THE CONCEPT OF MORALITY

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Ph.D. Degree.   1970

ABSTRACT.

The aim of this study is to reach a philosophical understanding of the concept of morality. The contemporary literature is dominated by a series of contrasts; 'individual' morality and 'social' morality, a morality of 'sensibility' and 'insight' and one of 'rules' and 'principles', 'formal' as against 'material' characterisations. In reviewing it the suggestion arises that this dualism is systematic and depends upon some more fundamental feature of the concept. A point of general agreement is that there is an intimate relationship between morality and the world of human actions and activities. This world makes two major intellectual demands on us. There is the need to decide how to act in particular situations, and there is the need to see one's actions as invested with a larger significance, as elements in a meaningful pattern. Morality is a response to both demands. Thus, it consists of a dimension of assessment of action, a sphere of practical judgement, and of a way of interpreting its significance, a mode of vision. These aspects may be distinguished by speaking of 'moral assessment' on the one hand and of 'moral understanding' on the other.

Moral understanding may be characterised in terms of the kind of significance it offers and the kind of reasons it can recognise. A striking feature of the distinction between moral and non-moral forms of understanding is its tendency to cut across conventional categories. This can be illustrated in the case of religious belief and of what may, loosely and provisionally, be called 'humanism'. But it is also possible to find familiar modes of thought which belong wholly and unequivocally to each side.

When the lesser contrasts are examined in the light of the understanding-assessment distinction it is found that the claims made for the fundamental significance of that between the 'individual' and the 'social' cannot be sustained. Only the 'individual' half can comprise both understanding and assessment and so qualify as a wholly adequate conception of morality. There are some residual problems here which involve the issue of 'form' versus 'content'. This controversy dissolves, in its turn, once it is recognised that while moral understanding is contentless, moral assessment is necessarily tied to certain material considerations. The stress on the contrast between 'sensibility' and 'rules' may be interpre- ted as an oblique way of drawing attention to that between understanding and assessment, and, more specifically, of warning against the danger of identifying morality with practical reason. The element of truth in this is safeguarded by assigning talk of 'sensibility' to understanding and of 'rules' to assessment. A general conclusion that emerges from the discussion of these antitheses concerns the need for moral philosophy to work with an adequate conception of what it is to be human, a philoso- phical theory of man.

The final task is to draw together the elements of the fundamental distinction, and so exhibit the unity of the concept of morality. It is best pursued through a discussion of some problems connected with education. There is an important tendency in the philosoph- ical literature which may be interpreted as a recognition of the conceptual link between education and moral understanding. Moreover the concept of education provides a bridge between the category provisionally known as 'humanism' and a reconstructed one from which the non-moral elements have been excluded. What remains are moral understanding and moral assessment. The essential link between them is that they constitute a coherent and systematic approach to a particular area of experience. Using a terminology that needs careful explication, morality may be characterised as the response of humanism to the demands of the practical world.

CONTENTS.

Chapter I.

A PERVASIVE DUALISM.

A striking feature of recent writings on the concept of morality is their tendency to revolve around a few well-worn antitheses. There is, for instance, the contrast between a morality of insight and sensibility and one of rules and principles. Frequently, attention has been drawn to it in a polemical spirit by those who feel that the first half has been unduly neglected in recent moral philosophy. The alleged result is that it has been forced to work with an inadequate picture of what a morality is. This is held to be unfortunate, and not only on conceptual grounds. It is felt that the moral life of a man dominated by the rules-principles model must be arid and shallow. The model can only be maintained by blinding oneself to certain areas of human experience, or by distorting ones apprehension of them to fit its abstract categories. The remedy lies in recognising its limitations and becoming receptive to the more elusive language of 'vision', 'insight', 'imagination' and so on. A second contrast runs roughly as follows. On the one hand there is the conventional moral code of a society or group, a 'positive' or 'social' morality. On the other there are the principles and standards which any member of society may choose to regulate his conduct by and which constitute his 'individual' or 'autonomous' morality. This distinction too has received most attention from people who wish to protest against what they take to be orthodoxy. Now it is its 'Protestantism', 'liberalism' or 'individualism' which comes under attack. Many contemporary philosophers, it is alleged, assume a picture of the moral agent as a rational mind operating in a social and cultural vacuum. He is free to contemplate in a detached way the whole field of human activity and to make an autonomous choice of the ultimate principles by which to live. Thereafter his behaviour

is regulated by this choice in conjunction with an awareness of the facts
of his situation. The objection to this view is that it obscures the
primary importance of the morality of the group and ignores the role of
the social framework within which the individual must think and act.
Besides, in plucking individuals and theories out of their historical
context, it may lead us to treat the great figures of the past as though
they were our less enlightened contemporaries. In this way, it is claimed,
the history of moral thought is distorted to the point of becoming uninte-
lligible. A third disagreement exists between those who hold that morality
has an inescapable 'material' element or subject matter and others who
think it may be characterised in purely 'formal' terms. Is it, for instance,
a sufficient condition of having a morality that one has practical rules
which one is prepared to live by and to commend to others? Will any such
rules do or is the range limited by considerations of content? Is it,
perhaps, necessary that they should display a concern for human well-being
in order to be properly regarded as 'moral'? There are persuasive arguments
on both sides, and the issues involved are perhaps the mostcomplex and
fundamental of all that arise in current discussions of the nature of
morality. It will be necessary to make a serious attempt to come to grips
with them later, and all of the debates outlined above will be documented
when they are discussed individually in detail. They have been introduced
here by way of providing a sketch of the background to the discussion.
The problem is set by these claims and counter-claims and, in the end,
one must return to them to test the validity of any solution that is
offered. Our aim is to provide a characterisation of morality in which
all the partial insights represented by them will be accounted for and
reconciled.

It seems reasonable to describe the main impression made
by recent discussions of morality as one of pervasive conceptual dualism.
In trying to account for it the suggestion naturally arises that it is
systematic and might be exhibited as such if one could find the key. This

must surely lie in some division within our conception of morality at the most fundamental level. The first requirement is to identify a starting point from which this suggestion may be explored. A plausible approach consists in asking whether there is any common element in the conflicting views described above.It seems clear that there is, ánd it is not hard to formulate it in a rough and ready way. A basic assumption shared by all is that there is an intimate connection between the concept of morality and the world of human action and activities. Whatever is disputed about the concept there is general, though usually tacit, agreement that its raison d'etre derived from its significance for the conduct of life. A claim that the analysis of morality should start with human actions may seem banal, even if unobjectionable, This is a price one must be prepared to pay for securing a base. Besides, when the suggestion is looked at closely some positive clues to the way ahead begin to emerge.

The world of action makes two distinct kinds of intellectual demand on us. On the one hand there is the need to resolve difficulties which call for practical decision. This leads us to seek knowledge of how to act and of what constitutes a reason for doing one thing rather than another. We look for ways of analysing and assessing the alternatives open to us and try to find or devise a rationale for the pro and contra attitudes we adopt towards them. The existence of the various spheres of practical judgáment is a reflection of this aspect of our situation: morality is one such sphere of judgement. But, as human beings, we cannot rest content with a technique for deciding what to do. We need to see our actions as possessed of a larger significance, as elements in a meaningful pattern. Religion, ideology and metaphysics offer ways of achieving this. A man may see his activities as instruments of God's purpose, or as blows in the class struggle, or as stages in the progressive self-realization of the Absolute. Morality also has a vision of this kind to öffer - it enables us to see our actions as invested with a distinctive kind of significance. Thus, it reflects both aspects of our situation as thinking beings confronted with the exigencies of practical life. To understand the concept one

has to distinguish between morality as a particular dimension of criticism and assessment of actions, a sphere of practical reasoning, and morality as a mode of vision, a general way of interpreting human behaviour. It functions, so to speak, both as a set of tools for measuring things of a certain kind and as a pair of spectacles through which to view them. Its complexity and distinctiveness stem mainly from this dual nature, and from its links with other spheres of reasoning on the one hand and with other ways of viewing the world on the other. For convenience in exploring these issues, let us use the term 'moral assessment' of morality as a sphere of reasoning, and speak of 'moral understanding' when we wish to refer to the other half of the concept. It is worth noting how the distinction is reflected in the familiar vocabulary of our talk about morality. Two distinct kinds of expression tend to be employed in it. There are those which are most at home in contexts of understanding; 'the moral point of view', 'the standpoint of morality', 'the moral outlook', 'moral attitudes', 'moral vision' and so on. There are also those which are more characteristic of assessment; 'rules', 'principles', 'good', 'right', 'ought', 'duty', and so on. More loosely, but still significantly, linked with the distinction are the contrasts between the 'moral' and the 'non-moral' or 'amoral', and between the 'moral' and the 'immoral'. The moral-immoral contrast is used more naturally of rules and principles while the other applies primarily to attitudes and points of view. Thus, there is some awkwardness involved in speaking without qualification of non-moral or amoral practical principles. For what one person sees as falling outside the realm nfn of morality may be located very definitely within it by another. What is 'moral' as opposed to 'non-moral' is not so much the principle itself as the agents conception of it; the stance he adopts in relation to it, so to speak. At this point, of course, we are beginning to use the language of understanding. Similarly it would be odd to speak of the 'immoral point of view' while talk of the 'non-moral point of view' presents no such difficulty. Here the problem arises from a transfer in the opposite direction: an epithet appropriate to assessment ('immoral') is being used in a context of understanding. These linguistic remarks may be useful in showing

how the broad outlines of the distinction between understanding are discernable in ordinary usage. But a complete grasp of their significance must wait until that distinction has been thoroughly explored.

The most pressing need is to elucidate the nature of moral understanding. Recent literature has dealt generously with aspects of assessment; its status and regulative principles, the conditions for engaging in it, its relations with prudence and other branches of practical reason and so on. No comprehensive agreement has emerged from these writings. Nevertheless it would be false to suggest that the impression they give is merely chaotic. They do serve to delimit the concept in a very general way. If one maps the various theories, taking account of all the alternatives that are canvassed, one does get a rough idea of the region of conceptual space it occupies. Besides, the materials are there for anyone who wishes to make up his own mind on the issues. This is not the case with moral understanding. It has usually been ignored and when its existence has been acknowledged this has been done inadvertently and without an awareness of its significance. Hence, it is desirable to try to rescue this aspect of morality from neglect and misunderstanding. Such an attempt will not leave our view of moral assessment unchanged. A new insight into any aspect of the concept of morality must affect the rest. At the very least the perspectives will be altered by the location of moral assessment in a new setting. Besides some significant questions will force themselves on our attention. Given that a certain account of moral understanding is correct, what must be true of moral assessment in order to make sense of current discussions of the undifferentiated concept of morality? What does one need to assume in order to understand the things that are said about morality in general? One can hardly claim that a particular view of moral assessment forces itself on any reasonable person who considers the issues in this light. It will always be necessary to allow for the element of arbitrariness that is inescapable on such an approach. It may seem that certain assumptions are demanded by the phenomena but the possibility of accounting for them

in a quite different way can never be absolutely excluded. Nevertheless a particular theory can be made to seem extremely plausible and part of our aim will be to achieve this for moral assessment. We shall then go on to offer some independent arguments in the hope of establishing it decisively.

The first step is to offer a characterisation of moral understanding. Following lines suggested by the introductory remarks on method, this will be given in terms of the distinctive kind of meaning or significance that is involved. To have moral understanding of an action is to see it as part of an activity or mode of behaviour whose significance derives from its own nature rather than from anything external. It should be contrasted with any interpretation of the world of human action in terms of transcendental objects and any tendency to see the 'sense' of it as located outside that world itself. The notion of 'meaning' or 'significance' which is used here may be explained by saying that to see an activity as 'meaningful' is to see that there are reasons for engaging in it. The contrast between moral and non-moral understanding may now be drawn in terms of the kind of reason appropriate in each case. To see an activity in a moral light is to see it as meaningful in terms of reasons involving no reference to concepts which are fully intelligible outside the framework of the activity itself. Thus, no characterisation of the entities or states of affairs referred to in the reason will be adequate without invoking the activity for which it is a reason. The point may be expressed by using the familiar distinction between internal and external relations. To have moral understanding of one's activities is to see them as meaningful in terms of reasons which make no reference to concepts except ones to which the activity is internally related.

Reasons of this kind may well strike an unsympathetic critic as odd. He may feel that they merely serve to emphasise a particular aspect

of the activity or offer a redescription of it from a different point of
view. Because the 'reasons' never involve any external point of reference
they may exert no leverage on someone who is dubious about the activity
as a whole or wishes to call it into question. In the end, it may be said,
all such reasons are tautologous - they come down to the assertion that
one engages in the activities one engages in because they are what they
are. There is a difficulty here which can be explained but perhaps not
dissolved. Nevertheless a clear statement of it throws some light on the
nature of moral understanding. It is not surprising that the resources of
language should often fail us when we try to get someone to share our
moral attitude towards a certain activity. Internal reasons may not satisfy
him because of the difficulties mentioned above and, in the nature of the
case, he cannot successfully be given external ones. For to be moved by
such considerations is to be excluded from moral understanding by defini-
tion. In some cases the limits of rational debate may be reached very
quickly and one may have to admit that no further considerations capable
of determining the intellect of one's interlocutor are available. The
reasons one gives for engaging in an activity towards which one adopts
the moral point of view may not seem to him like reasons at all unless
he knows from his own experience what it is like to engage in other activ-
ities in the same spirit. If he does, then he is merely being asked to
extend the range of his sympathies. If he does not, talk of 'reasons' may
be out of place: to persist in it is to try to say what can, at best, only
be shown. A wiser plan would be to describe, with as much concrete detail
as possible, the way of life of a man who is accustomed to viewing his
activities in the light of morality. Or, better still, one might advise
the objector to observe such a person for himself. The force of the example
may lead him to take the first steps on the same path, and, if it does,
he may come to see the point of the reasons which were offered earlier.
There is an element of paradox here. It consists in the fact that the
reasons are now likely to be redundant: they can only be appreciated when
they no longer satisfy any serious need. This phenomenon may be explained
by attending to the initial characterisation of moral understanding. It

is precisely because the reasons it demands are internal ones that they
can get no grip on someone who stands entirely outside the moral scheme
of things. What he needs is a new way of looking at his life, a different
mode of vision, and reason by itself may be helpless to bring such changes
about. They depend, for most people, upon the natural development of one's
response to experience and so must await the fullness of time. The paradox
described here has striking affinities with certain problems that arise
in the philosophy of education. In teaching children one encounters parad-
igmatic cases of reasons being either unintelligible (before they have
mastered a subject) or otiose (afterwards). This state of affairs may be
a source of concern to the teacher who wishes both to respect the children's
autonomy and to impart something of value to them. Some light may be thrown
on it by exploring further the analogy with moral understanding. Besides,
the thesis we shall present has a more general relevance to the problems
of moral education. An attempt will therefore be made in a later chapter
to come to grips with these issues.

A formal characterisation of moral understanding has been
given; the main need now is to clarify it and to draw out its implications.
The first step is to bring it into better focus by marking it off from
certain other positions with which it might be confused. Then, in the next
two chapters it will be given some content by establishing which of our
familiar ways of looking at the world it includes and which ones it excludes.
Only by getting down to detail in this way can one hope to show what subst-
ance the thesis has.

One might be tempted to think that the central point could
be expressed as follows: to take the moral point of view is to regard ones
activities as constituting their own end. The main objection to this
formula is not that it is positively incorrect but that it is difficult
to see what precisely it amounts to and, hence, it is liable to mislead.

A plausible gloss would be to take it as asserting that to adopt the moral point of view is to see ones activities as worth pursuing for their own sake. This is still, however, not completely clear and seems capable of at least two interpretations. One would involve taking the phrase 'worth pursuing for their own sake' to mean 'worth pursuing just for the sake of the pleasure they give, regardless of any other consideration.' This would fit in well with the ordinary notion of what it is to do something for its own sake. But the suggestion that one takes the moral point of view when one considers activities purely in the light of the pleasure they give is quite implausible. The paradigm of a moral attitude would be provided by the glutton or lecher. Another view would take 'worth pursuing for their own sake' to mean 'worth pursuing as things good in themselves and not because of their consequences, possessing intrinsic as opposed to instrumental value'. The results of such an interpretation are close to what usually seems intended whenever the moral point of view is referred to in the recent literature. This however serves primarily to reveal a failure to come to grips with the problems. For the result of taking such a line is that the distinction between understanding and assessment becomes blurred. To see ones activities in a moral light is simply to be disposed to make a particular kind of favourable moral assessment of them. Clearly it is assessment which benefits from this conceptual erosion and the tendency to concentrate on it at the expense of understanding is an important source of weakness in contemporary philosophy. To arrive at an adequate conception of morality it is essential to preserve the distinction and keep a balance between its elements. Any view that threatens this must be rejected.

There is another misinterpretation which should be guarded against: as before it consists in trying to characterise 'the moral' in terms of the distinctive kind of ends involved. The suggestion is that to take the moral point of view is to interpret the meaningfulness of ones activities in terms of ends which are constituted by states of affairs internally related to one's conception of the activities. An

example may be given which serves both to illustrate the reasoning behind this formula and to suggest why it will not do. Suppose that a man seeks in all he does to promote God's will. Such an end cannot simply be read off from his behaviour or empirically established by attending to the effects of what he does. To understand it one has to take account of the way he himself characterises his activities. If his conception of them changes, his view on what constitutes the attainment of the end will change also. Thus, an adequate characterisation of the end will necessarily involve reference to what the agent conceives himself to be doing in struggling to realise it. The case fits the formula being discussed but it would surely be implausible to suggest that the man must have a distinctively moral form of understanding of his activities. To do so would bring the concept of moral understanding in danger of vacuity. Indeed the feature in question might well be thought of as serving to distinguish human actions in general from those of animals. Thus A.Phillips Griffiths has argued that:

> '..the ends of beasts must be discovered - and this is true however resolutely teleological our descriptions of animal behaviour - by attention to the effects of their activity; whereas the ends of men are intelligible, not in terms of the actual effects of what they do, but in terms of objects internally related to their conceptions of their activities'.[1]

A similar point underlies the advocacy of <u>verstehen</u> in the social sciences. What distinguishes social action, and hence all characteristically human action, it is alleged, is that it is, in Weber's phrase, action to which a x 'subjective meaning' is attached. It is precisely because the ends men have are internally related to the meaning they give their actions that a grasp of it is felt to be a necessary condition of sociological understanding. Now claims such as these are not uncontroversial: they would, no doubt, be rejected by a thorough-going positivist. Fortunately there is no need to argue their merits here, for the important point so far as this discussion is concerned is quite clear. It is that, if they are true at all, they are true of human behaviour in a very general sense; one far wider than anything that could reasonably be claimed as denoting

1. <u>Kant on Masturbation</u>, (Unpubl. paper).

the realm of the moral. It is perhaps worth noting in conclusion that the use of our original criterion enables one to avoid having to attribute moral understanding to the man in the example. For the way he justifies his activities involves reference to a concept ~~it~~ ('God') which he may well think of as wholly external to them. Thus if he holds a traditional view of religious truth he may believe that the path to an understanding of the concept is through metaphysical speculation rather than through the sociology of religion.

A feature common to all of these misinterpretations is that they involve explicit reference to 'ends' and implicit reliance on the notion of 'means to ends'. This suggests that the ends-means category may be an unsuitable weapon in the present case. There are general considerations which might be taken to support such a view. No doubt people do sometimes find themselves in the kind of situation which the classification fits perfectly. They have a clearly defined goal and feel free to choose whatever method offers the best hope of achieving it. But it is at least equally characteristic of human activity that the value attached to an end should not be independent of the means used to attain it. What is desired is a state of affairs seen not as a detached and self-justifying goal but as a destination that must be reached by a particular route. One could say of such cases that in them the means are an integral part of the agent's conception of the end. But clearly the ends-means distinction does not constitute the most natural way of describing them and in stretching it to fit there is the risk of draining it of all its sharpness and utility. Other difficulties stem not so much from the agent's attitude as from the nature of the activities themselves. Sometimes it is possible to draw the ends-means contrast in a fairly unproblematic way; the taking of unpleasant medicines, for instance. But in many other cases the distinction is harder to apply, for no determinate end can be specified apart from the means used to attain it; for instance, rearing children, listening to music, defending the fatherland. This difficulty is important when

discussing the moral point of view. To take this viewpoint is to see the
sense of one's activities as located with the activities themselves. This
is at least to say that they do not derive their point from being directed
to an external goal. But there is a kind of dualism about the possibilities
of giving a further description of the situation. Since there is no deter-
minate goal to be achieved one might say that success in the activity
consists simply in taking part. Or one might hold that the notions of
success and failure have no application here. Similarly one could say that
to see one's activities in the light of morality is to see ends and means
as indissolubly fused: the means become ends and no ends can be distingui-
shed apart from the means. Or one might say that to take the moral point
of view is precisely to see one's activities as no longer subject to the
category of ends and means. On grounds of clarity and economy, the second
kind of description is preferable in each case. The concepts of success-
failure and ends-means do not apply naturally to the material. Their use
is liable to mislead unless accompanied by special explanations and satis-
factory alternatives are readily available. Hence we do well not to try
to cram the phenomena into these alien categories.

The conclusion seems to be that our approach to moral
understanding must continue to centre around the distinctive kind of
'meaning' and 'reasons' which it involves. The problem is to show how a
fully satisfactory account of it can be built around these concepts. A
particular thesis has been advanced here and the subsequent discussion
has done something to sharpen our apprehension of it and guard against
misunderstanding. The biggest hurdle remains to be surmounted. The crucial
test is whether the thesis has explanatory value when applied to the comp-
lexities of the intellectual life. We must therefore turn to examine the
relation between it and the phenomena that force themselves on ones atten-
tion when one considers the varied ways in which men have tried to make
sense of their experience.

Chapter 2.

BELIEVERS AND HUMANISTS.

A striking feature of the distinction between moral and non-moral understanding is that, in practice, it cuts across many of our conventional categories. To begin with, it will be shown how the process works for religious believers and for others who might loosely be called 'humanists'. A certain conclusion may seem to emerge irresistibly from the discussion. It is that a general transition from non-moral to moral forms of understanding characterises the intellectual history of the last hundred years. The phenomena are, however, very complex and only some aspects of them can be dealt with here. Besides we are concerned with the history of ideas not for its own sake but only in so far as it helps us to draw out the implications of certain conceptual distinctions and to show their relevance to human experience. The evidence to be considered may seem to point decisively in a particular direction and one can hardly avoid noting that this is so. But any historical thesis that is suggested by it must be regarded as highly tentative. It should be seen not as the conclusion of an excursion into history but, at best, as a suggested starting point. Perhaps the hypothesis of a general transition from the non-moral to the moral might be of heuristic value to the historian of ideas. But to explore its implications he would need to engage in a large scale independent study.

Traditional religious views provide the clearest paradigms of non-moral understanding. Within the Judaeo-Christian tradition at least, God has generally been thought of as a transcendent personal Being entirely distinct from His creation. Thus, as E.L.Mascall notes, although the Bible is not directly concerned with metaphysics, it 'does in fact rest upon a

profound metaphysical assumption, namely that of the absolute transcendence and independence of God'.[1] Within this tradition the world of human action is seen as co-existing with, and permeated by intimations of, another world in which its meaning and fulfilment are to be sought. Someone who belonged to it would tend to interpret the significance of his activities in terms of concepts which are wholly external to them. They may, perhaps, be seen as fragments of a cosmic plan which men have no part in shaping and which is only partially and fitfully intelligible to them. The appropriate attitude to the author of the plan is one of worship, but God would still be God whether or not He possessed the relational property of 'being worshipped by men': it is not an essential element in His nature. Clearly, someone who views his actions in this way does not have a moral understanding of them.

However, this position is not the only one which can claim to be 'religious' and which allows conspicuous room for talk of God. Some recent work on the philosophy of religion presents a very different picture. The contrast may be illustrated dramatically. P.T.Geach has revealed one pillar of the traditional view in noting that Aquinas, having a distaste for philosophical sounding arguments, took for his starting point 'a notion more familiar to ordinary believers in God — that God made the world and keeps it going'.[2] Against this may be placed the recent remarks by D.Z.Phillips in the introduction to a collection of essays on the fact that: 'People still seem to think of God's relation to the world as that of artificer to artifact'.[3] He mentions some of the difficulties some of his contributors finds with this notion and adds: 'Perhaps I should want to go further and say that to be in the grip of such a belief is to be in the grip of evil'.[4] It would probably not be unfair to regard Phillips as

1. E.L.Mascall, Existence and Analogy, Longmans 1949, p.18.
2. P.T.Geach and G.E.M.Anscombe, Three Philosophers, Blackwell, 1961, p.169.
3. D.Z.Phillips ed., Religion and Understanding, Blackwell, 1967, p.4.
4. Ibid. p.4.

belonging to the school of thought which Kai Nielsen has, rather tendent-
iously, labelled 'Wittgensteinian Fideism',[1] and the volume he has edited
contains many of its key texts. For present purposes the important point
about these thinkers is that, in Nielsen's words, 'they stress that relig-
ious concepts can only be understood if we have an insiders grasp of the
form of life of which they are an integral part'.[2] Norman Malcolm, for
instance, writes:

> 'I am sure there cannot be a deep understanding of that concept (ie.
> the concept of an infinite being) without an understanding of the
> phenomena of human life that gives rise to it'.[3]

and:

> '..I suspect that the argument (ie. the ontological argument), can
> be thoroughly understood only by one who has a view of that human
> "form of life" that gives rise to the idea of an infinitely great
> being, who views it from the inside not just from the outside and
> who has, therefore, at least some inclination to partake in that
> religious form of life'.[4]

Peter Winch asserts that what God's reality amounts to 'can only be seen
from within the religious tradition in which the concept of God is used..'
For, 'it is within the religious use of language that the concept of God's
reality has its place..'[5] Phillips takes the connection between understand-
ing religion and being actively concerned with it as a believer further
than most of the others. In his view, 'understanding religion is incompat-
ible with scepticism'.[6] It is not even sufficient to have been an active
believer in the past: to stop believing is to stop understanding:

> 'To nollonger believe in God is not to disbelieve one thing among many
> of the same kind, but to see no sense in anything of that kind. What
> has become meaningless is not some feature of a form of life, but a
> form of life as such.'[7]

1. 'Wittgensteinian Fideism', Philosophy, July 1967, pp.191-209.
2. op.cit. pp.191-192.
3. Religion and Understanding, p.68.
4. ibid. p.61.   5. ibid. p.12.   6. ibid. p.79.
7. From World to God, P.A.S. Supp.Vol. 1967, p.141.

Although there are considerable differences of emphasis among Wittgensteinian Fideists their views have enough coherence to justify the classification. It may advance the discussion if the common core is set out clearly:

(a) Religious concepts in general, and that of God in particular, are only fully intelligible if one has grasped the nature of the characteristic human activities which revolve around them; for example, prayer and worship.

(b) One cannot understand these phenomena unless one has a participants knowledge of them.

(c) Hence, one cannot understand the basic concepts of religion unless one knows what it is like to participate in religious activities.

The second premise is best understood as part of a general thesis which haswide implications for the study of society. Its fullest and most persuasive exposition is to be found in Peter Winch's The Idea of a Social Science,[1] To discuss it would take us far afield, and this is scarcely necessary since proposition (a) is the crucial one for our purposes. The claim is that religious concepts cannot be fully understood in isolation from certain modes of human behaviour. Thus, activities such as praying, worshipping, and working out one's salvation are internally related to the idea of God. A man who takes this view may well use the same words to characterise and justify his actions as would the traditional believer. But on his lips their significance is quite different. For the interpretation he gives them satisfies the criterion of moral understanding which the other conspicuously does not.

The difference between these two versions of the religious attitude are worth exploring further. Some of the most interesting concern the question of what is involved in understanding and accepting the existence of God. The traditional view implies that to understand

1. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958.

certain human activities one must have a grasp of the key concepts around which they revolve: God, Hell, Heaven, salvation, eternal life and so on. The alternative view is that to understand religious concepts one needs to have an insiders knowledge of certain human activities. The implications of this contrast are far reaching. One of them is explicitly stated and accepted by Phillips: it is that, on his account of things, 'there can be no theoretical knowledge of God'.[1] That is, there can be no knowlegde of Him apart from an active involvement in religious life. It follows that rational arguments can never suffice to achieve conversion. For someone who was outside the religious scheme of things could not even understand them. It also follows that Aquinas's belief in a way to God through metaphysical reflection alone must be rejected. In general, any attempt to establish His existence from facts about the world may be ruled out in advance. For the data must either be viewed from within the context of religious belief where God's existence cannot sensibly be denied, or from outside it, and there His existence is unintelligible. A statement asserting the existence of God can never be treated as a claim to an ordinary piece of propositional knowledge. It must be taken either as a piece of verbiage or as a shorthand description of a way of life. In either case one cannot treat God's existence or non-existence as a particular fact about the universe which can be grasped in isolation from all others. It is this line of thought that seems to underlie Phillips's assertion that 'It makes as little sense to say that God's existence is not a fact as it does to say that God's existence is a fact'.[2] Sometimes, indeed, Wittgensteinian Fideists give the impression that coming to believe in God involves no ontological commitment at all. Thus, Phillips writes:

> 'Coming to see that there is a God is not like coming to see that an additional being exists... Coming to see that there is a God involves seeing a new meaning in one's life and being given a new understanding'.[3]

1. <u>Religion and Understanding</u>. p.79.
2. <u>ibid</u>. p.66.   3. <u>ibid</u>. p.68.

Again the conclusion follows naturally from the basic assumptions. The essence of conversion cannot be a realisation that the proposition 'God exists' is true, for, in itself, this claim is no more acceptable than its negation. It consists rather in learning to operate a form of discourse which has the concept of God at its centre, and this development is inseparable from a shife of perspective on one's own life and actions. Phillips would be perfectly willing to admit that there is nothing particularly original about his statement of these ideas. Essentially the same points had been made by Kierkegaard when he said, 'God does not exist, He is eternal',[1] and by Wittgenstein: 'To believe in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life...To believe in a God means to see that life has a meaning'.[2] Nevertheless, the way Phillips formulates the thesis is useful in that it brings out very clearly what is for us the vital point. In the introduction to Religion and Understanding he writes:

> '..I did see as a common thread in all the papers, the centrality of the concept of understanding in relation to religion. Furthermore the analyses of religious beliefs given by these philosophers seem to me to show what true religion is'.[3]

The argument of this chapter is that what Wittgensteinian Fideism offers is indeed a mode of understanding and the verbal parallels with Phillips's characterisation of his position are significant. The essence of it is the view that 'true religion' should be thought of not as a corpus of truths about God and the world but as a technique for organising human experience and giving it meaning. The kind of meaning involved is such as to bring this mode of understanding within the scope of the moral. As an interpretation of religion it has the advantage of enabling the apologist to sidestep many traditional criticisms, but it does lead to problems of its own. A study of them lies outside the scope of this chapter but since our line of argument generates them in an accute form it may be relevant to mention some in passing. In the past there have been thinkers, such as Hume, who wished to empty religion of its cognitive

1. Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Quoted by Phillips, op.cit. p.69.
2. Notebooks, p.74.
3. p.6.

content but they have not usually been regarded as its friends. Many Wittgensteinian Fideists, on the other hand, are Christians and seem to feel that their arguments have a tendency to support the Christian scheme of things. But, apart from all else, there is surely a difficulty in seeing what the connection is between the concept of God they work with and the traditional Christian notion of a transcendent personal being. Moreover, if 'there is no theoretical knowledge of God' theology must be an empty subject. All that could remain for the redundant theologians is the study of certain forms of human activity; the sociology of the religious life. Finally one might wish to inquire what issues of substance now divide these religious believers from many who would call themselves atheists. Obviously there are differences of vocabulary and of emotional atmosphere but what else is involved? The issue becomes of particular interest when, as is sometimes the case, each side may be seen to possess a form of moral understanding. It has therefore a more direct relevance to our thesis than the other questions raised above and we shall return to it later.

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It is not only for religious believers that the distinction between the moral and the non-moral cuts across traditional categories. The process may be equally well illustrated by their humanist adversaries. In this discussion 'humanism' will be used in a wide sense to include any position which regards human beings as the sole rational occupants of the earthly stage, with no help or hindrance to be expected from supernatural agencies, and responds to this situation with something other than despair. Non-moral versions of the humanist outlook depend characteristically, though not necessarily, on a doctrine of inevitability; the view, for instance, that human development is leading inexorably to the classless society or to some final state of evolutionary perfection. Thus, The Communist Manifesto declared that 'the downfall of the bourgeoisie and

the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable'. Darwin believed that 'as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection'.[1] In the hands of Marxists and Darwinians these claims were to take more grandiose forms. Thus, the biologist Joseph Needham, whose views are an interesting combination of these versions of non-moral humanist understanding, writes:

> '...the new world order of social justice and comradeship, the rational and classless world state is no wild idealistic dream, but a logical extrapolation from the whole course of evolution, having no less authority than that behind it, and therefore of all faiths the most rational'.

and:

> '...the organisation of human society is only as yet at the beginning of its triumphs, and...these triumphs are inevitable, since they lie along the road traced out by the entire evolutionary process..'[2]

Of course, if the goal of human history is inevitable then it will come whatever any human being may do. A man who sees the significnace of his activities as consisting in their location in such a series can never conceive of any particular thing he does as internally related to the final term. His conception of the classless society is fully intelligible in isolation from the human struggle that precedes its establishment. A characterisation of it may be fully adequate without takinf any account of these preliminaries since they have no influence on its nature. The contrast with the viewpoint of morality is obvious, but like religious forms of non-moral understanding, doctrines of this kind have run into difficulties in recent times. In the first place xfix attempts to establish general laws of human development are open to serious theoretical objections.[3] Besides, inevitability theses are subject

1. The Origin of Species, quoted in Antony Flew, Evolutionary Ethics, Macmillan, 1968, p.18.
2. Time: The Refreshing River, quoted in Flew, op.cit. pp.23-24.
3. See, for instance, Sir Karl Popper, The Poverty of Historicism; Sir Isaiah Berlin, Historical Inevitability.

to the recalcitrance of events and this sort of pressure may come to
impose an intolerable strain. Thus, the history of the twentieth century
has been unfavourable to the more facile kind of Victorian evolutionism.
Another difficulty, to which Marxism is particularly liable, stems from
a tension between the supposed inevitability of the goal and the desire
to promote the cause in practice. Marx took account of this to the extent
of allowing that revolutionary activities could lessen and shorten the
birth pangs of the new era. In the hands of practical men like Lenin the
doctrine was further diluted in the interests of political action. Event-
ually the English Marxist, R.Palme Dutt, was able to write:

> 'It is the very heart of the revolutionary Marxist understanding of
> inevitability that it has nothing in common with the mechanical
> fatalism of which our opponents incorrectly accuse us. This inevita-
> bility is realised in practice through living human wills under given
> social conditions, consciously reacting to those conditions, and
> consciously choosing their line between alternative possibilities
> seen by them within the given conditions'.[1]

Antony Flew's comment on this passage is a reasonable one: it is to the
effect that the talk of inevitability without qualification is thoroughly
misleading. Once it is admitted that what happens in history is the
outcome of human decisions then, even though one claims to know how in
fact people will decide, the strict inevitability thesis has been aband-
oned. More important from our point of view, one has given up the concep-
tion of history as the working out of a design which is independent of
human wills and purposes. Its significance is no longer claimed to be
intelligible apart from the actual course of events. Instead it is seen
to be latent in the story and only to be divined by attending to the
details. What these changes amount to is the abandonment of non-moral
understanding.

       The transition to the moral can be traced even more readily
with Darwinian evolutionism. In his preface to Flew's Evolutionary Ethics,
W.D.Hudson refers to 'the confidence of some nineteenth century thinkers

1. Quoted in Flew, op.cit. p.25.

that, by a process as inevitable as the survival of the fittest in the animal kingdom, those principles of action and traits of character which are morally best will progressively triumph over all other elements in human nature till man becomes perfect', and he remarks that 'few, if any' now share this confidence. Perhaps the most likely place to look for those who do is among the members of the British Humanist Association, for organised humanism tends to trace its intellectual ancestry to the nineteenth century background which Hudson has in mind. Even among its ranks, however, there has been backsliding. Thus, A.J.Ayer, writing as President of the B.H.A. in the Association's journal, discusses the question 'what meaning can life have?' and comments:

> 'If what is sought here is an assurance that our lives play their part in the fulfilment of some cosmic purpose, then the answer is that this assurance cannot be given. Neither is it easy to see why it should be sought, since there can be little satisfaction in the idea that we play our allotted roles in a scheme the design of whifh is unintelligible to us and one for which we ourselves are in no way responsible'.[1]

Later in the same article he writes:

> 'I do not look forward to any millenium but only to a state in which the vast majority of people have the material opportunity and the moral and intellectual resources to lead satisfactory lives. I do not know whether such a state will ever be attained, but I believe that it is attainable. Even by granting the record of man's inhumanity to man, and his proved capacity for self-destruction, I still have more faith in his intelligence and goodwill. In this sense I am a Humanist'.[2]

These passages contain an explicit rejection of two characteristic features of non-moral understanding; the idea that we play our allotted roles in a scheme the design for which we are in no way responsible and the claim to possess a guarantee of what the future will be like. For Ayer, man makes his history and the meaning it has is inherent in the process, not borrowed or imposed from without. Clearly what he is advocating is a form of moral understanding. His fellow humanist, Antony Flew, has given a vigorous account of the way in which Darwinian humanism, by

1. 'What I Believe', Humanist, August 1966, p.227.
2. ibid. p.228

a process parallel to the development of Christian thought, arrived at a version of moral understanding. [1] Flew is sympathetic to the Darwinian moralists but he concludes that the most one can salvage from their work is a recommendation of what he calls 'seeing in an evolutionary perspective'. This kind of vision is intended as a way of satisfying the longing which some men have 'to see things as a whole, to find some deep, comprehensive, unifying perspective against which they may set their everyday lives'. [2] 'No philosopher', he argues, 'can afford either to despise or not to share such yearnings' and he goes on to quote approvingly form Julian Huxley:

> 'In the light of evolutionary biology man can now see himself as the sole agent of further evolutionary advances on this planet, and one of the few possible instruments of progress in the universe at large. He finds himself in the unexpected position of business manager for the cosmic process of evolution. He no longer ought to feel separated from the rest of nature, for he is part if it – that part which has become conspicuous, capable of love and understanding and aspiration. He need no longer regard himself as insignificant in relation to the cosmos.' [3]

On the Flew-Huxley view the significance which evolution can provide is not to be thought of in terms of a static and inevitable goal, conceptually distinct from the human strivings that precede it. Instead it is seen to be inherent in a dynamic process of which man is in control. As 'the sole agent of further evolutionary advances' and 'business manager for the cosmic process of evolution' the operations of the evolutionary processxxx, are, as it were, constituted by the manner in which he discharges his responsibilities. Human activities comprise a self-sufficient world whose sense is not to be located in any external source. It is a distinctively moral form of understanding that is being advocated here.

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An attempt must now be made to clarify the relations between the various theories that have been discussed. To begin with,

1. Evolutionary Ethics.
2. op.cit. p.60.   3. loc.cit.

one should note the conceptual gulf between traditional religious views and the religious version of moral understanding. ~~xxxxxx~~ On One side the essence of religion is seen as consisting in a set of cosmological and ontological truths, and on the other in its solution to the problem of how men can be given a means of conceptualising their experience. It is not just the details of the traditional scheme that are found wanting by adherents of the latter view. They would reject the suggestion that any story of that kind could possibly be regarded as satisfactory. Perhaps the central objection is to the tendency to think of God as a discrete, individual item in the furniture of the universe, very different of course from all the others but equally capable of being apprehended in isolation. What this overlooks, it is alleged, is the constitutive role of the concept of God within a particular universe of discourse and the internal nature of the relations between them. Thus, one is encouraged to think that the concept can be understood apart from the form of life which revolves around it and which gives it meaning. This in turn leads to the assumption that evidence and argument can be brought to bear on the question of God's existence just as they can for all other individual entities in the world. The verdict which this suggestion provokes comes out clearly in Wittgensteins remarks on Fr.O'Hara:

> 'What seems to me ludicrous about O'Hara is his making it appear to be <u>reasonable</u>.. I would definitely call O'Hara unreasonable. I would say, if this is religious belief, then it's all superstition'.[1]

The charge of superstition provides a useful clue to the attitudes of Wittgensteinian Fideists to traditional believers. The basic objection is that their views are caricatures of something which is of great importance and with which they profess to be vitally concerned. This feeling is at times very near the surface, as in some of the remarks by Phillips quoted above. It is, of course, notorious that disagreements between people who claim to be devoted to the same things often have a certain astringency. But it is difficult not to see this particular one as a reflection of the general schism which was referred to earlier. Thus it may be that any belief in transcendent entities or cosmic plans which

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1. <u>Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief</u>, ed. Cyril Barrett, Basil Blackwell, 1966, pp.58-59.

are independent of human control will strike many contemporary thinkers as superstitious. That is, any form of non-moral understanding will incur this criticism. At any rate is seems clear that the failure to achieve moral understanding underlies it in the present case. The conceptual gulf that has been described is in essence one between those who possess this form of understanding and those who do not.

It is tempting to stress the closeness of the links between the religious and humanist versions of moral understanding when they are viewed against this background. The historical affinities are obvious: the development of each seems to be explicable in terms of the general transition from the non-moral. The recommendations arrived at, Phillips's 'seeing a new meaning in one's life' and Flew's 'seeing in an evolutionary perspective' have more in common with each other than either has with the views of Bishop Wilberforce or T.H.Huxley. Though they differ greatly in the accounts they give of the world, they are united at a more fundamental level; in their view of the kind of story that is a possible candidate. Non of the views put forward in the Oxford debate of 1861 will do, and neither will any other version of non-moral understanding. These conceptual links between apparently opposite views are of great significance and an awareness of it has implications for our picture of the contemporary intellectual scene. Nevertheless the parallels can be taken too far. The sense of propriety is easily offended by any facile lumping together of people who feel themselves to differ profoundly. In the present case there seems to be good reasons for such misgivings. Thus, someone who favoured behavioural criteria of belief might very well be impressed by the need to emphasise differences. It is highly probable that there are considerable divergencies between the two groups in matters of church attendence, child rearing practices, membership of voluntary associations and so on. On issues of public controversy such as abortion and euthanasia members of each group may be found lining up with their traditionalist bretheren rather than with other exponents of the moral attitude. And, no doubt, sociological questionaires would elicit other differences of outlook and

behaviour. The point is that the particular version of moral understanding which a man professes is not a trivial matter. His choice will tend to colour all his other attitudes and, with its ramifications, may be seen as constitutive of a distinctive way of life. The observer may well be struck by the radical differences between this way of life and those associated with other forms of the moral outlook. Thus, moral understanding does not seek to impose a single narrow vision of the world; within it there is room for great variety and freedom. This diversity exists, of course, within a conceptual framework which is capable of sharp definition. The combination of unity and multiplicity is an important feature of moral understanding and in giving an account of it the central problem is to do justice to both elements.

There is another, perhaps more fundamental, reason for refusing to play down the differences between religious and humanist forms of moral understanding. The conceptual gulf between Flew and Phillips on the one hand and Huxley and Wilberforce on the other has been remarked on. It must now be noted that, in spite of the more urbane tone of their discussion, there is an important sense in which our contemporaries have less in common than their Victorian predecessors. Huxley and Wilberforce differed profoundly in their view of the world but they took for granted that it was the same world for both. Common to them was the tacit assumption that they operated within a single universe of discourse whose function was the objective delineation of reality. Thus if one was right about it the other was wrong in a straightforward literal sense and all their arguments and rhetoric were designed to securing a verdict on this issue. Mankind was either created from nothing a few thousand years before Christ or had evolved from more primitive forms over a much longer period. This was seen as a dispute over a question of fact and, in principle at least, was resoluble by rational means. The situation of contemporary believers and humanists is rather different. Enclosed within his own system of internally related concepts each may well be incapable of coming to grips in any significant way with his opponents case. The danger arises that

intellectual controversy will tend to become the mere rehearsal of incommensurable views. The crucial change concerns the assumption that objective standards are available in all disputes, that even for those between different conceptual schemes there is the test of an independent reality. Peter Winch has formulated this aspect of the situation with particular clarity. In 'Understanding a Primitive Society' he takes the anthropologist, E.E.Evans-Pritchard, to task for 'his attempt to characterise the scientific in terms of what is "in accord with objective reality"'.[1] Evans-Pritchard goes wrong in that 'although he emphasises that a member of a scientific culture has a different conception of reality from that of a Zande believer in magic' he 'wants to go beyond merely registering this fact and making the differences explicit, and to say, that the scientific conception agrees with what reality actually is like, whereas the magical conception does not'.[2] The complaint is that, not content with explicating the differences between Zande and European-scientific conceptions of reality he wishes to go further and add, 'the European is right and the Zande wrong'. This addition Winch stigmatises as 'illegitimate'.[3] The reason he gives is that the notion of the 'independently real' by which mens ideas and beliefs can be checked only has application within a particular universe of discourse, such as science or religion. It has none where the thing to be assessed is itself in Winch's phrase a 'form of the conception of reality'.[4] Thus he writes:

'We may ask whether a particular scientific hypothesis agrees with reality and test this by observation and experiment. Given the experimental methods, and the established use of the theoretical terms entering into the hypothesis, then the question whether it holds or not is settled by reference to something independent of what I, or anybody else care to think. But the general nature of the data revealed by the experiment can only be specified in terms of criteria built into the methods of experiment employed and these, in turn, make sense only to someone who is conversant with the kind of scientific activity within which they are employed... What Evans-Pritchard wants to be able to say is that the criteria applied in scientific experimentation constitute a true link between our ideas and an independent reality, whereas those characteristic of other systems of thought-in particular, magical methods of thought - do not. It is evident that the expressions

1. Americal Philosophical Quarterly, Vol.I (1964), p.308. Reprinted in Religion and Understanding.
2. loc.cit.   3. op.cit. p.313.   4. op.cit. p.315.

