proof in analogous ways. I concluded that these comparisons do not support the objectivity of moral judgments; the analogy with perceptual judgments breaks down at crucial points.

In the fourth chapter I examined the comparison between moral judgments and empirical statements using predicate terms governed by criteria. Again vital disanalogies appeared; moral disputes are not open to settlement in similar ways.

In the fifth chapter a comparison was considered on a higher level of generality, between moral principles or
normative theories, and scientific laws and theories. It was argued that disputes in the latter area are open to settlement, in spite of all that can reasonably be said against the objectivity of scientific theorising, in a way that disputes about moral principles and theories are not.

In the sixth and seventh chapters a comparison on another level again was considered; it was asked whether there are problems in showing the correctness or incorrectness of a moral principle, which do not also arise for an attempt to counter scepticism about a principle of inductive reasoning. Two different forms of justification offered for inductive principles were considered, to see whether they are equally satisfactory in the defence of moral principles. The first form of argument was found to be ineffective in ethics, and the second can provide only for a prudential practical principle the type of support it provides for a principle of inductive reasoning.

The comparisons examined in this thesis have given little support to the objectivity of moral judgments. At every level from statements about particular cases to fundamental assumptions, disanalogies between moral and empirical judgments have arisen, making it impossible to put the two on the same footing in relation to the settlement of disputes. The parallel noticed in the final chapter, between prudential and inductive principles as equally inevitable presuppositions, will provide comfort only to those objectivists prepared to give morality a prudential foundation.
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