"true link" and "independent reality" in the previous sentence cannot themselves be explained by reference to the scientific universe of discourse, as this would beg the question. We have then to ask how, by reference to what established universe of discourse, the use of those expressions _is_ to be explained; and it is clear that Evans-Pritchard has not answered this question'.[1]

Ultimately, what underlies these claims is the Wittgensteinian thesis set out in The Idea of a Social Science. The Tractatus has stated that:

'To give the essence of proposition means to give the essence of all description, therefore the essence of the world'. (5.4711).

and:

'That the world is _my_ world shows itself in the fact that the limits of my language (of the only language I can understand) mean the limits of _my_ world'. (5.62).

The moral drawn by Winch is that:

'..there is no way of getting outside the concepts in terms of which we think of the world.. The world _is_ for us what is presented through these concepts'.[2]

The essence of the mistake that people like Evans-Pritchard are supposed to make is now clear. It is that, in speaking of the superiority of science to magic, they are assuming an objective reality which is independent of our conceptual schemes and in terms of which they can be compared and judged. On the Wittgensteinian-Winch view of things no sense can be given to this assumption.

The relevance of all this to the problem of the relationship between religious and humanist versions of moral understanding is quite direct. It lies in the fact that within the realm of the moral all disputes conform to the Winchian model of one between a scientific materialist and a Zande. The merits of his general thesis are irrelevant here. One may or may not approve of the tendency to represent intellectual disagreements as, essentially, conflicts between universes of discourse which allow no room for appeals to a higher authority. The point is that the parties to a debate between different forms of moral understanding are necessarily bound to such a view of their situation. This is so in virtue of the

1. op.cit. p.309.   2. The Idea of a Social Science, p.15.

peculiar nature of moral understanding. The essence of the moral attitude lies in a refusal to justify one's activities in terms of concepts which are wholly external to them. To adopt it is to be committed to an independent and self-contained form of discourse. Hence discussions with adherents of other versions of moral understanding are likely to have a special kind of futility. If one remains within one's chosen world of discourse one never engages with their concerns at all, and if one steps outside it to seek mutually acceptable ground one has abandoned the moral attitude. Thus the disagreement is not even in principle capable of rational resolution. This is an important difference between the controversies of Victorian believers and humanists and some contemporary ones. It may perhaps be seen as another way of marking the extent of the conceptual gulf discussed earlier. If there is anything in the suggestion that moral understanding is to a significant extent characteristic of contemporary intellectual life, one would expect to find that our disagreements in general are m marked by this opacity to reason and the peculiarly interminable air that goes with it. It would not be hard to produce evidence which seems to suggest that this is so. Thus one might be tempted to think that the thesis advanced here could shed some light on the much-discussed fragmentation of our culture. But to pursue this suggestion would take one outside the limits of the present inquiry and into the empirical study of society.

Chapter 3.

POLITICIANS AND ARTISTS.

In order to give examples of moral and non-moral understan-
ding distinctions have had to be made within traditional categories. It
would round off this discussion neatly if one could now cite viewpoints
which belong unequivocally and in their entirety to each camp. With regard
to non-moral understanding there is, however, a difficulty to be noted.
It is highly probable that most human beings, now as at all times in the
past, come within this category in so far as they can be said to possess
any kind of comprehensive understanding of their activities. Their mater-
ial conditions have made it easy for them to see their lives as governed
by mysterious powers independent of human wills and purposes. Thus, a
community whose existence is thought to depend on the whims of the Rain-
God is not well placed to view human activity as an integral, self-suffic-
ient realm, and its intellectual experience is perhaps not untypical of
most human communities throughout history. Nevertheless, in spite of the
universality of non-moral forms of understanding one encounters problems
in trying to unearth articulated modern versions of it. For the historical
developments discussed in the previous chapter have had most influence
on those who reflect systematically and present their conclusions in
public. Hence, it is not easy to find expositions of non-moral understand-
ing which are free of extraneous elements and have contemporary rather
than merely historical interest, and enough intellectual content to merit
serious discussion. In this situation one runs the risk of neglecting or
caricaturing the manner in which a large part of mankind conceptualises
its experience.

Perhaps the best way to overcome the difficulty is by

considering people whose outlook is dominated by various forms of what
might be called 'political' understanding. Thus, some versions of nation-
alism exemplify non-moral attitudes in a fairly clear-cut way. 'Nationalism'
is a protean and elusive term and it would be well to start by making
clear how it will be interpreted. S.I.Benn has usefully distinguished
five senses and the last of these is the most significant for our purposes.
In this sense nationalism is:

> '..a political and anthropological theory which asserts that mankind
> is naturally divided into nations, that there are determinate criteria
> for identifying a nation and for recognising its members, that each
> nation is entitled to an independent government of its own, that states
> are legitimate only if constituted in accordance with this principle,
> and that the world would be rightly organised, politically speaking,
> only if every nation formed a single state and every state consisted
> exclusively of the whole of one nation'.[1]

The authorities agree fairly closely in dating the origins of this complex
of ideas and doctrines. Benn attributes them to the end of the eighteenth
century.[2] In Hans Kohn's view they are 'not older than the second half'
of that century.[3] Elie Kedourie begins his study by stating flatly: 'Nation-
alism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth
century'.[4] K.R.Minogue agrees with Kedourie and remarks that 'his dating
of the emergence of these ideas would command general acceptance.'[5] It
seems reasonable therefore to take the second half of the eighteenth and
the beginning of the nineteenth century as the crucial period. There is
a similar measure of scholarly agreement that the key figures are the
writers and thinkers of the German Romantic movement: Fichte, Herder and
Schliermacher in particular. It was these men who created the conception
of the nation as a metaphysical entity, the expression of a particular
aspect of the Divine Nature. Schliermacher puts the claim in this way:

> 'Every nationality is destined through its peculiar organisation and
> its place in the world to represent a certain side of the divine image.
> For it is God who directly assigns to each nationality its definite
> task on earth and inspires it with a definite spirit in order to glorify
> Himself through each one in a peculiar manner'.[6]

1. 'Nationalism', Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, General Editor Paul Edwards
   Vol.5. pp.442-443.
2. ibid. p.443.   3. The Idea of Nationalism.
4. Nationalism, Hutchinson University Library, 1960. p.9.
5. Nationalism, B.T.Batsford Ltd., 1967, p.18.
6. Quoted in Kedourie, op.cit. p.58.

The nation demands the supreme loyalty of its members and, in return, gives their lives coherence and meaning. An illustration of the process is provided by this extract from Ernst Moritz Arndt written in 1813:

'I have known misfortunes; I have suffered; it has scarcely moved me to tears. But when I have thought of the Volk I have always had to weep in the depth of my soul. When a great crowd moves before me, when a band of warriors passes by with flowing banners and sounding trumpets and drums, then I realise that my feelings and my actions are not an empty illusion, then it is that I feel the indestructible life, the eternal spirit, and eternal God... Like other men I am egotistic and sinful but in my exaltation I am freed at once from all my sins, I am no longer a single suffering individual, I am one with the Volk, and God. In such a moment any doubts about my life and work vanish'.[1]

This passage is instructive for it suggests strongly that it would be a mistake to regard nationalism as 'political' in a narrow sense, xxx as a form of understanding appropriate only to a limited range of human activities. On the contrary, it transcends mere politics, or perhaps more accurately one might say that it extends the political to cover all of life. Fritz Stern has said of the German nationalist Paul de Lagarde that 'through politics'he 'sought to gain spiritual ends, to reach and transform the moral life of man'.[2] A similar concern is evident in the work of many nationalist writers. The extravagant demands it makes on political activity are among the most characteristic features of the doctrine. Elie Kedourie offers a penetrating analysis of how this came about. He traces its intellectual origins to a combination of the Kantian concern with freedom and the widespread emphasis in German thought on the value of the whole at the expense of its parts. Post-Kantians such as Fichte were led to insist that the individual can realise his freedom and hence his destiny as a moral agent, only by absorption into an entity greater than himself. The work of Herder and others was widely taken to have shown that nationalities are the fundamental, divinely-established, units of mankind. Thus, the whole into which individuals should merge

1. Quoted in Minogue, op.cit. p.67.
2. The Politics of Cultural Despair, Berkeley, 1961, p.101. Quoted in Minogue, op.cit. p.78.

their separate wills and purposes came to be identified with the nation-
state. On the sociological side Kedourie argues that much can be explained
if one looks at the position of German intellectuals at the time. Deprived
of influence, and forced to endure what seemed to them the stifling
provincialism of the petty states, they longed for a transformation of
society which would lead to their worth being recognised and their alien-
ation cured. Such a change could only come through the establishment of
a single state for the whole German nation, a state of the kind foreshad-
owed in their metaphysics. In the 'Addresses to the German Nation' Fichte
had rejected a state which merely maintained 'internal peace and a
condition of affairs in which everyone may by diligence earn his daily
bread and satisfy the needs of his material existence so long as God
permits him to live'.'All this,' he went on to say, 'is only a means, a
condition, and a framework for what love of fatherland really wants to
bring about, namely, that the eternal and the divine may blossom in the
world and never cease to become more and more pure, perfect and excellent'[1].
Politics, the process embodying the individuals relationship to the nation-
state, becomes on this view a matter of supreme importance. It is the
means through which 'the eternal and the divine may blossom in the world',
and political issues involve man's deepest interests. No longer is politics
seen as a secular activity with the modest aim of ensuring certain external
preconditions of human freedom and the good life: it is itself the process
through which these values are realised. The end-product, absorption in
the organic unity of the nation-state.is the proper destiny of man. Many
people would, no doubt, agree with Kedourie in holding that such a view
radically misconceives what politics can do for us and is likely, in
practice, to lead to confusion and disaster. Whether or not one accepts
this valuation or the analysis that accompanies it one can hardly doubt
that he has focused attention on a vital element in the ideology. The
extravagant ethical and metaphysical demands it makes of politics largely
account for the plausibility of the various attempts to interpret nation-
alism as a kind of religion for societies in which traditional beliefs
have lost their hold.[2] However different in other respects it shares with

1. Quoted in Kedourie, op.cit. p.47.
2. See Hans Kohn's discussion in The Idea of Nationalism.

religion the ability to provide a comprehensive interpretation of exper-
ience and it can come to occupy a similar place in the believer's life.
The only form of understanding offered by the kind of nationalism consid-
ered so far falls well outside the realm of the moral. S.I.Benn is being
quite uncontroversial in remarking that:

> 'As these writers saw it a nations existence did not depend on its
> members choice or recognition; or rather because it formed their
> consciousness they could hardly choose not to be members'.[1]

Obviously to interpret one's activities in terms of such a concept of
the nation is to take a non-moral view of them.

Nationalism has provided a convenient illustration of non-
moral understanding. But it would be false to conclude that nationalists
are necessarily committed to such a viewpoint. Here again the tendency
of the fundamental distinction to cut across other categories asserts
itself. In the present case everything depends on how the central concept
of the nation is understood. The writers we have discussed relied on
the so-called 'objective' criteria of nationality; language, race, culture
and territory. Language in particular was taken to be an infallible guide.
Fichte in the 'Addresses to the German Nation' declared that:

> '..we give the name of people to men whose organs of speech are
> influenced by the same external conditions, who live together,
> and who develop their language in continuous communication with
> each other'[2].

and:

> 'Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a
> multitude of invisible bonds by nature herself, long before any
> human art begins; they understand each other and have the power to
> make themselves understood more and more clearly; they belong
> together and are by nature one and inseparable whole...'[3]

The concern of these writers with language goes far beyond what might be
expected if it were merely a convenient way of identifying one's father-
land. Thus Herder argued that for a man to speak a foreign language was

1. op.cit. p.443.   2. Quoted in Kedourie, op.cit.p.64.
3. ibid. p.69.

to live an artificial life and Fichte tried to show that the mere presence of foreign elements in a language can do moral harm to the speakers of it.[1] Yet, though language is a vital strand in nationalist thought one can go astray by trying to differentiate sharply between it and the other objective criteria. This may direct attention away from essentials, as Kedourie warns:

> 'In nationalist doctrine, language, race, culture, and sometimes even religion, constitute different aspects of the same primordial entity, the nation. The theory admits here of no great precision, and it is misplaced ingenuity to try and classify nationalisms according to the particular aspect which they choose to emphasise'.[2]

The truth is that the founders of nationalism never saw the need to distinguish clearly between the various indices of nationhood. They took for granted that although one or other might be convenient at different times there could be no tension or conflict between them: all pointed unambiguously in the same direction.

Later critics have found this assumption less than compelling. Indeed, the difficulties associated with objective criteria have become a commonplace of the literature. An obvious one is that there are groups such as the Swiss which have good claims to be nations but do not satisfy the criteria. And there are groups which do satisfy one or other of them, for instance, Scandinavians and the English-speaking peoples, yet do not form single nations. Besides it has become widely realised that attempts to take objective criteria seriously are likely to prove unworkable or disastrous in areas of mixed race and language such as the Balkans and West Africa. Considerations of this kind have encouraged a radically different approach to the basic concept of the 'nation'. Ernest Renan's lecture 'What is the Nation?' (1882), is one of the earliest examples. Renan saw the defects of linguistic and ethnic criteria very clearly and drew the conclusion that, in the end, only the will of its individual members could determine whether a nation exists or not. This is the view

1. See Kedourie, op.cit. ch.5.   2. ibid. p.73.

summed up in the famous slogan: (the nation is a daily plebiscite'. The
implications of this reliance on will are sometimes seen very clearly.
Thus, the Jewish nationalist, Ahad Ha'am (1856-1927) declared that once
the 'spirit of nationality' has come into being:

> '..it becomes a phenomenon that concerns the individual alone, its
> reality being dependent on nothing but its presence in his psyche,
> and on no external or objective actuality. If I feel the spirit of
> Jewish nationality in my heart so that it stamps all my inward life
> with its seal, then the spirit of Jewish nationality exists in me;
> and its existence is not at an end even if all my Jewish contemporar-
> ies should cease to feel it in their hearts'.[1]

Essentially what these writers are claiming is that the nation exists
if people think it does. It is constituted by the wills and consciousness
of its members and has no independent life apart from them. This is a
quite different view of the nation from that held by Fichte and Schlier-
macher. The significance of the change is that it embodies the operation
within nationalist thought of the general transition from the non-moral
to the moral. Once more we seem to have confirmation of the suggestion
that any tendency to interpret human activities in terms of external
concepts is antipathetic to an important strand in modern thought. To
the man who has renounced 'superstition' the nation of Fichte is at least
as objectionable as the God of traditional Christianity. Both lead us to
seek the significance of our actions in an ontology that transcends them
and so direct attention away from the only kind of meaning they can
legitimately have.

The recourse to 'subjective' criteria has not silenced
criticism. Kedourie, for instance, complains that the metaphor of a
daily plebiscite shows 'how inadequate the doctrine is in describing
the political process, for a political community which conducts daily
plebiscites must soon fall into querulous anarchy, or hypnotic obedience'.[2]
Benn argues that if one accepts subjective criteria there can be no defence
against the national claims of sub-groups, however small or hetrogeneous.

1. Quoted in Kedourie, op.cit. p.81.
2. op.cit. p.81.

Indeed, 'there is no good reason for stopping short of individual self-determination'.[1] Clearly, it is not easy to weld the elements of nationalism into a plausible or even coherent theory. Its merits or defects as an ideology do not directly concern us but we must take account of their implications for the form of understanding of experience that issues from it. Perhaps one should xxxxkxxxxk start by asking what precisely the incoherence of the doctrine is supposed to consist in. A straightforward answer is available here. Benn, in a passage already quoted, described nationalism as 'a political and an anthropological theory'. The essence of the charge of incoherence is that the political and the anthropological elements can never be got to lie down together. Given that nationalist anthropology is correct, that the basic divisions of mankind are certain ethnic and linguistic groups, it is not at all clear what political significance this fact has, and it may be thought that a serious attempt to give it some is likely to have undesirable consequences in practice. On the other hand a reasonable assessment of the kind of entities that might form the elements of a viable political order seems unlikely to coincide with the principles of nationalist anthropology. Thus, the nationalist is faced with a choice. He can insist on the anthropology and neglect the political implications, like the older kind of Welsh linguistic nationalist. Or he can retain the link with political realities and be prepared to ignore at least some intimations of the anthropology. In practice, much seems to depend on whether he has power ot not. Nationalist governments usually opt fot the latter alternative, while nationalists in opposition often succeed in obscuring from themselves and others the need to make a choice. Notoriously, when the new nation-state is actually established the pressures that result may become intolerable. It seems fair to conclude that the dynamic appeal of the doctrine rests on the joint acceptance of two claims. The ethnic and linguistic groups called nations are, in fact, the natural and fundamental divisions of mankind and the political order ought to be constructed in accordance with this fact. Its success depends, one might say, on the way in which it seems to bridge the gap between facts and values, between the condition of the world as it really is and

1. op.cit. p.445.

the forms of human organisation that ought to prevail in it. To note the necessity for choice is to be reminded of the continued existence of the gap. Of course one is then free to take a stand on one side or the other. A man may continue to interpret the significance of his actions in terms of the 'nation' and understand by this an ethnic grouping with ho political significance. Or he may regard it as a political entity which may roughly, but need not exactly, coincide with an ethnic division. But it is not easy to see why anyone should regard the meaning of his life as inextricably bound up with such a notion. Besides it seems doubtful that if these features of it were generally recognised it would continue to arouse the same enthusiasm as at present.

In the Marxist tradition ideologies as forms of 'false consciousness' are characterised by the illusion of being more solidly grounded in reality than in fact they are. Whatever the truth of this thesis in general it seems to provide a useful insight in the case of nationalism. Much of its appeal does rest on the conviction that its vision of how the world ought to be is somehow founded on, and guaranteed by, the facts of how it actually is. To note the hiatus between the anthropology and the politics is to reveal that this is not so. Someone who has realised it may continue to operate with a merely anthropological or a merely political nationalism. In either case he may choose to have a moral or a non-moral understanding of his activities. For the objective and subjective criteria are equally available to both. Thus, the units of one's anthropology may be those groups whose members regard themselves as constituting a nation and are determined to maintain it. The political nationalist may agree with the Abbe Sieyes in holding that a nation is 'a union of individuals governed by one law and represented by the same law-giving assembly'.[1] Here, as so often elsewhere, rational argument exercises no compulsion on practice. But it does serve to make clear the

1. Quoted in Benn, op.cit. p.443.

implications of our choices and the price to be paid for them.

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It is easier to find a clear-cut and unequivocal example
of the moral than the non-moral. The one to be discussed here is provided
by what might be called 'aesthetic' understanding. Any form of understan-
ding may involve seeing one's actions as elements in a pattern to which
aesthetic or quasi-aesthetic epithets are considered appropriate. Thus
it amy hinge on grasping their place in what is significantly called the
'story of one's life'. For the religious believer the backbone of the
story might be said to consist in his progress towards union with God.
He will not, however, be primarily interested in assessing the plot in
terms of economy, symmetry, or elegance, though he may be aware of the
presence or absence of these qualities. His real concern is with its
effectiveness in bringing about the denouement. In aesthetic understanding,
on the other hand, the rationale of the pattern is provided by concepts
whose standard application is to the products of art. People who take
this view often speak as though a man's life could be regarded as an
artefact: his situation, talents, character and desires are the raw
material on which he imposes order and design, and success or failure
is judged by the usual standards of aesthetic evaluation. It is, of
course, not necessary for a man to be a creative artist in order to view
his life in this way. Nevertheless the relationship between the two
enterprises is a complex one. Practitioners of aesthetic understanding
have sometimes felt a tension to exist between them. The idea is that
if the aesthetic impulse is satisfied by life nothing will be left over
for art. This suggests that aesthetic understanding will have most appeal
for those with a strong urge to express themselves in some form of art
and no talent for the usual ones. Thus, a passion for order has sometimes
been regarded as characteristic of the Nazi approach to politics and it
has been thought significant that so many of its leaders were themselves
failed artists. This example suggests a line of criticism of aesthetic

understanding which demands attention; the claim that its practical
implications are likely to be disastrous. Later an attempt will be made
to show that it rests on a confusion. For the present we shall merely
note the plausibility of the suggestion that unless someone possesses
a fairly strong aesthetic sense he will not be greatly attracted by this
view of life. But this does not amount to anything like a conceptual link
between aesthetic understanding and artistic creation in general. It will,
nevertheless, be found that our illustrations of aesthetic understanding
draw heavily on people who were themselves professionally concerned with
literature. In part the reason for this is a simple technical one. Such
men are often exceptionally candid and articulate and so make good
subjects for discussion. Another part of the explanation may be given
in terms of a commonplace psychological mechanism. The shift from thinking
of one's life as a source of raw material for art to thinking of it as
itself an entity with aesthetic properties is easy to make. But there
is also a profounder link between art and moral understanding and some
preliminary discussion will be needed before it can be understood.

A convenient starting point is offered by the career of
the poet Edwin Muir. The first version of his autobiography was called
The Story and the Fable. R.W.Hepburn has commented on this work as follows:

    'Significantly titled; for Muir contrasts the "story" of his life (the
    bare narration of events) with its "fable" – a slowly developing,
    often elusive, cluster of personal symbols, compounded of childhood
    memories, foci of aspiration, discoveries in literature, with reference
    to which his whole life is orientated, and his autobiography knitted
    into a natural unity, a unity different from any conventional articula-
    tion into a life's phases'.[1]

Things can go wrong with an enterprise of this kind, as Hepburn notes:

    'There is nothing easily won in this pattern-realising:
    indeed there are desolate tracts in the autobiography where the
    "story" stubbornly refuses to be transmuted into "fable"'.[2]

Assan example he cites Muir's years in Glasgow which:

    '...saw the shattering of his Orkney pastoral dream, the deaths of

1. 'Vision and Choice in Morality', P.A. S. Supp.Vol.30. 1956. p.15.
2. ibid. pp.15-16.

several intimate relatives and a general disorientation of his
intellectual and imaginative life. With these barren years he can
"do nothing": they lie in his memory "like a heap of dull immovable
rubbish". They are eccentric to the fable; that is to say, he has
no symbol which can cope with, give him"command"over these events;
no "image, "motif", "theme", is available through which his resources
may be organised and initiative recaptured'.[1]

Muir's intellectual history may be regarded as representative of one form
which aesthetic understanding is likely to take in practice. The picture
it represents is of a continuous struggle to reconcile 'story' and 'fable'.
He endures disappointments, setbacks, uncongenial surroundings, even the
complete breakdown of the undertaking, yet always recovers and continues
with it. Though this is in human terms a highly attractive model it is
not the only one available. To do justice to the possibilities afforded
by aesthetic understanding we must look further afield.

An obvious alternative would be provided by a case of
consistent success untroubled by the difficulties which Muir records.
It will not be easy, however, to point with assurance to actual examples.
A man may succeed in presenting an image of absolute competence but one
can hardly ever be sure that behind it there are no lacunae or incoheren-
ces. Notoriously, the effect of honest biography is often to
disillusion us about these matters. We shall, perhaps, be justified in
regarding the goal of complete success as merely an abstract possibility
so far as most human beings are concerned. Nevertheless, some have come
close enough to it to make their position significantly different from
that represented by Muir. If Wallace Stevens is right, the life of Santay-
ana provides an illustration. In his essay 'Imagination as Value' Stevens
discusses such topics as the nature of imagination, its relations with
reason and with the pressures of society on the individual, its implicat-
ions for morality and so on. 'Imagination' is for him 'the power that
enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos
in chaos'.[2] He contends that 'the operation of the imagination in life

1. ibid. p.20.
2. 'Imagination as Value', The Necessary Angel, Faber & Faber, 1960, p.153.

is more significant than its operation in or in relation to works of art'
and that, 'the imagination penetrates life'.[1] He seems to recognise that
these claims have a paradoxical air:

'In spite of the prevalence of the imagination in life, it is probably
true that the discussion of it in that relation is incomparably less
frequent and less intelligent than the discussion of it in relation
to arts and letters. The constant discussion of imagination and reality
is largely a discussion not for the purposes of life but for the
purposes of arts and letters'.[2]

An explanation is suggested:

'I suppose that the reason for this is that few people would turn to
the imagination, knowingly, in life, while few people would turn to
anything else, knowingly, in arts and letters. In life what is impor-
tant is the truth as it is, while in arts and letters what is important
is the truth as we see it... Again in life the function of the imagin-
ation is so varied that it is not well-defined as it is in arts and
letters. In life one hesitates when one speaks of the value of the
imagination. Its value in arts and letters is aesthetic. Most men's
lives are thrust upon them. The existence of aesthetic value in lives
that are forced on those that live them is an improbable sort of thing'.[3]

'Nevertheless', he argues, 'there can be lives.. which exist by the
deliberate choice of those that live them' and he gives an illustration:

'It may be assumed that the life of Professor Santayana is a life
in which the function of the imagination has a function similar to
its function in any deliberate work of art or letters. We have only
to think of this present phase of it, in which, in his old age, he
dwells in the head of the world, in the company of devoted women in
their convent, and in the company of familiar saints, whose presence
does so much to make any convent an appropriate refuge for a generous
and human philosopher. To repeat, there can be lives in which the
value of the imagination is the same as its value in arts and letters
and I exclude from consideration as part of that statement any thought
of poverty or wealth, being a _bauer_ or being a king, and so on, as
irrelevant'.[4]

Stevens's 'imagination', that 'power that enables us to perceive... the
opposite of chaos in chaos' is the power that makes art possible and his
remarks about its role in life leave no doubts about the accuracy of
classifying him as an advocate of aesthetic understanding. His intellectual
career seems, like Santayana's, to point to the possibility of a measure

1. _ibid_. p.146.   2. _ibid_. p.147.
3. _loc.cit_.   4. _loc.cit_.

of achievement in the enterprise quite different from anything intimated by Muir's. It is easy to suggest reasons for this contrast. It may be that the material conditions of Santayana's and Steven's lives were more fortunate, that they were not 'thrust upon them' to the same extent. Perhaps their powers of will and imagination were better adapted to the task. Or it may simply be that their official persona is harder to penetrate. At any rate they convey the impression of coming much closer than he to exemplifying the ideal of complete success. In doing so they illustrate some of the characteristic dangers to which aesthetic understanding is liable. Practitioners of it run the risk of becoming so proficient at pattern-weaving that the manipulation of symbols shuts out the ordinary world. Thus, it might be thought that the kind of tension between the 'story' and the 'fable' that Muir talks about is something important to maintain. One may also suspect that the danger of losing sight of the particular and the concrete is especially serious for a writer of imaginative literature. In an essay on Stevens, Randall Jarrell has vigorously expressed misgivings of this kind:

> '...Stevens has the weakness - a terrible one for a poet, a steadily increasing one in Stevens - of thinking of particulars as primarily illustrations of general truths, or else as aesthetic, abstracted objects, simply there to be comtemplated; he often treats things or lives so that they seem no more than generalisations of an unprecedently low order'.[1]

No attempt will be made here to argue the merits of this case against Stevens directly. The difficulties of resolving such an argument without having to resort to an arbitrary endorsement of one style of life at the expense of another are well known. Instead we shall try to offer a fresh perspective on the whole business by considering another of the mythmakers referred to by Hepburn. The case of W.B.Yeats seems to offer a possibility of mediating between Muir and Stevens. Besides it has other distinctive features that make discussion of it a suitable way of concluding this partial and schematic survey of the varieties of aesthetic understanding.

1. 'Reflections on Wallace Stevens', Poetry and the Age, Faber and Faber, 1955. p.130.

Hepburn, drawing on the <u>Autobiographies</u> characterises
Yeats's position in this way:

> 'Yeats, "deprived.. of the simple minded religion of.. childhood",
> could not live without some fable, and constructed "almost an
> infallible Church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories.."'[1]

This preoccupation has become a much discussed topic in the literature
on Yeats. In his case talk of life as an artefact is particularly
appropriate. George Russell, his close friend for many years, observed
that:

> 'He began about the time of "The Wind among the Reeds" to do two
> things consciously, one to create a "style"in literature, the
> second to create or rather re-create W.B.Yeats in a style which
> would harmonise with the literary style'.[2]

Projects of this kind are commonplace enough: what distinguishes Yeats
is the thoroughness and imaginative power with which it is carried
through. A.striking contrast with Muir is that he seems never to have
encountered any periods that were 'barren' or 'fallow' to the same extent.
The vividness and fertility of the symbols at his command enabled them
to cope with every kind of material. Thus the <u>Autobiographies</u> are the
portrait of a man whose imaginative life is remarkably independent of
how things go in the world. Mention of this work suggests another contrast
with Muir. In writing of his life Muir seems to have conceived of himself
as disengaging from the struggle in order to tell the truth about it from
an external, objective standpoint. For Yeats, Autobiography is itself an
essential element in the fable. It is the crucial episode in the process
of recreating himself 'in a style which would harmonise with the literary
style,' for it integrates and crystallizes the whole enterprise. A recent
commentator has caught this aspect of the work in the title of his study,
<u>Yeats's Autobiography: Life as Symbolic Pattern</u>.[3] The most striking
feature of the pattern is that nothing in the life is eccentric to it;
it is co-extensive withhis experience. The very task of making it explicit
is itself a contribution. Thus, if one judges in terms of comprehensiveness

1. op.cit. p.16.
2. Quoted in Joseph Ronsley, <u>Yeats's Autobiography:Life as Symbolic
Pattern</u>, Harvard University Press, 1968, p.2.
3. Ronsley, <u>op.cit.</u>

and flexibility Yeats's myth-making must be deemed an almost unqualified success. But, as was remarked above, success in this enterprise has its dangers and to note them reveals something important about its nature. The business of pattern-weaving may proceed too smoothly so that one loses sight of the disorder and contingency of the world. Aesthetic understanding then becomes a kind of distorting lens that transforms everything into a symbol before it is seen as a datum. Ultimately, one's apprehension of experience may become abstract and mechanical in the way that Yeats saw and detested among his contemporaries in the nationalist movement. Many readers have felt that something rather similar happened to him also; that both in art and life too much was sacrificed to the exigencies of the formal pattern. Thus far the parallels with Stevens are fairly close. The difference in Yeats's case, that which makes it so significant for any study of the forms of aesthetic understanding, must now be noted. It is that in old age he came to realise the force of these objections for himself and to make the case against the undertaking that had dominated his intellectual life as convincingly as any of his critics. In his first published book of poems he had proclaimed that 'Words alone are certain good'. In the end he came to think that this belief and the ideas underlying it are false and inadequate. It is perhaps the presence of this insight in the 'Last Poems' that largely accounts for the standard tributes to the exemplary nature of his development. 'The Circus Animals Desertion'[1] reviews the whole story and in doing so, provides a classic commentary on aesthetic understanding. It begins, significantly, with a confession of imaginative failure:

'I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
I sought it daily for six weeks or so'.

Instead he goes on to 'enumerate old themes' and in the process conveys his dissatisfaction at the facile way in which experience has been transformed into myth:

'I thought my dear must her own soul destroy,
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,
And this brought forth a dream and soon enough
This dream itself had all my thought and love.'

The crucial failure, to which the aesthetic understanding of life is ~~always available in the exhibited~~

1. Last Poems, 1936-1939.

always liable, is then admitted:

'Players and painted stage took all my love,
And not those things that they were emblems of'.

Finally a kind of resolution is achieved. He announces the end of myth-
making and the acceptance of a view reminiscent of Lear on his plight
as a 'poor, bare, forked animal'.

'Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.'

The pattern of Yeats's development is that of a transition from a brill-
iantly successful use of the technique of aesthetic understanding to the
explicit abandonment of the whole enterprise. As a model it has many
features of great interest. His involvement with aesthetic understanding
illustrates all its main elements while the eventual break with it provides
an additional insight by showing the kind of difficulty it characteristi-
cally encounters.

A final comment on the aesthetic version of moral understan-
ding concerns its special position within the general category. To take
this viewpoint is to see one's activities in a way normally reserved for
objects of art. It is the creation and appreciation of works of art which
provide the clearest examples of activities internally related to the
concepts in terms of which they must be characterised and justified. One
would be inclined to say of someone whose reasons for being concerned
with art involved purely external concepts that he had misunderstood the
nature of the enterprise. His interest lies in some element to which the
aesthetic experience is only contingently related, and to approach it
in this spirit is surely to fail to see what it really has to offer. Thus,
one who knows what it is like to be genuinely concerned with art possesses

a valuable clue to moral understanding. The attitude to art provides a
kind of paradigm of the moral point of view. Aesthetic understanding is
the most obvious xxix and straightforward way in which the lessons of
the paradigm can be applied to the raw material of morality, that is,
human actions. This explains why it supplies the best illustration of
the moral attitude. The point involved here is important for it raises
the general question of the relationship between art and morality. It
may be expressed in another way by reformulating the distinction between
non-moral and moral understanding. On one side are those who think that
the meaning our actions have is something there to be discovered, provided
that we can first establish the existence of God, or the nature of the
evolutionary process, or the laws of history. On the other there are
those who believe that the meaning has to be created by man, that the
only significance our actions can have is the significance we care to
give them. A.J.Ayer states this view explicitly in the course of expound-
ing his humanist version of moral understanding. After the passage quoted
in Chapter 2 in which he describes and rejects a form of non-moral under-
standing, he goes on:

> 'It does not follow, however, that our lives must be empty or
> futile, but only that we have to assume responsibility for them.
> Life has the meaning that we succeed in giving it'.[1]

Conservative religious thinkers make claims like Ayer's the basis for
criticism of their radical colleagues. Thus A.D.Adcock writes:

> '...one very important theme of Old Testament religion was the
> Covenant between man and his creator. If we omit the covenant, as
> we must do if we deny the transcendent God, then we have to say
> that all the "meaning there is in the universe is the meaning that
> we put into it, and that the only purposes are our purposes. It is
> certainly not easy to make sense of the religion of the Old Testament,
> if we take this line'.[2]

Yeats draws the distinction in a similar way in a passage in which he
recognises that some people are forever excluded from aesthetic understan-
ding. He has been discussing one of his central ideas, 'Unity of Being',
that state in which 'all the nature murmers in response if but a single

1. op.cit. p.227.
2. 'The Will of God', Hibbert Journal, Summer 1965, p.174.

note be touched' and he has done so in terms of his usual vocabulary of
Image, Mask and Anti-Self. He goes on to admit that there are people to
whom all this is irrelevant, for whom unity can only be a gift of God
or Nature, never a construction of the human mind:

> 'I now know that there men who cannot possess "Unity of Being", who
> must not seek it or express it - and who, so far from seeking an
> anti-self, a Mask that delineates a being in all things the opposite
> to their natural state, can but seek the suppression of the anti-self,
> till the natural state alone remains. These are those who must seek
> no image of desire, but await that which lies beyond their mind -
> unities not of the mind, but unities of Nature, unities of God - the
> man of science, the moralist, the humanitarian, the politician, Saint
> Simeon Stylites upon his pillar, Saint Anthony in his cavern; all
> whose preoccupation is to seem nothing...their imaginations grow more
> vivid in the expression of something which they have not created'.[1]

One could go back over the controversies discussed earlier and re-interpret
them in the light of these new ways of drawing the fundamental distinction.
For present purposes, however, the important thing is to note the close
link between moral understanding and the insight that the significance
of his actions must be supplied by man himself. This is an insight which
the artist is uniquely placed to grasp. Someone whose vocation is to
impose order and design on the formless materials of his art can hardly
doubt that meaning is something man invents and does not discover. Thus,
although moral understanding in general is only possibly in relatively
advanced societies which have escaped from the grosser forms of supersti-
tion and fanaticism, the germ of this way of apprehending experience may
be found among the creative artists of all periods. In this special sense
art is the clue to morality.

1. W.B.Yeats, Autobiographies, Macmillan, 1955, pp.247-248.

Chapter 4.

INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL. I.

The next task is to show the relevance of the distinction
between understanding and assessment to the lesser antitheses referred
to at the beginning. This chapter will be concerned with the contrast
between 'individual' and 'social' morality. Some large claims for its
significance may be found in the recent literature. Neil Cooper, for
instance introduces a discussion of the subject in this way:

> 'It is a surprising fact that moral philosophers have rarely examined
> the distinction between what I shall call 'positive' or 'social'
> morality on the one hand and 'autonomous' or 'individual' morality
> on the other. Accordingly, conceptual and moral issues of the greatest
> importance have been neglected'.[1]

A little further on he includes H.L.A.Hart's paper on 'Legal and Moral
Obligation' among the rare texts which provide 'a glimpse of one of the
main issues of moral philosophy and of morality'.[2] Turning to Hart's
paper one finds a similar sense of the weightiness of the issues, as
this passage shows:

> 'To characterise morality (as eg. R.M.Hare does in his illuminating
> book,'The Language of Morals') as primarily a matter of the application
> to conduct of those ultimate principles which the individual accepts
> or to which he commits himself for the conduct of his life seems to me
> an excessively Protestant approach. Important as this aspect or kind
> of moral judgement is, we need to understand it as a development from
> the primary phenomenon of the morality of a social group',[3]

Versions of this contrast have been employed by a number of recent writers,
but it may be well to take Hart and Cooper as our main guides. Their use
of it is particularly explicit and ambitions. Besides they illustrate in

1. 'Two Concepts of Morality', Philosophy, VolXLI, 1966. pp.19-33.
2. loc.cit.
3. 'Legal and Moral Obligation', Essays in Moral Philosophy, ed.
   A.I.Meldon, p.100.

varied but equally striking ways the dangers of operating in this area without the help of that fundamental distinction which is our main concern.

Perhaps the best source for Hart's views is the chapter on 'Justice and Morality' in The Concept of Law. The starting point for his discussion is a recognition that, for the sake of his main thesis, it is necessary 'to characterise in general terms those principles, rules and standards relating to the conduct of individuals which belong to morality ~~ixxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and make conduct morally obligatory'.[1] He goes on to draw attention once more to 'the social phenomenon often referred to as "the morality" of a given society or the "accepted" or "conventional" morality of an actual social group'.[2] These phrases, it is explained, refer to 'standards of conduct which are widely shared in a particular society and are to be contrasted with the moral principles or moral ideals which may govern an individuals life, but which he does not share with any considerable number of those with whom he lives'.[3] We are then given descriptions of 'four cardinal related features which collectively serve to distinguish morality not only from legal rules but from other forms of social rule'.[4] Many of the difficulties one encounters in Hart's discussion may be traced to a crucial uncertainty about his intentions. It is never clear whether he wishes the four features to relate to the concept of social morality alone or to morality in general and all its varied forms. This uncertainty is already detectable in the passages quoted above and persists throughout the discussion. In support of the narrower interpretation one might cite such apparently conclusive evidence as the reference to the four features as ones to which 'might be taken as defining characteristics of social morality'.[5] Yet at times he seems to regard himself as offering a perfectly general characterisation of morality, as pointing to features which any genuinely moral rule or standard must possess. Thus he remarks that the four features are 'constantly found together in those principles, rules and standard of conduct which

1. op.cit. p.163.   2. ibid. p.165.   3. loc.cit.
4. ibid. p.169.   5. ibid. p.222.

are most commonly accounted "moral".' He continues:

'These four features reflect different aspects of a characteristic and important function which such standards perform in social life or in the life of individuals'.[1]

Besides, he refers to the first feature as 'an essential element of <u>any</u> moral rule or standard' and one which 'cannot be omitted in any faithful account of the morality of any social group or individual'.[2] Some degree of vagueness on this issue is excusable and, up to a point, may be ~~intentimable~~ intentional. Hart's primary concern is with the concept of law and with morality only in so far as the two are connected. On the whole he seems content to aim at a bland, generalised account which any reasonable person could accept. That he fails is, perhaps, not in itself either interesting or surprising. The precise manner of the failure is however significant in the context of our general argument. We must therefore go on to examine his discussion of the subject in some detail.

The first feature 'Importance' is introduced as follows:

'To say that an essential feature of any moral rule or standard is that it is regarded as something of great importance to maintain may appear both truistic and vague. Yet this feature cannot be omitted in any faithful account of the morality of any social group or individual, nor can it be made more precise'.[3]

The way this feature is treated fits in well with the suggestion that Hart wishes to characterise morality in a completely general way. To say that any moral rule or standard must possess 'importance' is indeed to say something that appears truistic and vague. As the quotation shows, Hart is pessimistic about the prospects of refining it further and makes no serious attempt to do so. This puts severe limits on the value of a close study of his discussion. Nevertheless some general features of it are worth noting. Thus, an attempt to apply his own individual-social distinction here yields interesting results. Most notably, the suspicion arises that 'importance' must pertain to each half in a different way. There is, for instance, a temptation to say that the rules of individual

1. <u>ibid.</u> p.164.   2. <u>ibid.</u> p.169.   3. <u>ibid.</u> p.169.

morality are important in the sense of being 'overriding', that what
makes them elements in someone's moral code is precisely the fact that
he accepts them as supreme guides for the conduct of life. A corresponding
claim in the case of social morality is rather implausible. Hart and
Cooper seem, reasonably enough, to regard the 'conventional morality' as
just one of the social institutions whose function is to influence behav-
iour. In this respect it does not differ fundamentally from law, religion,
ettiquette or custom. Hence, it would be difficult for them not to admit
that in a particular community legal or religious rules might be regarded
as more important guides to action than those of the conventional moral
code. Of course, the moral rules must have 'importance' in the sense of
occupying a respectable position on its scale of priorities. But it would
be wilful to insist that they must always be supreme or that whatever
rules are, as a matter of fact, most important constitute the group's
morality. The conclusion that seems to emerge is that 'importance' is
not really a feature of much significance in the context of social morality.
When it comes to individual morality, however, the claims made for it can
be given a precise meaning and must be taken seriously. It may be that
the unacknowledged influence of the individual concept is responsible
for the emphasis laid on 'importance' by Hart. Such a suggestion fits in
well with other aspects of his discussion as we shall see.

        The second feature is called 'Immunity from deliberate change'.
Hart explains it in this way:

    '..it is inconsistent with the part played by morality in the lives
    of individuals that moral rules, principles or standards should be
    regarded, as laws are, as things capable of creation or change by
    deliberate act'.[1]

Taken at face value this claim is rather dubious. Surely it is not at all
inconsistent with the part played by morality in the lives of individuals
that moral rules should be regarded as liable to deliberate change. On
the contrary I am perfectly free to change any elements of my individual
moral code at any time. This ability is an important part of what is

1. ibid. p.171.

involved in speaking of 'my moral principles' and of myself as a moral
agent. Furthermore, unless one wishes to hypostatise 'society', and to
do so would be foreign to the spirit of Hart's approach, it is hard to
see why any sharp distinction should be drawn in this respect between the
individual and the social. Hence, if individual morality is not immune
from deliberate change then social morality will in principle not be
immune either. A rule or standard which is generally accepted in a social
group may come to be generally rejected as the result of many acts of
private legislation.

In reaching the conclusions he does Hart is influenced by
an apparent contrast between morality and law. Thus he writes:

> 'It is perfectly good sense to say such things as "As from 1 January
> 1960 it will be no longer illegal to do so-and-so" and to support
> such statements by reference to laws which have been enacted or repea-
> led. By contrast such statements as "As from tomorrow it will no
> longer be immoral to do so-and-so" or " On 1 January last it became
> immoral to do so-and-so" and attempts to support these by reference
> to deliberate enactment would be astonishing paradoxes, if not sense-
> less'.[1]

Let us look at these claims in the light of Hart's notion of social morality
the' "accepted" or "conventional" morality of an actual social group.' It
is not at all difficult to conceive of a situation in which it would make
perfectly good sense to say: 'On 1 January last it became immoral to do
so-and-so' if immorality is to be assessed in terms of whatever standards
are, as a matter of fact, accepted by a particular social group. It is,
perhaps, part of the conventional moral code in the United States that
the possession of firearms by private citizens is a praiseworthy exercise
of their rights. This attitude might change suddenly if it was seen to
have contributed to some national disaster, say the simultaneous assassin-
ation of the President and all the members of Congress. The historian of
American _mores_ might well wish to claim that on that day the conventional
moral code ceased to condone the indescriminate sale and possession of
guns. The position is less clear in the case of Hart's other example:

1. _ibid._ p.171.

'As from tomorrow it will no longer be immoral to do so-and-so'. The
oddness of this locution springs, however, not from the fact that it is
senseless but from the difficulty of imagining a situation in which
anyone could have a reason for uttering it. Nevertheless, this is not
a conceptual difficulty and with a little ingenuity one could no doubt
fill in a suitable background. If the murder of all the leading American
politicians had been planned by one organisation, its leader might well
have been in a position to predict that 'as from tomorrow the conventional
code will regard private ownership of guns as immoral'. On one of the
interpretations of 'immoral' which Hart accepts this is, of course,
equivalent to, 'as from tomorrow it will be immoral to keep a gun'. The
contrast between social morality and law lies not in any immunity from
deliberate changes but in the fact that inxxthx with the former there are
no established and recognised procedures for making them. No doubt a
sociological explanation of this difference could be given and it may
well have great significance in some contexts. But from the standpoint
of the present discussion the existence or non-existence of machinery
for implementing change does not constitute an important conceptual dist-
inction between a society's morality and its law. Hence, Hart's reliance
on the contrast between them has no tendency to prove his case. Nothing
else in his discussion seems capable of providing any grounds for holding
that either individual or social morality are immune from deliberate
change.

        At this point it might be objected that by interpreting
Hart in too literal and unsympathetic a way we have failed to do him
justice. For, it might be said, it is not at all dificult to see what
really underlies his concern with immunity. It is not that the actual
content of an individual or social morality should be regarded as immune
from deliberate change but that its status and truth-value must be seen
in this way. The correctness of a moral principle is independent of
whether or not a particular individual or social group accepts or rejects
it. To say this is surely to pick out a genuine feature of our concept

of morality. The difficulty, however, is that such a defence of Hart takes one outside the individual-social dimension with which he is officially concerned. It goes beyond the merely positive, the moral beliefs that people actually have, and points towards a conception of morality as the source of standards in terms of which such things may be judged. Thus, in place of a neutral attempt at delineating the field assumptions are being made about the status of at least some moral principles. There are other elements in Hart's work which might seem to encourage such a development. Here and there one finds the presence of another conception of morality which he in inclined to contrast to the individual and the social. This is morality in the sense of 'the true morality' which consists of whatever objective and universally valid principles there may be. Thus, he refers with approval to John Austin's distinction between 'positive morality' that is 'the actual morality observed within a society' and 'the law of God' which 'constitute for him the ultimate standards by which both positive morality and positive law are to be tested'.[1] Hart comments: 'This marks the very important distinction between a social morality and those moral principles which transcend it and are used in criticism of it'.[2] Elsewhere in the book we are offered 'crude formulations' of two extremes in moral philosophy. One tendency is to regard moral rules as 'immutable principles which constitute part of the fabric of the universe'. The other is to see them as 'expressions of changing human attitudes, choices, demands or feelings.'[3] The connection between talk of 'immunity from deliberate change' and the notion of morality as consisting in those 'immutable principles which constitute part of the fabric of the Universe' is too obvious to need comment. It is in this context that Hart's second feature has its natural home. Indeed it is tempting to suggest that the entire discussion of it is conditioned by his awareness of those transcendent and objective principles which are, in the truest sense, the principles of morality. This suggestion at least serves to explain why he never gets his official subject-matter properly into focus. Besides the general line of thought is reinforced by a consideration of what he says about the third feature, 'Voluntary character of moral offences'.

1. ibid. p.252.   2. loc.cit.   3. ibid. p.164.

The notion is introduced in this way:

> 'If a person whose action, judged ab extra, has offended against
> moral rules or principles, succeeds in establishing that he did
> this unintentionally and in spite of every precaution that it was
> possible for him to take, he is excused from moral responsibility,
> and to blame him in these circumstances would itself be considered
> morally objectionable. Moral blame is therefore excluded because
> he has done all that he could do'.[1]

What Hart is describing here is surely not an essential characteristic
of social morality. At this level the assertion that 'I could not help
it' will always excuse is simply untrue. A society with an institution
of vendetta may not allow any plea of this kind to mitigate failure to
carry on the family tradition. In our own society relics of a similar
attitude still linger in some areas of sexual morality. But empirical
evidence is perhaps not essential here. The fact that a conventional code
containing elements of 'strict liability' analogous to those in some
legal systems is perfectly conceivable seems to tell decisively against
the claim that 'voluntary character' is an essential feature of social
morality. It might be possible to get round this by frankly stipulating
a definition for x 'social morality' but this could only be a rather
implausible ad hoc device and would be quite alien to Hart's mode of
argument.

A question now arises as to whether 'voluntary character'
is a necessary feature of individual morality. The obvious answer is that
this can only be the case if one insists that there must be no overlapping
of content between the individual and the social. But it would surely
be implausible to restrict a person's individual morality to those areas
where he differs from the conventional code. How could such a fortuitous
collection of beliefs have any conceptual significance? Besides the moral
assumptions current in one's society are not things to be taken or left
in any facile way. They provide the individual with a starting place and
framework for his moral thinking. It might well be thought exceptional

1. ibid. p.173.

if he succeeds in escaping from their influence to any significant extent. Hence, it is hard to see why individual morality should have the importance that many wish to attach to it if it is merely co-extensive with the individuals success in shedding the conventional wisdom. On the contrary it may be argued that the distinctive feature of individual morality consists in, for example, a special kind of committment on the part of the moral agent, and the extent to which this is shared by others is irrelevant. Whatever the merits of this particular suggestion it seems clear that a distinction between the individual and the social in terms of content will not do. If this is so one cannot exclude the possibility that a person's autonomous morality may agree with that of his social group in refusing to acknowledge 'voluntary character' in the case of some offences. There is surely nothing paradoxical or incompatible with ordinary moral experience in this conclusion. The tragedy of Oedipus lies in the fact that not only does the conventional morality condemn him for what he could not help but he also accepts this judgement himself. Our response to the drama only makes sense on the assumption that we find nothing absurd in such a view of his situation.

As before, it seems that there is a contrast to be drawn between individual and social morality on the one hand and 'true morality' of the other. The believer in eternal and universal standards will be convinced that at this level, at least, justice is done and no one condemned for what he cannot help. In the light of these standards he might wish to characterise as undesirable or evil those elements in individual and social morality which militate against 'voluntary character'. But it would surely be unreasonable to exclude them by <u>fiat</u> from the realm of morality altogether. 'Voluntary character' although no doubt an integral and constitutive element of the 'laws of God' is something that positive morality only achieves by accident or inspiration. It is difficult to account for Hart's sponsorship of it except in terms of an unnoticed tendency to oscillate between the two kinds of conception.

The last feature 'the form of moral pressure' is explained in this way:

> 'A further distinguishing feature of morality is the characteristic form of moral pressure which is exerted in its support... moral pressure is characteristically, though not exclusively, not by threats or by appeals to fear or interest, but by reminders of the moral character of the action contemplated and of the demands of morality... emphatic reminders of what the rules demand, appeals to conscience, and reliance on the operation of guilt and remorse, are the characteristic and most prominent forms of pressure used for the support of social morality'.[1]

The last sentence suggests that Hart wishes to confine the scope of this feature to social morality. It is obviously a wise limitation, for my fellow-citizens may well be ignorant of, or indifferent to, the tenets of 'true' morality and my efforts to live in accordance with my own. But difficulties remain even on the most modest interpretation of Hart's claim. In the first place it is not merely breaches of moral rules that tend to be met with social pressure. Some rules of etiquette may be backed in this way, and 'boycotting' may be done for purely prudential reasons. How is one to characterise the particular form of pressure that is distinctive of morality? The difficulty is to achieve this without circularity, to avoid formulas that reduce in the end to the assertion that it is a 'characteristically moral' form of pressure. Unfortunately, as the passage quoted suggests, it is a difficulty which Hart can hardly be said to have overcome. But even when it is granted that social pressure cannot in itself be a sufficient condition of the moral status of a rule one might go on to inquire whether it should even be regarded as necessary. It is surely not impossible to imagine a social group whose members were tolerant or diffident enough not to offer any reproaches against offenders, at least in respect of some rules of the code. Would it always be feasible to take a strong line here and deny that such 'rules' could be regarded as components of the social morality? It is open to doubt whether the conceptual link between rules and sanctions is as close as this would imply, and a high price might have to be paid for insisting on it.

1. _ibid_. pp.175-176.

There is another aspect of Hart's account which may cause misgivings. He tends to write as though the typical situation is one in which breaches of social morality are readily identifiable and meet with unanimous disapproval. But the notions of a clearly defined and universally accepted moral code has little relevance for modern pluralistic societies. On most issues it will be found that there are individuals and groups holding widely divergent views. Seldom or never is it possible to regard the community as speaking with one voice, giving the verdict of _the_ social morality. One must, it seems, acknowledge the existence of a multiaplicity of moral codes which may or may not need to be understood as operating within some loose consensus. What are their criteria of identity and how are they to be related to the general distinction between the individual and the social? Hart, of course, makes no attempt to deal with these questions and it might be said that they fall outside the scope of his inquiry. Besides, it may be added, there is obviously some substance in the suggestion of a conceptual link between social morality and neighbourly pressure. To decide precisely what it amounts to would require a moQe detailed discussion than one has a right to expect in The 6oncept of Law. Nevertheless, Hart has made a useful contribution in showing the need for such a study and in providing it with a starting point.

A similar comment is appropriate in the case of the first feature 'importance'. It may well turn out to have more significance in the context of individual than of social morality. But clearly the idea deserves to be taken seriously. On the other hand, the case made for 'voluntary character' and for 'immunity from deliberate change' is not at all plausible in respect either of the individual or of the social concepts. Much of what is said about these features is intelligible only on the assumption that underlying it is the notion of a morality that transcends the merely positive, the moral beliefs and attitudes that belong to individuals and groups as a matter of empirical fact. Many of

the deficiencies in Hart's case may be traced to confusion in this area. Ironically, the other main source of weakness is the failure to take seriously that distinction between individual and social which he explicitly recognises and indeed insists on elsewhere. The true significance of this failure becomes apparent when it is looked at in the light of our main thesis and, in its turn, it helps towards a better understanding of the thesis by revealing its detailed implications for a specific area. Before discussing these matters, however, it would be useful to widen the scope of the inquiry by turning to consider a rather different account of the individual-social contrast.

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In his paper 'Two Concepts of Morality', Neil Cooper develops a particular view of the distinction through an elaborate process of argument. The main outlines of it may be set out as follows:

(1) He begins with a number of distinctions which form the basis of the later discussion. These include Hart's contrast between the 'external' and the 'internal' points of view.[1] More important is a version of the individual-social contrast and a distinction between 'supervenient' or 'critical' autonomous judgements and 'non-supervenient' or 'immediate' ones.

(2) He then argues that it is more x 'rational' to make autonomous moral judgements critically than to make them immediately.

(3) He goes on to ask 'whether it is rational in coming to decisions to prefer the social concept of morality to the autonomous concept, where the autonomous concept is represented by critical autonomous moral judgements'.[2] He decides that no clear-cut 'yes' or 'no' answer can be given to this question. Each is a genuine concept and both are necessary: neither can be dispensed with in any rational process of decision making.

1. The Concept of Law, pp.86-87.
2. ibid. p.25.

Cooper accepts a version of Hart's 'form of moral pressure' as the distinctive feature of social morality. He explains it in this way:

> 'Just as there are objective criteria for determining what the law of a particular country is, so there are objective criteria for determining what the morality of a social group is. We have to study customs of a certain kind, those customs deviation from which is met with a distinctive kind of socail pressure or sanction, "the reproaches of one's neighbours"'.[1]

The difficulties that arose from Hart's discussion of this feature are again relevant here. Thus, someone may incur the reproaches of his neighbours for a wide variety of reasons. Cooper does not say what is distinctive about the moral cases, nor does he deal with any of the other problems that were mentioned. His explanation of 'individual' or 'autonomous' morality has a similar weakness. He tells us that:

> 'We employ the autonomous concept whenever we stand back from the positive morality and try to make up our minds whether to accept or reject some part of it... An autonomous moral judgement is...a moral judgement made from an autonomous point of view, it is a judgement made off one's own bat, which may or may not coincide with the positive morality or moralities of the social group to which the speaker belongs'.[2]

This may be acceptable as an explanation of the force of 'autonomous' in the phrase 'autonomous moral judgement' but it offers little help with the rest. We have some idea of what a moral judgement is when the context is that of social morality. It is, roughly, a judgement which is ultimately backed by the threat of some kind of socail pressure. But what is involved in making autonomous moral judgements as distinct,say, from autonomous judgements of other kinds? How is a persons autonomous morality to be distinguished from the rest of his beliefs and attitudes? Cooper makes no attempt to answer such questions. The lack of precision on this crucial issue of what it is to have a morality in the autonomous sense is, as we shall see, a source of difficulty later on.

The problems that arise over the autonomous-social distinction

1. _ibid._ p.19   2. _ibid._ p.23.

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are of a different kind. Now we are embarrased by a profusion of criteria.
At least four are offered in this passage:

> 'Now autonomous moral judgements admit of two different uses, a
> supervenient use and a non-supervenient use. An autonomous moral
> judgement is said to be used 'superveniently' or 'critically' if
> the speaker can give reasons for making it, if the moral word in
> the judgement is applied to acts or people in virtue of their
> possessing certain characteristics of which the speaker is aware.
> An autonomous moral judgement is said to be used 'non-superveniently'
> if the speaker is not ready to give reasons for it, if he applies
> the moral word in the judgement to something 'immediately' without
> analysis of the objects characteristics. Someone who used an auton-
> omous moral judgement 'superveniently' or 'critically' may be said
> to be making an autonomous moral judgement 'from the critical point
> of view'. On the other hand someone who uses an autonomous moral
> judgement 'non-superveniently' or 'immediately' may be said to be
> making an autonomous moral judgement 'from the immediate point of
> view'. Which of these two points of view someone is speaking from
> depends on whether he is ready to give reasons or not'.[1]

Later a fifth criterion is introduced. Reliance on it is implicit through-
out the attempt to establish the conclusion of the second section.[2] The
nature of it comes out most clearly in passages such as the following:

> 'Someone who makes an"immediate"use of the word "wrong", the non-
> criterionist, invites the retort, "Why should we take any notice
> of what you are saying? You are merely expressing your personal
> likes and dislikes". The non-Criterionist has no answer to this
> retort and this is a shortcoming in his use of moral language'.[3]

It would seem from this that the distinguishing feature of non-supervenient
judgements is that they are mere expressions of emotion. Supervenient
ones amount, in some unspecified way, to something more than this. Perhaps
it may be useful at this stage if the other four criteria are listed with
the help of quotations.

(1) 'An autonomous moral judgement is said to be used "non-superveniently"
if the speaker is not ready to give reasons for it'. 'Which of these two
points of view someone is speaking from depends on whether he is ready
to give reasons or not'.

(2) 'An autonomous moral judgement is said to be used "superveniently" or
xr "critically" if the speaker can give reasons for making it..'

1. _ibid_. p.23.   2. _ibid_. pp.26-27.   3. _ibid_. p.27.

(3) It is said to be used 'superveniently' or 'critically' if 'the moral word in the judgement is applied to acts or people in virtue of their possessing certain characteristics of which the speaker is aware'.
(4)'An autonomous moral judgement is said to be used "non-superveniently"' if the speaker 'applies the moral word in the judgement to something "immediately" without analysis of the objects characteristics'.

Some comments on the differences between these ways of making the distinction may be useful here. The first suggestion is difficult to take seriously. A lack of readiness to give reasons may stem from many sources, including perverseness and taciturnity. It seems unlikely that Cooper can really wish to make the distinction depend on foibles of this kind. There is a similar objection to the second suggestion: that all depends on whether a person is able to give reasons or not. A person may be inarticulate or bad at explaining and yet it will sometimes seem appropriate to say 'he has his reasons ~~though~~ though he cannot communicate them'. To make the distinction depend on such factors would turn it into something of merely psychological interest. At this point the third suggestion begins to seem attractive for at least it offers a criterion with some conceptual significance. There are, however, two points which should be made about it. The first is that to assess the criterion one should observe the uses to which it is put in practice and the way it links up with other elements in the general argument. Unfortunately, Cooper fails to provide the necessary evidence, for after introducing it, he neglects the suggestion entirely. Secondly, one should note that it is a rather different criterion from that offered in (4). According to (3) a man makes a non-supervenient judgement unless he judges as he does in virtue of some feature of the situation of which he is aware. According to (4), to judge non-superveniently is to judge 'immediately, without analysis of the objects characteristics'. But it is surely possible, even after a prolonged and partially successful analysis, that the final decision will not be made in virtue of some feature of which the agent is aware. He may be convinced that a particular

course of action is the right one and yet not know what the crucial factor in the situation is. In such a case we may, perhaps, say that the complexity of the situation has defeated the man's powers of analysis, but it would often be misleading to say that he had decided without any analysis at all. This example will also serve to reveal the differences between (3) and (5). For the man's judgement may be quite unlike a mere expression of emotion. Thus, he may be prepared to universalise it. He may insist that the feature, whatever it is, which constitutes the reason for his moral judgement, will also be a reason for any similar person in similar circumstances. Finally, it is worth noting that Cooper's fourth and fifth suggestions differ substantially and may lead to conflicting results in practice. It is by no means safe to assume that a judgement is made immediately and without analysis can be identified with expressions of emotion. Some people have, for instance, claimed to be able to intuit the existence of simple non-natural properties. They would presumably agree that their judgements are made 'immediately' and 'without analysis'. Yet they would indignantly deny that they merely serve to express personal likes and dislikes.

Although the precise nature of Cooper's distinction is unclear it is not difficult to form a general idea of what he is driving at, and this should be enough to justify taking the discussion a stage further. What underlies his approach to the problem is the notion of a contrast like this. On the one hand there is the person who, after refl-ection, makes a moral judgement in virtue of certain clear-cut features of the situation, and is then able and willing to justify it with reasons formulated in terms of them. On the other there is the case where judge-ment is made spontaneously, without reflection, and the judger is unable or unwilling to give reasons for it, or to offer any serious defence to the charge that he is merely expressing likes and dislikes. Surely, it may be said, we have here examples of critical and immediate judgements. The difficulty, however, is that we cannot be certain which features are defining and necessary and which are not. Some, such as the readiness to

give reasons, are fairly obviously inessential while others present a problem. Is it really necessary, for instance, to be aware of the feature in virtue of which one's judgement is made before it can be a critical judgement? We have been able to feel confidence in the model situation only by building into it every feature that could conceivably be taken as a criterion for the distinction. But while as a result we may be sure that one of the judgements is supervenient and the other is immediate we are still unable to say precisely what constitutes membership of either class. Hence the distinction cannot safely be used outside artificial paradigmatic situations. It might be thought that this is a serious weakness, but in practice it does not prove much of an obstacle to Cooper. For what he does is to ignore all criteria except the fifth when it comes to applying the distinction. That is, he identifies, in effect, non-supervenient judgements with expressions of emotion.

The argument which constitutes the second main division of Cooper's paper may be summarised as follows:

(a) 'To choose means which will promote one's ends or what one wants is rational; to choose means which will frustrate or fail to promote one's ends or what one wants is irrational'.[1]

(b) It is 'an invariant end of moral language to aim at agreement about what to do'.[2] When we pass an autonomous moral judgement in an interpersonal situation, when, say, we call someone's proposed action "wrong", it must be the case, if we are sincere, that we want him to avoid that action and take up towards it an attitude similar to our own'.[3]

(c) '..critical uses of autonomous moral language offer greater hope of obtaining agreement than immediate uses'.[4]

(d) Hence, 'it is rational to prefer the critical uses to the immediate uses of moral language'.[5]

1. ibid. p.25.   2. ibid. p.26.
3. loc.cit.   4. ibid. p.27.
5. loc.cit.

Stages (b) and (c) of this argument are highly dubious.
It is not easy to accept that a desire to gain the agreement of one's
hearer can be a test of sincerity in calling his proposed action 'wrong'.
It seems reasonable to allow that a man may be perfectly sincere in
judging something to be wrong while not caring in the least what others
think or do. Indeed, we may begin to suspect his sincerity precisely
when he shows himself toosensitive to such considerations. Claims and
counter-claims of this sort are, of course, notoriously difficult to
settle. A point which may however be made with some confidence is that
Cooper's view is far from being self-evidently correct: it needs to be
argued for. He comes nearest to supplying what is required in the following
passage:

> 'It is, I suggest, an invarient end of moral language to aim at
> agreement about what to do. True, we use moral language not only
> prospectively and prescriptively, but also in ways which are less
> imperatival, less obviously relevant to questions about what to do
> here and now, as when we consider what somebody ought to have done
> or whether somebody long since dead was a good man or not. But such
> uses of moral language derive their interest from their connection
> with moral talk which is more closely related to the question "What
> are we to do?" Whether a moral judgement about the past is actually
> relevant to any live question about what to do depends on how much
> the present resembles the past, but even a moral judgement about a
> temporally remote event is capable of being relevant to present
> action. The general purpose of using moral language is, then, to
> obtain agreement on what to do'.[1]

What is the force of 'then' in the last sentence? At best Cooper can
claim to have given an argument to show that prescriptive uses of moral
language have some special status; that, ultimately, its point is derived
from its relevance to the practical question 'what are we to do?' Even
if this argument were sound it would not establish the conclusion he
requires. It is one thing for language to be prescriptive and quite
another for it to have the function of securing inter-personal agreement.
As R.M.Hare makes clear, our usas of language may be fully prescriptive
when it is directed at influencing no one but ourselves.[2] It is true that

1. ibid. p.26.   2. See Freedom and Reason, ch.5.

if a man refused to regard his judgement about the wrongness of an action
as in any sense prescriptive, as having any implications even for his own
future conduct, we might legitimately begin to question his sincerity.
But to admit this is not to admit that any case has been made for Cooper's
second premise. The assumption made in (c) is even less plausible. In
support of it he writes:

> 'If in using the word "wrong" in an interpersonal situation we do
> no more than express an adverse reaction to the action, we neither
> have nor can hope to have any hold or leverage over our auditors.
> For the direct confrontation of one persons emotional reactions
> with another's does not of itself produce agreement, rather the
> reverse'.[1]

No doubt there is legitimate room for disagreement here though presumably
the issues involved would in the end have to be settled empirically. But
at least one can say that many shrewd observers have been unable to share
Cooper's faith in the effectiveness of reason as against rhetoric. It
would need more discussion than he provides to persuade one of its correct-
ness. One must conclude that the argument in this part of the paper is
not very compelling. But before going on one feels obliged to raise the
issue of why it was thought necessary to produce any formal argument at
all! If our interpretation of the immediate-critical distinction is
approximately right then the question with which Cooper is concerned
may be formulated as follows: is it more rational to make judgements
which are the products of reflection and which can be supported with
reasons than to make them unthinkingly and in a way that serves only
to express emotion? Surely the description of the first method tells us
what constitutes rational behaviour in this context: to judge in this
way is to judge rationally. Hence, the question does not present us with
genuine alternatives between which we are free to choose and to defend
our choice by argument. No argument is needed to establish Cooper's conc-
lusion: it must be accepted by anyone who understands the concepts involved.

In the last part of the paper Cooper, drawing on his earlier
conclusions, declares that he will ignore the immediate uses of autonomous

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1. _ibid_. p.27.

moral language. He goes on:

> 'The question, then, which we have to consider is "To which concept
> the positive or the autonomous, is it rational to give priority in
> coming to moral decisions?" or, to put it differently, "which kind
> of moral judgement, positive or autonomous (critical) is it rational
> to regard as overriding in coming to a moral decision?"'1

This question has a strange and rather artificial air about it. It would
surely be odd if a person with a moral difficulty were to ask himself,
'should I use my autonomous concept of morality or the social concept in
deciding about this?' For Cooper, social morality consists of customs of
a certain kind, those from which deviation is met by 'a distinctive kind
of social pressure'. The autonomous concept is, on his view, employed
whenever we stand back from the social morality and try to make up our
own minds: an autonomous moral judgement is one made 'off one's own bat'.
In the light of these suggestions Cooper's question might be rephrased
as follows: 'Should I decide to be guided by what I think I ought to do
or by what most people in my society think I ought to do?' Not only is
he committed to treating this as a genuine question but he also wishes
to hold that it would sometimes be rational to answer it in one way and
sometimes in another. But this liberality is surely misplaced. Even for
one who does not subscribe to the principle that people ought always to
do what they think they ought to do there can be no general problem about
deciding whether it should be preferred to what others think they ought
to do. That is, there can be no rational disagreement when the only
specified difference between the two prescriptions is their source; the
one issuing from the agents personal beliefs and the other from the conv-
entions of his society. Cooper's question is therefore an empty one in
that to understand it is to see that only one answer is possible.

Turning again to his original version of the question one
finds another way of displaying its oddness which has the merit of raising
general issues about his conception of the individual-social distinction.
The point involved might be expressed by saying that to raise the question
of whether to be guided by the autonomous or the sodial concepts is already

1. _ibid_. pp. 27-28.

to have decided in favour of autonomy. A serious concern with the question
must involve that degree of detachment from the positive code and the
attempt to make up one's mind whether to accept or reject some part of
it which Cooper regards as characteristic of employing the autonomous
concept. Whatever decision is reached in this situation will be expressed
by an autonomous judgement, made 'off one's own bat'. If it conflicts with
what had hitherto been regarded as one's autonomous code the proper way
to describe this is in terms of the extension or revision of the code,
not in terms of its abandonment for something else. Hence, if one is
faced with a moral problem, it can only be a confusion to think of autono-
mous morality and social morality as rivals for the job of solving it.
The alternatives cannot present themselves to the moral agent in this
guise. For in so far as he is seriously concerned with what he ought to
do he is necessarily committed to the enterprise of autonomous moral
reflection.

        At this point it may help to advance the discussion if
Cooper's own treatment of the question is looked at in more detail. For
it might be thought that he succeeds in giving it substance through his
use of a contrast between two 'conceptual schemes'; 'the traditionalist
conceptual scheme which emphasises the positive or social concept, custom
and tradition, and recommends that we should derive our moral decisions
from positive morality, and anti-traditionalism which emphasises the
autonomous concept, private judgement and reflection'.[1] He argues that
'both positions, if maintained in their extreme forms, have consequences
which we ought to condemn as "irrational" and that therefore a rational
morality should contain elements of each.[2] The argument runs as follows:

    '...the extreme anti-traditionalist will argue that if someone thinks
    that there is an evil in a moral rule or an institution, then he eo
    ipso wants to get rid of it, and that therefore it is always rational
    for him to try to get rid of it more quickly rather than less quickly...
    This view is superficially attractive but false. For there are situat-
    ions in which the very attempt to get what one wants more quickly will
    produce consequences more unwelcome than the original evils... But

1. ibid. p.31.   2. loc.cit.

because it is not always rational to try to get rid of an evil more
quickly, it does not follow that we should accept the extreme trad-
itionalist viewpoint that it is never rational to try to get rid of
an evil more quickly... To believe that we should always get rid of
evils more quickly is irrational because it sometimes leads to the
frustration of one's ends, namely in those situations where "the
cure is worse than the disease". To believe that we should never
take deliberate stept to get rid of evils will also sometimes lead
to irrational behaviour, namely in all those situations in which it
is possible to get rid of evils by speedy but relatively harmless
means. Since both positions are irrational in that they commit the
holder to irrational behaviour, the rational procedure is to steer
a middle course'.[1]

There seems to be some confusion in this passage. Cooper
reaches his conclusion by conflating two separate distinctions; that
between the traditional and the autonomous moralist on the one hand and
that between what we may call the 'ideological conservative'and the
'ideological radical' on the other. The ideological conservative belongs
to that familiar school of thought which likes to contrast the individuals
stock of reason unfavourably with the 'funded wisdom of the ages'. Hence,
it emphasises the value of a tradition of gradual development and the
dangers of sudden change. Perhaps it may serve as an illuminating piece
of shorthand if we label him 'the follower of Burke'. The ideological
radical, on the other hand, tends to be sceptical or contemptuous of
the claims of tradtion as presented by the conservative. He is sympathetic
towards the method of drastic innovation in dealing with problems and his
intellectual ancestry goes back to Bentham or Marx rather than to Burke.
The crucial point to note is that these distinctions cut across each other.
A man may be both an ideological radical and a traditional moralist, if,
for instance, he belongs to a society whose tradition is sympathetic to
change. More significantly, he may be an autonomous moralist and an ideo-
logical conservative in that he may include among the elements of his
autonomous morality a hostility to change and a readiness to be guided
by the well established conventional standards of his society. Cooper's

1. ibid. pp.31-32.

argument may have shown that it is irrational to be either an extreme radical or an extreme conservative, to believe that evils must always be got rid of as quickly as possible or to believe that one should never do anything about them. But this establishes nothing about the rationality of autonomous or of social morality.

To note the possibility of being both an ideological conservative and an autonomous moralist serves not merely to draw attention to a weakness in Cooper's argument but also to raise issues of general significance. It is conceivable that such a person, if he were a thoroughgoing Burkean, might believe that he would generally do best in moral matters by trusting to 'the funded wisdom of the ages', as it reached him in the shape of the traditional standards of his own society. That is, he might take it xxx as a basic principle of his autonomous morality that he should regulate his conduct in accordance with the social code. The suggestion made earlier that we need a quite different conception of the autonomous-social distinction from Cooper's has now been strengthened. For we are able to reinterpret what his 'establishment moralists' xx were trying to achieve. He represents them as advocating that in deciding what to do one should employ the social in preference to the autonomous concept. There is a gain in clarity if we see them not as wishing to establish a hierarchy among the concepts but as advocating that their practical implications should be harmoniously aligned, that the individual should make the content of his autonomous morality identical with that of the social code. The ideal of the moral life which dominates these men is, that in Oakeshott's phrase, the 'unself-conscious following of a traditional mode of behaviour'. But they recognise that once this habit has been broken and the demon of self-consciousness had made its entrance, the next best thing is a deliberate decision in favour of traditional standards. Cooper misrepresents them in holding the essence of their case to be the claim that the social concept is 'the only real or genuine one'. Basically their position is itself a moral one and not primarily the result of conceptual analysis at all. What underlies it is the conviction

that any attempt to ignore or transcend traditional values must prove disastrous in practice. The warnings given by Burke and Bradley to which Cooper refers[1] fit in perfectly with this interpretation and indeed it is difficult to see how they can be accounted for at all on his view of their case. At this point the doubts about the propriety of Cooper's question have been confirmed. The view that the autonomous and social concepts are rivals between which the individual moral agent may have to adjudicate is the result of confusion. Furthermore there are no good grounds for attributing this error to those illustrious members of the traditional camp who have insisted most strongly on the general significance of a distinction between individual and social.

Cooper's thesis is built around the assumption of a close and sustained parallelism between the autonomous and social concepts of morality. Its failure stems ultimately from the insistence on a symmetry where it is inappropriate, at the point where one has to describe the situation of the individual moral agent trying to decide how to act. This suggests that there may be a kind of category mistake here. The suspicion arises that the autonomous and social concepts cannot be rivals because they are not entered in the same competition. Hence an adequate account of them would have to respect the radical nature of the differences. A similar conclusion emerges from our discussion of Hart. Having noted the individual-social distinction he proceeds to offer a generalised account of morality which will avoid the need to take it seriously. Such a procedure might work where the distinction being ignored is not of any real significance in the context of the enterprise as a whole. The manner of Hart's failure suggests that this condition does not hold in the present case and, indeed, that no attempt made in the same spirit can hope to succeed. Once again one is led to suggest that what is needed is an adequate recognition of the fundamental character of the gap between individual and social. Until an attempt has been made to say what gives

1. _ibid._ p.28.

the contrast its special character, this can, however, be at best only an isolated insight. Hence our general thesis must now be invoked in order to provide it with a context and a rationale. In doing so it will also help us to see the real significance of the lessons to be learned from Hart and Cooper.

Chapter 5.

INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL. 2.

The discussion in the previous chapter concerned itself with the details of Hart and Cooper's case while accepting in a general way the conceptual framework it presupposes. If further progress is to be made it is important that this limitation should be overcome. Some fresh perspectives are suggested by an issue which has received a certain amount of attention recently. It is the question of whether every human community should be credited with a morality. G.J.Warnock is prepared to give a negative answer:

> 'Surely there have been individuals and even whole societies, of whom or of which we should want to say that moral principles did not play any large part in their lives – that, perhaps, both their ideals of conduct and their actual conduct were shaped in accordance with standards that were not moral standards at all. Homer, in approving the ferocity, guile and panache of the warrior chieftain might be said to have been employing moral standards different from our own; but he might just as well, or better, be said not to have been employing moral standards at all'[1]

John Ladd in his study of the Navaho Indians takes a different line.[2]

Finding their conventional code of behaviour to be of a purely prudential-ist character, and taking for granted that it is a moral code, he is prepared to draw general conclusions about the nature of morality. This procedure has been trenchantly criticised by W.K.Frankena. Ladd, he writes, 'can only do this if he first assumes that every culture, including the Navaho, has a morality in our sense of the term and this is precisely the question at issue.' He goes on to amplify the point:

1. Contemporary Moral Philosophy, Macmillan, 1967, p.54.
2. The Structure of a Moral Code, Harvard University Press, 1957, See esp. pp. 76-77,80,313ff.

'One cannot say that the Navaho have a morality until after one has
formed some conception of morality and found that the Navaho have
such an institution. The fact that they have some kind of a code
which partakes of certain formal properties proves that they have
a morality only if these properties suffice to define morality. But
this is our question. No doubt one wants some term for all such codes
but it may be that to call them all "moralities" is an undesirable
departure from our traditional conception of such an institution. The
fact that a certain code lacks a certain feature does not prove that
this feature is and should be no part of our conception of morality;
it may in fact be a reason for not calling that code a morality at all'.[1]

Frankena is surely wise to call attention to the dangers of question-
begging for they are endemic in this area. Let us try to see whether the
distinction between understanding and assessment can do something to
reduce them by making clear what the issues at stake really are.

The immediate effect of invoking it is to split the original
question into two parts. Do all human communities operate codes of moral
assessment? Do all of them contain members who possess moral understanding?
This way of distinguishing the issues may seem natural and obvious but
there is a feature of it which is worth noting. In the first case one
is asking whether something may be attributed to a social group qua group
and, in the second, whether it may be attributed to individuals. If these
formulations are accepted the suggestion arises that the individual-
social and assessment-understanding distinctions do not cut across each
other in a completely symmetrical way. Clearly an individual morality
maycontain elements both of understanding and of assessment. Indeed, an
important part of our case is that it must do so before it can be said
to encapsulate the full concept of morality. It is equally obvious that
a code of moral assessment may be attributed to a social group. As we
shall see the only serious question about such an attribution is whether
it should be regarded as necessary on conceptual grounds. The pattern
seems to be disrupted, however, when one comes to the link between
understanding and social morality. It would surely be odd to ask whether

1. 'Recent Conceptions of Morality', Morality and the Language of Conduct,
   ed by Hector-Neri Castaneda and George Naknikian, Wayne State
   University Press, 1963, p.17.

a particular community has moral understanding. One might protest that such understanding is essentially a matter of how indiฝiduals conceptualise their experience and, unlike codes of moral assessment, not something that a group may be said to possess or not to possess. It might be tempting to conclude that the understanding-assessment distinction does not apply to social morality at all and can only be drawn within the individual or autonomous concept. This conclusion would be attractive in a number of ways. For one thing it seems to provide a rationale for our criticism of Hart and Cooper. It does so by making clear what the radical difference between the autonomous and the social concepts consists in: social morality is a matter of assessment alone while autonomous morality necessarily involves understanding as well. Hence, disaster might well be predicted for any attempt to treat the individual and the social as twin concepts in the manner of Hart and Cooper. In spite of this explanatory usefulness, however, the suggestion will have to be formulated with more care before one can proceed with any confidence. For in its present form it is open to a serious objection.

It is that the whole position depends on a notion of 'Society' as an hypostatized entity with an existence independent of that of its members. Only on the basis of such an assumption, it may be said, is it possible to interpret talk about ascribing a morality to a social group in a literal way and to go on to contrast it with ascriptions to individuals. It is this contrast which in turn provides the grounds for concluding that social morality is confined to assessment alone while individual morality includes understanding as well. Yet, it may be argued, the concept of 'society' employed here involves such notorious difficulties that few would wish to subscribe to it except as part of a general metaphysical thesis. Certainly it has little appeal as a conceptual tool used in an ad hoc way to enforce a particular distinction. Furthermore, when assumptions of this kind are abandoned, it becomes clear that everything that can be said about the relationship between assessment and social morality can be said of understanding also. For it must ultimately be

possible to analyse talk about social morality in terms of the beliefs
and attitudes of individuals. To ascribe a code of assessment to a social
group is, in the last resort, to ascribe something to the individual
members of the group. This is precisely the same kind of ascription that
one meets in the case of moral understanding. If on the other hand, while
accepting this point one sees no harm in continuing to speak metaphorically
in the case of assessment why cannot one do precisely the same with under-
standing? Thus one might wish to say that a particular community possesses
moral understanding if the dominant outlook and attitudes of its members
fall within the realm of the moral. It would perhaps not be inappropriate
to characterise in this way a community of ardent supporters of the
Flew-Huxley brand of humanism. Hence, there is no asymmetry whatever
between ascriptions of understanding and of assessment to social groups.
Neither should be taken literally: for both, the substance of the metaphor
is constituted by its connection with the individual case. At this point
it begins to look as though attempts to confine social morality to assess-
ment are quite gratuitous. In so far as the concept is a legitimate one
at all its links with understanding will precisely parallel those with
assessment. Hence, the notions of understanding and assessment cannot
provide the basis for a fundamental distinction between the individual
and the social concepts of morality. It follows that no rational support
has yet been given to the claim that Hart's and Cooper's troubles stem
from failure to recognise their radical differences. It should perhaps
be noted that there is nothing strained or implausible about defending
Hart and Cooper along these lines: it in no way transcends the limits of
their own conception of the situation. Cooper in particular is fully
aware of the force of the considerations that have been urged here and
makes the case himself with vigour and clarity:

> '..to say that something is a rule of positive morality is to say
> something analysable in terms of the behaviour-patterns of individuals.
> If we unpack what is meant by "positive morality" we come down to the
> opinions of individual people, and this indeed is implied by calling
> positive morality "the law of opinion". Prichard was making the same
> point in his attack on Green when he said (Moral Obligation. p.75)
> of custom or the law of opinion: "The phrase can only be a veiled
> term for the thoughts held by individuals that certain actions are
> duties"'.

1. op.cit. pp.29-30.

The substance of this case must surely be conceded and hence the reasoning on which our conclusions have rested must be given up. It may however still be possible to re-establish them on a different basis. One might hope to show that the relationship between the concept of 'the social' and codes of assessment is significantly different from its relationship with forms of understanding and that this is not the case with the concept of 'the individual'. The objection has shown that the asymmetry we seek does not pertain to the logical status of our ascriptions. Perhaps instead it may be found among the criteria on which they depend? There is a fairly uncontroversial point which may help is here. It is that possession of a system for making practical assessments is bound up with the existence and identity of social groups in a way that agreement on forms of understanding is not. This is a conceptual not an empirical point. Unless there was widespread agreement on standards for regulating inter-personal behaviour a collection of individuals could not be said to constitute a human community at all. Their condition would be that nfth of the benign or ferocious states of nature described by social contract theorists. Indeed it is perhaps this core of conceptual truth that accounts for the durability of contractual ideas. In the classic versions of the doctrinex it is the absense of agreed rules of conduct that distinguishes the state of nature and the process by which it is remedied is what constitutes civil society. The genuine insight behind this is that a code of assessment is essential before the concept of 'society' can have application. The case of forms of understanding is quite different. Research might reveal some correlation between the degree of cohesion of a social group and the extent to which its members agree on basic ways of viewing the world. But one can set no a priori limits on the extent to which fragmentation of understanding is possible within a given social framework. Even the hypothetical case where all the members of a group have radically different ways of interpreting experience cannot be ruled out on conceptual grounds. What I require if I am to enter into social relationships with others is that their behaviour should in some degree be subject to my prediction and control. That is,

I need some assurance that our practical assessments will have a tendency to work together. It would be unreasonable to demand that we also share those more elusive elements that go to make up a persons general conception of the significance of his life. The social fabric could hardly be expected to depend on agreement of this kind, whatever importance it may have in personal relationships.

We now have a new basis for our distinction. In so far as the word 'social' in 'social morality' is taken seriously the rules governing the use of the phrase must accord with those for 'society' and 'social group'. That is, the links with assessment are conceptually necessary while those with understanding are contingent and empirical. We may now proceed to draw the same conclusions as before though they rest on different grounds. A social morality is essentially a code of assessment. But this is not simply true, as it were, by default: it is not due to any special incoherence about talk of understanding in connection with such a morality. Instead, the conclusion is established by considering the criteria which govern the use of the concept and give it substance. It then becomes clear why any attempt to run such diverse concepts as those of individual and social morality in harness must end in failure. Besides we thereby re-establish the right to view the work of Hart and Cooper as a rich source of material which with which this theme might be illustrated and developed.

At this point it may be well to inquire what light the discussion has thrown on the original problem of whether a morality is something possessed by all human communities. The main impression that has emerged is of the variety and complexity of the issues that lie behind its simple exterior. It may be useful to pick out one element in this background which can now be treated with some confidence. This will be no great gain in itself but it gets rid of a potential source of confusion and helps to focus attention on the substantial issues that

remain. The point is simply that the question, 'must every society be credited with a code of practical assessment?' can have only one answer. Without a system of generally agreed procedures for regulating behaviour one has no right to use the language of social entities at all: instead one is faced with a collection of asocial individuals. When this point is granted however it is still possible to question whether the code of assessment of a particular community must be accepted as a moral code. Would it not be better in some cases to characterise it as 'religious' or 'magical' or 'prudential'? Perhaps there are occasions when the use of any label of this kind is liable to mislead. May it not presuppose discriminations which are only significant in a very different social context? These questions have implications which extend far beyond the limits of our present concerns. They raise important issues in, for instance, the philosophy of social science. Nevertheless, some aspects of them have direct relevance for our argument and must be discussed later. For the present however it will be more convenient to turn to another issue embedded in the original question which we are now in a position to resolve. This is the question of whether every society has members with moral understanding.

A short answer emerges readily from the preceeding discussion. It is that, given our criterion of moral understanding, the issue is one for the anthropologist to settle. There is no necessary link between the concepts of 'society' and of 'moral understanding'. Nothing can be settled here by philosophical inquiry and the empirical evidence alone must be decisive. This answer is correct so far as it goes. It might however be unfortunate if matters were allowed to rest there. A closer look at the conceptual aspects of the question will make clear the sort of relevance that empirical evidence can have and hence give some clues as to the research directions in which it should proceed. On the other hand, a glance at what one might call the 'natural history of mind' will serve to place the conceptual issues in a richer perspective.

The most important lesson of that history for present purposes is that the emergence of differentiated modes of understanding is a comparitively recent development. As P.H.Hirst has shown[1] even the Greeks failed to achieve an adequate grasp pf the forms of thought and awareness that we now readily categorize as 'moral', 'religious', 'aesthetic' and 'scientific'. For them the mind operated like a searchlight with a single beam which can play indiscriminately over all aspects of reality. The essential distinctions within the realm of knowledge are to be made at the level of its objects. A characteristic Greek view, as Hirst points out, is that they are susceptible to arrangement in a hierarchical series ranging from mere particulars to pure Being. But the faculty by which they are apprehended is the same in every case. What is lacking in this conception is a sense of the autonomy and variety of what Hirst has called the 'forms of knowledge'. These 'basic articulations by which the whole of experience has become intelligible to man' include science, mathematics, religion, history and morals. Two conclusions which emerge from Hirst's work are of particular importance here. The first is that the various 'forms of knowledge' are conceptually distinct from one another in a number of important ways. They differ as regards the nature of their central concepts, the ways in which these may be combined, the techniques by which their work is carried on,,and, perhaps most important, the manner in which their findings may be tested against experience. All of these differences may be illustrated readily by considering, say, the relationships between science, mathematics and history. The second point is that it would be a serious error to think of the forms on the tempting analogy of pipelines for oil or water, as so many channels that facilitate the flow of knowledge without affecting its nature. On the contrary, what can be known by us depends on the patterns of order made available by the forms. The conceptual schemes which they embody determine the kind of sense we can make of our experience. The world presents one face when we consider it from a scientific viewpoint and a quite different one when

1. See eg. 'Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge', in Philosophical Analysis and Education, ed. R.D.Archambault, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, pp.113-138.

our interests are religious or historical. But we must apprehend it under the guise of some fairly specific mode of consciousness before we can begin to understand at all. Thus the mind is not an isolated essence possessed of a searchlight for exploring reality. Instead it is a function of complex factors whose operations are dependent on differentiated forms of thought evolved over millenia. The resources of these forms of thought are made available to the individual by the public traditions of his society. Acquiring knowledge is not simply a matter of bringing the natural powers of the mind to engage with reality. Essential to it is the process by which the traditions are assimilated. The picture we form of the world is dependent on the nature of this inheritance, in particular on the richness and variety of the conceptual discriminations it incorporates. One must not expect to find sophisticated versions of moral understanding in a society in which morality has not fully disentangled itself from religion and magic. Thus, to take the moral point of view is an achievement which is only possibly within a certain kind of social framework.

The main features of this historical outline are, perhaps, relatively uncontroversial and one scarcely needs the expertise of a professional historian to interpret their significance. Indeed it might be a mistake to think of one's conclusions as determined solely by the facts, however vaguely and innocuously they are described. To do so would be to underestimate the importance of conceptual factors in the situation. The picture that has been presented is one of a progressive differentiation of modes of thought and awareness. It is not easy to see how else the development of understanding might be conceived, at least if it is to take a form that is recognisably and characteristically human. The fundamental features of the situation in which human beings find themselves must surely dictate that they start with the simple, the concrete, the undifferentiated, and if there is change at all it will be in the direction of complexity, abstraction and articulation. What oher form could the development of reflective consciousness take? It is worth noting that there are limits to what might conceivably be the case here. If this point

is taken in conjunction with the banality of the empirical elements in the discussion, it may rescue us from anxieties about overstepping the bounds of legitimate philosophical inquiry, however tightly they are drawn. The services of a historian would however be needed if one wished to map the details of the process described and, in particular, if one wished to assign a chronology to it. There is however one point that should be made briefly. In Ethics and Education Professor R.S.Peters goes over some of the ground covered here though with different interests in view. In the course of the discussion he refers to those 'specific modes of thought and awareness' such as 'science, history, mathematics, religion and aesthetic awareness' and 'moral, prudential and technical forms of thought and action'. 'Such differentiations', he remarks, 'are alien to the mind of a child or preliterate man - indeed perhaps to that of a pre-seventeenth century man'.[1] It is difficult not to feel that Peters is correct in suggesting the seventeenth century as the crucial period for the transition. It was surely the rise of modern science in the period from Bacon to Newton that sounded the death-knell for the traditional view of the unity of knowledge. The differences between its procedures and those of any subject which, like metaphysics and theology, relied on a priori speculation were too striking to be ignored. The dramatic success of the new science with its own terms of reference ensured that sooner or later they would transform the intellectual scene. One is therefore led to suggest that the seventeenth century might well turn out, on examination, to be the crucial episode in the development of that sense of the fragmentariness of our understanding and the variety and autonomy of its modes which is described by Hirst and Peters. The rearguard action on behalf of the unity of knowledge, may perhaps be said to have begun with the refusal of the theologians to look through Galileo's telescope.

It has been shown that talk of moral understanding only has point in contexts where the differentiation of modes of awareness has become fairly sophisticated. There is nothing universal or inevitable

1. Ethics and Education, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966, p.50.

about such situations: they are the products of a particular kind of history. Even a superficial acquaintance with the facts serves to indicate that the concept of moral understanding cannot be applied with confidence outside the bounds of the modern period in Europe. This conclusion is strengthened be noting that it seems to have little or no relevance to the intellectual experience of primitive peoples. The anthropological evivence suggests that they tend to view their activities in a manner which is no more and no less appropriate to call 'moral' than 'prudential' or 'religious'. The reality if their situation seems to elude the grasp of these categories, and one may have to struggle to devise more adequate ones. Crawley, for instance, remarks that 'Primitive man has only one mode of thought, one mode of expression, one part of speech - the personal'.[1] Clearly he lacks a 'morality' if by that is meant a distinctive way of conceptualising experience, a mode of moral understanding. It may well be that this deficiency goes a long way to account for the reluctance of people like Warnock to ascribe a morality to primitive societies in the sense in which ours might be said to possess one. To note this point serves to take some of the sting out of the disagreement with Ladd. It now becomes uncertain whether the one is denying precisely what the other wishes to asserr, for one suspects that Ladd is almost exclusively interested in matters of assessment. Nevertheless, the controversy is not thereby deprived of all its substance. For while it seems safe to deny that the Homeric chieftains possess moral understanding, it is still open to anyone to claim that their code of assessment is a moral code. Whether this is so or not has now emerged as the crucial issue which underlies disagreements over ascriptions of a morality.

Before turning to discuss this issue, however, something more should be said about the relationship between the pairs of distinctions 'individual-social' and 'understanding-assessment'. It was suggested x above that moral understanding should be seen as a comparatively late development in the history of thought. To say the same of the concept of

1. Quoted in H. and H.A. Frankfort, et.al., Before Philosophy, Penguin Books, 1949, p.14.

'individual' or 'autonomous' morality would merely be to point out the
obvious. In the tribal society such a notion is entirely out of place
or, at best, finds expression in rudimentary forms. A comment by Professor
E.E.Evans-Pritchard on the Azande makes this point succinctly: 'When
Azande say that an action or feeling is bad they mean that it is socially
deplorable and condemned by public opinion'.[1] Among the Azande, as Evans-
Pritchard shows, the solutions to practical difficulties are thought of
as given in the natural order of things. In particular cases the answer
may be hidden from the layman and he may need the guidance of the oracle
to uncover it. But even then what is required is not reasoning but
observation. In so far as genuine intellectual difficulties do arise
they will typically be ones of casuistry: how do the customary rules
apply to this case? Moreover, the verdict on such an issue is itself a
matter for the authorities of the tribe. What is missing here is any
awareness that a conflict between private inclination and social rules
might be a moral conflict, a clash of duties. Of course, people do not
always in practice behave as the conventional rules prescribe. But the
tragedy of the nonconformist in such a society is that he lacks the
concepts in terms of which an intellectual defence of his stand could
be given. The precise nature of the social conditions which facilitate
the emergence of such concepts is perhaps not entirely understood by
anyone at present. Nevertheless, that some general relationship of
dependence is involved seems impossible to deny.

        At this stage there is another point to be made which may
look like an empirical generalisation but which, as we shall see, is not
entirely contingent on the facts. It is that individual morality flourishes
in the same kind of social setting as does moral understanding. The
briefest acquaintance with the historical background suggests that their
development has been roughly contemporaneous as a matter of fact: crucial
for both is the post-medieval period in Europe. This is surely not an
accident of history. A social morality in the sense of a generally accepted

1. _Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande,_ p.110. O.U.P. 1937.

code of moral assessment may function perfectly well without the aid of any widespread sense of the distinctiveness of the moral point of view. Indeed its effectiveness may depend to some extent on this being absent or weak. For a diffused that awareness that there exist alternative ways of looking at things may impede the task of ensuring a degree of uniformity and predictability in peoples behaviour. The task is made still more difficult if it becomes generally realised that individuals may live by codes of behaviour which differ substantially from those current in their community. Individual morality, no less than moral understanding, is an obstacle to the smooth working of the conventional rules. These function best where the very possibility of conceiving of alternatives to the official standards and attitudes has been minimised as among the Azande and the imaginary societies of science fiction. Thus, one can say that moral understanding and individual morality are connected in that they spring from the same source, the weakening or collapse of the monolithic value-structure and outlook of the traditional community. They need the same social environment if they are to develop to the fullest extent. To state the condition crudely, it is one in which the rights of individual conscience and freedom of thought receive a fair measure of practical recognition.

The links so far noted between individual morality and moral understanding, although interesting in themselves, are not the most important for present purposes. Much that is of philosophical significance will be missed if the connection is thought to consist primarily in the fact that, viewed from an external sociological standpoint, they can be said to have causal antecedents in common. It has been shown that social morality is essentially a matter of assessment while the individual concept incorporates understanding as well. Hence, it is not a sufficient condition for the emergence of individual morality that people should begin to detach themselves from the conventional rules of their social group and to contrast them unfavourably with the dictates of conscience. This is merely the stage at which individual codes of assessment begin

to operate within the social framework. Such a development is to be
expected whenever a decline in the authority of the social rules forces
people to rely on other resources. Periods of social unrest are convent-
ionally, and no doubt rightly, said to have this kind of effect. At any
rate it seems clear that this stage was reached by minorities in, for
instance, Ancient Greece. Without a grasp of the dimension of understanding
however the full concept of individual morality was inaccessible to them.
As we have seen, moral understanding presupposes discriminations which
cannot properly be attributed to the Greeks in spite of their intellectual
sophistication and independence in other respects. It is this that accounts
for the frequently expressed feeling that their moral universe differs
radically from ours. Such doubts are given point by the notorious difficul-
ties encountered in translating the words for Greek moral concepts.
Reflection on these difficulties has sometimes led to the fear that all
our translations may be systematically misleading. The legitimacy of
such fears should now be obvious. What is missing from the Greek view of
things is a sense of the distinctiveness of the moral point of view. This
in turn makes it impossible for them to possess the concept of automomous
morality. One may expect serious confusion to result from failure to see
how fundamentally our conception of morality differs from any that were
available to them.

        The conclusion that we have reached is that moral understan-
ding is not related to individual morality simply as an effect of the
same cause: it provides one of the vital criteria governing the use of
the concept. Without the possibility of characterising the view an indiv-
idual takes of his life as a moral view the notion of individual morality
can have no application. To say this is merely to draw attention to some
implications of our concepts. It is not an attempt at a priori legislation
about the facts though no doubt it will influence the way they are concei-
ved and described. Besides it does not by itself provide all we need to
know about the conceptual position. There is another condition to be
fulfilled before talk of individual morality becomes appropriate. Such

a morality as we have seen involves assessment no less than understanding.
Hence, before a person can properly be said to possess one it is necessary
that he should be capable of making autonomous assessments as well as
having a grasp of the moral point of view. The emergence of the possibility
of large numbers of people being able to satisfy the two conditions
simultaneously is the source from which our concept of morality has sprung.

The preceeding discussion has placed a good deal of emphasis
on the social dimension of moral concepts. In doing so it might be taken
as lending support to the various critiques of 'individualism' in contemp-
orary moral philosophy. For an important element in them is the claim
that a misleading picture of the moral life has been built up by concent-
rating on the isolated autonomous agent making his unconditioned choices
in a kind of social vacuum. A trenchant statement of this line of argument
appears in Alisdair MacIntyre's A Short History of Ethics.[1] It will help
us towards a conclusion if MacIntyre's account is looked at in some
detail. A point to be made at the outset is that his general thesis is
capable of at least two substantially different interpretations. The
stronger one is suggested by, for instance, his attack on the view that
'moral concepts can be examined and understood apart from their history'.
'Some philosophers', he remarks, 'have even written as if moral concepts
were a timeless, limited, unchanging, determinate species of concept,
necessarily having the same features throughout their history, so that
there is a part of language waiting to be philosophically investigated
which deserves the title "the language of morals" (with a definite article
and a singular noun)'.[2] This may surely be taken as implying that a
concern with history is an essential and integral item of the philosophers
equipment. To conduct a philosophical investigation of a concept it is
necessary to inquire into its historical background and success in this
inquiry is vital for philosophical understanding. A weaker thesis seems
to be assumed in the following passage which is concerned to illustrate
the dangers of neglecting history:

1. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967.
2. op.cit. p.1.

'It is all too easy for philosophical analysis, divorced from historical inquiry, to insulate itself from correction. In ethics it can happen in the following way. A certain unsystematically selected class of moral concepts and judgements is made the subject of attention. From the study of these it is concluded that specifically moral discourse possesses certain characteristics. Whenever counter examples are adduced to show that this is not always so, these counter examples are dismissed as irrelevant, because not examples of moral discourse; and they are shown to be nonmoral by exhibiting their lack of the necessary characteristics. From this kind of circularity we can be saved only by an adequate historical view of the varieties of moral and evaluative discourse'.[1]

What is being criticised here is the tendency to take too narrow a view of the possibilities afforded by moral discourse. Philosophers, it is alleged, have fixed all their attention on particular segments of the field and then insisted on the necessity and exhaustiveness of the criteria they have found. From dogmatic partiality of this kind we are saved by an awareness of the wider perspectives which the study of history reveals. The suggestion now is not that historical insight is an essential or constitutive element in philosophical work but rather that it is a safeguard against certain kinds of error, an ally that philosophers dispense with at their peril.

The uncertainty about MacIntyre's views on the philosophical significance of history has an interesting parallel in that which surrounds J.L.Austin's claims for 'ordinary language'. Is the concern with it a necessary and defining characteristic of philosophical inquiry or is it merely a source of reminders and warnings, with the primary function of recalling our speculations to reality? The analogy here is a suggestive one and we shall return to it later. It is fairly clear in MacIntyre's case at least that if the thesis is taken in the weaker sense it has a great deal of plausibility. It does seem reasonable to suppose that a total absence of historical or sociological awareness will have a debilitating effect on philosophical inquiry. At times the simple reminder that the concepts we analyse are our concepts, that they have a history and that their first-order uses occur in a particular social setting may be

1. ibid. pp.3-4.

salutary. To put the case in a minimal way: it would surely be unwise to exclude possible sources of inspiration and guidance in an arbitrary manner, and to ignore the considerations to which MacIntrye draws attention may well be to do just that. But the acceptability of this advice is directly connected with its failure to raise fundamental issues. At best it offers heuristic hints, rules-of-thumb which it might be imprudent to ignore. One cannot seriously maintain that any of this is conceptually necessary for the achievement of philosophical understanding. It is precisely the presence of claims of this kind thatcdistinguishes the stronger and more interesting thesis.

Before turning to discuss it there is however a preliminary point to be made. The stronger thesis has been interpreted as the claim that philosophical understanding presupposes a grasp of the historical dimension of the subject matter. MacIntyre, however, speaks simply of 'understanding' in this connection. It may be desirable to guard against the danger that he or his readers may draw illegitimately on the resources of this elusive though indespensible concept. For in one sense of'understanding' his case is difficult to dispute. If what is sought is the kind of understanding which can only come through empirical study then acquaintance with the historical background may well be indespensable. But, of course, this does not have the implications for philosophical inquiry which MacIntyre wishes to draw. Hence, to do him the justice of being credited with a significant thesis, it may be well to natrow the field explicitly to forms of understanding which are distinctively 'philosophical' rather than, for instance, 'sociological' in character. When the claim has been refined in this way it becomes clear that MacIntyre offers little in the way of formal argument for it. On the whole he seems content that a conviction of its truth should be built up through the accumulated weight of historical detail: what is important for him is that 'we should, as far as possible, allow the history of philosophy to break down our present-day preconceptions, so that our too narrow views of what can and cannot be thought, said and done are discarded in face of the record of

what has been thought, said and done'.[1] But however persuasive this procedure may be it can hardly be made to bear the full weight of his thesis. Indeed, it may prove a dangerous substitute for philosophical argument in so far as it makes it easier to beg important questions. For until the basic conceptual issues are clarified the import of his empirical researches must remain, at best, ambiguous. At one point, however, he does indicate the sort of rational backing he might be disposed to rely on. Having noted that there is no precise English equivalent for the Greek word usually translated as 'justice' he goes on:

> 'And this is not a mere linguistic defect, so that what Greek achieves by a single word English needs a periphrasis to achieve. It is rather that the occurence of certain concepts in ancient Greek discourse and of others in modern English marks a difference between two forms of social life. To understand a concept, to grasp the meaning of the words which express it, is always at least to learn what the rules are which govern the use of such words and so to grasp the role of the concept in language and social life'.[2]

MacIntyre makes no serious attempt to supply arguments for these assertions, but, fortunately, there is a full-scale reasoned defence of the position available to us. It is contained in Peter Winch's The Idea of a Social Science.[3]

From our point of view this work may be seen as a sustained attempt to elaborate and justify the links which MacIntyre asserts to hold between the notions of understanding a concept, knowing a corresponding rule for the use of a word and grasping the role of the concept in social life. But the thesis which he has evoked may prove an awkward ally when its full implications are realised. For one thing Winch lays great stress on the need for the student of society to see forms of social life from the inside. This peculiarly intimately relationship xixx with the subject-matter is seen as constituting a vital difference between the natural and social sciences. Thus the relation of the sociologist of religion to the performers of religious activity 'cannot be just that

1. ibid. p.4.   2. ibid. p.2.
3. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958.

of observer to observed'.

> 'It must rather be analagous to the participation of the natural scientist with his fellow workers in the activities of scientific investigation.. it is quite mistaken in principle to compare the activity of a student of a form of social behaviour with that of, say, an engineer studying the workings of a machine.. If we are going to compare the social student to an engineer, we shall do better to compare him to an apprentice engineer whi is studying what engineering - that is, the activity of engineering - is all about. His understanding of the social phenomena is more like the engineer's understanding of his colleagues' activities than it is like the engineer's understanding of the mechanical systems which he studies'.[1]

On this account it is not easy to see how understanding of, say, the moral concepts of the Greeks is possible at all. The forms of life in which they operated have vanished for ever. How could there be any significant analogy between one's understanding of the activities of those who engaged in them and the understanding one might have of the activities of 'colleagues'? In what sense could one's relationship with them be one of'participation'? The same difficulties, in a less hopeless form, confront the student of contemporary societies which differ considerably from his own. In this way the value placed on being an insider creates a problem of explaining how anthropology and ancient history can be genuine branches of knowledge at all. The natural tendency of Winch's line of argument is towards reducing all study of human society to a kind of informal sociology. Hence, so far from supporting MacIntyre's claims for the study of Homeric moral concepts it seems rather to suggest that such an activity is quite certain to be a waste of time.

There is an even more serious difficulty lurking in Winch's discussion. It is connected with the fact that the inside knowledge he demands is of a quite untechnical and unsophisticated kind. To understand the notion of prayer one must know what it is like to approach it as an ordinary believer. No formal study or reflection is needed to enjoy this insight: it is the reward of intelligent participation in a religious tradition. The implications of this point for MacIntyre's argument may

1. *ibid.* pp.87-88.

be stated simply. To understand a particular moral concept one must have a grasp of its ordinary 'first-order' use and for this it suffices that one should be an active member of the moral community. Formal historical study of the kind he advocates will be redundant where this condition is met and sterile where it is not. Moreover its nature is such that the least historically minded of philosophers will have no difficulty in satisfying it for a certain range of concepts and will be in the same hopeless position as anyone else for ones outside. The 'analytical' philosophers whom MacIntyre criticises are concerned to give an account of our moral concepts, that is the concepts which have active roles in the moral practices of our society. Like everything else they have a history and an acquaintance with it will be indispensable for some kinds of understanding and useful for others. But, on Winch's showing, the sort of comprehension which is a necessary condition of giving philosophical analysis of them cannot be supplied by historical study. It is part of the heritage of the philosopher as of everyone else in the community and he realises it by acquiring the language and learning to use the moral concepts in the course of everyday life.

Strangely enough, this requirement turns out to be not very different from those which are implicit in the practice of people like Austin. For them also it is important that the philosopher should be on the inside of the traditions of his society. The rewards of this position are conceived in terms of the sensitivity it confers for nuances and distinctions embodied in ordinary usage. Since they had served the purposes of generations of language-users and survived, it was assumed that they must have enough substance to be philosophically significant. This kind of emphasis on the importance of being an insider is rather different in conception and purpose from what one finds in Winch. But the spirit of the advice is strikingly similar and so too are its implications for practice. On both accounts what the philosopher is given is, in the end, a certain conceptual structure embodied in the language of a particular social group. This structure has to be accepted as it

stands: it is no part of his task to attempt radical revisions of it. Instead he works within the limitations it imposes and what matters is not elaborate equipment but common sense and a feeling for the material. This conservatism of intention and informality of technique serve to link Austin and Winch within what is perhaps the central tradition of British intellectual life. In many respects MacIntyre's work falls outside this tradition and the sources of his inspiration are alien to it. At any rate, it is clear that the intellectual background he invokes gives no support to the stronger thesis. He offers no independent arguments in its favour and it is sufficiently implausible to make them indispensable. On the other hand, even the most individualistic of xxxixxixix analysts need have no intellectual objections to the weaker thesis. A familiar sort of position has now been reached. The case being discussed has turned out to consist of two major elements. One is uncontentious but trivial, and there are no good reasons for accepting its substantial and interesting companion.

The tendency to erect a critique of contemporary moral philosophy on concern for the social dimension of moral concepts expresses itself in a variety of forms. Some have more specific and detailed implications for philosophical inquiry than MacIntyre attempts to draw in the work we have been considering. This may be illustrated in a way which has the incidental advantage of enabling one to make a final comment on the views of Hart and Cooper. The relevant aspects of their case are the attempts to use the individual-social distinction as a tool of analysis and the suggestion that what they are offering has important methodological implications for moral philosophy. The general nature of the claim is apparent from Hart's remarks about the 'excessive Protestantism' of philosophers like R.M.Hare with their tendency to concentrate on 'those ultimate principles which the individual accepts or to which he commits himself for the conduct of his life...' Cooper is still more confident about being able to show where moral philosophy has gone astray. We have already noted his concern with the 'surprising fact' that philosophers

have 'rarely examined' the distinction between individual and social morality and accordingly have neglected 'conceptual and moral issues of the greatest importance'. Later he illustrates the practical application of the distinction by trying to show how it may be used to dissolve the controversy over John Searle's alleged derivation of an 'ought' from an 'is'. Obviously these are ambitious and far reaching claims: how are they to be assessed?

It may be said at once that if the interpretation of the individual-social distinction which has been developed here is correct then they are all radically misconceived. Indeed, it becomes difficult to see why 'social morality' should be thought to have any interest for the moral philosopher. Only the autonomous half of the distinction can exemplify the concept of morality in all its richness and complexity. In the first place, it alone can provide ultimate answers to the problems of practical reason. The verdicts of social morality have always to be understood as operating under a restriction. They are effective only within the limits of one's willingness to go along with the conventional rules or the autonomous moral decision that this is how one ought to live. Thus, to push the questions of practical reason as far as they will go is necessarily to arrive at autonomous morality: the social concept can be only an arbitrary resting-place. Besides, the autonomous concept alone is able to fulfil the other essential function of morality, that of providing a perspective within which all one's activities may be seen as having purpose and significance. Even if social morality was accepted as a useful, though limited, guide to action it could provide no help at all with other questions which we are driven to ask and for an answer to which we rightly look to morality. Here moral understanding is indispensable. Thus, in so far as the philosopher's concern is with the question of how problems of moral assessment may ultimately be resolved and with the limits and presuppositions of the moral point of view it is to the individual concept that he must turn. If he confines himself to the level of 'positive' morality, the conventional rules of social groups,

these problems can never be posed in a sufficiently fundamental way. A morality in this sense is merely one of the institutions of society which have an influence on the behaviour of its members. Just as in the case of customs and rules of etiquette, the 'first-order' study of the phenomena is the business of the social scientist. It is not easy to see why there should be any asymmetry at the 'second-order' level. One is led to suggest that in so far as a concern with these institutions does give rise to philosophical questions they belong to the philosophy of social science. The realm of the moral philosopher on the other hand is adequately delineated if he is given the task of explicating the nature of moral understanding and of the individual or autonomous form of moral assessment.

We have been considering some of the forms taken by opposition to the 'individualism' of contemporary moral philosophy. One tendency is to emphasise the significance of the historical aspects of moral concepts. Another is to argue that the dimension of the social represents an integral part of the concept of morality itself. Neither turned out on examination to be really plausible and indeed doubts began to emerge as to whether they represent coherent possibilities at all. It may be, of course, that either or both might be reconstructed so as to escape this criticism. But such an enterprise would have to be different in scale and conception from anything we have been offered so far. It now looks as though the 'Protestants' are left in possession of the field. Such a conclusion can hardly be palatable to anyone who sees little room for complacency in the present state of British moral philosophy or is sensitive to the feelings of _malaise_ that have been expressed so frequently in the last decade. Besides it might be premature to insist on it at this point. A clue as to how the discussion might be sustained is provided elsewhere in MacIntyre's writings. In a paper entitled 'Hume on "is" and "ought"',[1] he seeks to connect what he regards as the dominant tradition in moral philosophy from Kant to Moore and Hare with the Protestant Reformation. This may well strike one as a legitimate and plausible use

1. _Philosophical Review_, 1959, Reprinted in _The Is-Ought Question_, W.D.Hudson ed., MacMillan, 1969, pp.35-51.

of historical insights and it is difficult to cavil when he goes on to credit the Reformers with the introduction of 'a morality of law' indeed 'a morality of law-and-nothing-else'.[1] At this point a hint as to the real nature of the case against their philosophical descendents begins to emerge. It rests not on their ignorance of history but on the thinness and partiality of their conception of morality. This subject will have to be discussed in detail in a later chapter. It may do no harm, however, if we anticipate our conclusions at this point to suggest that the basic weakness of the 'dominant tradition' is not its neglect of the jejune and unimportant concept of social morality but its neglect of moral understanding. Within it, as MacIntyre claims, morality has tended to be regarded as exclusively a matter of law; that is, of assessment, of rules for the guidance of conduct. The fundamental error, it might be said, is the identification of morality with practical reason. A discussion of the important and difficult issues to which this suggestion gives rise must, however, be postponed for the time being.

We shall now turn to reconsider the question with which this chapter began in order to see what light the subsequent discussion has thrown on it. The question was whether all human communities ~~would~~ ~~necessarily~~ should be credited with a morality. It soon became clear that one element in the problem could be disposed of fairly readily. It concerned the connection between the existence and identity of social groups and the agreement of their members on systems of practical assessment. The link was found to be a conceptual one in that codes of assessment are partly constitutive of forms of social life. Another subsiduary question was then identified; whether all communities possess members with moral understanding. It was suggested that, in the end, the answer could only be discovered empirically. Nevertheless the question does raise some interesting conceptual issues and an attempt was made to identify and explicate them. After all this ground had been cleared the residual problem was formulated as follows? must the code of practical

1. W.D.Hudson, ed. op.cit. p.49.

assessment of every community be accepted as a moral code? It seems ㅍㅍ possible to concede that the members of a particular community make systematic assessments which, so to speak, take up the same room in their lives as moral assessments do in the lives of other people and yet deny that they are entitled to be called 'moral'. Whether this really is possible or not is the problem to which we must now turn our attention.

A suggestion as to how one might proceed is provided by Warnock's treatment of the subject. He is prepared to deny that the code of Homeric society was a moral code **primarily** because for him the concept of morality is inseparably bound up with considerations to which Homer's characters were indifferent. The general nature of these considerations is made clear in the suggestion that 'moral judgement is concerned by definition or _ex officio_, in one way or another, with human good or harm, needs, wants, interests or happiness'.[1] What underlies Warnock's stand on the question of Homer's heroes is a particular commitment in a more fundamental debate. This is, of course, the general issue of 'formal' versus 'material' delineations of the realm of 'the moral.' It is the belief that morality cannot be adequately characterised in purely formal terms that enables him to treat the peculiar nature of Homeric assessments as a disqualification. A formalist, on the other hand, might well be disposed to take a different view. Provided, for instance, that the Homeric heroes were consistently prepared to take their practical principles as supreme guides to conduct he might see no reason to deny their moral status. Notoriously, similar disagreements arise over the interpretation of Nietzsche. Was he recommending a morality in which strength, cunning and ruthlessness replaced the 'Christian' virtues of love, compassion and co-operation? Or is it preferable to regard him, as he sometimes did himself, as putting forward a programme that goes beyond moral good and evil altogether? Here again the supporters of 'form' and 'content' are likely to disagree. It seems that our pursuit of the original question about ascriptions of a morality to social groups has

1. op.cit. p.61.

led us to the point where we see it as being swallowed up in a larger controversy. Hence, if we are not to abandon hope of reaching a conclusion, we must be prepared to widen the scope of the inquiry. Fortunately it should be possible to do this in a way that fits in with the overall pattern of the argument. Form and content are the poles of the second of the antitheses referred to in Chapter One. There it was recognised that we would eventually have to come to grips with the problem of the relationship between them and the fundamental distinction of understanding and assessment. The attempt to do this will be the main theme of the next chapter.

Chapter 6

FORM AND CONTENT (I)

It may be well to begin with a short account of the debate over 'form' and 'content'. The literature on this topic has been surveyed a number of times[1] and all that is needed here is an essential minimum of background for the discussion. Such a sketch will not do justice to the many distinctions that might be made within the broad categories it recognises. But scholarly comprehensiveness is not our main concern here, and, besides, the important omissions will be repaired later in the discussion.

Let us adopt the simplest method of drawing up the battle lines. On one side are those who hold that any practical principle whatever may be a moral principle. One cannot lay down in advance any restrictions in terms of nature or content or the range of considerations that might be appealed to in its support. Instead what is required is, perhaps, a readiness to 'universalize' it; that is, roughly, to regard it as having the same validity for everyone.[2] Alternatively it may be held that what is essentially required is that the moral agent should regard the principle as being supreme or overriding. It must, as a matter of fact, have a dominant role in the guidance of his conduct.[3] Some critics, however, remain dissatisfied whatever requirements of this sort are suggested.

1. See, for instance, W.K.Frankena, op.cit; and G.J.Warnock, op.cit. chs.5-7.
2. See, for instance, the writings of R.M.Hare, The Language of Morals, O.U.P. 1952, and Freedom and Reason, O.U.P. 1963.
3. See, for instance, D.H.Munro, Empiricism and Ethics.

In part at least this is due to the suspicion that merely formal conditions may in the end commit one to accepting the moral status of trivial or absurd rules such as 'never walk on the lines of a pavement' or 'always have your bed facing the north-east'. It is not inconceivable that someone might be prepared to regard these rules as universally valid and to live consistently in accordance with them himself. Yet, it may be said, surely the claim that these are moral rules would scarcely be intelligible: what could be the significance of 'moral' here? More moderately it might be argued that while in exceptional cases one could make sense of the suggestion, this would never be due merely to the satisfaction of such conditions as universalizability and overridingness. It would be possible only where the 'rules' are given a background which brings out their links with considerations of a quite different sort. These relate not just to the form or structure of morality but also to its content or subject-matter:

> 'Given the background of a religious community, one can begin to see how the rule, "Never walk on the lines of a pavement" could have moral significance....By linking disapproval of walking on the lines of a pavement with lack of reverence and disrespect, even those not familiar with the religious tradition in question may see that a moral view is being expressed. Such concepts as sincerity, honesty, courage, loyalty, respect, and, of course, a host of others, provide the kind of background necessary in order to make sense of rules as moral principles'.[1]

This concern with the social setting of practical rules and judgements has sometimes been carried a good deal further. It has been suggested, for instance, that the social harmony or co-operation represents a goal which is built into the very meaning of words like 'moral' and 'morality' in their ordinary uses. Stephen Toulmin in _An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics_[2] has provided what is still perhaps the clearest

1. D.Z.Phillips and H.O.Mounce, 'On Morality's Having a Point', _Philosophy_, 1965. Reprinted in W.D.Hudson(ed), _The Is-Ought Question_, Macmillan, London, 1969, p.230.
2. Cambridge University Press, 1950.

expression of such a view. In one place the 'function of Ethics' is 'provisionally defined' as being 'to correlate our feelings and behaviour in such a way as to make the fulfilment of everyone's aims and desires as far as possible compatible'.[1] Later the point is expressed less tentatively: 'the function of ethics is to reconcile the independent aims and wishes of a community of people'.[2] For Toulmin, 'what makes us call a judgement "ethical" is the fact that it is used to harmonise people's actions'.[3] It follows that there are definite restrictions on the range of considerations that can be appealed to in a moral argument. One reaches the boundary by invoking the harmony of society and to refuse to accept such an appeal as conclusive is to put oneself outside the realm of morality altogether. In a rather different spirit it may be suggested that morality is inescapably bound up with what are vaguely termed 'considerations of human good and harm'. Thus G.J.Warnock thinks it 'enormously plausible' to say that 'one who professed to be making a moral judgement must at least profess that what is in issue is the good or harm, well-being or otherwise, of human beings'.[4] On this view, as on Toulmin's, the decision as to whether a particular judgement is moral must take account of what it is about and cannot be determined by its formal status alone.

Enough has now been said to indicate the main possibilities discussed in the recent literature and to establish a general framework within which to proceed. Let us begin by applying the fundamental distinction between understanding and assessment to the debate. The first point to force itself on ones attention is that moral understanding is obviously contentless. As a lens through which to view the world of action everything within that world is equally eligible to come within its scope. The only requirement is that the concepts in terms of which it is interpreted should

1. ibid. p.137.   2. ibid. p.170.
3. ibid. p.145.   4. op.cit. p.57.

be related to one another in the way described above.[1] This places no
restrictions on the nature of the concepts themselves and an attempt has
been made to show how varied are the alternatives available.[2] The core
of the problem that remains may be stated quite simply: can moral assess-
ment be characterised in purely formal terms or does it has an inescapable
material element? The issues that this raises are of great complexity and
in view of it perhaps it may be best to state at once the conclusion we
shall be working towards. It is that moral assessment is indeed necessarily
linked with a certain range of material considerations and that Warnock
is essentially right in identifying these with the good or harm of human
beings. To say this however is to do little more than indicate very roughly
that part of the spectrum of possibilities which we hope to occupy. A
great deal of work must be done before we can know its exact boundaries
and main internal features, or indeed before we can feel any confidence
in the claim to it.

        All the attempts to characterise morality that have been
mentioned are subject to a peculiar sort of difficulty. Since this is
likely to be no less true of ours it may be well to try to come to grips
with it at once. In general terms the difficulty is one of establishing
any conclusion about these matters with the kind of finality and decisive-
ness that one would wish. To help us get down to details let us look at
Frankena's treatment of an objection that is made to Toulmin.

> ' It is argued that there are or might be people who deny that we
> ought to be concerned about the harmony of society, eg. Nietzsche;
> that their opposing principles and the issue between them and Toulmin
> are, or may properly be, or should be called "moral"; and that there-
> fore Toulmin is wrong in thinking that a concern for the harmony of
> society is or should be a necessary condition of morality. For on his
> view his opponents cannot be said to have a morality at all, and the
> issue between himself and them is not an issue between two moral
> principles or moralities but between morality and something else.
> Toulmin is concealing the existence of radical ethical disagreement,
> it is said; he begs the question against opposing moralists, he takes
> sides in a moral issue while claiming to do "logic".'[3]

1. See ch.1.esp.p.8-11.   2. See ch.2 above.   3. op.cit.pp.17-18.

Frankena remarks that this objection can be generalised and indeed that an 'exactly parallel' one 'can be made to the view that the universalization requirement is a necessary condition of morality'. 'Thus', he continues, 'MacIntyre contends that those who define morality in terms of universalizability are not neutral either, as they claim to be, that they too are begging questions, taking sides, for example, against the existentialists'.[1] Frankena is pessimistic about the chances of being able to escape the charge of question-begging entirely: one must it seems be prepared to take a tough line. Thus, 'anyone who maintains that some particular requirement is essential to morality will have his Nietzsche, as Toulmin has his, and he must either give up his position or deny that his opponent's is a moral one, just as Toulmin must'.[2]

At first sight it might be tempting to dismiss the objection with which Frankena is concerned as having little weight. In taking this line one could point to its very general nature. Since it is equally available against all conclusions it might be held that it cannot tell seriously against any particular one. To make this point serves at least to get the difficulty into a less troublesome perspective. Nevertheless it retains enough nuisance value to make it advisable to define an attitude towards it explicitly. For unless one is careful it may lead to a rather unprofitable kind of discussion. This may happen if, for instance, someone is moved to protest that his understanding of the terms 'moral' and 'morality' has been outraged by a particular account of them. A dispute may then arise which, in the end, rests on nothing more substantial than rival intuitions about usage, and in which charges and counter-charges of question-begging are exchanged with the facility envisaged by Frankena. No one with experience of the path that discussion of these issues tends to take will regard this as an empty fear. Hence, Frankena's difficulty

1. ibid. p.19.   2. loc.cit.

should be treated with some seriousness. Nevertheless one would not wish to be reduced by it to the kind of position he adopts. It is surely invidious to have to choose between the sacrifice of one's own position and bald dismissals of one's opponents. Besides the resources of reason may not be exhausted so readily as this suggests. The primary requirement here is to get a clear idea of what one can legitimately hope to achieve. In deference to Frankena's view it must be admitted that xxd an element of inconclusiveness will be impossible to avoid, at least to the extent that is constituted by failure to rule all the alternatives out of court as being untenable in principle. One will have to allow that some may be held without incoherence or absurdity. Nevertheless this may not be an unsatisfactory dtate of affairs if one can show that there is little or nothing more positive to be said in their favour while the weight of the argument falls on our side. This need not be regarded as an impossible goal. Hence the aim will be to reduce all rival views to bare possibilities, possessed only of the modest advantage of self-consistency. The adoption of them must then be seen as wilful or arbitrary, a step that reason cannot warrant, and perhaps this is as damaging a verdict as one needs in philosophical discussion. A somewhat complicated strategy is required here: one must be content to work towards a conclusion in a piecemeal and roundabout way. We shall begin by asking whether the one result that has been firmly established, that moral understanding is contentless, can shed any light on the general situation. The next step will be to dispose of the more important considerations that have been taken to support the view that moral assessment is not necessarily tied to a material element. We shall then be in a position to tackle our positive thesis more directly.

The first question is whether our account of moral understanding has any explanatory value for the controversy as a whole. A fairly obvious point may be made at once. It is simply that no serious attempt has been made to apply the fundamental distinction of understanding and assessment to the issues. This neglect has surely been of some significance

for the progress of the debate. Thus it might be agreed that the tendency
to overlook the distinction, together with the fact that moral understand-
ing is contentless, goes some way to account for the charm of formalism.
Much of its strength stems from the conviction that none of the available
material accounts tell anything like the complete story and that no
injection of further content could rescue them. There seems to be an
element in our pre-philosophical intuitions about morality that is never
satisfied however far one travels along this road. So a radically different
kind of approach comes to be favoured. The permanently unsatisfied element,
it may be suggested, is the genuine insight that moral understanding as
such has no material ingredient. Thus, there is an important sense in
which morality may be said to be a purely formal affair. At this point
if one fails to note the significance of the understanding-assessment
distinction one may be led to reject material concerns altogether. Such
a move would be unwarranted and might well turn ont to be a mistake.

Let us try to approach the problem from another direction
by asking the following question. Given that moral understanding has no
distinctive content or subject-matter what must be true of moral assessment
in in order to make sense of philosophical discussions of the undifferen-
tiated concept of morality? If, so to speak, one subtracts what can be
attributed to understanding from talk about morality in general what sort
of residue is left to assessment? When one takes the apparently conflicting
assertions that are made about the general concept and performs this
operation on them, the essence of what remains is an insistence on its
distinctive content. It is now tempting to acknowledge the core of truth
in this view by assigning it, not to morality as a whole, but specifically
to assessment. For it might be thought that if this were not done it
would be impossible to explain why material definitions should have any
plausibility at all, much less the perennial appeal that they in fact
exert. How could the debate between such perceptive antagonists have been

sustained unless this suggestion were essentially correct? Once again
one is led towards the conclusion that the formal element in morality is
supplied by understanding and the material element by assessment.

An obvious merit of this view is that it offers an attractive
perspective on the debate as a whole. For one thing it accords well with
its peculiarly interminable character, the sense one gets that the two
sides operate in different dimensions and never really come to grips with
each others concerns. At least it can be said that if the suggestion
were correct this is just the state of affairs one would expect to find.
Besides it offers an agreeably civilized way of resolving the controversy
in that it acknowledges and makes use of elements of value from both sides.
The truth in each is safeguarded by the recognition that it applies either
to understanding or to assessment, though not in any straightforward way
to morality in general. One is tempted to say that any proposed solution
of the problem must be irenic and eclectic in the same sort of way if it
is to have any plausibility or permanence. For we are faced with a deep-
rooted and persistent conflict in which each side can marshal weighty
arguments and sincere and able supporters. No wholehearted verdict for
one can avoid giving rise to an uneasy feeling that something of value
has been lost with the other. The view suggested here does have the
advantage of being able to accommodate considerations of this sort.

It is now time to approach the issues at a less abstract
level and to begin to consider the case for formalism in detail. We shall
concentrate on what is probably the most formidable and widely-discussed
element in it, the arguments that centre round the feature known as
'universalizability'. This is a difficult and elusive notion and the
extensive literature on it is far from achieving any uniformity of inter-
pretation. Hence the first task is to form a clear impression of what is
involved. R.M.Hare's treatment of the subject has been particularly

influential and is still perhaps the best place to turn initially for enlightenment. For Hare, moral judgements are universalizable in virtue of possessing 'descriptive meaning'.[1] Universalizability is a feature common to all judgements which carry this kind of meaning.[2] Indeed, universalizability and the possession of descriptive meaning are, in some sense, identical: 'the feature of value judgements which I call universalizability is simply that which they share with descriptive judgements; namely the fact that they both carry descriptive meaning'.[3] Descriptive meaning is a kind of meaning which is or involves the use of an expression in accordance with descriptive meaning-rules.[4]

Clearly the key notion here is that of xiixxxxixxixx a 'descriptive meaning-rule' and it is unfortunate that Hare's account of it is not altogether satisfactory. The main weakness is that it is m open to a number of substantially different interpretations. In order to arrive at the one which accords best with his general position and is therefore most likely to represent his real intentions the chief candidates will have to be described. The discussion of these matters will have some significance for our general thesis for it will serve to illustrate the difficulty of adhering strictly to a formalist view of moral assessment. A convenient way of bringing out the tension between the various conceptions of descriptive meaning-rules is by asking what a breach of one is supposed to involve. Hare's answer is that a descriptive meaning-rule is broken when the descriptive term which it governs is misused. But what is it to misuse a descriptive term? At this point the incongruities that lurk beneath the surface of his account begin to cause trouble.

1. op.cit.
3. ibid. p.15.

2. ibid. 2.2.
4. ibid. 2.1.

In places it looks as if a descriptive meaning-rule is a codification of the practice of a particular group of language users. Such rules license the application of descriptive terms to particular kinds of object. Their function is to enable language to serve as a social instrument by ensuring a degree of uniformity among its users. A rule of this kind serves to lay down the standard range of application of words like 'red' and 'ultramarine'. A breach of one would occur if, for instance, the term 'ultramarine' was applied to things which most speakers of English would call 'red'. The textual evidence for this interpretation consists in statements like the following:

'In general a person is misusing a descriptive term if in using it he breaks the descriptive rule attaching the term to a certain kind of objects...'[1]

A descriptive meaning-rule then, attaches a term to 'a certain kind of objects'. The implication is that it is a rule with an objective inter-personal validity based on its general acceptance by users of the language. This suggestion comes out more clearly in the following passage:

'...we can detect a misuse of a term by observing that the term is used of an object of a certain kind, when the descriptive rule which determins the meaning of the term excludes its use of objects of that kind. Normally, if a man said that an object was ultramarine when it was not, and when the object was in plain view, and he had normal eyesight, and was a straightforward person, we should conclude that he did not know the meaning of "ultramarine"'.[2]

One may conclude, it seems, that descriptive meaning-rules serve to formulate the principles which underlie the accepted usage of words like 'red' and 'ultramarine'. If one takes into account the significance which Hare attaches to such rules the implications of this for morality are rather startling. To use words like 'good' and 'right' in unconventional ways, to apply them outside the limits generally accepted in the community, is to infringe the corresponding meaning-rules. Legitimate uses of moral language, on the other hand, employ the terms in accordance with the

1. ibid. p.8.   2. ibid. p.9.

socially accepted rules by means of which they are attached to particular
kinds of objects. Claims of this sort might well form the basis of an
attempt to build material considerations of a fairly crude kind into one's
account of morality. If they were taken seriously one would have to
regard Hare as an extreme example of the 'establishment moralist', someone
who sees in nonconformism nothing but intellectual failure expressed
through the systematic abuse of language. One hesitates to ascribe such
a view to him, and fortunately there is enough textual evidence to support
an alternative.

For, on other occasions, Hare seems to think of descriptive
meaning-rules as rules laying down standards of internal consistency which
an individual's use of language must satisfy but which need not in any
way resemble those used by other people. Thus, if a person describes an
object as 'red' the descriptive meaning-rule governing the use of the
word forbids him to deny its applicability to other objects which he
admits to be relevantly similar to the first. The range of similarities
which count as relevant is determined by the reasons which he would invoke
to justify the use of the descriptive term in the first place. If he
appeals to the fact that the object is scarlet he cannot refuse to allow
that other scarlet objects may properly be called 'red'. His use of 'red'
may be highly idiosyncratic and thus run contrary to descriptive meaning-
rules of the first kind without involving any breach of rules of this
second kind. He might for instance always refer to objects which most
English speakers would call 'red' as 'ultramarine' and to things they
would agree to be 'ultramarine' as 'red'. The evidence for this way of
interpreting Hare is contained in a number of passages of which the
following is a sample:

> 'If a person says that a thing is red, he is committed to the view
> that anything which was like it in the relevant respects would
> likewise be red. The relevant respects are those which, he thought,
> entitled him to call the first thing red; in this particular case
> they ammount to one respect only: its red colour. This follows,
> according to the definitions given above, from the fact that 'This is

red' is a descriptive judgement. 'This is red' entails 'Everything like this in the relevant respects is red' simply because to say that something is red while denying that some other thing which resembles it in the relevant respects is red is to misuse the word 'red'; and this is because 'red' is a descriptive term, and because therefore to say that something is red is to say that it is of a certain kind, and so to imply that anything which is of that same kind is red'.[1]

Clearly the consistent eccentric need never be involved in breaches of the kind of rule with which Hare is concerned here. He can, it seems, call anything he likes 'red' with impunity provided he sticks by this usage on all other occasions. He would infringe this second kind of descriptive meaning-rule only if having called something 'red' he were to refuse to apply the term to another object, while admitting that there was no relevant difference between them; that is no difference in respect of the features which he thought entitled him to call the first one 'red'. This is of course a quite different requirement from that which is appropriate to descriptive meaning-rules of the first kind.

An interesting feature of this discussion is the impression it gives that Hare is unable to avoid hints of a material presence in ~~hixx~~ his account of morality. The warrant he provides for interpreting descriptive rules as rules of conventional usage may be taken to represent the intrusion of such an element. But apart from being intrinsically implausible, this interpretation is difficult to reconcile with important features of his general argument, in particular with what he has to say about universalizability. For one thing he is willing to allow that a 'fanatic' may use moral terms in an idiosyncratic way without necessarily offending against the principle.[2] Besides there is the insistence that 'the thesis of universalizability... is a logical thesis'[3] and that 'offences against the thesis of universalizability are logical not moral'.[4]

1. *ibid.* p.11.
2. *ibid.* ch.9.
3. *ibid.* p.30.
4. *ibid.* p.32.

To describe as 'ultramarine' an object which most English speakers would
call 'red' is surely not to commit a logical blunder. On the other hand
the offence involved in applying the label 'ultramarine' to some objects
and refusing it to others without being able to point to any relevant
differences might well be described as a 'logical' one. It seems necessary
to conclude that the second interpretation of descriptive rules is required
by Hare's general position.

      A descriptive meaning-rule then is a rule which the individ-
ual commits himself to whenever he uses a term with descriptive meaning.
The content of the rule is determined by the reasons he would give to
explain or justify his use of the term. They may be thoroughly eccentric
reasons: all that the rule requires is that he should be prepared to accept
their validity in other cases. Thus, at the beginning he is free to choose
the content of the rule for himself. But, as the word rule implies, the
choice he makes will limit his freedom thereafter. We can now begin to
appreciate the force of Hare's insistence that 'the thesis that descriptive
judgements are universalizable is a quite trivial thesis'.[1] The case for
it consists essentially in drawing out the implications of some banal,
yet fundamental facts about language. The complexity and variety of the
tasks it has to perform impose economy on our treatment of it. To put
the point in the most obvious wa y, words are not disposable things to
be used only once: they must serve our purposes over and over again. Yet
if we are to succeed in communicating with one another there must be some
intelligible connection between the different occasions of our use of
them. For some, those which have what Hare calls descriptive meaning, the
link is constituted by xhxxxhixx features of the situations to which they
apply. Hence it should always be possible in principle to justify a use
of such a term by appealing to the appropriate feature. If this is to x
count as a genuine justification rather than a piece of ad hoc rationalising,

1. ibid. p.12.

one must accept that it has an inescapable reference beyond the particular occasion. A reason in one case will be a reason in all others unless there are differences that make it inapplicable. The opponent of universalizability is committed to denying all of this. His position in effect is that descriptive terms may be applied to or withheld from objects in capricious and arbitrary ways. This is to say that one's procedure need have no intelligible basis whatever. To attempt tb take this view seriously in practice would defeat the purposes of language as an instrument of communication. Someone who rejects Hare's thesis will have to be prepared to accept such a result: in this lies the point of his insistence on its triviality.

So far the argument has moved at a rather obstract level and one might begin to worry about the dangers of loosing sight of the particular case. Besides there is a need to tie this general discussion of universalizability more closely to the specific problem of moral judgements. If the interpretation of it as a logical thesis is correct it follows that there can be no genuine counter-examples. That is, there can be no judgements which are both moral and non-universalizable. Nevertheless various candidates have been suggested from time to time and instead of rejecting all of them in advance it may be useful to look at the process of accommodating them in some detail. One might well be suspicious of a purely a priori style of proceeding here. Discussion of these issues has often foundered in the past because of insufficient attention to the data. Besides a study of how the awkward cases are dealt with in practice should sharpen our apprehension of what the thesis involves and, more particularly, reveal the cash-calue of the concessions about its triviality. Let us therefore turn to consider some of these alleged hard cases. Many of the most promising ones have been brought together by Alisdair MacIntyre in his paper 'What Morality is Not'[1] and it will be convenient to use his examples.

1. Philosophy, 1957.

The first case is the well known one of Sartre's pupil
who had to choose between staying with his mother and joining the Free
French.[1] Hare's discussion of this situation seems to dispose of most of
the grounds for its claim to constitute a difficulty for the universalist.
One of these is the assumption that universalism 'implies that there are
certain rather simple general moral principles which, in some unexplained
sense, exist antecedently to the making of any moral judgement, and that
all we have to do whenever we make such a judgement is to consult the
relevant principle and, without more ado, the judgement is made.[2] Sartre's
example does indeed show that in some cases 'no antecedently existing
principle can be appealed to'.[3] But of course Hare is in no way committed
to denying this possibility. He merely insists that however the decision
is arrived at the young man cannot deny that if there is another case
relevantly similar the same choice ought to be made. To universalize
characteristically involves creating rules rather than subscribing to
them. There is another element in the case of Sartre's pupil which perhaps
accounts for some of the plausibility of its claim to raise difficulties
for universalizability. Sartre's account of the matter is brief and imprecise
and it is difficult to be sure that one has not misdescribed the situation.
Nevertheless a significant factor in the case seems to be the suspicion
that the pupil, being a rather inarticulate young man, may be unable to
say in what respect the decision he eventually makes is morally preferable
to the alternatives. He may be unable to point to any feature of the
situation as the reason for his choice. Even if this is the case the
universalizability thesis seems able to accommodate it. Indeed Hare has
explicitly allowed for this possibility: '..universalism is not the
doctrine that behind every moral judgement there has to be a principle
expressible in a few general terms; the principle, though universal, may
be so complex that it defies formulation in words at all'.[4] So the

1. Existentialism and Humanism, Methuen, London, 1948. pp.35-38.
2. ibid. p.37.   3. ibid. p.38.   4. ibid. p.39.

universalist need not be worried by the fact that Sartre's pupil might
claim his decision to be a moral one and yet be unable to give any reasons
for it. What he insists is that, if the decision is a moral one, the
young man must agree that the course of action he chooses has some feature
or set of features which make it morally preferable. It may be impossible
for him to describe them in words. Nevertheless, he must, logically,
admit that whatever they are, they will constitute a reason for any
similar person in similar circumstances. If he refuses to allow this
he makes nonsense of the original acceptance of the view that the course
of action he chooses has some features which make it morally preferable.
This is to admit that no reason can be given for his choice. This in
turn, as we saw earlier, implies that for him moral terms do not carry
any descriptive meaning, and hence, that he is not using words 'morally'
at all and that his decision cannot properly be described as a 'moral'
one. Like everyone else Sartre's pupil must choose between accepting
universalizability and admitting that his use of moral language is
entirely capricious. Of course, if the principle behind his judgement is
so complex that it defies formulation in words the young man's acceptance
of its existence will be no help to other people with moral problems.
But universalizability is a logical thesis, not a technique for making
decisions.

The next example is that of moral heroes who do 'more
than duty demands'. MacIntyre argues:

> '..a man may set himself the task of performing a work of supererogation and commit himself to it so that he will blaim himself if
> he fails without finding such failure in the case of others blameworthy. Such a man might legitimately say "I have taken so-and-so
> as what I ought to do". And here his valuation cannot, logically
> cannot, be universalized'.[1]

1. 1. op.cit. p.328.

The plausibility of this case seems to rest, not on any new principle it embodies, but on the fact that the conditions for relevant similarity are unusual. They are not exhaustively specified by listing the observable 'objective' features of the situation. The moral hero would refuse to allow that anyone else, however similar the external aspects of his position, ought to attempt the work of supererogation. There is an additional 'subjective' requirement before relevant similarity is attained. The other person must, in the same way as the moral hero, regard the work of supererogation as what he ought to do. If he does, the hero must surely agree that he really ought to do it. If he refuses we must invoke the familiar penalty - that his use of moral words is merely capricious and there can be no rational backing for his judgements. It is worth noting that the hero is not committed to agreeing that the other person ought to perform the work of supererogation merely because he regards it as what he ought to do. That is, he is not merely subscribing to a general principle of tolerance 'everyone ought to do what he thinks he ought to do'. He might quite consistently reject such a principle. Thus he might refuse to accept that someone who thought that he ought to torture others really ought to do so. That the man takes the work of supererogation as what he ought to do is a necessary but not sufficient condition of the moral heroes agreement that he ought to do it. The other necessary conditions are given by specifying the observable features which the two situations have in common. It is necessary to make this point in order to establish that we have here a genuine case in which a man universalises the judgement he passes on himself, and not merely one in which he passes a similar but independent judgement on someone else. But now the universalizability thesis seems perfectly able to accommodate works of supererogation. The only novel feature they introduce is that in certain cases, the existence of a particular feature or attitude - a 'subjective' not an 'objective' element - may be an essential constituent of relevant similarity. But such a qualification does not affect the logical thesis of universalizability.

Finally let us look at another case mentioned by MacIntyre. He writes:

'The fact that a man might on moral grounds refuse to legislate for anyone other than himself (perhaps on the grounds that to do so would be moral arrogance) would by itself be enough to show that not all valuation is universalizable'.[1]

Now the interesting point here is that such a man, so far from constituting as it were a living disproof of universalizability would find it hard to öffend against the thesis. He might succeed in doing so through his self-legislation but never merely by virtue of refusal to legislate for others. A breach of the universalizability principle characteristically occurs when a person asserts that he ought to do a certain act but denies that someone else ought to do it, while admitting that there are no relevant differences between the two cases. But to deny that the other person ought to do it is to legislate for him. Hence in so far as ones relations with others are concerned one can only offend against the universalizability thesis if one is prepared to legislate for them. Refusal to legislate is merely a refusal to draw the consequences which the principle licenses. It may well involve unwillingless to universalize the judgements one passes in one's own case, as well as unwillingness to pass any independent moral judgements on others. But all this is perfectly compatible with acceptance of the universalizability thesis. Oddly enough it suggests that the person concerned regards the principle so highly that he prefers to say nothing rather than risk a breach of it.

This detailed look at the way in which MacIntyre's examples are accommodated by the universalizability thesis has served to confirm and give substance to our interpretation of it. The position that has now been reached has, however, some intriguing features. Our main interest in Hare's writings has been to see if they can help in charting the distinctive features of judgements of moral assessment. The answer that

1. ibid. p.328.

emerges is that they are 'universalizable' and 'prescriptive'. The trivial
nature of the first is insisted on by Hare and the justice of his claim
has been explored in some detail. Let us now look more closely at the
notion of 'prescriptive meaning' or 'prescriptivity'. Hare describes his
moral theory as 'a type of prescriptivism, in that it maintains that it
is one of the characteristics of moral terms, and one which is a suffic-
iently essential characteristic for us to call it part of the meaning of
these terms, that judgements containing them are,as typically used,
intended as guides to conduct'.[1] Elsewhere he remarks about certain
'weakened' uses of 'ought' that 'in these cases "ought" fails to imply
"can" because it is not prescriptive in meaning at all; that is to say,
it is consistent with its meaning as used in this context,not to be
intended to serve as a guide to anybody's actions'.[2] It appears then that
what Hare means when he says that moral judgements are typically prescrip-
tive is that they are, as typically used, intended as guides to conduct.
But in present circumstances the effect of this is to make the second
part of his answer the equal of the first in triviality. Moral assessment
is that part of morality which is concerned with the problems of practical
reason. It is a defining characteristic of the judgements
belonging to this sphere that their typical use is to guide conduct,
that is, in Hare's terminology, they are prescriptive. To say that
judgements are prescriptive is just to say that they are judgements of
practical assessment. But it is now very difficult to derive from Hare
anything like a satisfactory account of the nature of moral assessment.
Universalizability is a perfectly general feature possessed by anything
one could call a'judgement' while prescriptivity belongs to the class
of judgements we are concerned with as an elementary matter of initial
definition. To be told that judgements of moral assessment possess these
characteristics is to be given no new information. It merely restates
with a positive air what was already implicit in the question. What is

1. op. cit. p.67.   2. ibid. pp.52-53.

missing may perhaps be brought out in the following way. Our aim is to understand that category of practical judgement we have called 'moral assessment'. In this context Hare's work may be seen as a useful exegesis of the notions of 'judgement' and of 'practical assessment'. It fails however to contribute anything substantial on a crucial point, the significance to be attached to the term 'moral'. Hence we are forced to look beyond universal prescriptivism for a solution to our problems.

This conclusion, however, still leaves a number of points to be explained. For one thing it is disturbing that we have so far found nothing like a plausible reason for believing that moral assessment may be adequately characterised in formal terms. Yet such views have been widely held and the suspicion may now arise that somewhere a crucial point has been overlooked. To help in allaying thixf this fear we shall come durectly to grips with what is perhaps the best argument for a formalist position. It is that it is presupposed by a stronger thesis whose correctness may be demonstrated. The stronger claim is that substantive principles of moral assessment may be derived from its formal properties alone. Hence, an understanding ofthe form of morality is all the raw material that practical reason requires. If this claim can be established it will be impossible to reject the weaker one that formal conditions alone may be a sufficient guarantee of the moral status of judgements and principles. One way in which the link may be made explicit is this. It might be asked how one can be sure that the practical conclusions which, it is claimed, are derivable from formal resources are genuinely 'moral' conclusions. Suppose that the presence of a certain material element is necessary to provide a guarantee of this. Since we are supposed to be dealing with deductive arguments that element must have been present also in the premises. But in that case we have not succeeded in drawing substantive conclusions from formal sources alone. If, on the other hand, the introduction of a material element is not essential to ensure the moral status of the conclusions then it is not the case that moral judgements

are necessarily tied to a certain content or subject-matter. Hence our
proposed resolution of the 'formal-material' controversy falls to the
ground. It follows that we must either abandon our thesis or show that
the attempt to derive substantive conclusions from purely formal features
of moral judgements is a failure. This enterprise will therefore have to
be examined in some detail. It is worth noting that while the stronger
thesis entails the weaker the converse does not hold. It is possible to
hold the latter in isolation and, indeed, this seems to be Hare's position.
For it is not his contention that the formal properties of morality serve
by themselves to lead us in any particular practical direction. He is
prepared, for instance, to grant the moral status of views which he finds
repugnant, such as those of the fanatical Nazi, and to admit that, in the
end, universal prescriptivism may be unable to furnish any decisive
arguments against them.[1] An indispensable role in Hare's theory is played
by 'decisions of principle',[2] that is decisions on a particular filling
for the formal shell of morality. Without such a commitment to content
no practical guidance can logically be derived from universalizability
and prescriptivity alone, though Hare believes that a sincere concern
with them will for most people set limits to the moral beliefs they find
psychologically possible. For a defence of the stronger version of forma-
lism one must look elsewhere. It will be convenient to consider a moral
philosopher whose work is similar in spirit to Hare's and might in some
respects be seen as a natural extension of it. M.G.Singer in Generalization
in Ethics[3] has made a detailed xxxxx and ambitious attempt to show how
the substance of a moral theory may be derived from the form of morality.
As it is now clear that the feasibility of this project is crucial for
our general thesis we shall have to look at Singer's arguments with some
care.

1. See Freedom and Reason, Ch. 9.
2. See The Language of Morals, Ch. 4.
3. Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1963.

Chapter 7.

FORM AND CONTENT   (2).

A crucial role in Singer's case is played by what he calls 'the generalization principle'. The principle states that 'what is right (or wrong)for one person must be right (or wrong) for any similar person in similar circumstances'.[1] The importance of the principle consists in the fact that it is 'involved in or presupposed by every genuine moral judgement, for it is an essential part of the meaning of such distinctively moral terms as "right", "wrong" and "ought" in their distinctively moral senses'.[2] It follows that 'one who says that a certain act is right for some given person and not right for any similar person in similar circumstances would be involved in a contradiction.'[3] So far, although the terminology is rather different, the general line of argument is familiar enough from Hare. Where Singer goes beyond Hare is in his insistence that the feature of moral language he is concerned with is not 'trivial' nor is it 'morally neutral'.[4] On the contrary:

'...the generalization principle... does have moral consequences.
Moral judgements can be based on this characteristic of moral judgements'.[5]

As Singer notes 'the best way to show that the generalization principle has moral consequences is actually to trace out these consequences'.[6]
The way in which he sets about this task will have to be examined in some detail.

1. ibid. p.5.   2. ibid. p.34.
3. ibid. p.46.   4. ibid. p.46.
5. ibid. p.50.   6. ibid. pp.46-47.

There is however a preliminary matter to be dealt with. It concerns an apparent difference of substance between Hare's 'universalizability thesis' and Singer's 'generalization principle'. Hare's thesis, as we have seen, is concerned with what one is committed to in making a moral judgement. It states that if one judges action Y to be right one must judge any action relevantly similar to Y to be right also. In many formulations of the generalization principle on the other hand it appears as a thesis about actions rather than judgements: what is right for x is right for anyone else in similar circumstances. It might be thought that the differences between the two formulations are significant, and hence that one should be cautious about any easy identification of the generalization principle and the universalizability thesis. Before turning to Singer's text for guidance there is a general point to be made here. It is that while there may be a prima facie distinction between the two versions it is not easy to see what the substance of it could amount to. What precisely does the principle that 'what is right for x is right for any similar person in similar circumstances' add to the principle that 'what x judges to be right for himself he thereby judges to be right for any similar person in similar circumstances'? Perhaps one might have something like the following in mind. The point of the first formula is that it offers a kind of metaphysical guarantee. It assures us that the objective world of morality is isomorphic with the logic of the moral judgements we make. That is, values do not attach to things in random and arbitrary ways, but conform to intelligible patterns of order. This, it might be said, is important for it represents a necessary precondition if morality is to be a subject for rational investigation. This sounds impressive enough: the real difficulty is to see what, in the present context, could be the point of denying it. Of course, one might have misgivings about talk of a realm of objective moral reality independent of our conceptual schemes. But even if one is willing for the sake of the discussion to grant the propriety of this language it is hard to see what could be made to hang on the distinction here. Our aim is to reach a philosophical understanding

of that sphere of reasoning which is concerned with telling us how we should act. The practical problem of deciding what to do will continue to face us whatever view is taken of the relation between our judgements and 'moral reality'. Thus, reasoning about conduct is unaffected by the kind of speculation we are having to engage in to attach some weight to the differences between the formulas quoted above. To note this is surely to call the point of the attempt into question. It is significant that this line of argument is very close to one used by Singer against the moral sceptic. He remarks that:

> '..even though such skeptical theories have had some value as a stimulus to more accurate thought about the matter, there is an important sense in which all such theories are morally irrelevant. They have no relevance to the problems of <u>morality</u> (and at the same time they are productive of moral confusion). Hence they can be no substitute for a theory that does. To one who is trying to decide whether something ought or ought not to be done, it is no help to be told that moral judgements are all subjective, or merely expressive of attitudes. And to claim that therefore one ought not to have some moral problem, because moral ideas have no objective or rational basis, is to depart from the moral neutrality that is now so widely regarded as the paragon of philosophic virtue'.[1]

This passage is highly relevant to our discussion. The suggestion we have been considering may easily be reformulated so as to bring this out. It amounts to the claim that the point of stating the generalization principle in terms of 'what is right for x' rather than of 'what x judges to be right' is to provide a guarantee against absolute moral scepticism. Clearly this line of argument is not available to Singer for he regards the danger that it is supposed to avert as quite unreal in that it has no relevance to the concern of the philosopher with practical reasoning. It is now hard to see what significance he could possibly attach to the distinction.

When one turns to consider the details of Singer's discussion the overwhelming impression is that he would not in practice wish to let

1. <u>ibid</u>. p.7.

anything whatever depend on it. Thus he seems to regard the generalization principle as applying indifferently to actions and to judgements:

'The generalization principle has so far been stated in such a way as to refer more explicitly to actions than to moral judgements. But it can easily be restated so as to make its application to moral judgements more explicit'.[1]

Besides he tends to switch from one kind of interpretation to the other in a way that suggests he sees no significant difference between them. The process is illustrated in the following passage:

'Anyone who judges an action to be right for himself implicitly judges it to be right for anyone else whose nature and circumstances do not differ from his own in certain important respects (that is for any similar person in similar circumstances). If a kind of conduct that is right (or wrong) for one person is not right (or wrong) for someone else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases, other than the (tautological) fact that the individuals involved are distinct individuals'.[2]

Perhaps the best evidence of all is provided by the way in which he applies the principle to particular practical issues: at this point the thesis about actions dissolves entirely into one about judgements. Throughout the discussion Singer tends to take for granted that the generalization principle is immune from serious doubt. Thus he remarks that 'it is not likely to be regarded as fallacious though it has frequently been regarded as vacuous and hence devoid of significant application'.[3] As this statement suggests, he believes that the real difficulties arise not in connection with its correctness or justification but with its application in practice. More specifically, he recognises that the 'basic question' about the principle 'concerns the import' of the qualification 'similar persons in similar circumstances'.[4] The first step he takes in dealing with this question is to switch the focus of attention to reasons for judgements. Relevance is determined by reasons:

'The criteria for "all similar cases" are contained in the "general grounds" or reasons on the basis of which an act is, or is said to

1. ibid. p.36.
3. ibid. p.5.
2. ibid. pp.17-18.
4. ibid. p.17.

be, right or wrong. These reasons determine who are similar and
who are not in a certain context. All those to whom the reasons
apply are similar toeach other and relevantly different from those
to whom the reasons do not apply'.[1]

Elsewhere he writes:

'...it is the reasons that are given in any particular case that
determine the application of the principle, for they determine the
scope of the qualification "similar persons in similar circumstances"'.[2]

As was stated earlier our interest in Singer's discussion of the generaliza-
tion principle arises mainly from his claim to derive substantive moral
conclusions from it. It is now clear that in this context the differences
between its implications for actions and for judgements are unimportant.
It is the possibility of giving reasons for judgements that gives the
principle its practical significance, and it is the nature of the reasons
that determines its scope in particular cases. Thus, before one can apply
the generalization principle it must be transformed explicitly into a
thesis about judgements. In this form it becomes indistinguishable from
Hare's principle. The cash value, one might say, of the generalization
principle is the universalizability thesis. Our initial view of Singer's
case as an attempt to take over Hare's thesis while discarding the insist-
ence on its triviality will therefore stand.

We now come to consider in detail the ways in which Singer
'traces out' the practical consequenses of the generalization principle.
He offers two 'model cases' which are intended to serve as 'paradigms' of
its application.[3] Both models are of great interest, though for contrasting
reasons. In one case the attempt to show that the generalization principle
is not trivial or morally neutral founders through difficulties of detail.
What happens is that at crucial points substantive moral assumptions have
to be smuggled in to help the argument along. This,of course, is what our
thesis would lead one to expect, but it is difficult to derive any general

1. ibid. pp.21-22.   2. ibid. p.34.   3. ibid. p.20.

arguments against Singer's position.from the fact that he has to resort
to it in a particular case. For this purpose his treatment of the other
model is more useful. Here his problem is to cope with a maneouvre which
would seem to be quite generally available to the hostile critic. Hence
if it can be shown that he has failed to deal with it we have been given
reasons for rejecting his entire programme.

It may be useful to begin with an outline of Singer's
general strategy. As we have seen, he recognises that the basic problem
is to determine which differences and similarities are relevant and which
are not. Since he claims that the generalization principle will yield
substantive conclusions by itself he is committed to trying to overcome
the difficulties by the use of formal or conceptual devices alone. His
first step, as was noted above, is the plausible one of switching the
weight of the argument on to reasons for judgements. What he has to do
now is to show that on purely formal grounds certain kinds of alleged
reasons for judgements may be shown not to be reasons at all. The practical
judgements based on them will then be deprived of all rational support.
Singer takes a strong line on the role of reasons in morality. He holds
that 'there can be no genuine moral judgements apart from reasons'.[1]
Hence an 'alleged moral judgement that one is unable to support by reasons
is not a genuine moral judgement at all...'[2] The argument is that the
generalization principle enables one to reject certain kinds of alleged
reasons, and this is to eliminate the practical judgements based on them
in so far as one is considering what one morally ought to do. Clearly the
substantive conclusions derived by Singer from the generalization principle
will typically be of a negative character. The usual effect of the principle
will be to exclude certain possibilities rather than to guide one unambig-
uously in a particular direction. It would be unfair however to use this

1. ibid. p.34.   2. ibid. p.35.

as a criticism of his case. Negative conclusions will be substantial
enough in most circumstances: to be told that certain courses of action are ruled
out is to be given practical guidance. Neither is there any need to cavil at
the lofty view he takes of the status of reasons. Even if one does not
wish to be committed to the view that without the ability to give genuine
reasons there can be no moral judgements, it might still be possible to
agree that Singer has shown that certain alleged reasons for judgements
are not reasons at all. Hence, one might concede that the moral judgements
based on them could have no appeal for someone who wished to decide ration-
ally what he should do. Again this conclusion will appear substantial
enough to anyone seriously interested in moral assessment, a sphere of
judgement concerned with reasoning about conduct. Hence it is essential
for us to show that even results as modest as this cannot be established
by Singer's procedure.

One of the questions which he considers is this:

'What would justify excluding some class of persons from public
employment, or more generally, from appointment from to any sort
of position'.[1]

He goes on to make clear the kind of 'reason' he wishes to exclude:

'The fact that someone does not like people of a certain type would
not, by itself, justify him in claiming that they ought to be excluded
from some position. The fact that he does not like them would not be
a reason though he might think that it is'.[2]

The argument now proceeds as follows:

'For suppose that it were. Then the argument would be that people
of type T ought not to be allowed to hold a certain type of position
because A does not like people of type T. But this presupposes that
anyone A does not like ought not to be allowed to obtain that sort
of position....Anyone can argue in the same way. If there is anyone
who does not like the people A does like (himself included), then
these people ought to be excluded also. It is possible to maintain
on these grounds that no one ought to hold any position, and this
is absurd.[3]

1. ibid. p.25.   2. loc.cit.   3. loc.cit.

Singer does not go on to say what is absurd about such a claim, and in
the abstract it is difficult to see what he might have in mind. It seems
reasonable to suppose that there is nothing conceptually odd about it.
Thus, an anarchist might believe that no one ought to hold any position,
for there ought not to be positions to be held. It might be said that such
a view would be contrary to common sense or that it would be unlikely to
appeal to anyone with much insight into the nature of human society.
Perhaps this is all that Singer wishes to suggest in speaking of its
absurdity. But even if this point were granted it would not be enough to
establish the conclusion as decisively as he requires. Besides to rely
on this interpretation would be to invoke a particular normative assumption;
the view that society should be structured in a way that allows for the
existence of positions of authority. This may strike one as a modest
enough claim but it can hardly be regarded as conceptually necessary.
We surely cannot rule out the possibility of a viable community of anarch-
ists on a priori grounds. Here then we have the first introduction of a
substantive value-judgement. It plays a vital role in Singer's argument
for without the results that are based on it he can proceed no further.
Let us however waive this point for the present and look at how he continues.

Having eliminated appeales to personal likes and dislikes
he goes on:

> 'Now what would count as a reason for excluding a class of people
> from a certain type of employment? In order to justify the claim that
> a certain class or group of people ought to be excluded from a certain
> type of position, it would have to be shown that the members of that
> class have certain characteristics, in virtue of their membership in
> that class, which are such as to unfit them or make them incompetent
> to perform the duties of that postition. But then this class of
> people must be defined by these characteristics. Identification of
> them in terms of some popular category, as say Negroes, or Poles,
> or Jews, will not be sufficient. It would have to be shown that
> because someone is a Negro, or has certain characteristics commonly
> associated with Negroes, he is incapable of carrying out the require-
> ments of the position in question.'[1]

1. ibid. p.27.

The primary difficulty is to see how any of this is warranted by the generalization principle. The central claim is that to qualify as a moral reason one's reason for excluding people from employment must make reference to their capacities. But a nepotist might refuse to appoint anyone except his own relations on the grounds that one has special obligations to members of one's family. In some societies this stand might be applauded as showing a commendable loyalty to traditional ways. It is surely not inconceivable that such a person might be able to invoke the backing of moral reasons. Would it not be unreasonable to refuse to allow that there might be a case to answer here? It may well be that the nepotist's arguments could be refuted. At any rate, the assumptions which Singer tacitly relies on would have fairly general support. For what he does in effect is to appeal to widely-held views of what constitutes justice in the making of appointments. In the circumstances this move has a certain insidious charm. In part this is due simply to the fact that Singer sometimes refers to the generalization principle as itself a 'principle of justice'.[1] But a more ominous factor in the case is the close link between the notions of 'being just' and 'being rational'. A central element in each is the refusal to make arbitrary discriminations. Because of this affinity it might be thought that Singer is merely appealing to conceptual considerations which are inescapably bound up with our idea of what constitutes rational procedure in such a situation. This would, of course, fit in perfectly with his general programme. To get to the heart of the issues involved here we shall have to look more closely at the notion of justice in general and its relationship with the generalization principle in particular.

One can hardly do better at this stage than refer to the discussion of 'justice' in H.L.A.Hart's The Concept of Law. There is, as Hart makes clear, a sense in which justice is a purely formal or procedural principle which enjoins that we should 'treat like cases alike and different

1. See, for instance, p.5.

cases differently'.[1] When interpreted in this way the analogy with the generalization principle is obvious. Central to each is the claim that distinctions should not be made without a reason and that the genuineness of alleged reasons is tested by willingness to accept their authority in other cases. Indeed it might be said that the generalization principle and this formal principle of justice are, in a sense, identical: the verbal differences are accounted for by the fact that they are concerned to work out the implications of the sovereignty of reason for different practical contexts. But if this is so then one must take seriously Hart's warning that although the formula given above is a 'central element in the idea of justice' it 'is by itself incomplete, and, until supplemented, cannot afford any determinate guide to conduct'.[2] For, he explains:

> '...until it is established what resemblances and differences are relevant, "Treat like cases alike" must remain an empty form...
> Without this further supplement we cannot proceed to criticize laws or other social arrangements as unjust'.[3]

Hart sums up the position by remarking that the idea of justice 'consists of two parts: a uniform or constant feature, summarized in the precept "Treat like cases alike" and a shifting or varying criterion used in determining when, for any given purpose, cases are alike or different'.[4] Let us try to apply the lessons of this analysis to Singer's discussion. He wishes to show that the generalization principle has practical consequences for the making of appointments. In the process he becomes involved with considerations of what constitutes justice here. This may be legitimate in so far as he is merely invoking what Hart calls the 'central precept' of justice: 'Treat like cases alike and different cases differently'. For this formula might plausibly be seen as a restatement of the generalization principle in a way appropriate to the particular context. But there is a difficulty here which was predictable from Hart's analysis. It is that an appeal to the formal element in the idea of justice leaves one still at the level of procedural rules which point in no particular practical

1. <u>op.cit.</u> p.155.
2. <u>loc.cit.</u>
3. <u>loc.cit.</u>
4. <u>ibid.</u> p.156.

direction. Hence to save his conclusion Singer is forced to supplement the 'central precept' with a criterion of relevance, the capacities of condidates. By doing so he is able to generate practical conclusions but such a move is impossible to reconcile with an official policy of relying on the generalization principle alone. Besides, although the criterion of relevance that is used is quite plausible it can hardly be said to be necessarily demanded by our idea of what constitutes justice in these matters. Capacity is not the only criterion that might reasonable be thought appropriate. Considerations of 'need' may be involved in some cases. For instance, it might be thought desirable to take account of the number of dependants each candidate has to support. Or perhaps notions of 'dessert' in a sense which involves more than capacity might be introduced. It might be thought that war-veterand and other public benefactors should in justice be given precedence over other candidates. Thus it might be argued that even if the unwarranted adsumption which Singer makes is granted.one is still in no way obliged to accept his conclusion.

In view of these difficulties it is tempting to suggest that Singer's references to the generalization principle as a principle of justice should be interpreted in a different way. One might see them aw identifying it not merely with formal elements, but with the idea of justice in its entirety; that is with justice as a substantive principle which incorporates criteria for determining what considerations are relevant in practice. It might then be claimed that among these in-built criteria notions of capacity have a special importance when considering candidates for employment. To take this line would leave no room for doubt as to the practical significance of the generalization principle. The difficulty would be to reconcile it with other elements in Singer's case, in particular with the claim that the generalization principle is 'involved in or presupposed by every genuine mebal judgement' and that it is 'presupposed in every attempt to give a reason for a moral judgement'.[1]

1. ibid. p.34.

No doubt the concept of justice is of great importance in morality but
it is hardly as fundamental or ubiquitous xxx as this implies. It has
been suggested that in some areas of the moral life, such as personal
relations, notions of justice have little relevance. Or it may be said
such notions are really appropriate onle where questions arise as to how
conflicting claims are to be settled and not all moral problems take this
form. Even in situations where the principle of justice is obviously
relevant, for instance where appointments are being made, it may be thought
that there are other kinds mf moral consideration with which it conflicts.
This point has important implications for Singer's attempt to provide
unequivocal moral guidance on the issue. Thus, for instance, it might be
argued that the head of the government, on whom national survival is
thought to depend, should in a time of grave crisis be free to appoint
whomever he likes to serve under him, even when his only criterion is t
that he finds their faces congenial. In such a case considerations of
'national well-being' or 'the public interest' take precedence over
justice in the making of appointments. An egalitarian will believe that
there are important moral issues involved apart from justice in the sense
that Singer has in mind. If he takes an extreme view of these matters he
may insist that everyone should be considered equally eligible for every
position and that any reckoning of capacities is an affront to human
dignity. More moderately, he may believe that equality is at least a
relevant consideration which would often tend to work against the notion
of justice as a matter of abilities. A liberal may feel that the emphasis
on competence is unfortunate in other ways. He may think that in a demo-
cratic society there are positions such as that of the secret policeman
which are best held by people who will not function too efficiently. More
generally it may be argued that, at least in peace-time, it is best if
the civil service contains a high proportion of incompetents, in that an
efficient and self-confident bureaucracy may pose a threat to individual
freedom. Thus it appears that considerations of justice in the making of
appointments may come into conflict with considerations of freedom or
equality or the public interest. It would surely be unreasonable to insist

that any one of these principles must always outweigh the others. Singer's assumption that we can be guided by justice alone is, however, perfectly intelligible in the light of his general position. In order to derive practical conclusions from the generalization principle what he does is to identify it with the principle of justice and then, interpreting the notion of justice substantively rather than formally and taking for granted a particular critérion of relevance, to expand it to fill all the conceptual space available. But however insidious the charm of this sequence may be it contains too many discontinuities and begs too many questions to exert a grip on the uncommitted observer.

It may be useful at this point to list the more important assumptions which Singer relies on to supplement the generalization principle in this first 'model case'. One is the view that there ought to be positions of authority in society and that people ought to be appointed to fill them. Another is the assumption that in applying the principle of justice to the practical problem of choosing candidates the only relevant criteria are ones which relate to capacities. A third is the belief that justice overrides all other moral considerations here. If one brings these assumptions together one finds that they amount to something like a coherent ideal of social organization. It is one which is incompatible with anarchism, fascism and the acceptance of inherited or customary authority. Instead it pins its faith to efficient administration by a meritocracy. No doubt this position has its merits but it is surely not one which all rational men must feel bound to accept. If the body of extra assumptions is set aside and one asks what the generalization principle by itself will achieve here, the answer is likely to be disappointing. The situation is precisely analogous to that noted by Hart in the case of his formal principle of justice. That is we are offered no 'determinate guide to conduct' at all. Even where someone's reason for excluding a candidate is that he does not like him, the generalization principle will not entitle us to reject it provided that the feeling of

dislike is taken as relevant in all other cases. Indeed it is not even obvious that this must be a foolish way to proceed: the man may have found his feelings to be a reliable guide in the past. The general point may perhaps be put in this way. The generalization principle ordains that what one judges to be right in case x one must judge to be right in all relevantly similar cases, but it gives no guidance as to how one should judge in case x. Of dourse it follows from the thesis we wish to establish that Singer is perfectly right in maintaining that not every practical judgement in the employment case will be a moral judgement. This element of selectivity is the core of truth in his position and accounts for much of its appeal. But the conditions which must be satisfied cannot be derived from the logical thesis of generalization. They are dependent on the material considerations inherent in the nature of moral assessment.

The issues raised by Singer's second 'model case' are of still more general significance. His problem is the familiar one of showing that certain sorts of considerations could not possibly qualify as moral reasons. On this occasion the considerations being advanced are particularly troublesome for they are always available to the critic. Hence if his objections are sustained once they dan never be resisted. Essentially the argument relies on an appeal to trivial, though admittedly distinctive, features of the particular situation such as the fact that some person is a unique individual, that he has a certain name or that the geographical location of his house may be precisely specified. In trying to dispose of such claims Singer makes use of an interesting maneouvre. He points out that anyone can invoke similar considerations and hence if they are admitted in one case they must be admitted in all. He the argues that this result can be shown to be unacceptable on conceptual grounds. The core of the argument is contained in the following passage:

'The fact that I am I, or the person I am, cannot justify my claim ±
that my case is exceptional, that I have the right to do something
others do not have the right to do. But this is not because this
purported reason is not a general one, or does not have a general

application. It actually has <u>too general</u> an application. If I can
say"I am I,and you are someone else", <u>everyone</u> can say "I am I and
you are someone else". Thus this cannot show that one case is differ-
ent from another. The attempt to use the fact that I am I to justify
the claim that my case is exceptional actually involves a contradict-
ion. For since it is true of everyone that he is he, since everyone
can say "I am I", it would follow that every case is exceptional, and
this is self-contradictory'.[1]

The main objection to this conclusion is that it begs the question in a
subtle way. Given that an objector is willing to accept the procedure by
which his argument is generalized so as to be available to everyone, he
might well refuse to accept Singer's description of the state of affairs
that results. That is, he might deny that it is a situation in which every
case has turned out to be exceptional. This would indeed be conceptually
odd, but talk of exceptions only has point against a background of accepted
rules or ways of proceeding. The existence of such a background cannot
be assumed in advance.of applying the generalization principle if one is
claiming to derive practical conclusions from that principle alone. Besides
it may well happen that the effect of the piecemeal examination of each
individual case in the light of the generalization principle is to show
that the assumption of a settled background would be unwarranted. For
everyone involved may be able to cite distinctive features of his own
case which we may think to be trivial but which the generalization princ-
iple by itself does not entitle us to ignore. There is no need to resort
to absurd descriptions of this situation in terms of rules to which every
case is an exception. It is simply one in which there are no reasons for
believing in the existence of the alleged rule.

Let us take the discussion of this second 'model case' to
a more detailed level by considering an issue which Singer raises later
on. It concerns the grounds on which one might legitimately refuse to pay
income tax. As before Singer argues that one could not legitimately appeal
to the fact that one has a certain name or lives in a certain house, for:

1. <u>ibid</u>. p.22.

'...exactly the same sort of consideration would apply to everyone.
Thus this sort of consideration could not show anyoneto be an
exception to the rule, simply because it would apply to everyone
and hence would imply that everyone is an exception, which is...
self-contradictory'.[1]

Now it would indeed be odd to claim that one is an exception to a rule on
grounds that are equally available to everyone else. Someone who wished
to defend his refusal to pay income tax would be foolish to attempt such
a line. He would do better to begin by challenging the presupposition that
there is a general obligation to pay the tax, and, given a certain backg-
round of factual and normative assumptions, this need not be an indefens-
ible position. He may go on to argue that if one considers each individual
case on its merits without any predilections one may find that everyone
who might conceivably be thought liable for the tax can appeal to consider-
ations such as the location of his house which show that he has no such
obligation. In this way it might emerge that no one has an obligation to
pay income tax. But this is not a matter of finding that everyone is an
exception to a rule: it is the discovery that there is no rule. This way
of stating the result is not open to Singer's attempt at a reduction to
absurdity, and the generalization principle together with the sorts of
conceptual device he is restricted to offer no other way of dealing with
it. The significance of the income tax case is perfectly general. Singer
is anxious to rule out the trivial considerations that are appealed to
precisely because they are available on every conceivable occasion. The
failure to do so undermines his whole position.

        The vital point that has emerged is that to apply the
generalisation principle so as to yield practical consequences it is
necessary to presuppose the existence of moral rules. It may prove illum-
inating to ask what is the basis of Singer's confidence in the existence
of the rule in the income tax case, or indeed in any other. The answer
yielded by the text is plain enough: to see what moral rules there are
one must refer to the 'generalization argument'. This is formulated in

1. ibid. p.87.

a number of verbally different ways but a standard version runs as follows:
'If everyone were to do that, the consequences would be disastrous (or
undesirable), therefore, no one ought to do that '.[1] Singer is quite
explicit about the nature of the connection b4tween moral rules and the
generalization argument:

> 'Moral rules are established by means of the generalization argument.
> A rule that cannot be derived from an application of the generalization
> argument cannot be justified'.[2]

One might now ask what the generalization argument is itself derived from
and how it is to be justified. The answer is that it 'presupposes and
consequently depends upon the generalization principle'[3]: it is a 'deduct-
ion' from the principle and certain other premises.[4] Clearly at this
point we are beginning to turn in a circle. To apply the generalization
principle it is necessary to presuppose some moral rules and all such
rules are established by the generalization argument. If one asks what
justifies that argument the answer is that it is a deduction from premises
which include the generalization principle. The circularity involved here,
though not formally vicious, must be disturbing to anyone concerned with
the rationale of Singer's position. The key concepts fit together so
tightly that once one enters the chain one is carried smoothly all the
way round. It is difficult, however, to see what reasons have been given
for taking the first vital step. Singer's procedure does succeed in
creating an impression of rigour and economy. But this is bought at a
heavy price, that of detaching the system from the sorts of objective
consideration that could exert rational pressure on one who stands initia-
lly outside.

To pursue these general comments, however, would take us
outside the scope of the present inquiry. For its purposes the essential
point is that it is now clear that the generalization principle can only
be usefully applied if one accepts the generalization argument. The

1. _ibid_. p.4.   2. _ibid_. p.119.
3. _ibid_. pp.5-6.   4. _ibid_. p.66.

'argument' raises a number of doubts and difficulties peculiar to itself, but perhaps the crucial feature may be picked out without entering the disputed area at all. It is that it embodies assumptions which are far from being self-evidently correct and which, as a matter of fact, not all moralists and philosophers would accept. Thus, for instance, the 'deontologists' among them would regard the reference to consequences as irrelevant or, at best, necessarily inconclusive. According to Miss Anscombe the Hebrew-Christian moral tradition would forbid all appeals to consequences in certain cases and she herself is prepared to say that sometimes even a willingness to raise such issues for discussion would show a 'corrupt mind'.[1] However eccentric or undesirable Singer might find such views they can hardly be treated as conceptually absurd. That is he cannot refute them with the range of weapons he is restricted to in the attempt to show that the generalization principle is not 'trivial' or 'morally neutral'. What he does in effect is to bypass the issue by taking for granted the background of a quite different sort of moral theory, a version of what is sometimes called 'rule-utilitarianism'. To note this is to be given a vivid reminder of how complete has been the failure to derive substantive conclusions from formal characteristics of the moral judgement.

The contents of the last two chapters may be summarised as follows. After a brief survey of the literature on the form versus content dispute a particular way of resolving it was proposed. It is that, while moral understanding is contentless, assessment is necessarily bound up with certain material considerations. It was suggested that serious doubts about this thesis are likely to arise only in connection with the second half of it. We then discussed the difficulty of providing a straightforward demonstration of any conclusion here and decided on an indirect strategy. In the first place it was suggested that the view

1. 'Modern Moral Philosophy', Philosophy, 1958, Reprinted in W.D. Hudson, op.cit. See.p.♀ 192.

being proposed has the merit of being able to account satisfactorily for all the phenomena. Then an attempt was made to reveal the weaknesses in the formalist position as it applies to assessment. Attention was concentrated on what is probably the most formidable and thoroughly discussed aspect of the case, the feature generally known as 'universalizability'. It was found that the influential account given by R.M.Hare yields only a vacuous thesis in the present context. An attempt was then made to demolish the chief remaining support of a formalist view of moral assessment based on universalizability. The claim is that this feature serves not merely to distinguish those practical judgements that may be accounted 'moral' but can also provide guidance to as to which moral judgements are correct. This view was examined in the elaborate and ambitious version presented by M.G.Singer. His attempts to draw practical conclusions from the 'generalization principle' were found to involve either unacknowledged normative assumptions or unsuccessful formal maneouvres. When his conclusions are rejected one is left with some version of Hare's thesis and this provides not so much a characterization of moral assessment as a restatement of the problem. The situation at present is that serious weaknesses in the formalist case have been revealed and we have outlined some of the advantages of an alternative view. But, however persuasive, the effect of the discussion so far must be largely negative and indirect. At this point we must go on to ask what independent arguments may be advanced in favour of our positive thesis.

Chapter 8.

FORM AND CONTENT (3).

The hypothesis we are seeking to establish is that moral assessment is necessarily tied to considerations of human good and harm. A rather banal but useful general point should be made before considering it in detail. It is that to set out the contention clearly with all its ramifications is to perform an important service for it. At present the chief obstacle it has to face is misunderstanding, and this is as easy to illustrate from the work of supporters as from that of opponents. The picture that will emerge from the discussion should strike one with a sense of familiarity. For the aim is not to promote any radical conceptual revision in this area, but to reach a philosophical understanding of the concepts we already have. Hence it would be disturbing if our characterisation of moral assessment was in any significant degree paradoxical or counter-intuitive. The primary requirement here is a strategy that will allow the truth to emerge and establish its claim on us. It may be well to start with the sort of case that seems to represent the greatest difficulty for the hypothesis. It concerns the person whose practical assessments seem to be totally uninfluenced by considerations of human well-being but have a claim to be called 'moral' that would on general grounds be thought overwhelming.

Discussion of this topic is often carried on in terms of a stock figure labelled 'the Fascist' or 'the Nazi' or 'the follower of Nietzsche'. In spite of the perjorative associations of these terms it will be convenient to use them here in a more or less technical sense whose precise significance will gradually become clear. One might convey

a rough idea of what is involved by saying that the Fascist has ideals
which emphasise certain kinds of excellence, and in pursuit of them he
makes assessments which are unaffected by considerations of human welfare
in any ordinary sense. It would seem that if our hypothesis is to have
any substance we must allow for the possibility that at least some Fascists
operate a system of practical assessment which is distinct from morality.
Yet it may well be that from an external, structural point of view their
judgements are identical with ones we unhesitatingly accept as moral.
Thus they are willing to prescribe them universally, to allow them a
dominant influence on the conduct of their own lives, and so on. It might
now be asked, how can the exclusion of such people from the realm of
morality be anything but arbitrary and question-begging? We may be in
danger of separating the sheep from the goats without being able to point
to any difference that might constitute a justification. Many writers have
been sensitive to this line of criticism and it may be one of the factors
that leads to the rejection of material concerns altogether. The situation
is particularly delicate if one is personally inclined to favour the
'liberal' view. For one might be worried by the thought that the refusal
to credit the Fascist with a moral position is due to dislike of his
views and the wish to see them excluded from the realm of respectable
debate. Thus, one seems to be faced with a choice between dismissing the
opponents case by linguistic _fiat_ and abandoning one's own. The best hope
of escaping from this situation is to find some rational basis for one's
treatment of the Fascist. Perhaps it might be shown that there are differ-
ences between his position and that of the 'liberal' which deserve to be
marked in some manner, and that the most reasonable way to do this is
in terms of the distinction between morality and all that lies outside?
Let us explore this possibility by considering in more detail what a
Fascist position might involve.

There are a number of possibilities here which should be
clearly distinguished. The first might be sketched in this way. The

Fascist is a person who sets great store by such virtues as pride, loyalty, ruthlessness and courage. He in inclined to contrast these with the 'Christian' emphasis on love, compassion and humility. It may be part of his creed that his ideals stand the best chance of being realisdd in times of war and violence and that prolonged peace leads to decadence. He may believe that these virtues are unlikely to be displayed by the 'masses' in any period and that in their purest form they must be the monopoly of an elite. If he inclines to an optimistic view of the human situation he may believe that these 'supermen' will one day become the dominant force on earth. Or,pessimistically, he may think that those who exemplify his chosen forms of excellence will always be at the mercy of the envious majority. At any rate the general nature of the position is reasonably familiar. The first question one might ask is whether some, perhaps eccentric, conception of human well-being does not underlie it. The suggestion that it might is easy enough to develop. Perhaps our Fascist believed that what is most valuable in human life, indeed the only thing that is intrinsically valuable, is the development of certain qualities to the greatest possible extent. If this can only be achieved by a few at the cost of the degradation of others the man of genuine insight will consider the price worth paying. A situation in which some people display the qualities of supermen is, whatever other features it may have, preferable to one in which everone lives in comfortable medioc- rity. It may even be maintained that the underdogs in such a system should be prepared to agree with this assessment in so far as they are capable of objective judgement. For, objectively, there has been a net gain in human terms: the highest forms of excellence have been realized and this outweighs all else. Considerations of honour and dignity must take prece- dence over vulgar utilitarian ones of material comfort and peace of mind. Now it does not seem at all implausible to suggest that there is some general conception of human good and harm at work here. Indeed one may suspect that if this were not so Fascist ideas could never exert the influence that in fact they do. Perhaps only a tiny minority are ever likely to be attracted by ideas which fail even to pay lip-service to

a vision of the good life for man. It is worth noting the oblique tribute paid to the strength of this tendency by even the most debased versions of the position. It is conventionally, and no doubt rightly, said that it was an important aim of Nazi propaganda to gain acceptance for the view that Jews, Slavs and gipsies were not quite fully human. They therefore fell outside the range of those who must be considered in making assessments of purely human good and harm. This is, of course, to narrow the denotation of 'human' in vicious and unjustifiable ways. And, no doubt, the Nazi view of what constituted the well-being of those who came within the scope of the term was somewhat bizarre. Nevertheless it may still be argued that these views retain some link with a general conception of what is valuable in human life. In this respect there is an important distinction to be made between even the most extreme exponents of this first kind of Fascist position and those who fall ~~sitting~~ within the category we now come to consider.

Sometimes the virtues with which the Fascist is supposed to be concerned differ significantly from those mentioned above. What he values, it is said, are states of affairs which exhibit in a high degree such qualities as order, uniformity, symmetry and discipline. Correspondingly his opposition tends to focus on a different set of enemies; variety, disorder, nonconformity, individualism in all its forms, whatever is amorphous and resistant to central control and so on. In practice it would of course be impossible to divide people neatly between the two categories. Some pure representatives of each may perhaps be found but in most cases one may expect to find their elements combined in varied proportions. Conceptually, however, the distinction is reasonable sharp. Putting the point in terms of a rather crude dichotomy one might say that, while the first kind of Fascist wishes to see Jews eliminated because in their absence various kinds of human excellence will flourish, the second wishes it because the world would be left a tidier place. What is happening in the latter case is that human affairs are being assessed in terms of

standards normally reserved for inanimate things. Hare's discussion of 'the Nazi'[1] contains a shrewd appraisal of this tendency though it is not clearly distinguished from other possibilities in the case.

'The enormity of Nazism is that it extends an aesthetic style of evaluation into a field where the bulk of mankind think that such evaluations should be subordinated to the interests of other people. The Nazis were like the emperor Heliogabalus, who, I have been told, had people slaughtered because he thought that red blood on green grass looked beautiful'.[2]

No doubt many would agree that the application of an aesthetic style of evaluation to human affairs is liable to prove disastrous. It is not difficult to see why this should be so. To make such evaluations is to look at human life from the outside. It abstracts from the individuals own view of his situation and treats his conception of where his interests lie as irrelevant. Instead his case is judged in terms of its contribution to a larger pattern which in its turn is controlled by notions of order and design. Within such a perspective its role is analogous to that of the notes in music or the pieces in a game of chess. Obviously the practical consequences of judgements made in this spirit may easily turn out to be repugnant to our ordinary sense of what is permissible or appropriate. It will be an accident if in particular cases the craving for order produces the same results as would a concern for human welfare. Our purpose is not to adjudicate this issue but simply to note that two quite different sorts of consideration are involved. Besides we wish to suggest that what is excluded by this second variety of Fascism are precisely those considerations that are constitutive of moral assessment.

It may offer a fresh viewpoint if one considers the sort of case which this suggestion would lead one to exclude from morality. An example is provided by the man who desires the destruction of certain human groups in the interests of a more economical universe and another

1. Freedom and Reason, ch.9.   2. ibid. p.161.

by the emperor Heliogabalus who had people killed because he liked the
effect of their blood on the grass. There is surely a prima facie difficulty
about grasping the significance of calling these judgements 'moral'. If
such cases are not to be excluded one might begin to wonder how any limits
at all could be placed on the concept. Besides a description of a quite
different sort lies ready to hand. We can say with complete appropriateness
that these are aesthetic judgements, unusual mainly by virtue of their
objects. Even the appeal to what we find it natural to say, usually quite
inconclusive in this area, offers some support. In describing some situat-
ions in which considerations of human well-being are disregarded in a
spectacular way we do seem to step naturally from the vocabulary of morals
to that of aesthetics. Thus, writers on the Marquis de Sade sometimes
urge that he be seen as an 'artist' in an unusual sphere. It would be a
commonplace to remark that those Indian tribes who strove to keep their
prisoners alive in great pain for as long as possible had made torture
into an 'art'. Or we may recognise that Machiavelli in developing his
'art' of politics was proposing to set moral considerations aside as irrel-
evant. All this suggests, with whatever force is to be attached to such
considerations, that we are on the right lines in holding that, while the
first kind of Fascist has a moral code of a sort, the second has left the
realm of morality altogether. Perhaps it does not matter greatly in the
end whether one agrees to use the terms 'moral' and 'aesthetic' to mark
this conceptual gulf. The essential point is to grasp the nature of the
distinction and to insist on its significance. On the one side is a
system of practical assessment controlled by some general conception of
the good life for man. On the other is a system to which such considerat-
ions are wholly extraneous and irrelevant. If someone refused to acknowl-
edge that this difference is important one would be at a loss to know
what his conception of 'importance' could amount to. If the distinction
between exclusive concern for and total neglect of human interests is not
regarded as significant then where is significance to be found? Of course
when one accepts that the difference is philosophically important and
deserves formal recognition the question arises as to how it should be

done. In support of the terminology proposed above one can at least say that it manages this in a perfectly satisfactory way and moreover puts minimum strain on our ordinary use of language.

There is a third variation on the Fascist position to be considered. Where practical judgements fail to connect with any conception of human well-being it will not follow automatically that they must be of an aesthetic dharacter. There is another possibility which may often, though not always, be understood as a development from the one we considered first. It may happen that a man's ideals gradually become detached from their original background of a general picture of the good life. They come to be held with a degree of purity and abstraction that makes all reference to the ordinary circumstances of human existence seem vulgar and inconsequential. The existence of such a situation is most likely to reveal itself through a rigid insistence on the practical implications of the ideals regardless of their cost in human terms. The Fascist might constitute an example if his concern for racial purity led him to believe that the extinction of all life on earth should be preferred to miscegenation. It might be thought that this view has a pathological aspect which makes it unsuitable as an example. But the presence of this element is not entirely accidental: it represents a danger to which the position is inherently liable. To insist on one's ideals regardless of their human cost is an important part of what is usually meant by 'fanaticism'. Nevertheless not all manifestations of the tendency will be as difficult to defend as the one that has been cited. One can find more plausible, and perhaps more characteristic, examples among what are conventionally regarded as the less extreme forms of nationalism. This may be explained by looking at the intellectual background of the position. The characteristic line of development is as follows. A particular concept comes in the course of time to be hypostatized and endowed with exalted significance. It is thought of as an entity having many of the attributes of human persons and with interests and needs peculiar to itself. In favourable circumstances it

may become widely accepted that these outweigh merely human interests
and needs and should always take precedence in the event of a conflict.
The history of the concept of 'the nation' is a classic illustration of
this process. In the end people may come to think of 'France' or 'Italy'
as a sort of eternal metaphysical entity whose welfare is quite independent
of that of ~~indryxxlxx~~ individual Frenchmen and Italians. Thus a nationalist
might wish to claim that the nation is in a disastrous state when all its
citizens are living peacefully and prosperously under a non-national
government. Not only are the interests of the nation autonomous, they are
also overriding. On occasion it may even be held, as Hitler seems to have
done in his last days, that the honour of the nation requires that all
its members should commit suicide. It is difficult to see how this sort
of judgement can have any connection with considerations of human welfare.

Some at least of those who favour the general line of
thought would not wish to pretend otherwise. A characteristic element in
their creed is that there are types of consideration that transcend mere
human interests, and in the context of these larger notions a concern with
such interests is felt to be stifling and ignoble. Men ought to sacrifice
their welfare to that of the nation for it incorporates the highest ideals
they can formulate. Religion is perhaps the natural home of views of this
kind. It has not been unusual for believers to think of God as having an
interest in seeing one kind of development rather than another take place
on earth. Interference with the desired course of events may be seen as
an affront to His dignity which should be avoided at whatever cost. Such
views have sometimes been attributed to the Roman Catholic Church, as in
the following passage from John Henry Newman:

> 'The Church holds that it were better for sun and moon to drop from
> heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions who are
> upon it to die of starvation in extremest agony, so far as temporal
> affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say should be lost,
> but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one ~~xixgix~~
> wilful untruth, though it harmed no one, or steal one poor farthing

without excuse'.[1]

According to Newman, the Church would prefer the extinction of all human life to the theft of a farthing. Such an assessment must be understood as based on what can only be called a calculation of divine, as opposed to human, interests. Indeed, if one sought a paradigm example of the somewhat elusive category of purely religious practical assessments one could hardly do better than refer to this case. If any sense can be made of the distinction between the moral and the religious in this area such a judgement must surely fall outside the moral half of it. Significantly, many religious believers would have no difficulty in accepting this verdict. It is not unusual in such circumstances to encounter the claim that at a certain point the realm of secular morality has been abandoned for the higher one of religious truth. Hence, our thesis is perfectly able to accommodate the situation. Moreover it has little difficulty with the nationalist case discussed earlier. If a man were to prefer his own death and the deaths of all his fellow countrymen to a loss of dignity by the nation one might well be struck by the contrast between the sort of consideration he is concerned with and those usually associated with moral judgements. It seems reasonable to hold that the most appropriate way to acknowledge these conceptual gaps is in terms of the distinction between moral and non-moral forms of practical assessment. One is greatly encouraged here by the fact that such a conclusion fits in well with the descriptions that many nationalists and religious believers would give of their position.

This examination of the case of the Fascist has revealed it to be a good deal more complex than it may appear at first. A number of substantially different positions have had to be distinguished under

1. ~~Ichxxxxxxxxx~~ Quoted in John Hospers, Human Conduct, An Introduction to the Problems of Ethics, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., New York, 1961, p.260.

the general heading. The basic distinction is between the cases where assessment is based on some general notion of the good life and those where it is not. Attempts to put representatives of the first category outside morality may generally be explained in terms of a tendency to take for granted some particular, limited conception of what human welfare must consist in. There is on the other hand no temptation to include any members of the second once its true nature has been understood. In this latter case there are alternative descriptions ready to hand in the shape of various well-established categories of judgement; religious, aesthetic and ideological. The general conclusion that emerges is that the case of the Fascist presents no serious difficulty for our thesis. On the contrary it offers a chance to show its explanatory power in reducing a welter of phenomena to order. There is a further point to be made before leaving this topic. We have been arguing for a liberal interpretation of the notion of human good and harm. The characteristic risk of such a proceeding is that one's thesis may become vacuous and serve to exclude little or nothing within the field of its operation. The discussion of the Fascist has given some guarantees against this in that it has shown that various familiar styles of evaluation fall outside the limits of the moral as they have been drawn here. It may be useful, however, to reinforce this point in a way that enables one to make a final comment on a question raised earlier; whether every community must be credited with a morality.

Part of the answer has already been given. It is that when a characterisation of moral understanding is achieved the problem takes on a substantial empirical aspect. The picture may now be completed by remarking that our account of moral assessment serves to take the remaining issues out of the philosopher's hands. Whether or not a community's code of assessment is a moral code depends on its relationship with general conceptions of human good and harm. If this issue can be settled at all it will only be achieved by anthropological evidence. It does however seem reasonable to suppose that the verdict will sometimes go one way and some-

times the other. The standard accounts of Homer's heroes, for instance, tend to assimilate their views to the first kind of Fascism. Thus they are conventionally said to attach great importance to qualities of guile, ferocity and ruthlessness. These might well form the core of a more or less coherent ideal of human existence, however mistaken or objectionable it may appear. On the other hand, some descriptions of their position would serve tb bring them closer to the second kind of Fascist. For sometimes the emphasis is on their regard for the manner or style in which human faculties are exercised rather than the substantive virtues which the exercise reveals. Again it would not be difficult to conceive of situations analogous to the third category. These might arise where for instance the assessments of a primitive community are dominated by the supposed wishes of a bloodthirsty deity who demands sacrificial victims without the assurance of any quid pro quo whatever. But there is little point in trying any further to anticipate the results of empirical inquiry. Enough has been said to indicate in a general way the implications of our thesis for this area. We must now return to the task of making its foundations secure.

It may help to carry the argument a stage further if one notes an important feature of the way these issues have been treated in recent moral philosophy. It is that disagreement between those who accept and those who reject a general link between the concepts of morality and of human welfare is based on a measure of agreement at a more fundamental level. The common element is the assumption that in many cases what constitutes human good and harm is a quite straightforward and uncontroversial matter. It can be read off from the situation with the same ease as its ordinary empirical properties. Underlying this assumption in its turn is a general tendency for the notion of human welfare to be cashed in terms of an unsophisticated kind of utilitarianism. The results are unfortunate in a number of ways. A thin and partial view of morality has been bequeathed to those who continue to insist on the conceptual link. The implausibility

of this has led others, taking for granted the same narrow view of human good and harm, to deny that there is any necessary connection here at all. Their search for an understanding of morality has then led down various paths with nothing in common except that all lead away from the truth. One source of the trouble is that discussion has centred on how to operate with the concept of human welfare without any adequate sense of how obscure and problematic a concept it is. The recovery of this awareness as a first step towards the resolution of the problems to which it is at present the appropriate response is therefore highly desirable. At this point we shall turn to consider some particular cases in order to substantiate these claims.

Mrs. Philippa Foot has been one of the most influential advocates of the view that considerations of human good and harm are in some way constitutive of moral reasoning. The paper entitled 'Moral ~~Belixfxx~~ Beliefs'[1] is a convenient text for examination in detail. The starting point of the discussion is the claim that moral evaluation is internally related to its objects.[2] When this view is looked at closely it becomes apparent that two rather different conclusions might be thought to be implicit in it. They are not mutually exclusive but there is no difficulty in holding one without the other. The first is that there are conceptual limits on the kind of action or situation towards which one may properly be said to have an attitude of moral approval and, likewise, of moral disapproval. For convenience let us call this 'position A'. The second is that there are conceptual limits on the kind of feature that can constitute ~~xx~~ evidence or reasons for a moral evaluation: this is 'position B'. The sense of the distinction may be conveyed by means of a question that poses what is for present purposes the crucial issue. Are there any restrictions on one's ability to entertain attitudes of moral approval and

1. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Vol.59, 1958-9, pp.83-104. Reprinted in Theories of Ethics, ed.Philippa Foot, O.U.P.1967.pp.83-100.
2. Theories of Ethics, p.85.

disapproval which are entirely independent of ones conception of the
situation or any beliefs one may have about it? In particular, do its
'objective' features, those which are external to the observer and may
be specified independently of him, constitute such a restriction? Anyone
who holds position A is committed to answering 'yes' to these questions
while if he stops short at B he is not. As we shall see Mrs. Foot's
discussion tends to equivocate between the two and this point is crucially
important for one's view of her case.

        Before dealing with moral evaluation Mrs. Foot declares
that she will discuss, 'some other mental attitudes and beliefs' which
have the same internal relation to their object.[1] The first example she
considers is 'pride'. In the course of the discussion the position we
have labelled 'A' comes to be rejected in favour of position B. Thus she
writes:

> 'Given any description of an abject, action, personal characteristic,
> etc., it is not possible to rule it out as an object of pride. Before
> we can do so we need to know what would be said about it by the man
> who is to be proud of it, or feels proud of it; but if he does not
> hold the right beliefs about it then whatever his attitude it is not
> pride'.[2]

Here is an explicit admidsion that one cannot rule out anything in advance
as a possible object of pride. However unlikely a candidate may appear it
is always conceivable that it will qualify if someone holds a sufficiently
odd set of beliefs about it. Later in the paper however it becomes apparent
that Mrs Foot has moved over to an acceptance of position A. Indeed this
is essential for her general argument. She wishes to maintain that moral
evaluation is grounded on the facts of human good and harm, and that these
are quite independent of what anyone may think or believe. Thus, for
instance, she argues that 'an injury is necessarily something bad and
therefore something which as such anyone always has a reason to avoid',[3]
Now whether or not someone has incurred injury is, for Mrs. Foot, a stra-
ightforward empirical matter. The typical cases arise when some part of

1. op.dit. p.85.   2. ibid. p.86.   3. ibid. p.93.

the body is affected in a way that impairs the performance of its charac-teristic function. Thus for example: 'An injury to an eye is one that affects, or is likely to affect its sight; an injury to a hand is one which makes it less well able to reach and grasp, and perform other operations of this kind.'[1] The contention therefore is that certain kinds of bodily change always constitute a reason, though perhaps not a conclusive one, for a certain kind of moral evaluation. Some things are appropriate objects of moral disapproval quite independently of any beliefs of human beings. Their moral import is simply part of the natural order in the same way as more ordinary empirical facts. To hold such views is, of course, to subscribe to position A. Yet while Mrs. Foot presents a solid and convincing case for position B, at the end of her discussion position A is still largely without any rational backing. Thus she makes it very difficult for anyone to deny that only against a certain kind of conceptual background does it make sense to speak of a practical assessment as 'moral'. The analogy with pride is a persuasive one here. The point is driven home by asking whether it would make sense to say, without assuming any special background, that a man who clasped his hands three times in an hour had performed a good action. Mrs. Foot suggests, very plausibly, that it would not, and that attempts to make it acceptable only appear to work by slipping in the background element surreptitiously. In principle it might be achieved by showing that the action was an exemplification of some virtue and this in its turn must be connected with human good and harm.[2] Significantly, she does not wish to deny that some story of this kind might conceivably be told. She is not willing to make a similar concession in the case of injury. That is, she is not willing to allow that there may be people for whom the fact that something leads to injury does not constitute any kind of moral reason for avoiding it. Thus the discussion of pride and of the hand clasping case makes use of position B while the discussion of injury and the general thesis require the stronger, but more dubious, position A.

1. ibid. p.89.   2. ibid. p.92.

It is interesting that the point at which the transition is made can be fixed precisely. Even more significant is the fact that the argument relied on to effect it is quite inadequate. At one stage Mrs. Foot considers the possibility that someone might concede the case for what we have called position B and yet refuse to accept position A. The discussion makes clear that she sees herself as committed to position A as well. This stage is represented by the following passage:

> 'It will be said that indeed a man can be proud only of something he thinks a good action, or an achievement, or a sign of noble birth; as he can feel dismay only about something which he sees as bad, frightened at some threatened evil; similarly he can warn only if he is also prepared to speak, for instance, of injury. But this will limit the range of possible objects of those attitudes and beliefs only if the range of these terms is limited in its turn. To meet this objection I shall discuss the meaning of 'injury' because this is the simplest case. Anyone who feels inclined to say that anything could be counted as an achievement, or as the evil of which people were afraid, or about which they felt dismayed, should just try this out. I wish to consider the proposition that anything could be thought of as dangerous, because if it causes injury it is dangerous, and anything could be counted as an injury.'[1]

She has little difficulty in showing that not anything can be counted as an injury. All that is needed is to invoke the very reasonable account of what an injury is, that was referred to above. She then concludes:

> 'It seems therefore that since the range of things which can be called injuries is quite narrowly restricted, the word 'dangerous' is restricted in so far as it is connected with injury. We have the right to say that a man cannot decide to call just anything dangerous, however much he puts up fences and shakes his head'.[2]

But this argument is simply not good enough for her purposes. Mrs. Foot does not limit the concept of danger by displaying the specialised nature of one of the occasions of its use if all the others are allowed to proliferate unchecked. The qualification 'in so far as it is connected with injury' concedes all that a critic could want. All that has been shown, he may say, is that someone who wished to argue that anything whatever might conceivably be regarded as dangerous would be unwise to confine

1. ibid. p.88.   2. ibid. p.90.

himself to the kind of danger that arises from threats of injury. Indeed
he may claim that everything rejected under this heading may be resurrected
and must be accepted under another. According to Mrs. Foot when a part of
the body is injured it is changed for the worse in a specific sort of way:
it cannot perform its characteristic function as before. Yet she explicitly
recognises that 'other threats besides that of injury can constitute
danger' and gives as examples death and mental derangement.[1] But now the
critic may take the offensive. Anything whatever may be thought of as
dangerous, he may claim, for if it threatens a change for the worse it is
dangerous, and anything whatever can be thought of as threatening a change
for the worse. In support of this claim he may go on to cite anthropological
evidence about the views of primitive peoples or what is known about those
who are conventionally said to be 'neurotic' in our society. But there is
no need for colourful detail of this sort here since the main point of
philosophical interest has by now emerged.clearly. Perhaps it may be well
to restate it in terms which will bring out its relevance for our general
argument. Anything that can be thought of as a threat to one's physical
or mental well-being may be said to be dangerous. There are no limits to
what may be regarded in this way since, for all that has been shown to
the contrary, there are no limits to what one may see as constitutive of
one's well-being.

The chief consequence of the gap in Mrs. Foot's argument
is that her version of position A is left without any rational support.
So far as the intrinsic merits of this view are concerned the essential
points have been made by D.Z.Phillips and H.O.Mounce in a paper 'On
Morality's having a point'[2] which later formed the basis of a chapter
in their book Moral Practices.[3] The case they make against the insistence
that injury is necessarily bad is of a very simple kind. It consists
essentially of a list of what might be called counter-examples. By drawing

1. ibid. p.90.   2. Philosophy, 1965.
3. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970.

attention to the real diversity of the phenomena this serves to throw the
inadequacies of Mrs.Foot's view into sharp relief:

'...consider how Saint Paul does not think 'the thorn in the flesh'
from which he suffered to be a bad thing. At first, he does so regard
it, and prays that it be taken away. Later, however, he thanks God
for his disability, since it was a constant reminder to him that he
was not sufficient unto himself. Or again, consider how warriors,
among whom valour is extremely important, might regard their injuries.
Might not their attitude to their injuries be similar to a soldier's
attitude to his medals? Another example is worth quoting. Brentano
was blind at the end of his life. When friends commiserated with him
over the harm that had befallen him, he denied that his loss of sight
was a bad thing. He explained that one of his weaknesses had been a
tendency to cultivate and concentrate on too many diverse interests.
Now, in his blindness, he was able to concentrate on his philosophy
in a way which had been impossible for him before. We may not want to
argue like Saint Paul or Brentano, but is it true we have no idea what
they have in mind?'[1]

Phillips and Mounce go on to point out that any attempt to dismiss on
grounds of 'peculiarity' the contexts in which injury is not regarded as
necessarily bad must beg the question:

'...why speak of incidental gain in any of these contexts, and why
speak of the contexts themselves as peculiar? In doing so, is not the
thesis that injury is necessarily bad being defended by calling any
examples which count against it incidental or peculiar?'[2]

They conclude that the position of people like Mrs. Foot is based on
'elevating one concept of harm as being paradigmatic'. Injury is said to
be necessarily bad 'at the price of favouring one idea of badness'.[3]

Phillips and Mounce's discussion succeeds in making a number
of points very clearly. In the first place it exposes the error of taking
for granted a simple hedonistic-utilitarian view of human welfare. As
against this tendency they rightly insist that 'what must be recognised
is that there are different conceptions of human good and harm'.[4] They
have also shown that in some conceptions the things that Mrs. Foot calls
'injuries' do not figure significantly at all. Hence these cannot in them-
selves constitute reasons for acting valid for all men. There is another

1. Moral Practices, pp.56-57.   2. ibid. p.57.
3. ibid. p.58.   4. ibid. p.53.

important point which Phillips and Mounce may be said to have established. It is that talk of human good and harm 'cannot be cashed in terms of what all men want'.[1] What they have done is to provide vivid reminders of the fact that the things men want are extremely varied and that no _a priori_ limits can be set to what may be the case in this respect. Preconceptions about what men must want are fated to dissolve in the face of the bizarre and stubborn facts of what they actually want. Thus the notion of what all men want'is as artificial as the common evidence which is supposed to support it'.[2] This conclusion is a significant one for our purposes. It rules out a way of giving substance to the notion of human good and harm that might otherwise be seen as an alternative to Mrs. Foot's utilitarianism; the attempt to ground it on the supposedly universal nature of certain wants. So far the implications we have drawn from Phillips and Mounce's work have been, however salutary, of a somewhat negative character. Essentially what they have provided is a warning against arbitrary reductions of the notion of human good and harm. To see if any further guidance can be obtained we must look more closely at the positive aspects of their case.

It would be unfortunate for our argument if these had to be accepted. For the lesson Phillips and Mounce take from the discussion of Mrs. Foot is that the notion of human good and harm has no useful role in moral philosophy. In their theory the fundamental concept is that of a 'moral practice'. A preliminary idea of its function may be conveyed by listing the more important claims made on its behalf. They hold that what constitutes a moral reason for acting is determined by the moral practices to which the agent belongs.[3] Indeed, 'in order to make a moral judgement at all one must belong to or be related to a moral practice'.[4] There exists a 'multiplicity of different moral practices, some of them opposed to each other': they have an 'irreducible variety'.[5] In cases of

1. _ibid._ p.58.　　2. _ibid._ p.60.　　3. _ibid._ p.12.
4. _ibid._ p.14.　　5. _ibid._ pp.44-45.

disagreement the ultimate appeal is to what is sanctioned by them: if this is rejected there is nothing more to be said.[1] For moral practices provide the criteria for right and wrong without themselves standing in need of further justification.[2]

        This summary of Phillips and Mounce's main contentions is by no means complete but it should suffice to establish the outlines of their case. The more significant details will be filled in during the course of the discussion. There is however an important preliminary point to be made before embarking on this task. It is that from the viewpoint of the present inquiry their argument has a serious general weakness. This is its failure to provide any criteria by which the practices on which all else depends may be identified. Phillips and Mounce do not offer any account of the concept of a moral practice. Instead they rely on picking it out ostensively: the most comprehensive list consists of promise keeping, truth telling and generosity.[3] This way of proceeding becomes particularly significant when considered along with another element in their case, the emphasis on the 'multiplicity' and 'variety' of moral practices. Thus they can conceive of societies which do not have the practices of promise keeping and respecting property.[4] Presumably they would also admit the possibility of a society whose moral practices do not overlap at all with ours. How could the moral practices of such a society be distinguished from all its other habitual and traditional ways of proceeding? What would the moral judgements of its members have in common with ours? In the nature of the case it could not consist in a background of generally accepted modes of thought and behaviour. One could say, tautologically, that it is the fact that both are 'moral' but this is little help without an account of what 'being moral' consists in. Phillips and Mounce make no attempt to supply such an account. In its absence we cannot apply the notion of a moral practice with any confidence except to cases they explicitly recognise and their near relations. These will be found to consist of practices like promise keeping whose claim to moral status is for

1. ibid. p.16.   2. ibid. p.19.   3. ibid. p.93.   4. ibid. p.15.

people in our society intuitively overwhelming. Thus there are definite
limits on the utility of Phillips and Mounce's talk of moral practices in
the context of an attempt to delineate the realm of the moral. What it
really offers is a restatement of the problem. If taken seriously this
would lead us to conduct the inquiry in terms of practices rather than
principles or judgements. But the difficulty of accounting for the distinc-
tively moral element would remain the same as before. If one now looks more
closely at their case one may begin to doubt whether the new starting
point would prove as satisfactory in other respects as the old.

In the first place there is a disturbingly obscurantist
air about some aspects of the treatment of moral practices. This impression
is due partly to the failure to enlarge analytically on the notion. More
important, however, is the refusal to allow the legitimacy of questions
that arise in a perfectly natural way in connection with it. It is never
quite clear, for instance, why it is improper to try to get beneath the
level of moral practices to something more fundamental or to ask how a
particular practice might be rationally justified. In place of argument
one tends to get confident assertions of what must be the case; in partic-
ular of what one must see to be unintelligible. Such a procedure is notor-
iously likely to prove indecisive but there are special difficulties about
the present case. For it is not at all easy to understand the use
made by Phillips and Mounce of the distinction between what it makes sense
and what it does not make sense to say. At one point, for instance, we are
assured that 'In our society, for example, it does not make sense to ask
whether honesty is in general good, or murder bad, or generosity admirable![1]
Now whatever the merits of this claim it soon becomes clear that Phillips
and Mounce do not take it very seriously. For they go on to add:

'If it did not follow as a matter of course that dishonesty was to
be condemned, we should be unable to justify or render intelligible
our condemnation of a dishonest action. For us, therefore, it must
follow in normal circumstances that a man who has been dishonest has
done something to be condemned',[2]

1. ibid. p.17;   2. loc.cit.

If it makes sense to assert that dishonesty is to be condemned it must
surely make sense to deny that dishonesty is to be condemned. How then
can one reject as senseless the question which such claims might be taken
to answer: is dishonesty to be condemned? A similar difficulty arises in
connection with an earlier passage. It was argued that in a society
which has the institution of promise keeping 'to ask whether a man ought
to do what he has undertaken to do' is 'to involve oneself in a piece of
nonsense'.[1] In such a situation 'from the fact that a man has undertaken
to do x, the judgement that he ought to do x will follow so inevitably
that to question whether it follows will not even be intelligible'.[2] On
a number of other occasions Phillips and Mounce make clear their allegiance
to the view that 'within a moral practice certain facts will entail certain
moral conclusions'.[3] But if what they say about the dangers of becoming
involved in nonsense is taken seriously it is not easy to see how one
can be entitled to speak of such logical relationships at all here. Is it
plausible to hold that there are degrees of 'inevitability' such that when
a connection possesses them doubts about it become unintelligible? In the
standard cases where something follows from, or is entailed by, something
else it will always make at least make sense to question whether it does
or not. If doubts about the validity of valid arguments were merely sense-
less how could there be such a subject as logic at all? The study of the
formal structure of arguments would be rendered superfluous by a theory
of meaning. It is not unfair to suggest that the appeal to meaninglessness
is the basic device which Phillips and Mounce rely on to enforce their
conclusions. This procedure is tricky enough in the ordinary way but to
resort to it with the facility illustrated here can hardly fail to bring
it into disrepute.

        The shortage of solid arguments would be easier to accept
if the conclusion were intrinsically more plausible. But it is at least
not obvious that in the search for rational justification moral practices

1. ibid. p.12.   2. ibid. p.13.   3. ibid. p.15.

represent rock-bottom. There is no need to attempt a conclusive treatment of this topic here. It will be enough to mention some of the more obvious difficulties by way of showing that in the absense of positive reasons there is little need to take the claim seriously. Suppose that a person begins to question one of his moral practices, say promise keeping, and to wonder whether he ought to continue to follow it. On Phillips and Mounce's view there is a difficulty in explaining how this can be a moral problem or how the person can be trying to come to a moral decision. For it 'is only from within such a practice that one can speak at all of making a moral judgement or decision'. Moreover, 'from within the practice of promise keeping one cannot ask whether a promise ought to be kept'.[1] Since the person in the example has succeeded in raising the question it follows that he cannot be regarded as being within the practice of promise keeping and also, it seems, that his ultimate decision can never be expressed as a moral judgement. But to refuse to allow that a decision to abandon or retain a moral practice may be a moral decision is surely to reveal that one is in the grip of a faulty theory. Perhaps, however, Phillips and Mounce may be rescued from such a conclusion if one emphasises other aspects of their case; for instance, by taking a hint from the phrase 'such practices' in the sentence quoted above. Thus, it may be said, while no moral issues can be raised in complete isolation from practices, all that is necessary to make moral criticism of a practice possible is that there should be comparable ones to which the person belongs and which he does not regard as open to question in the same way. There can be moral doubts about promise keeping provided they are formulated from the standpoint of some alternative to it. The difficulty that now arises is to reconcile the claim with familiar features of experience. One might surely wish to say on occasion that a person had lost his moral bearings completely and was unable to draw on the resources of any established mode of behaviour. Yet he might be intensely concerned with the problem of how he should act. Indeed it is the existence of this factor that gives such situations their peculiar character. Phillips and Mounce

1. ibid. p.12.

recognise that the presence of many different moral practices in an
individuals life 'may occasion situations which are moral tragedies',[1]
that is situations in which the intimations of various practices are
irreconcilably in conflict. The account they give of such dilemnas is as
penetrating and subtle as any that is available in the recent literature.
Equally tragic situations may however be occasioned precisely by the
absense of any practices to which the agent can give allegiance. To be
forced to choose between practices to which one is equally devoted is
hard enough, But at least the recognition of them serves to impose some
degree of order on the situation and this may be a consolation in itself.
The case of the person who is unable to discern any structure of this kind
is more poignant still. The essence of the complaint against Phillips and
Mounce is that they are unable to allow that his difficulties may have any
moral significante. Perhaps the rather fanciful metaphor of a race may be
helpful here. One possibility which they recognise is the straightforward
sprint fob the tapes. This, one might say corresponds to the situation
where the moral practices in which a man was reared serve him satisfactorily
throughout life. They are also willing to acknowledge a slightly more
complicated situation in which the moral life becomes more like a relay-
race. It is however a race in which there is always a perfectly smooth
transition from one stage to the next: one set of practices taking over without
a break from another. But in reality it sometimes happens that, to continue
the metaphor, the baton is dropped. That is, continuity of standards is
lost and the moral agent does not know where to turn for guidance. Yet
the need for it may be deeply felt, for he may believe that a great deal
in terms of human good and harm depends on how he decides. It is surely
difficult not to concede that such a situation had the makings of a
distinctively moral kind of tragedy.

It may be worthwhile to approach Phillips and Mounce's
position from a slightly different angle. One of its merits may be picked

1. ibid. p.94.

out by saying that it fits well enough the situation in stable and orderly societies dominated by traditional modes of behaviour and inclined to look on them as part of the natural scheme of things. It is scarcely necessary to share the existentialist concern with the 'anguish' of choice to feel that in societies like ours the moral life does not always fall into this pattern. On the contrary, radical confusion and uncertainty about practices is familiar enough to us. In this situation it may easily happen that a person begins to question the practices in which he was reared and, perhaps after a long period of indicision, transfers his allegiance to a new set. It is not difficult to give this suggestion a more concrete form in terms of the sorts of moral practice that Phillips and Mounce explicitly recognise. There is a commonplace progression from acceptance of the 'bourgeois' practices of promise keeping and respecting private property to the view that property is theft and honouring promises a luxury which the revolutionary can ill afford. The difficulty on Phillips and Mounce's theory is to do justice to the viewpoint of the person in the transitional stage between bourgeois and revolutionary. How, for instance, is the eventual decision to be described? It is presumably not a moral decision for by hypothesis it is not made from within any existing practices. Yet it may have the precise feel and weight usually associated with moral decisions. Indeed for someone not in the grip of a theory the decision to adopt new moral practices might seem to be the paradigm of a moral decision. Perhaps Phillips and Mounce would wish to say that there is something conceptually odd about this case, that the description of it must contain confusion or inaccuracy somewhere. But here once again we are brought up against the absense of any serious attempt to supply reasons that would justify such a dismissal. This has the effect of making further pursuit of the general line of thought unprofitable. Enough has been done to reveal the weight of the prima facie case against Phillips and Mounce and, in the circumstances this was all that we required.

There is a final aspect of Phillips and Mounce's position

to be noted. It concerns the implications for the task of the moral philo-
sopher. It is sometimes claimed that the vitality of a discipline depends,
at least partially, on maintaining the belief that it can achieve a defini-
tive solution of its problems. In moral philosophy this goal would be
constituted in part by a theory which allows for the rational resolution
of all disagreements. Phillips and Mounce are sceptical of this demand
for 'ultimate agreement, moral finality'[1] and clearly their kind of concep-
tual pessimism does little to satisfy it. Conflict of practices is bound
to arise and when it does there is nothing more to be said. Our discussion
has suggested that this is to end the search for justifications at a some-
what premature and idiosyncratic point. But there are more specific reasons
for wishing to escape the implications of such a view. They arise when
one tries to conceive in any detail what the task of the moral philosopher
would be like if it were accepted. On the one hand it would consist in
keeping us reminded as vividly as possible of a few simple truths, all
connected in one way or another with the primacy of moral practices. On
the other there would be the constant need to keep a check on the preten-
sions of those who wish to ignore or circumvent them. In practice this
must lead to a mixture of the banal and the polemical which is unlikely
to provide any real intellectual satisfaction or depth of understanding.
What is missing from such a programme is the sense that there is work of
fundamental importance still to be done in moral philosophy. Of course
there may be a great deal to be said for a pessimistic conservatism of
the sort described. But Phillips and Mounce do not provide solid enough
grounds for it and in their absense it is bound to strike one as an unatt-
ractive position. Besides an alternative view is suggested by looking
again at the course their discussion has taken.

        Their success in revealing the weaknesses in current inter-
pretations of human good and harm led Phillips and Mounce to look for
solutions in a quite different direction. Since the results they come up
with have proved disappointing it may be worthwhile looking again at the

1. ibid. p.51.

crucial step in this development. For, obviously there is another possibility here. Instead of drawing the conclusion that the notion of human good and harm is empty and artificial the blame might have been laid on failure to reach an adequate understanding of it. Perhaps what is needed is a more determined attempt to press the question 'what does human well-being really consist in?' The mere fact of radical disagreement about this does not show that talk of correctness and incorrectness, truth and falsity, is out of place. It can hardly be denied that conceptions of human good and harm may be more or less valid and enlightening and that advocacy of them is subject to the ordinary requirements of evidence and argument. One cannot say what one likes here however far one may be from knowing what needs to be said. At this point a number of questions arise that appear to be both legitimate and important. What does human 'flourishing' consist in? Are there any universally necessary conditions for the good life? Is there anything we need simply by virtue of our humanity? These are baffling enough, but even a superficial concern with them leads to others still more far-reaching and opaque. For one can hardly begin to cope with problems about the nature of human welfare without some general conception of what 'being human' consists in. One is led to ask, how are we to conceive of ourselves as human beings?, what is distinctive about human existence?, how is it to be thought of as related to the rest of the universe? Thus in pursuing the line of thought embarked on here we find that in the end what is required is nothing less than an account of what it is to be human, a philosophical theory of man.

It is not merely by trying to escape the difficulties we have been discussing that one comes to see the need for such a theory. The awareness may stem directly from reflection on the implications of our general argument. For one effect of it is to reveal the existence of a conceptual gap which can only be filled in this way. There are two quite different goals to be distinguished here. One is to delineate the field of morality while the other is to uncover the criteria of truth and falsity that operate within it and so lay the basis of a substantive

moral theory. A prerequisite for achieving the first is to recognise that
moral assessment is co-extensive with concepts of human well-being. But
moral philosophers have traditionally aimed at doing more than characterise
morality. They have also wished to discover principles of moral assessment
and show how disagreements may be rationally resolved. If our account is
correct it follows that to achieve these goals one must be able to distin-
guish conceptions of human good and harm as more or less adequate approx-
imations to the truth and ideally be able to say what the precisely the
truth consists in. To recognise this is to come to see from a different
viewpoint the need for answers to the questions raised above. Indeed, it
might reasonably be claimed that these represent the really important
issues in moral philosophy and that the achievement of a characterisation
of morality serves primarily to bring us to the point where they emerge
clearly. Nevertheless this achievement is by no means negligible. It is
essential if the nature of the residual problems is to be properly appre-
ciated. Besides it serves by itself to throw light on some important issues.
Thus, for instance, it enables one to see that some Christians and some
~~Xixtxxkxxxx~~ Nietzscheans are offering different answers to the same
questions while others are concerned with different questions. What remains
to be achieved are the insights that will enable us to resolve the genuine
disagreements. But however the verdict eventually goes it is now clear
that its authority will depend on exhibiting errors of moral belief, not
on extruding one party from the realm of morality altogether.

These remarks have a good deal in common with the diognosis
made by Miss Anscombe in her paper 'Modern Moral Philosophy'.[1] There she
argued that 'philosophically there is a huge gap, at present unfillable
as far as we are concerned, which needs to be filled by an account of human
nature, human action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all
of human "flourishing".'[2] Clearly Miss Anscombe is pessimistic about the
prospects for improving this state of affairs. Elsewhere in the paper she
remarks that she is not able 'to do the philosophy involved' and that, in

1. op.cit.   2. op.cit. p.194.

her opinion, 'no one in the present situation of English philosophy can
do the philosophy involved'.[1] The situation has not radically changed since
the paper was written and this in itself suggests that there are solid
grounds for her pessimism. There are, however, considerations which might
be taken to encourage a different view. In the first place, predicting
the future development of philosophy is bound to be risky since what now
seems impossible may well be achieved through advances which, in the nature
of the case, we cannot envisage in any detail. Besides it is important to
bear in mind what the alternatives are to the programme we have sketched.
Moral assessment is necessarily tied to a range of considerations of which
at present we have a quite inadequate understanding and to remedy this is
a necessary precondition of progress in moral philosophy. The subject can
hardly fail to become devitalised if tasks of such central importance are
neglected. The implications of this fact are apparent even from the highly
selective treatment of some contemporary views that has been given here.
It has revealed a tacit assumption which connects thinkers so apparently
diverse as Hare on the one hand and Phillips and Mounce on the other that
there is essentially very little to say in moral philosophy and that what
there is may be said with complete assurance. In this situation it may
be important for the health of the subject that it should once again
come to be seen as concerned with issues of fundamental importance and
of great, perhaps even insurmountable, difficulty.

There is, however, another gap to be filled before our
conclusion can be regarded as secure. Our aim has been to give a character-
isation of moral assessment rather than to establish the correctness of
any of its principles. Yet the way in which the first task was dealt with
has obvious implications for the second. At the very least it establishes
the general framework within which the problem is to be approached. If
the results obtained by working out these implications prove not to be
viable this will in its turn shed an unfavourable light on our main thesis.
Besides advocacy of a general programme may sound a bit hollow unless some

1. ibid. p.191.

attempt is made to show how it would work in practice. There is no need
to embark on a full-scale treatment in order to remove doubts of this
kind. In principle a fairly tentative and limited discussion will suffice
to show that our conclusions do connect up with the moral philosopher's
ordinary concern with the details of his subject. We shall try to supply
what is needed here with as much brevity as the nature of the task will
allow.

A conventional starting point is provided by the suggestion
that Human welfare is constituted at least in part by the possession of
certain 'virtues'. Perhaps these are things that a person needs in just
the way that, to take the usual sort of analogy, a plant needs water?
But immediately we run into difficulties. They arise from a danger that
besets all discussion in this region; that of tacitly relying on assumpt-
ions whose effect is to beg the question at issue. In the present case
suspicion is aroused by what may be thought of as a too facile assimilation
of mankind to the rest of the natural order. Against this it may be said
that the nature of their relationship is, in a sense, the fundamental
issue underlying the whole debate. For convenience we shall identify the
parties to it by the labels 'naturalist' and 'anti-naturalist': their
general significance in this context will be familiar from the literature.
It will have to be conceded on behalf of the naturalist that there may
well be a risk of question-begging in the way the problem has been set up.
But his opponent may wish to press the point further. Perhaps there are
more serious and specific reasons for thinking the analogy with such organ-
isms as plants a dangerous one here? A plant needs water if it is to flour-
ish. But what sort of 'need' is this? It can hardly be functioning as a
normative concept, but rather must mark a causal connection. If a plant
does not have water it will not flourish, but perhaps it ought not to
flourish? In the opinion of gardeners all those species which they classify
as 'weeds' ought not to flourish. Surely the _Agave_ plants which the Mexican

revolutionary Zapata employed to execute his prisoners through the natural growth of their steel-like spines[1] ought not to have flourished? The danger of applying this analogy tb the human case is that it may obscure from us the fact that we are taking for granted a particular kind of evaluation and building it in to what should be factual description. The assumption in question is that human existence has a positive value. There is, it may be pointed out, nothing conceptually inevitable about this. It is a preference not shared by Saint Augustine, Timon of Athens, and any number of anonymous suicides. Thus our supposedly 'neutral' theory of man has revealed itself to be based on an evaluative premise; roughly speaking, that life is worth living. Once again the naturalist must allow some substance to the charge that the situation has been rigged in advance to suit his case. Clearly if we are to make any progress here we shall have to approach the issues at a more fundamental level.

Perhaps what is needed is a wider perspective on the circumstances of human existence than we have so far achieved. Considering them in the most general terms possible, there are two features which strike one as particularly relevant to present purposes. The first is that for human beings not all courses of action are equally eligible. The alternatives do not present themselves as so many peas in a pod between which there is nothing to choose. An awareness of considerations which tell in favour of some and against others is inextricably bound up with our apprehension of their distinctiveness. A world of which this was not true would be one where the concepts of action and inaction, deliberation and decision, achievement and failure, could have no place. Such a world could hardly contain anything recognisable as a distinctively human form of existence at all. The first general feature that confronts us then is that some courses of action are preferable to others. The second is that the field of action in which we operate exerts continuous pressure against our attempts to do whatever is to be preferred. Friction and resistance are

1. For the details see Edward Hyams, The Gardener's Bedside Book, Faber and Faber, London, 1968, p.196.

the natural accompaniments of human effort. Again, this is so fundamental
and pervasive a feature of our experience that one can hardly conceive
of the possibility of things being otherwise. The ability to translate
preferences effortlessly and unerringly into action is one usually assoc-
iated with some form or other of super human existence. Thus there are
t̶h̶i̶n̶g̶s̶ things we ought to do, and doing them is characteristically
attended by difficulty. It follows that we need whatever it is that enables
one to cope with difficulty, to pursue in the face of it whatever it is
that ought to be pursued. Perhaps the most suitable term for what is
primarily required is 'courage'; roughly speaking, the ability not to be
rendered ineffective by fear or despair. This is of course a somewhat
technical use of the term. The characteristic traditionally identified
by it involves other things as well, or at least carries a different set
of associations. It is not, for instance, necessarily tied to the perform-
ance of what is to be preferred, but may be employed in the pursuit of
any goal, however base or undesirable. It should be noted that in speaking
of the need for courage we are not committed to a positive evaluation of
human life. Indeed if our lives have no value we have all the greater need
for courage in order to end them. Courage therefore is something that a
person should have whatever practical assessments he is disposed to make.
The need for it is guaranteed by the very possibility of assessments in
accordance with which his actions ought to be regulated. Thus it is an
essential ingredient of human well-being.

        The essentials of this argument may be recapitulated quite
simply. From the fact that there are some things that human beings ought
to do in preference to others and that the performance of them is charact-
eristically attended by difficulty it follows that they need the quality
that enables them to cope with it, that is, courage. At this point one
may be reminded of the dangers of encroaching on the much-disputed territ-
ory of the facts-values debate. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say
that in one form or other this issue has dominated contemporary moral

philosophy: by some it has come to be explicitly recognised as 'the central problem'.[1] The debate has nevertheless now reached a stage at which the supply of fresh insights and lines of inquiry is beginning to slow down. Most of the moves on each side have become stereotyped and yet no resolution is in sight. In these circumstances it might be well if the concern with the facts-values issue were to be supplemented by other perspectives. We have tried here to suggest one way in which this might be done. Nevertheless the significance conventionally attached to the controversy makes it difficult to avoid direct reference to it. An adequate treatment of the topic would be outside our scope but perhaps something should be done to make clear the implications of our argument for it. Besides this may throw a light on the issues which is all the more welcome for coming from an oblique angle.

A preliminary point is that the tendency to insist on an absolute gulf between facts and values is understandable in the light of our main contentions. Moral assessment is necessarily tied to considerations of human well-being and our philosophical grasp of their nature is as yet quite inadequate. It follows that any particular attempt to draw 'evaluative' conclusions from 'factual' premises is bound to have an ixx inconclusive air. It will always be possible for the critic to withold consent from the conception of human welfare that is being appealed to, confident in the knowledge that closer study will reveal partiality and arbitrariness. This maneouvre is, for instance, easy to perform with Mrs. Foot's appeal to the facts of 'injury'. It may then be said quite correctly that the premises do not suffice to establish the conclusion. But this need not be due to any logical gulf between facts and values. Instead it can be explained in terms of the present state of moral philosophy which ensures that our knowledge of the facts is always inadequate to the demands

1. Note, for instance, the sub-title of the volume edited by W.D.Hudson which was cited above: 'A collection of papers on the central problem in moral philosophy.

the naturalist wished to make on them. There are too many loopholes in our philosophical title to the foundations required for evaluative conclusions. Without the kind of rational backing that can only be supplied by a theory of man, isolated attempts to grasp at them can easily be made to seem implausible. Thus the whole facts-values controversy is parasitic on our ignorance in this region.

Support from this conclusion may be drawn from the remarks made earlier about the desirability of courage. It is impossible to apply any rigid dichotomy of facts and values here without distorting the phenomena. Even to describe it as a case in which evaluative conclusions are drawn from factual premises may be misleading. Such a description may tend to beg the question against the naturalist in so far as it suggests that the facts-values distinction is a substantial one. It might be more accurate to say that what the anti-naturalist calls 'facts' and what he calls 'values' have been found to merge in a perfectly harmless way into the total conceptual background of the conclusion. To understand the very general facts about the human situation to which attention was drawn is to see them as already charged with moral import. One could not be said to grasp the full significance of the fact that men have obligations unless one sees that it carries some implications for what should be the case. Neither the 'evaluative' nor the 'descriptive' elements can be sifted out and discarded without changing the nature of the data. One must be particularly careful at this point about the use of question-begging arguments. Foremost among these is the device of coining new terms to carry 'evaluative' and 'descriptive' meanings separately where ordinary usage provides no warrant for distinguishing them.[1] Then the fact that one can operate satisfactorily with the new terms is taken to be an indication of the validity of the distinction they represent. If the description-evaluation distinction is indeed a substantial and significant one then it is of course a legitimate device, though its use is dependent on, and does

1. See for instance R.M.Hare, The Language of Morals, ch.7. and 'Descriptivism', Proceedings of the British Academy, 1963.

not establish, this truth. If it is not then one has here merely another illustration of the ease with which linguistic ingenuity can outstrip the conceptual resources. Earlier we came across examples of question-begging in favour of naturalism: here we have to recognise the process operating in reverse. The obvious lesson is that there is a general difficulty about approaching the issues at a level which avoids prejudging them in one way or another. This in its turn is perhaps a reflection of how deeply the division goes. It is possible to see in conflict here two quite different ways of viewing the world. Someone who sees the natural order as a medium for divine purposes or the laws of history can hardly fail to disagree with one whose fundamental insight is that 'in the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists.[1] A direct conventional approach is unlikely to weaken these rigidities. We have tried here to suggest a more oblique method. Our main concern was to give an account of the concept of morality. We then went on to ask whether the results have any implications for the facts-values controversy. This line of inquiry has led naturally to the conclusion that in some areas at least a rigid distinction between the two can only be maintained at the cost of distortion. Those who are not committed on other than rational grounds are likely at this point to begin to wonder whether the game is worth the candle. These doubts may be reinforced by noting a point which connects with another theme of this chapter, the current state of moral philosophy. There is a general difficulty about the insistence on the absolute autonomy of values which even its supporters might be willing to acknowledge. It is the difficulty of preventing ones moral theory from becoming thin and abstract, unable to do justice to the complexities of experience and insufficiently sensitive to the needs of particular individuals with particular problems. It arises of course, because the insistence on autonomy makes it hard to retain any links with the facts of the human situation and the psychological springs of human action. The consequences of this state of affairs would be easy to illustrate from the contemporary literature. Clearly it is only through some version or other of the naturour

1. L.Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Translated by D.F.Pears and B.F.McGuinness, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1961.

alternative view we have been suggesting that the problem can be overcome.

Chapter 9.

SENSIBILITY AND RULES.

This chapter will complete the attempt to show the relevance of the understanding-assessment distinction to that pervasive dualism described at the beginning. The contrast it will be concerned with is usually drawn in terms of a morality of 'rules' and 'principles' and one in which the key concepts are 'imagination','insight' and 'sensibility'. It will be argued that while there is a genuine distinction to be made here its nature has been generally misconceived. As a result the theoretical conclusions which are based on it tend to prove incoherent when examined closely. Nevertheless the element of truth in them is important for an understanding of morality and goes some way to vindicate the concern with the sensibility-rules contrast. Advocates of it have usually wished to draw attention to aspects of morality which they feel must be ignored or distorted by a model constructed around rules and principles. The complaints are extremely varied in detail but the main burden is that such an account cannot do justice to the complexities of moral experience. It may be said, for instance, that there are practical dilemmas in which any invocation of principles must appear facile and unhelpful. Such a move could only reveal a lack of sensitivity to the way in which the situation presents itself to the moral agent. What is required instead is the sensibility to register nuances and intimations too subtle to be captured in a formula. Then, perhaps, the problem may be dissolved by a creative stroke of moral imagination. Where this is not possible the only comfort may be the rather bleak one to be derived from the insight that one is confronted with a moral tragedy. The emphasis on rules valid for all men may be thought to distort experience in other ways. It leads one to play down the differences that stem from the varied conceptions that people form of their situation and the varied responses that they find

appropriate as a result. These are difference of moral 'attitude' or 'vision' or 'sensibility'. The language of inter-personal rules, it may be said, cannot accommodate diversity of this kind. Hence it is simply ignored and, as a result, conventional accounts of morality tend to impose a spurious uniformity on the data. It comes to be seen primarily as something which unites people while the equally valid insight that it is a deeply divisive force is overlooked. In this respect, as in others, the rules-principles model is open to the charge of building ideals of a specifically liberal kind into the structure of morality. Clearly many of the issues raised by this debate call for lengthy discussion. However enough has been done to suggest the main features of the opposition to rules. To complete this preliminary clearing of ground we shall go on to ask what can be said in a general way of the other side. The residue we will then be confronted with is the real core of the problem and will have to be examined in close detail.

We shall begin by dealing with the exaggerated and inessential elements that tend to accompany talk about the morality of sensibility. It is sometimes, for instance, linked with a rejection of universalizability. The freedom with which this concept is interpreted makes it difficult to deal with such claims in a summary way. But the essential point is made if one explicitly rejects the suggestion that the universalizability thesis is a substantial one about the status or scope of moral problems principles. On the interpretation adopted earlier[1] exponents of universalizability are, in effect, drawing attention to some fundamental features of language. In crude terms they are the tendency for any particular use of it to commit one outside the immediate occasion and the need for this commitment to conform to some intelligible pattern. A morality of sensibility is no more immune to these 'logical' requirements than is any other. There is another aspect of the support for such a morality which should be noted. This is its tendency to rely on a distorted view of what the alternative involves. Before discussing this point it will be useful to make clear the significance we shall attach

1. See ch. 6.

to the difference between 'rules' and 'principles'. There is no uniformity on this point in the literature but it will be sufficient for our purposes to adopt the simplest method of distinguishing them that can claim some currency. Thus we shall treat the difference as essentially one of degree, so that a principle is characteristically more abstract and wider in scope than a rule. Following these hints it will be easy enough to classify cases at either end of the spectrum. In the middle there will be an intermediate area where they merge indistinguishably but this will be harmless for present purposes. Thus our practice will be to employ whichever term seems to fit better in particular cases while recognising that nothing of real substance hangs on the choice.

Having principles is sometimes represented by advocates of sensibility as a matter of applying rigid standards without any regard for the distinctiveness of the actual situation. These standards are thought of as existing in advance, as it were, of moral experience and the solution of particular problems is a matter of subsuming them under the appropriate heading. Thus practical reasoning is essentially an exercise in taxonomy. Clearly there would be some justification for doubts as to whether experience can be captured in a net of this sort. But our discussion of universalizability has succeeded in absolving the defender of rules from some elements of the criticism and it is not difficult to extend this to others. It has already been shown that so far as Hare, for instance, is concerned there need be nothing prefabricated about rules. The vital link with particular decisions is not that each one is the implementing of a rule but that it carries rule-like implications for future decisions. Neither is their any necessity for the use of the rules model to be mechanical or hide-bound. Hare has given a persuasive account of the way in which a principle may be adapted to meet changing circumstances, not by becoming loose or empty, but by incorporating categories of exceptions within itself.[1] Another suspicion is that rules and principles must constitute a formalist kind of morality

1. The Language of Morals, ch3, sec.6, and ch.4, sec.3.

in which the significance of the particular case is bound to be devalued. Again a reference to Hare suffices to show that blindness in this respect is not inevitable: 'We have to consider the particular case and make up our minds what are its morally relevant features, and what, taking these features into account, ought to be done in such a case'.[1] It seems fair to conclude that the rules-principles model as interpreted here, could hardly become more open and flexible without risking a loss of identity. Indeed one may suspect that the supposed alternatives would, if worked out in detail, prove to be so loose-jointed as to be incapable of getting any intellectual grip on the material. At any rate the natural temptation for a concern with sensibility and insight is to dissolve into passive contemplation of its complexity. This point will have to be taken up later. For the present we shall simply note that the case against rules has proved to be based, partly at least, on misunderstanding. There is an elementary consideration which may help to explain why this is so. It is that there seems to be an understandable tendency to confuse moral rules with those gleanings of wisdom which may be more appropriately called 'maxims'. Thus, while rules are dynamic and flexible, products of individual experience and capable of developing in harmony with it, maxims are prefabricated, inert, the outcome of other peoples reflections, and offering only the choice of being taken or left. Clearly there may well be something artificial and second-hand about a moral life governed by maxims. But such stigmas cannot apply to the creative and imaginative use of rules.

At this point it may be helpful to look again at Hare's reference to the need to consider what are the 'morally relevant' features of the particular case and what 'taking these features into account' ought to be done. The notion of moral relevance is a convenient starting-point for it seems reasonable to think of it as fundamental to any system of moral assessment. Unless some features of a situation were to strike one as morally significant it could not present a problem of moral

1. _Freedom and Reason_, p.38.

assessment at all. Thus, for instnace, the dilemna of Sartre's pupil only arose because he took for granted that in general the interests of one's parents and of one's country have a bearing on decisions about what should be done. Without an awareness of the presence of such factors the situation could never have appeared as morally problematic: nothing in it would call for moral decision. The need, referred to by Hare, for the decision to take these features into account is simply part of what is required for it to qualify as 'moral'. Obviously it is not enough that one should make practical judgements if they are entirely based on features that have no moral significance. Moreover, having picked out the morally relevant features one cannot refuse to accept their guidance in other cases. What made the situation morally problematic in the first place was the presence of factors that in general have a bearing on practical decisions. To go beyond lip-service to these factors is necessarily to respect their element of generality. Thus, it appears that the basic facts which confront anyone wishing to construct a model of moral assessment are these. People find themselves in situations which strike them as having morally significant features: that is, features which are generally belevant to deciding what ought morally to be done. In reaching a moral decision these factors are taken into account and this presupposes a willingness to accept their authority in other cases. But in acknowledging that all of this is an integral part of our conception of moral assessment one is surely going a long way towards ~~conceeding~~ conceding the case for rules and principles. For one way of understanding the notion of a moral principle is to see it as a general specification of a set of factors that are morally significant in the sense described. Thus, A.Phillips Griffiths suggests that moral principles may be thought of as 'statements picking out those factors of situations' which are 'generally relevant to what ought to be done' and 'can be appealed to as moral reasons'.[1] Here is a central element in our conception of moral principles in that whatever other tasks they may be expected to perform, this one must be ascribed to them on the most modest interpretation. Thus to assert that

1. 'Ultimate Moral Priñciples: Their Justification', Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, gen.ed. Paul Edwards, Collier-Machillan.

'stealing is wrong' is a moral principle is at least to assert that if
a particular course of action would involve stealing one has a moral
reason, though perhaps not an overriding one, in all circumstances, for
abstaining from it. Much of the opposition to principles seems to be
based on the assumption that they must function like axioms in a deductive
system, as major premises from which, with the addition of factual state-
ments, conclusions about what should be done may be generated automatically.
But if they are thought of in the way suggested here this criticism will
lose its point. Their function will then be, not to provide a practical
calculus but, to structure situations in a way that allows the faculty
of moral judgement to get a grip. They serve to individuate features
without which the context of action would lack form and significance so
far as the moral agent is concerned. Clearly it is misleading to talk of
principles in this sense as though they represented one possible model
of moral assessment among others. Since they constitute the basic patterns
of order and intelligibility in this area they must provide the structural
skeleton with which any conceivable model has to work.

The conclusion to be drawn is that there can be no adequate
description of the way in which questions of moral assessment arise and
are answered that does not involve principles. One can hardly allow a
comparable status to imagination or sensibility. It is surely possible
to see that a situation raises moral issues and to know how it should
be assessed without involving these attributes in any significant sense.
Thus, to suggest that they are needed to respond morally to situations
in which children are being tortured for pleasure might be taken as a
bitter sort of joke. In order to avoid having to trivialise the notions
of imagination and sensibility it may be well to admit that moral
assessment is possible without them. Indeed a refusal to admit this would
run counter to some deeply-held views about morality. For whatever else
they may be, they are not gifts that all men possess in equal measure
simply by virtue of their status as moral beings. It would be surprising
if their possession was not correlated with other qualities of mind and

character and, perhaps, with education. More generally, they seem to be
dependent on a social setting which allows people some respite from
satisfying the basic demands of their metabolism. In any developed form
they are, it may be said, the fruits of a civilised way of life. This
makes it difficult to argue that they have an essential role in moral
assessment. There would be widespread agreement that xm a man may be
conscious of the demands of morality and reflect them in the conduct of
his life without being particularjy well-endowed in respect of these
concomitants of imagination and sensibility. At this point the suggestion
that we have here a rival or alternative to rules looks hard to defend.
Nevertheless, it is impobtant to guard against the opposité error of
assuming that imagination and sensibility can have no relevance at all
for moral assessment. It would be foolish to deny the value of imagination
for any enterprise that is concerned with finding solutions to problems,
and sensibility must have a place when dealing with issues that are
intimately bound up with the lives of human beings. These gifts are not
indispensably necessary to engage in moral assessment, nor is the ability
to xrixxx arrive at moral decisions a proof that one possesses them.
Nevertheless when one turns one's attention away from clear-cut situations
and elementary forms of natural goodness their value becomes impossible
to dispute. Although one must reject the claim that imagination and sens-
ibility can constitute a model of moral assessment their practical value
in the moral life should not be underestimated.

The concession of a role of this kind, however, is unlikely
to satisfy those who have wished to emphasise the contrast with principles.
They would deny that the link with morality is merely external and
contingent in the way described. It may be that claims of this sort have
more substance than we have yet acknowledged. For if one turns away from
assessment and considers understanding they take on an entirely different
aspect. It is not at all implausible to hold that for some forms of
understanding qualities of sensibility are not just useful adjuncts but
prerequisites of existence. It may be helpful to make a distinction

between cases in which a person takes over an established mode of
understanding from some external authority, a Party or Church, and
those in which he pursues his own path towards an independent view.
The connection we have in mind is easier to spot in the second sort of
case. Here it is difficult to see how, without imagination, anything
frxxk genuinely fresh or individual can emerge, or how, without the
discipline of sensibility, the results could stand up to the demands
of everyday experience. Hence it would not be unreasonable to take success
in the enterprise as a sufficient condition for the ascription of these
gifts. The position in the first sort of case is more difficult to define.
It is tempting to treat it in the same way so as to be able to argue for
a general conceptual link between sensibility and moral understanding.
It might be said that even where the basic concepts and forms of organis-
ation are taken over from outside an exercise of sensibility and imagina-
tion is needed to transform them into something one could call a personal
mode of vision. Otherwise all one has are ideas learned by heart which
do not really inform the individuals view of the world. Hence, it may be
claimed that while religion and ideology make various forms of understan-
ding available no one can possess them for himself without the help of
imagination and sensibility. So these qualities are indispensable for
the operation of moral understanding in any of its forms. This line of
argument must be granted some weight and perhaps no harm would be done
by accepting it as it stands. A great deal depends here on how widely
one wishes to stretch the notions of 'imagination' and 'sensibility'.
On the whole it may be advisable not to let them become too diffused.
They will function best as tools of argument if kept within fairly tight
bounds. Besides the tendency of ordinary usage is to take them as signify-
ing gifts of a rather special kind. It would probably fit in best with
it if one refused to allow that the possession of a traditional form of
understanding is, in itself, a criterion for their application. From
this point of view it would be preferable to restrict them to cases
which involve some element of 'creativity' in a fairly conventional
sense. The orthodox believer or party member would indignantly deny that
his relationship with the official viewpoint comes into this category.

Hence, we shall not press the general connection with moral understanding.
That is, we shall require not merely that the material should be transmu-
ted by the individual's imagination but also that some at least should
be originally derived from private rather than public sources.

As yet however we have not touched upon the aspect of moral
understanding whose link with imagination and sensibility is most direct
and intimate. It is that which is constituted by all those points of
view that were earlier grouped under the heading of 'aesthetic understan-
ding'.[1] Perhaps the paradigm case of an activity which is inconceivable
apart from these qualities is artistic creation. Aesthetic understanding,
a kind of imaginative autobiography in which nothing need be committed
to paper, is as near as those who are not artists can get to the paradigm
case. Piecing together the elements of one's life into a satisfying
pattern is an enterprise that demands essentially the same qualities,
though no doubt at a different level and with less stringent criteria
of success. It is through the medium of this activity that imagination
and sensibility find their true expression in the moral life. Thus their
essential link with morality is that they are indispensably necessary
for at least some forms of moral understanding. Discussion of these
issues has suffered greatly from failure to draw on the understanding-
assessment distinction. As usually happens in contemporary philosophy
the dimension of assessment has tended to emerge the more strongly from
the confusion and to prove in the last resort the dominant influence.
Thus, advocates of imagination and sensibility, having seen that there
is some kind of conceptual link with morality, have tried to express the
insight through the misleading and implausible claim that they can offer
an alternative to rules and principles. Their opponents, equally dominated
by assessment, have rightly rejected this, and have usually gone on to
draw the erroneous conclusion that sensibility has no necessary connection
with morality at all. All this confusion could have been avoided by the
use of our fundamental distinction. We must now try to drive the lesson

1. See above ch.3.

home by considering some particular cases.

A particularly rich source of material is the symposium between R.W.Hepburn and Iris Murdoch on 'Vision and Choice in Morality' to which reference has already been made.[1] The title is significant for it captures perfectly that basic tension within morality which we have been concerned to explore. It might be thought that a necessary requirement for handling this material is to recognise that the language of 'vision' belongs to what we have called 'understanding' and that of 'choice' to 'assessment'. Unfortunately the symposiasts tend to treat them as entrants in the same competition,and this failure of perspective has some interesting consequences. While there are isolated insights of great value in each contribution they fail to add up to a coherent treatment of the subject as a whole. Crucial points concerning what might be called the architectonics of the scheme are left obscure, and there is a general difficulty about seeing how it relates to the regions of conceptual space that lie all around. The source of the trouble is that the monolithic conception of morality which Hepburn and Miss Murdoch take for granted is unable to accommodate all the material they wish to cram into it. Hence, however the details are adjusted discrepancy and distortion are bound to crop up somewhere in the result. Since there are important and distinctive lessons to be learned from each contribution it will be best at this point to leave the level of general diagnosis and begin to consider them in turn.

Hepburn begins by introducing the contrast he will be concerned with:

'Most recent British moral philosophy has been dominated by the "rule-obedience" model: moral judgment as the endorsing of principles, commitment to universalizable policies... however...very different models are quite often in fact held by morally sensitive people - by those, for instance, who see moral endeavour as the realizing of a pattern of life or the following out of a pilgrimage'.[2]

1. See above p.40
2. 'Vision and Choice in Morality', reprinted in Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy, ed.I.T.Ramsey,S.C.M.Press Ltd,London,1966,p.181.

As the argument proceeds one can hardly fail to be struck by the affinities
between our 'aesthetic understanding' and Hepburn's alternative models.
The terms that constantly recur, 'fables', 'stories', 'patterns', 'symbols',
'myths' and so on would fit naturally into a discussion of either. Besides,
as was noted earlier,[1] the examples Hepburn gives of the use of his
models may be taken over without any significant alterations to illustrate
aesthetic understanding at work. Thus, the obvious interpretation of his
case is that what he is commending to our attention is simply a particular
version of moral understanding and in this fact the significance of his
material for the moral philosopher may be thought to consist. His own
view however is that what he offers is relevant to morality in a quite
general way. It is interesting that in one place he touches upon the
vital distinction, though the point is never seriously taken up. He notes
that 'many people who speak the language of "bringing into being a pattern
in one's life", speak of the pattern or pilgrimage not only as relevant
to the question"what shall I do?" but also to those very embarrassing
questions - "what does my life add up to?" "what is its meaning?" "is it
coherent, integrated, or formless, chaotic?" "have I maintained initiative,
been successfully creative; or has life gone past in uncreative passivity"[2]
That is, the pattern or pilgrimage is supposed to be relevant not merely
to assessment ('what shall I do?') but also to understanding ('what does
my life add up to?') Soon however it becomes clear that Hepburn's concep-
tion of morality is for all practical purposes dominated by the problems
of assessment. Thus he assumes that his subject-matter must connect up
with them to have any philosophical interest. This goes against the
logical grain of his position and, as a result, he is saddled with
some quite gratuitous difficulties. He feels obliged, for instance,
to guard against the danger of supposing that 'if one looks after the
character the actions will look after themselves' to which 'all ethics
which stress the state of mind of the agent at least as much as what he
does' are peculiarly liable.[3] This will be seen as an artificial problem
once it is accepted that what Hepburn is concerned with is a form of
moral understanding and not an 'ethics' in the sense of a system of

1. ch.3. above.   2. ibid. pp.181-182
3. ibid. p.195.

practical reasoning. More significant, however, is the fact that the line
he takes makes it impossible to give a coherent account of the role of
patterns and fables. Ironically, in the absence of a satisfactory concep-
tual framework the genuine but partial insights seem almost to make
matters worse. Thus he recognises that there is a sense in which the
language of rules must be more fundamental to the business of decision-
making than any alternative can possibly be. He sees the need for the
kind of distinction that we made earlier between two senses of 'rule'.
In one a rule is 'an explicitly formulated elementary rule of thumb';
in the other a rule is 'implied by any universalizable judgement..whether
or not it exists as a formulated copy-book maxim'.[1] In this latter xxx
sense 'and judgement that could be called "feature-dependent" may be
called the expression of a rule or principle...'[2] Hepburn concludes that
'if the "rule-model" does no more than affirm the feature dependent
nature of any moral judgement, then the "parable model" cannot displace
it, cannot even conflict with it; for it assumes it'.[3] But having admitted
this much the precise role allotted to the 'parable model' is left obscure.
His controlling assumptions do not allow him to conceive of a place for
it outside the sphere of assessment. Within that sphere it is impossible,
given the recognition of the indispensability of rules, to see how it
can be an alternative to them. Yet it is clear that he still wished to
think of it as having such a role, that in some sense a person may opt
either for rules and principles or for parables and fables. Thus there
is supposed to be a difficulty which the 'person who habitually thinks
in terms of parable and fable' encounters and which the 'follower of
principles' does not: it is 'a difficulty about altering an individual
moral judgement...'[4] It must be admitted that Hepburn's argument at this
point is rather compressed and it may be that some of the difficulties
he is involved with could be removed by a further explanation. It may
however be unprofitable to speculate about his real intentions. Instead
we shall try to clear the air by dealing with the substantive point at
issue, the relationship of the language of parables and fables to moral

1. ibid. p.192.
2. loc.cit.
3. loc.cit.
4. ibid. p.193.

assessment.

There are two rather different ways in which talk of fables
and parables might be thought relevant to moral assessment. Both find an
echo in Hepburn's discussion though they are not clearly distinguished.
The first possibility is that the agent chooses his courses of action
on aesthetic grounds. In making decisions he is constantly aware of the
fable he has constructed around the events of his life and his main
concern is to preserve its coherence. Hence he tends to choose whatever
action can best be assimilated by it or will carry it forward to a new
stage of development. It is a relationship of this sort that Hepburn
seems to have in mind when he speaks of the 'pressure on the fable-
follower not to violate the unity of his pattern'.[1] Besides, an important
part of what he admires in people like Muir and Yeats is their apparent
readiness to conduct their lives in this manner. It is clear by now,
however, that such a procedure has nothing to do with morality, but
represents a version of what was earlier called 'aesthetic assessment'.
Moral assessment is necessarily tied to considerations of human good and
harm. It can only be a coincidence if its results fit in with what would
be demanded by aesthetic criteria. Of course it may happen in particular
cases that qualities of order, elegance or symmetry may be ascribed to
them. But this is not something that the moral agent is entitled to
strive for and he need not be surprised if the effect conveyed by his
efforts is boring, repetitive, uneconomical, or in some other way lacking
in aesthetic appeal. Besides there is a profound antipathy between a moral
concern with peoples interests and the standpoint from which they appear
as minor characters in a private drama. Hepburn quotes a remark of Oscar
Wilde's which, when one considers its implications, might be taken to
epitomise the contrast: 'I grew careless of the lives of others'.[2] One
might describe what happened to Wilde by saying that he grew away from
morality and indifferent to its claims. If the language of patterns and
fables depends for its significance on developments of this kind it can

1. ibid. p.193.
2. quoted in Hepburn, op.cit. p.190.

offer no help with our main concerns. For to use it in such a way is to leave the moral realm altogether.

There is, however, another way in which parables and fables might be thought relevant to moral assessment. It is this second possibility that Hepburn seems to have particularly in mind when he discusses the use of religious parables: 'in parable, a characteristically religious mode of moral reaching, a whole slice of life is presented , not an isolated maxim; and the <u>effects</u> of the prescribed conduct (often too the effects of its omission) may be built into the one economical story'.[1] In a later passage he suggests that 'in part at least the propositions of the Christian religion can be construed as the specification, through fable, of a way of life'.[2] On the view suggested by these remarks the point of parables and fables is that they are a source of moral wisdom and guidance. They have lessons to teach which are all the more effective for being invested with concrete detail and presented in a dramatic form. Hence they may be of great value to a person faced with a moral dilemna. He may have exhausted the resources of his private stock of practical reason and still be unable to see his way clear. What he may need is the kind of stimulus to the imagination that reflection on the parable can provide. Or, if it really is a repository of moral wisdom, he may do best simply to accept the authority of whatever it intimates for his particular case. There would surely be nothing odd or objectional about proceeding in such a way. Practical reasoning is a difficult business and it must happen often enough that a person cannot reach a decision in spite of his best efforts. This possibility is well recognised by moralists and many remedies have been suggested. One may be advised to be guided by the intimations of a traditional mode of behaviour or to put ones trust in God, or to rely on the virtues inculcated by a public school education to see things through. These are all devices intended to reduce the risk of serious moral error when the ordinary resources of individual reason fail. The parables of the great religious leaders

1. <u>ibid</u>. p.187.   2. <u>ibid</u>. p.193.

may function admirably in such a role. Even when interpreted in a secular spirit they may be seen as embodying the reflections of someone whose practical wisdom and experience far exceed one's own. Besides one might well be impressed by the fact that they have retained a grip on people's imagination for many centuries. In practical reasoning one needs all the help one can get and it might be foolish to ignore a source of this kind. But there is nothing here that need disturb our account of moral assessment. If the parable is a genuine source of moral wisdom it will be so in virtue of the fact that reflection on it has some tendency to encourage choices that promote human well-being. The decision that eventually emerges from ones reflections will be universalizable in the ordinary way if it is to count as a moral decision. Used in this manner parables may well have a legitimate role in the moral life. But if this is how one should conceive of their link with morality it is hard to accept Hepburn's presentation of the case. For one thing the suggestion that there is a sense in which 'fable-following' may usefully be contrasted with 'principle-following' is quite misconceived. Besides one can hardly be entitled to speak of a 'parable model' even on the most generous interpretation of the phrase. Parables may be a useful standby in moral reasoning but they do not shed any light on its logical structure. No doubt many of Hepburn's difficulties could have been averted had he made the distinction described here between using stories as a source of moral inspiration and treating the events of one's own life as constituting a story. The fact that one of these activities has a legitimate, if secondary, role within morality may help to account for some of the confusion. But whichever view is taken of the language of stories and parables it is now clear that it can never constitute a rival to that of rules and principles so far as moral assessment is concerned. This conclusion will be particularly significant when we consider the work of Hepburn's fellow-symposiast.

Miss Murdoch's contribution may be seen as an attempt to

draw out the implications of some of the lines of thought suggested by Hepburn. She begins by remarking that she agrees very much with the general direction of his argument and that her main criticism is that 'he has not made enough of his case'.[1] The charge is developed with the help of a distinction which has striking affinities with that between understanding and assessment. These extend in even to some points of verbal formulation. Thus, Miss Murdoch interprets Hepburn's purpose as being to suggest that 'morality is understanding, interpretation and reflection as well as "choice"'.[2] At many points in the paper there are valuable comments on this contrast as she conceives it. There are, for instance the implications drawn from it for our conception of what a moral difference is. Miss Murdoch notes that, 'It is proposed on the current view that we regard moral differences as differences of choice, given a discussable background of facts'.[3] But if one takes account of the fresh material to which she draws attention they, 'look less like differences of choice, given the same facts, and more like differences of vision'.[4] The point being made here is vital for an understanding of the role of moral differences in human affairs, and it may be true that it has been unduly neglected in contemporary philosophy. Miss Murdoch's comments would provide a useful starting-point for a discussion of it within the context of our general thesis. Unfortunately, she is condemned to misrepresent the significance of this material because of inadequacies in the conceptual framework imposed on it. She sees herself as going beyond Hepburn precisely because she wishes to argue that the effect of thinking of morality as 'understanding, interpretation and reflection' is to displace the notion of choice. Thus, she remarks that she has 'attempted to offer an alternative view of moral concepts which shows moral differences as differences of vision not of choice'.[5] Having mentioned the other aspects which Hepburn wishes to set beside choice, she goes on:

'Mr. Hepburn is cautious, however, in that he seems content to regard these as merely preliminaries to choice. Whereas I would argue that we cannot accommodate this aspect of morals without modifying our view of 'concepts' and 'meaning';[6] and when we do this the idea of choice becomes more problematic'.

1. ibid. p.195.
4. ibid. p.203.
2. ibid. p.203.
5. ibid. p.213.
3. ibid. p.202.
6. ibid. p.203.

As the discussion proceeds it becomes clear that Miss Murdoch's purpose
is to establish that there are 'models' of morality in which, in contrast
to the 'current' one, the notions of choice and universality have no
significant place. Thus, she wishes to argue that 'certain moralities
make use, positively, of a quite different model',[1] and that there are
'positive and radical moral conceptions which are unconnected with the
view that morality is essentially universal rules'.[2]

There is no great difficulty in seeing how this situation
should be interpreted in the light of our general ~~thxxixx~~ argument. We
are faced with a tendency, natural enough in the absence of an adequate
philosophical grasp of morality, to concentrate on one or other of its
basic components. Those who are most impressed by the connection with
practical reasoning will emphasise the language of 'rules' and 'choice'.
Those who are most impressed by the connection with the ways in which
a person may form a systematic understanding of his activities will
speak instead of 'vision' and 'insight'. What Miss Murdoch wishes to say
is that we have here alternative and incompatible moral conceptions.
The truth, however, is that we have a contrast between two sets of
correct but partial insights which are not really in conflict at all.
There is no conflict because they are not focussed on the same objects.
A proper grasp of the concept of morality would enable one to see that
the language of vision and the language of choice complement each other.
Both are indispensable to the reflections of the ordinary moral agent
and to the everyday workings of the institution of morality. In spite
of its prominent and unmysterious role it may well be true that the dimen-
sion of morality for which we have appropriated the term 'vision' has
been unduly neglected in contemporary philosophy. Hence, Miss Murdoch
has performed a service in drawing attention to is. But this leaves
things no better than before if its cost is the supplanting of our concern
for the aspect of morality which is suggested by talk of 'choice'. A
satisfactory account would have to accommodate Miss Murdoch's insights

1. _ibid._ p.205.   2. _ibid._ p.208.

and those of the people she criticises. To say this is just to say that
it would have to accommodate both understanding and assessment. Although
it is easy to see in a general way.what are the implications of our
thesis for Miss Murdoch's case it would be foolish to end the discussion
of it at that stage. The real test of our interpretation is whether it
can accommodate points of detail smoothly and without distortion. Besides
the process of seeing if this is so can teach a good deal that cannot
be acquired in any other way.

One might begin by looking more closely at the kind of
model that becomes available when the obsession with choice is overcome.
What are the 'positive and radical moral conceptions that are neglected
on 'the current view'? Miss Murdoch explains: 'I have in mind moral
attitudes which emphasise the inexhaustible detail of the world, the
endlessness of the task of understanding, the importance of not assuming
that one has got individuals and situations "taped", the connection of
knowledge with love and of spiritual insight with apprehension of the
unique'.[1] Obviously, some of the issues this raises have implications
that extend beyond moral philosophy. It is clear from other evidence that
Miss Murdoch believes that the contrast she is concerned with is the
reflection of quite fundamental differences:

> 'There are people whose fundamental moral belief is that we all live
> in the same empirical and rationally comprehensive world and that
> morality is the adoption of universal and openly defensible rules
> of conduct. There are other people whose fundamental belief is that
> we live in a world whose mystery transcends us and that morality is
> the exploration of that mystery in so far as it concerns each indivi-
> dual'.[2]

Moreover, these differences are irreconcilable: it is inevitable that
morality should be a disputed concept:

> 'There is perhaps in the end no peace between those who think that
> morality is complex and various, and those who think it is simple
> and unitary, or between those who think that other people are usually
> hard to understand and those who think they are usually easy to
> understand. All one can do is to try to lay one's cards on the table'.[3]

1. ibid. p.208.   2. ibid. p.208.   3. ibid. pp.217-218.

The main suggestion that has been offered as a guide in interpreting
Miss Murdoch is that her advocacy of alternatives to the rules-choice
model may be seen as an attempt to draw attention to the dimension of
morality we have called 'moral understanding'. If this idea xxx is sound,
one would expect to find that the main problem for her new material,
conceived as a model of morality, is to accommodate the business of
deciding what one morally ought to do. For it is not easy to see how
the alternatives of conceiving of morality as vision and as choice could
be reflected in distinctive approaches to this matter. How can the
implications of the contrast be such as to make us want to use quite
different explanatory models? The situation is not made easier when one
takes account of the hints that are given as to the specific nature of
the alternatives to choice. How precisely should a sense of the inexhaust-
ibility of the world and the mysteriousness of other people affect one's
approach to practical reasoning? Perhaps there will be a tendency for
people who are impressed by these considerations to have a distinctive
style; slow to reach judgement, tentative about its status, disinclined
to press the implications on others and so on. But nothing in this is
incompatible with explanation in terms of rules. The differences must
surely be more substantial to justify Miss Murdoch's position. There is
no attempt in her paper to work out solutions to these problems in any
detail. At the crucial points where questions arise as to the place of
reasoning about action in her scheme of things, she is inclined to appeal
to ordinary moral experience: 'Here all I can say is that in this compli-
cated matter most moral agents know how to proceed'.[1] But the philosophical
problems arise precisely because although we may know how to proceed we
disagree as to what account should be given of our procedure. The appeal
to practice settles nothing here because in the relevant sense we do not
know what we are doing. Now of course it would be correct and easy to
say that failure to supply details is hardly surprising since the task
is not really feasible. As has been shown, to be seriously concerned x
with moral assessment is necessarily to be involved with rules and
principles. Thus, the alternative that Miss Murdoch seems to be envisaging
could never be coherently worked out. The plausibility of its claim to

1. ibid. p.204.

represent a distinctive conception of morality depends on a refusal to focus on the realm of practical reasoning. But once again it may be felt that this is a somewhat bland and dismissive way to deploy a conclusion. To use it like this is to fail to do justice to Miss Murdoch's work and, hence, to deprive oneself of the elements of value in it. In order to dig a little deeper we shall enquire whether some still more fundamental considerations do not underlie the views which we have been discussing.

Let us note again the key phrases in the description of what she wishes to set against the 'current' view. She is concerned with attitudes which emphasise 'the inexhaustible detail of the world, the endless of the task of understanding, the importance of not assuming that one has got individuals and situations "taped"'.[1] These attitudes are connected with the belief that 'we live in a world whose mystery transcends us'. Elsewhere Miss Murdoch remarks that, 'The insistence that morality is essentially rules may be seen as an attempt to secure us against the ambiguity of the world'.[1] A useful starting-point is to note that there is a sense in which this last claim is quite certainly correct. But in this sense any enterprise with an intellectual or cognitive content may be described as an attempt to secure us against the ambiguity of the world. Simply to re-enact its ambiguity would be pointless. We reduce experience to order by picking out discrete elements in it, grouping them under concepts, and linking the concepts within larger forms of organisation. There is a sense in which this process necessarily involves abridgement, a reduction of detail, and so reveals something less than absolute reverence for the mysteriousness of the world. It must do this if it is to fulfil its purpose. A perfect mirror-image of the manifold of experience would be as chaotic and unmanageable as its original, and leave us no better off than before. This is as true of the form of organisation we call morality as of any other. Indeed, it might be argued that, at least in its manifestation as practical reason, morality is particularly likely to be intolerant of delay in imposing

1. ibid. p.210.

its conceptual apparatus on the phenomena. By its very nature it is perp-
etually forced to run the risk of what Miss Murdoch might regard as
premature conceptualisation. For while a sense of the importance of not
assuming that 'one has got individuals and situations "taped"' may create
no tensions for a purely theoretical mode of reasoning, practical reason
cannot suspend judgement indefinitely. Decisions have to be made under
a time-limit and failure to reach them will itself have consequences
xxxxx that must be borne in mind by the agent. Moreover, there is a sense
in which it is characteristic of practical judgements to be premature,
to be based on an imperfect grasp of the situation. For the typical
situation in which a need for them arises will have a dynamic character.
It will be constantly liable to change under the pressure of the beliefs
and actions of oneself and others. There is a paradox here which helps
to give practical reasoning its distinctive character. The longer one
delays in the hope of achieving a perfect grasp of the situation the more
likely are the conclusions to be out of date as soon as they are formulated.
There is, therefore, a special difficulty for moral assessment in adopting
the kind of patience that Miss Murcoch commends. It may perhaps be seen
as another reflection of the general weakness of her theory where this
dimension of morality is concerned.

        The difficulties extend, however, beyond assessment. It
is equally hard to see how morality as a form of understanding can be
accommodated on Miss Murdoch's account. At this point we come upon the
crucial issue. Her opposition to 'the current view' only becomes fully
intelligible against the background of the ideal of a morality which
would not be subject to the limitations we have described. It would be
a perfectly faithful mirror of moral experience, infinitely receptive to
every nuance of detail and ever willing to let action wait upon reflection
for fear of a premature resolution of issues. As we have seen this is an
inappropriate ideal for any attempt to get an intellectual grip on the
material. Yet even if we are right in suspecting that it underlies Miss
Murdoch's position something more remains to be said here. It might be

suggested that her real purpose is to commend a certain kind of attitude to the world, roughly speaking, one of reverence and humility in the face of its mysteriousness. It would not be unfair to characterise this as a 'mystical' attitude; perhaps even, if one takes seriously the references to the transcendent nature of the mystery, a specifically 'religious' one. Such an interpretation could call on the support of some hints in the text. Thus at one point Miss Murdoch suggests that the effect of taking her new material seriously is that of 'inducing humility and being an expression of love'.[1] A similar import may be attached to the reference to 'the connection of knowledge with love and of spiritual insight with apprehension of the unique'. However one interprets the notion of 'apprehending the unique' there is a difficulty about giving a description of it in a public language. The attempt can only get started if one can relate the experience significantly to others by means of common features, analogy, family resemblance or in some other way. But success here must be destructive of the claims to uniqueness. It is appropriate that Miss Murdoch should suggest that the experience is the fruit of spiritual insight rather than the more mundane faculties of cognition. But it is not easy to see how one could seek an understanding of it through the form of public discourse that must be used in philosophy. And it is not easy to see how a concern for the attitudes she recommends can be opposed to any secular attempt at philosophical understanding. It seems that the element of theory in her case has a tendency to dissolve on close inspection. What we are then left with may be interpreted as advocacy of a shift of sensibility rather than ideas. But if this is so it cannot conflict with acceptance of any philosophical account of morality.

In particular it cannot conflict with acceptance of 'the current view' based on the idea of choices governed by rules. Such a view is perfectly compatible with a sense of the mysteriousness of the world and of other people. All that seems to be required is the assumption that the mystery is not utterly impenetrable and that the notions of 'rules' and 'choice' are the essential tools of moral assessment in exploring it.

1. ibid. p.209.

At this point, however, we touch upon what may well be a legitimate
complaint against some representatives of 'the current view'. The point
involved here goes some way to account for the distinctive tone of Miss
Murdoch's criticism. It is that the view in question has not always been
associated with the kind of humility that these insights make appropriate.
Sometimes, and perhaps particularly in the period at which she
wrote, it has been invoked with a degree of facility, even glibness, to
which one might resonably take exception. The suggestion arises that her
real objection is not to any theoretical defects in 'the current view'
but to the spirit in which it has sometimes been applied. This would
fit in with certain other aspects of her case. For instance, it may help
to explain why she regards 'the current view' as an expression of a
distinctively 'Liberal' ideal.[1] The 'liberal' is sometimes suspected of
a desire to minimise the difficulites with which human life is attended
and a reluctance to admit that any may be quite intractable. There are
indications in Miss Murdoch's paper that it is a suspicion she shares.
It may be that what she finds objectionable is the tendency to approach
problems of practical reasoning in this spirit. What she misses is a
proper sense of the weight and density of the issues. The arguments we
advanced earlier may serve to reinforce this point from another direction.
Practical reasoning is a difficult enterprise and at present we lack
an adequate philosophical grasp of its foundations. To advise humility
and caution is a perfectly appropriate response to this situation. But
in accepting the advice one must be wary of some other possibilities
latent in Miss Murdoch's position. It is easy for the attitudes she
commends as an antidote to a facile optimism to develop their own kind
of glibness. The appeal to the unique, the ineffable, the transcendent,
can degenerate into a device for putting a stop to argument. A sense of
difficulty is valuable if it makes one aware of how much remains to be
achieved, but dangerous if it induces passivity or obscurantism. In the
quasi-theological language of Miss Murdoch's paper what is needed here
is a path between despair and presumption.

1. See especially pp.213-216.

It was noted earlier that Miss Murdoch makes, inadvertently as it were, a number of illuminating comments on the distinction between understanding and assessment. By way of conclusion we shall consider one which is particularly significant in the present state of the argument. At one point she remarks that:

'When we apprehend and assess other people we do not consider only their solutions to specific practical problems, we consider something more elusive which may be called their total vision of life, as shown in their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words, their assessments of others, their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive or praiseworthy, what they think funny: in short, the configurations of their thought which show continually in their reactions and conversation. These things, which may be x overtly and comprehensively displayed or inwardly elaborated and guessed at, constitute what, making different points in the two metaphors, one may call the texture of a man's being or the nature of his personal vision'.[1]

Miss Murdoch does not spell out the differences between the points made in the two metaphors. Nevertheless, the subsequent discussion makes clear that she regards the notions of 'being' and 'vision' as intimately related. Thus, usually she does not bother to single them out for separate treatment. Instead she speaks of moral insight as 'communicable vision or...quality of being',[2] and of '"personal vision" or "moral being"'.[3] Enough has been said to show how our argument can accommodate talk of 'vision'. At this point it may be worthwhile to bring the language of 'being' within its scope as well. There is a quasi-conceptual point to be made and an epistomological one. In the first place one can say that a person's vision of his life is, partly at least, constitutive of his being. This is not to commit oneself to the view that a person just is whatever he conceives himself to be. There are limits that may not be transcended by any amount of taking thought. Nevertheless, in noting that there is an internal relation between a person's conception of himself and what he is 'really like' one is drawing attention to an important and distinctive feature of human existence.[4] The second point

1. ibid. p.202.   2. ibid. p.204.   3. ibid. p.205.
4. These remarks have been influenced by the argument of A.Phillips Griffiths,'Kant on Masturbation', (unpubl. paper).

concerns our knowledge of other people. Its significance is brought out
clearly by Miss Murdoch's way of stating the matter. When we 'apprehend
and assess' other people what we consider are 'the configurations of
their thought which show continually in their reactions and conversation'.
It is by fitting this evidence together that, as Miss Murdoch puts it,
we arrive at a conception of their 'total vision of life'. It is precisely
the same process that yields our knowledge of what others are 'really
like'. These are the ways in which the 'being' of other people is revealed
to us and we have no other means of access. Hence, the epistomological
point is that the sources of our knowledge of 'being' and of 'vision'
are identical. It is not surprising that the terminology appropriate to
either concept should be available in describing the results.

    Miss Murdoch asserts that we not only consider other peoples
solutions to practical problems but also their 'vision of life'. Putting
this point in our terms one can say that in apprehending other people
as moral beings we take account of modes of understanding as well as
styles of assessment. When restated in this way the significance of her
claim becomes clear: it is a reminder of the fundamental role of moral
understanding. In general the commendation of 'insight', 'sensibility',
'imagination', 'patterns', 'fables' and 'symbols' may be seen as making
a similar point. It corresponds to nothing that is integral or vital so
far as moral assessment is concerned. Yet without these concepts no
satisfactory account can be given of the most characteristic and developed
forms of moral understanding. The conclusion to be drawn is that the
emphasis on the contrast between a morality of sensibility and one of
rules is a confused and oblique way of drawing attention to the distinction
between understanding and assessment. The contrast is seriously misrepre-
sented if it is seen as forcing upon us a choice between self-contained
and irreconcilable conceptions of morality. The natural result of presen-
ting the issues like this is that we are led to reduce morality either
to understanding or to assessment. One way of interpretinf the central
weakness in Miss Murdoch's case is to see it as a victim of the tendency.

As we have shown the place of assessment in her scheme of things is quite unsatisfactory. It is, however, the opposite error that has been the more serious risk in contemporary philosophy and Miss Murdoch's paper may perhaps be seen as a somewhat exaggerated reaction against it. Many writers display a vague and inchoate awareness of the dimension of moral understanding. But when it comes to the point of presenting the substance of their theories and spelling out the detailed implications the dominance of assessment constantly tends to re-assert itself. It would be possible to trace the unfortunate consequences of this tendency in many different areas. Here we shall have to be content with discussing a particular aspect for which the way has been prepared by Miss Murdoch's talk of 'being'.

As a preliminary statement of the criticism one might say that the human image in contemporary moral philosophy is entirely inadequate. The picture it presents has admirable qualities of clarity and economy, but the overall impression is closer to that of an X-ray photograph than to a recognisable likeness of a living entity. The individual's intellectual concerns are wholly absorbed by the need to solve specific practical problems. He lives in a world of other practical beings whose lives are equally dominated by the demands of choice and action. His relations with them are conducted by means of a form of discourse whose primary function is the resolution of conflicts and dilemmas. Obviously, this is a one-dimensional picture. It is by no means true that our intellectual life can be fully understood in terms of its orientation to practical reasoning. But the real objection is not that what we are offered is inadequate if seen as an attempt at a comprehensive and rounded picture of what human beings are like. It is that it is defective in a quite gratuitous way as a working model of morality. With such a model we cannot hope to do justice to its role in human affairs. A man's morality is something that, one might say, 'goes deep'. It is a vital part of what makes him the person he is and differentiates him from others. If our attention is fixed on attention alone we shall never

be able to accommodate these truths. For one thing there is the tendency
for people to agree on the practical issue of what should be done while
having radically different conceptions of the significance of the action.
This is particularly likely to be found in societies which are dominated
by the sort of liberal consensus of which Miss Murdoch complains. In
such cases the general tendency, which was given its classic defende
by J.S.Mill, is for people to be allowed to think what they like provided
that their actions do not infringe too drastically on the interests of
others. A difficulty arises here as to how a persons individual morality
can be the individuating factor that one might naturally suppose. In
the nature of the case it cannot be resolved merely by attending to the
answers he gives to particular practical questions. There is, moreover,
a deeper point involved. In an important sense his answers to practical
questions can only be contingently related to anything more fundamental
This is so precisely because moral assessment employs a form of objective
public discourse. Our purpose in engaging in it is to produce answers
that are not merely idiosyncratic, not more intimately related to our
own distinctive characteristics than to those of anyone else. They should
be such that anyone appraised of the relevant facts will, in so far as
he is rational, assent to them. It follows that there is an inherent
tendency for this form of public discourse, if allowed to operate freely,
to bring about agreement on all disputed issues. No doubt this is an
ideal not to be realised in ordinary circumstances since ignorance of
facts and reluctance to be guided by reason are so hard to eliminate
from our situation. Nevertheless, in so far as they are informed and
rational, people who engage seriously in moral discourse will come to
agree. The exclusive concern of recent philosophy with assessment
virtually forces such a view upon us. From the standpoints it offers
it is very difficult to think of morality except as something whose
tendency is to unite people, and as, potentially at least, an instrument
of complete harmony. Its divisive aspects are bound to be neglected.
Yet a man's individual morality is one of the most distinctive things
about him: it lies near the heart of what makes him the person he is.
It is surely a mistake to think of it as a purely contingent element,

waiting to be dissolved under the impact of rational argument. Ordinary moral experience offers no support for such a view. Sometimes at least, when a disagreement strikes one as being characteristically'moral' there seems to be an element involved that is deep-rooted, and unamenable to argument in a way difficult to account for if one supposes that all that can be at stake are conflicting practical judgements. To take this view would be to trivialise the notion of a moral difference. Besides, we do find it natural to think of a man's'moral being' as something elusive and individual, something that we may find difficult or impossible to grasp and that differentiates him more profoundly from us than his views on particular practical issues ever could. One cannot account for these aspects of experience if morality is thought of exclusively as practical reason. The dimension of understanding is indispensable here. Moreover, to be seriously concerned with it is necessarily to be involved with such notions as 'sensibility', 'insight', 'imagination' and 'vision'. The conceptual links which we have explored give them an essential place in any account of its functioning. However awkward or embarrassing this material may prove it is now clear that without it we cannot remedy the radical defects in the image of the moral life and of man as a moral agent that is reflected in our philosophy. Some encouragement may be found in the fact that the general distinction between understanding and assessment, with the ramifications explored in this chapter, provides at least the rudiments of a set of conceptual tools for handling it.

Chapter 10.

THE UNITY OF MORALITY.

The effect of the discussion so far has been to emphasise
the diversity within the concept of morality. We have insisted on the
need to make distinctions if the philosophical issues are to be understood.
In the climate of contemporary moral philosophy this emphasis has much
to commend it. The chief obstacle to progress is a tendency to treat
morality as a more homogeneous concept than it really is. Discussion
then centres on the problem of deciding which of the many individual
accounts that respect this character is correct. It is important to
break the hold of this assumption and our main effort has been directed
to that end. Nevertheless there is a danger that in the process one may
lose sight of the essential unity of the concept. It would be unfortunate
to leave the impression that it consists of almost entirely separate and
self-contained parts. Our ordinary use of the concept is compatible with
the view that it is diverse and complicated and an attempt has been made
to account for this. But it also seems to require an assumption that
the diversity is the reflection of unity at some level, that morality
is not a hopelessly incoherent concept. We must now try to accommodate
this aspect nfthixxx of things as well. In doing so we shall have to
deal with such questions as these: what is the precise nature of the
connection between moral understanding and moral assessment?, what is
it that justifies the use of the term 'moral' in each case?, and what
entitles us to regard them as the components of the single concept we
call 'morality'?

There is a connection which is intuitively easy enough to
grasp but is difficult to articulate satisfactorily. It may be introduced

by noting again the essential features of understanding and of assessment.
To have moral understanding is to see the world of human action as
explicable in terms of concepts which depend on it for their existence.
To engage in moral assessment is to be guided by considerations of human
good and harm. Perhaps the connection is best conceived of in terms of
the nature of the boundaries and of what is excluded in each case. Putting
it crudely, one can say that they are, in their different ways, co-
extensive with the dimension of 'the human': what they exclude is any
appeal to the transcendent, to concepts whose link with it is purely
external or to interests whibh are thought of as 'above' or 'beyond' the
interests of human beings. One can say that morality is an intellectual
enterprise which accepts the human realm as autonomous and self-containéd
and this is reflected in a distinctive mode of vision on the one hand
and a distinctive form of practical reasoning on the other. These remarks
are true so far as they go. It may even be the case that they contain
the essence of all that needs to be said here. Nevertheless they will
not do as they stand, and this is not merely due to the abstract and
generalised way in which they have had to be formulated. It is not just
a working out of details that is needed. There is a more interesting
explanátion of their inadequacy. Even on their own terms there are some
awkward phenomena which they fail to fit.

        The point may be brought out in the following way. It can
be argued that the connection between moral understanding and moral
assessment which we have noted is a particular instance of a general
relationship between modes of understanding and systems of assessment.
Thus, for example, a similar pattern may be traced in the case of religion.
The traditional Judaeo-Christian version of religious understanding in
which a crucial röle is played by the concept of 'God' falls, as we have
seen,[1] outside the range of the moral. Moreover, a sense can be given to
the notion of a system of practical assessment which would be specifically
religious rather than moral in character. Judgements would fall into

1. See ch.2. above, pp.13-14.

this category in so far as they were based on a calculation of divine
interests and ignoring all other considerations: some illustrations of
this possibility were given earlier. Thus there is a point of general
significance involved here. There is a systematic parallelism between
the basic concepts around which modes of understanding revolve and the
sorts of consideration that determine the nature of systems of assessment.
To note this point is to be offered a hint as to where our account of the
moral case falls short. It fails to explain why the components should
be linked in quite the distinctive way that in fact they are. In our
society the functioning of morality is rather different in this respect
from that of religion. One can characterise the difference in a way that
is adequate for present purposes by saying that in the religious case
understanding and assessment do not cohere with anything like the same
tightness and precision. Understanding alone represents a going concern,
and it functions perfectly well without its conceptual twin. Traditional
believers seem content to see the general significance of their lives
as inextricably bound up with the concept of 'God' without allowing
considerations of His interests a distinctive and dominant place in the
making of practical decisions. No widespread sense of intellectual
discomfort is felt in connection with this practice. The problem we face
in the case of morality is set by the fact that it must be understood
as containing two entirely viable components which, taken together,
constitute a highly unified and homogeneous concept. Later we shall
suggest an explanation of this contrast between the religious and the
moral cases. The fact of its existence is what is significant for present
purposes. Although there is some substance in the connection we have
traced between forms of understanding and systems of assessment it fails
to prepare one for the variety that is encountered in practice. Different
ways of combining understanding and assessment can be used without giving
rise to any suspicion of incongruity. To note this serves to give the
link between moral understanding and moral assessment a disturbing air
of contingency. One would surely have to draw them together more tightly
than this for a completely convincing account. More generally the possib-
ility of there being various combinations raises in an accute form the

question of why the elements of morality should combine in just the way that produces the concept that we in fact have. The source of the difficulty, one may suspect, is that hitherto the attempt to trace the link between moral understanding and moral assessment has relied on an important but isolated insight. What is needed at this point is a comprehensive and integrated background for it.

The task of providing the background will be approached by considering the relevance of our general argument to an area which has traditionally been closely linked with morality. Some of the most aceute and interesting moral problems arise in connection with the education of young people. An account of the concept of morality is bound to have implications here, particularly for the question of moral education. Hence the discussion should have the useful side-effect of establishing whether our thesis has any explanatory value in this conceptually rich and important field. But our main purpose will be to use it as a stepping stone towards exhibiting the unity of the concept of morality.

When one begins to consider the relevance of our account of morality to education a difficulty arises which it may be well to tackle at once. It stems from the fact that much recent writing is dominated by a misleading assumption about the relationship between education and values. The influence of this view is pervasive enough to make one wish to deal with it directly and so avoid the risk of it being an unacknowledged presence in the discussion. Besides its charm will be found to depend on the fact that it misrepresents an important truth. To disentangle this element will be a useful step towards a satisfactory theory. The view we are concerned with may be formulated roughly by saying that the link between education and values is a conceptual one, or, to put it another way, that 'education' is itself an evaluative concept. Though common enough in the literature such claims are xxxx

not easy to assess. In part this is because they have achieved such a
degree of acceptance that supporters seem to feel no need to supply
arguments in their favour. Moreover, they tend to be piched at a level
of abstraction that makes it hard to see what sorts of consideration
could possibly tell for or against. In view of these difficulties it is
convenient to be able to refer to the account given by R.S.Peters in
Ethics and Education.[1] It offers reasons rather than blank assertion and,
by spelling out some implications of the claim, enables one to bring
discussion of it to a manageable level. This is, on other grounds, a
suitable work to examine. It gives an account of the concept of education
which deserves to be taken very seriously. Moreover, it would probably
not be unfair to suggest that its influence goes a long way to explain
the popularity of the view with which we are concerned.

Peters states the general claim in this way: '"Education"
implies that something worthwhile is being or has been intentionally
transmitted in a morally acceptable manner'. He goes on: 'It would be
a logical contradiction to say that a man had been educated but that he
had in no way changed for the better, or that in educating his son a
man was attempting nothing that was worthwhile'.[2] This statement deserves
close attention. Peters offers it as a self-contained illustration of a
general theme and then carries straight on with the main line of argument.
Thus, the context offers little or no guidance as to how the claim should
be interpreted: it stands or falls on its own merits. In order to bring
the issues as sharply into focus as possible we shall begin by concentra-
ting on one aspect of it; the reference to the man educating his son.
The claim to be considered is this: 'It would be a logical contradiction
to say that in educating his son a man was attempting nothing that was
worthwhile'. To begin with it should be noted that there is an element
of ambiguity here. This has little interest in itself and would not be
worth mentioning but for the fact that it may have some general significance.

1. op.cit.   2. ibid. p.25

For on one interpretation what Peters says is almost certainly true, though, as we shall see, this has no implications for the concept of education. On another interpretation it is equally certainly false. It is tempting to point to this ambivalence as one source of the plausibility of the claim.

The situation arises in the following way. There seems to be a fairly straightforward distinction to be made between 'what is worthwhile' on the one hand and 'the transmission of what is worthwhile' on the other. It would surely be unreasonable to insist that every attempt to pass on what is worthwhile must itself be regarded as worthwhile. In general this would presumably not be the case where the attempt is bound to fail at great cost, or where it can only lead to results that are the opposite of those intended. Although a love and appreciation of Bach may well be worthwhile an attempt to get a tone-deaf child to share it might not. It would surely not be worthwhile if the only result is to turn his indifference into active hostility. We can distinguish, it seems, between judging the worthwhileness of the activity of trying to transmit something and judging the worthwhileness of the content of what is transmitted. Thus, there are two things that might be said about the man educating his son. The first is that his efforts were not worthwhile where this has no implications for the value of the material he is concerned with. If one takes what Peters says in a literal way this seems to be the most reasonable interpretation of the statement he wishes to reject. It may well be agreed that it involves something rather like a logical contradiction. The other claim is that what the man is trying to pass on is not itself worthwhile. This is the interpretation to which Peters is more firmly committed by virtue of his general position. It will be argued that if the statement is taken in this way there is nothing contradictory about it. Let us consider each version in turn.

On the first interpretation the claim might be formulated in this way: it would be a logical contradiction to say that a man's attempt to educate his son was not in any way worthwhile. To help in assessing it we shall have to ask some questions that may seem almost facetious but have a serious purpose. Would it be a logical contradiction to say that a man's attempt to educate his daughter was not in any way worthwhile? The history of girls education would surely reveal many who were prepared to make just this claim. No doubt their views were wrong-headed or obnoxious but it seems hard to maintain that they were incoherent. Indeed it might be difficult to make senseof the history on this assumption. The opposition to girls education was formidable precisely because it was not open to refutation on purely logical grounds. Would it be a logical contradiction to assert that there was nothing worthwhile about a man's attempt to educate his mother, or commanding officer, or next-door neighbour. Surely, so far from involving any logical difficulty, the advice to abstain from such attempts on the grounds of their lack of worthwhileness would be eminently sensible. It seems that when we begin to consider persons other than the man's son the charge of logical contradiction may become implausible. This is odd as the contradiction is supposed to stem directly from the nature of the concept of education. Why should it make a difference who the benificiaries of the man's educating zeal happen to be? To raise this question is surely to begin to doubt whether there can be a conceptual point about education involved here. Yet the fact remains that, as originally formulated with reference to the man's son, Peters assertion is difficult to dispute. Indeed it may well strike one as almost certainly correct. How is this to be accounted for?

Let us consider the formula: it would be a logical contradiction to assert that A's attempt to educate X was not worthwhile. Some substitutes for X produce an assertion that seems obviously incorrect; for instance,'his mother' or 'his valet'. With others the result is

considerably more plausible; for instance where X is replaced by 'his son'. What distinguishes those values which lead to acceptable results from those which do not? A plausible suggestion is that the claim is legitimate only where X is a person related in such a way to A that A has a responsibility for his education. The standard case arises when X is A's son. Taking up this hint one might generalise the contention in the following way: it would be a logical contradiction to assert that a man's attempt to educate someone for whose education he had a responsibility was not in any way worthwhile. This statement is surely plausible enough. Yet the impression of contradictoriness is adequately accounted for by the conceptual links between the notions of worthwhileness and of discharging responsibilities. Doing one's duty is always worthwhile in one respect at least; that is, in so far as what one does is one's duty. It would also be a contradiction to assert that a man's attempts to punish or indoctrinate those whom he had a duty to punish or indoctrinate were not in any way worthwhile. Clearly, the possibility of arriving at a contradiction by this route indicates nothing whatever about the concept of education. In particular, it has no tendency to show that it has worthwhileness, as it were, built-in. Nevertheless, the fact that one interpretation of Peters does produce a genuine contradiction is of general significance here. It is hard not to believe that it goes some way towards explaining the initial plausibility of what he says.

The second interpretation presents us with this claim: it would be a logical contradiction to assert that in educating his son a man was trying to transmit nothing that was worthwhile. Here worthwhileness is taken to characterise the subject-matter rather than the man's attempts at being an educator. The nature of the concept of education is assumed to be such that in accepting the description 'educating his son' one is already committed to valuing the content of what is passed on. Hence the contradiction is seen as arising in a perfectly straightforward way: it is being simultaneously affirmed and denied that something is worthwhile. At this point we reach the core of the thesis which is our main concern.

The difficulty is to see how this central contention may be rationally discussed. For the situation which was avoided earlier begins to threaten again. The risk is one of becoming involved in an interminable round of claims and counter-claims which rest only on rival intuitions about usage. However, hopes of avoiding stalemate are raised by another feature of the general thesis developed in Ethics and Education. This is the connection that is established between the concept of education and the achievement of certain kinds of knowledge and understanding.[1] Perhaps we may find here a way of coming to grips with the elusive doctrine that education is an evaluative concept. Our purpose in exploring this possibility is not simply to expose a source of tension in Peters's account. Since the argument will depend on accepting that what he says about knowledge and understanding is substantially correct, and indeed goes right to the heart of the concept of education, its conclusion will have a perfectly general significance. Because Peters is right about the links between education and certain kinds of knowledge and understanding it follows that education is not an evaluative concept.

In order to work with as much detail as possible we shall concentrate on a particular element in Peters's case. He argues convincingly that one of the criteria for the central uses of the term 'education' is supplied by what he calls 'cognitive perspective'. The notion is introduced in this way. He suggests that a man might be highly trained in the eminently worthwhile activity of science, be devoted to it and have a good grasp of its principles, and yet we might refuse to call him an educated man. The question is what could be lacking in such a case. Peters answers:

> 'It is surely a lack of what might be called "cognitive perspective". The man could have a very limited conception of what he is doing. He could work away at science without seeing its connection with much else, its place in a coherent pattern of life. For him it is an activity which is cognitively adrift'.[2]

He goes on to point out that the popularity of the slogan 'education is of the whole man' bears witness to the 'conceptual connection between

1. See esp. ch.1. sec.3.   2. op.cit. p.31.

"education" and seeing what is being done in a perspective that is not too limited'.[1] This is surely a persuasive argument and we shall accept that it succeeds in establishing its conclusion. The procedure to be used now is quite simple. The first step is to offer reminders of the possibility of sincere and intelligent people holding views which attach little or no importance to cognitive perspective. Indeed on certain presuppositions it might be seen as a positive evil. Moreover, it may be argued, its nature is such as to contaminate everything into which it enters as an essential ingredient: it is the fly that always ruins the ointment. Hence in so far as education is necessarily concerned with acquiring cognitive perspective it can involve the transmission of nothing that is worthwhile. In so far as possession of cognitive perspective is essential to the state of being educated the achievement of that state must be regarded as thoroughly undesirable. Of course, to make such claims is to reveal one's substantive commitments: our contention is that to deny them is to do so too. That is, the connection between education and worthwhileness can only be established by a normative judgement, not by conceptual analysis. The view that the link is necessary seems to derive much of its force from a readiness to accept a restricted view of the data. It should prove difficult to maintain once their diversity has been realised. What is needed is not so much straightforward philosophical argument but rather the pointing out of neglected facts. Such a procedure must derive its force from the weight of accumulated detail. The full effect is perhaps impossible to achieve within our present limits but enough can been done to convey a sense of its persuasiveness.

The various kinds of opposition to cognitive perspective may be classified in terms of whichever aspect is singled out for particular attention. The categories that this gives rise to will overlap rather than be rigidly exclusive. Nevertheless some general tendencies are easy to discern. One possibility is that criticism may focus on what is taken to be the excessive rationalism of the cognitive perspective thesis. The objection is to its emphasis on grasping connections between

1. ibid. p.32.

activities and mapping their relationships within some overall pattern of living. This may seem to allow too large a role for discursive thought to suit some people. Such an attitude may be found in, for instance, the writings of D.H.Lawrence. The distinctive feature of the position is its irrationality: basically the objection is to the very notion of trying to form a reflective and comprehensive view of one's activities. There is a related but more formidable line of criticism which one associates with people whose main interests are religious or aesthetic. In such cases the objection is to the degree of sophistication which the notion of cognitive perspective implies. It involves, it may be said, an excessively abstract way of apprehending experience, the erection of a screen of theory between ourselves and the world. As against this, attention is drawn to the virtues of simplicity, directness, freshness of vision, 'the innocent eye' and so on. Thus we are told that salvation depends on us becoming as little children. Poets and artists warn of the dangers of losing sight of the particular and the concrete. It may be said that in coming to see how things are connected together one is prevented from seeing anything as it really is, in its unique, individual existence. Significantly, many who incline to such a view seem implicitly to agree with Peters in taking breadth of perspective as the mark of the educated man. Where they differ is in regarding its possession as undesirable. Their remedy is in line with what one might expect. It consists in ridding ourselves of the burden of our education and recovering the vision of the world which we are supposed to have enjoyed before it was so painfully acquired. Finally, one might mention views which stress for practical purposes the value of total absorbtion in an activity. It may be felt that the kind of distancing needed is to see it in a wide perspective must make one a less effective participant. What is sought instead is the intensity that comes through a deliberate narrowing of the field of vision. Perhaps the most obvious examples are provided by people whose interests are mainly political. It would, for instance, be difficult to combine cognitive perspective with following Lenin's advice to 'live, eat and breathe' revolution, and this, of course, finds no shortage of takers.

The conclusion to be drawn is that some ways of interpreting human activities have no place for cognitive perspective: on the contrary they value what might be called 'cognitive narrowness'. They include a number of familiar and well-established modes of thought. It would surely be difficult to argue that all this opposition is incoherent, that to deny the worthwhileness of cognitive perspective is to be involved in contradictions. At any rate there is no evidence that Peters would wish to hold anything of the sort. Thus, he would have to admit that one can without any logical blunder regard cognitive perspective as a positive evil and insist that anything that includes it as an integral part must be an evil also. Hence this is true of education in so far as it necessarily involves cognitive perspective, and Peters has made a convincing case for the view that it does. For someone who rejects that case it may be useful to state the position we have reached in a different way. This will have the incidental advantage of throwing some light on the structure of the argument. One might see it as being concerned to present a dilemma. One can insist on the necessity of the links either between education and what is worthwhile or between education and cognitive perspective. But one cannot have both, for there is no logical difficulty about denying that cognitive perspective is worthwhile. Hence it may be denied that anything into which it enters as an essential element can be worthwhile. The dilemma may be stated in a more general form. Someone who wishes to give an account of the concept of education is free to treat it as 'evaluative', as having worthwhileness built-in. But it then becomes impossible for him to give the notion any further substance whatever. Alte natively he may try to explain it by specifying the substantive criteria governing its use. The price to be paid now is the abandonment of the claim that it contains an evaluative element. Apart altogether from the reasons there are for holding that education is necessarily tied to cognitive perspective, there could surely be little difficulty about the choice in practice. One could hardly rest content with remarking on the evaluative role of the term 'education' while attempting no further characterisation of it. To do so would give rise to the odd suggestion

that it might rival 'good' as the most general term of commendation. One is left therefore with the second alternative. Whatever criteria are specified it will be open to anyone to regard them as ones in which it would be undesirable to try to realise and to view any state of affairs in which they are realised as being unfortunate. Nor is this a remote and merely theoretical possibility. In the particular case of education it seems inevitable that any list of criteria that is at all plausible will be antipathetic to well-established systems of belief. Thus, many people will hold that there are good reasons for regarding the conditions which give substance to our concept of education as ones which ought never to be satisfied, and that whatever is transmitted in the course of trying to satisfy them cannot be worthwhile. Of course, others will be inclined to make a different assessment. But their position also will ultimately be grounded on a normative committment, not on the nature of the concepts involved. Nothing is lost by recognising this. Indeed to someone who is concerned with education as something worthwhile it may well seem a pity that this allegiance should be obscured under the guise of a conceptual point. He may think that his values are quite capable of standing on their own feet. Besides failure to see that the connection between education and what is worthwhile has to be made by a normative judgement may have unfortunate consequences in practice. The comfortable belief that the value of education is somehow grounded in the nature of our concepts may make it difficult to appreciate how few people care about it at all. Besides it may lead to underestimating the opposition which one is forced to recognise. One may see it as merely a sympton of intellectual muddle, and, hence, not worthy of serious consideration, rather than the formidable outcome of clear-headed error. Failure to grasp this point must surely reduce the effectiveness of one's support for what is valuable.

A number of points remain to be clarified before any lessons can be drawn from this discussion. It has been argued that there are no conceptual links between education and worthwhileness. But the

opposite view has been widely accepted and it seems desirable to be able to account for its plausibility. Perhaps it will be found to contain an element of truth that is significant for our purposes. Besides the discussion is incomplete in another way. It has been suggested here that what Peters says about the cognitive aspects of 'education' succeeds in identifying some of its essential features. One might now ask what needs to be added for a complete account. His remarks about knowledge and understanding may be correct within their limits but it would be surprising if so elusive and perplexing a concept as education were completely captured in them. This point is connected with the previous one. It may be that the charm of talk about in-built worthwhileness is due to the fact that it seems to supply what is missing. Thus, we have to supplement Peters's criteria of knowledge and understanding for a complete account of the concept of education, and justice must be done to any genuine insights that may underlie the concern with worthwhileness. It would be agreeably neat and economical if these demands could be satisfied together.

One attraction of the view that education has worthwhileness built-in is its value as a tool of argument. It enables one to dispose of some rather unprofitable controversies. There is, for instance, the confusion that often surrounds talk about 'aims' in connection with education. Sometimes at least this may be construed as a request that the point or purpose of education should be explicated in terms of an extrinsic goal. Peters deals with this by remarking that 'as "education" implies the transmission of what is of ultimate value it would be like asking about the purpose of the good life.' Besides, in so far as things like science and carpentry are regarded 'as part of someone's education they are regarded ipso facto as having value'.[1] Thus one advantage of treating education as an evaluative concept is that it enables one to cut through the fog surrounding the notion of 'aims'. One can say with Peters that much of the confusion comes about 'through extracting the normative feature built into the concept of education as an extrinsic end'.[2] The attractions of this argument are obvious, but as we have

1. ibid. p.29.   2. ibid. p.27.

denied that education has any in-built normative features we are debarred
from using it. It may help to advance the discussion of one looks for
an alternative way of dealing with the problems it disposes of so
efficiently.

One may note to begin with that Peters's hostility to any
kind of 'instrumental' or 'utilitarian' view.of education has a good deal
of support in the philosophical literature. It is often felt that the
attempt to locate the point of the educational process in some external
goal is inimical to the spirit which should animate it and the social
and intellectual climate which it needs in order to flourish. Besides
it may be thought that to view the content of education exclusively
from this angle is to be condemned to miss its point. To value eduaational
activities solely for the changes they bring about in the world is to
fail to see what they really have to offer. Thus, in the course of a
general attack on 'utilitarianism' in education, Alisdair MacIntyre
remarks that, 'Above all the task of education is to teach the value of
activity done for its own sake'.[1] A.Phillips Griffiths regards it as an
essential feature of universities that in them 'subjects are pursued
as ends in themselves'.[2] It is obvious enough that in spite of verbal
differences Peters, MacIntyre and Griffiths are united on what they see
as the essential point that needs to be made about education. There can
be still less doubt that they would agree in identifying the forces
hostile to it. The difficulty is to formulate their basic insight in
a satisfactory way. One can hardly fail to be struck by the similarities
between the versions they offer and the attempts to characterise the
moral point of view that we earlier considered and rejected.[3] The
objections that proved decisive then are relevant once more. Difficulties
arose when we tried to spell out what could be meant by talk of activities
which are 'ends in themselves' or 'constitute their own end'. The

1. 'Against Utilitarianism', in Aims in Education, ed T.H.B.Hollins,
   Manchester University Press, 1964, see p.21.
2. 'A Deduction of Universities' in Philosophical Analysis and Education,
   ed. R.D.Archambault, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965, see
   p.200.
3. Ch.1. above.

discussion developed into a general criticism of attempts to state the position in terms of the notion of 'ends' and its inseparable, though sometimes silent, companion 'means'. There are many activities which cannot readily be captured in such a net. They include some which may be thought of as distinctively 'human' and, it may now be added, as highly relevant to education. It is, for instance, only at the cost of some distortion that one can describe the activity of listening to music in these terms. There is an additional difficulty in the case of education. It arises from the temptation to explain the point involved here by speaking of activities which are 'pursued for their own sake'. This is itself not altogether perspicuous, and an obvious way to interpret it is in terms of the notion of what is 'intrinsically worthwhile'. It might then be supposed that a concern with activities which have intrinsic worthwhileness represents a basic conceptual feature of education. Thus we arrive back at Peters's position and become liable to the objections that were discussed above. A conclusion of a somewhat negative kind may be drawn at this point. It is that one should try to formulate the basic insight about education without involving the idea of value or the category of 'ends and means'. Perhaps the reference to the account of moral understanding can provide a clue to the way ahead. The analogies are sufficiently striking to suggest that perhaps there is some sort of conceptual link between education and what we have called 'the moral point of view'. Let us see how this idea might be developed.

What is common to the educational philosophers we have mentioned is the desire to warn against 'external' or 'instrumental' views. Their tone conveys the impression that they feel themselves to be up against a common error, that in the case of education it is all too easy to find oneself on the outside looking in. This in turn suggests that education is a self-contained world and one bound within fairly narrow limits. We shall work towards a less metaphorical way of speaking by considering the form of discourse that is appropriate to this world and, in particular, the kind of rational argument that it makes available.

What, for instance, would count as an educational reason for studying history? It may be easier to begin by saying what, on the position we are considering, would be excluded. Obviously it will not do to cite considerations that involve treating the study of history as a means to some external goal. Thus if someone were to defend his interest in it by saying that he hoped to establish his tight to a legacy, or obtain material for political propaganda he would not be offering educational reasons. He cannot, one might say, be considering the study of history from an educational point of view. It might be thought that to exclude any approach of this kind is to leave oneself with a fairly restricted range of possibilities. Nevertheless it is easy to suggest ones that will qualify. For instance it might be said that a reason for studying history is to increase historical understanding. Of course, if one is pressed to say more, perhaps by way of explicating the point of having historical understanding, one may soon have to give up dealing in educational reasons. It may be impossible to satisfy one's questioner while keeping within the limits they impose. Thus, it is characteristic of educational discourse that in it the giving of reasons comes to a stop with a peculiar sort of abruptness. What is distinctive about the reasons one is left with is that they fail to establish any point of reference outside the activities they justify. As the example of historical study shows they do little more than redescribe the activity. But these are precisely the complaints levelled against the kind of reasons that are acceptable to the moral point of view.[1] It seems that educational reasons, like moral reasons, are forced to rely on concepts that are parasitic on the activities they relate to. The link may be made stronger by taking up the reference to the notion of an 'educational point of view'. One can now say that to see activities from the educational point of view is to see their significance as inherent in their nature and not dependent on any external goal or purpose. That is, the educational and the moral points of view operate, as it were, from the same position in conceptual space though they are focused on different regions of it. Perhaps it would be still nearer the truth to say that the educational point of view is the moral point of view as it relates to the distinctive activities

1. See ch.1 above, pp.6-8.

and processes that belong to education.

This conclusion has far-reaching implications for the philosophy of education. To trace them in detail would be outside our scope. Nevertheless, one of the purposes of this discussion was to reveal something of the explanatory value of our general thesis in a new area. We shall have to concentrate attention on a single aspect if it, but this should be enough to establish the main point. Public discussion of education tends from time to time to be invaded by slogans which are felt, often in a confused way, to represent important truths. Mention was made earlier of an example given by Peters, 'education is of the whole man'. We are now in a position to see the significance of anbther member of this group, 'all education is moral education'. There is a genuine insight struggling to find expression here. But in practice it has often been confused with some fairly dubious hypotheses. The element of truth behind the slogan does not consist in the fact that education is, or should be, a training in moral assessment, still less that it should always be accompanied by homilies, or the drawing of 'morals'. It is not even accounted for by the rather more plausible claim that all education has a moral purpose, in that its ultimate aim is to produce good men or good citizens. These extrinsic goals are as foreign to the spirit of it as is the desire to produce wage-slaves or fanatical adherents of a party line. We are now in a position to appreciate the genuine insight behind the slogan. It is that to be educated is to be introduced to the possibilities afforded by moral understanding. This may be achieved by concentrating initially on subjects such as mathematics and history whose suitability on grounds of intrinsic interest and inexhaustible resources has long been recognised. The task of the educator is to bring his students to see the business of engaging with them from the educational point of view, to appreciate it for reasons which have nothing to do with the results it may achieve in the world. The lesson of padagogic tradition and of ordinary experience is that this is impossible without enlisting emotions and wills as well as intellects. In practice a grasp of the

educational point of view is usually conjoined with devotion to some particular discipline. The significance of achieving it is that the student now knows what it is like to view some of his activities in the light of morality. The first vital step by which he is brought on the inside of this mode of understanding has been taken. It remains for him to enlarge his moral vision by bringing other activities within its scope. Thus the surface content of a lesson in moral education may be drawn from cooking or astronomy: what gives it moral significance is its place in the process by which a distinctively moral way of viewing the world is transmitted. Education, one can say, is that part of the institution of morality which is concerned with ensuring its perpetuation. There is, finally, one other feature of educational discussion which we are now in a position to appreciate. It is routine for commentators to stress such points as the significance of the personal factor, the relative unimportance of direct instruction, the fact that the most enduring rewards of an education often seems to be picked up inadvertently. It is difficult to account for these factors if one thinks of education as primarily a matter of acquiring knowledge or mastering a technique. They become intelligible when one realises that its essential purpose is to communicate a way of looking at the world, a mode of vision. For this is something that a person cannot be bullied, cajoled, or reasoned into. Its acquisition is bound to be a somewhat haphazard affair in that there can be no formulas guaranteed to give success. But there can be rules of thumb, and perhaps the safest is that the moral point of view is most likely to be acquired from someone who has it already. An aware-ness of this underlies the concern with personal relationships and the widespread recognition that the best teacher is the one with a disinteres-ted devotion to his subject. For his practice will exemplify in the most vivid way the charm of that mode of understanding which it is the business of education to transmit.

At this point we shall return to our main purpose of using the discussion of education as a means of demonstrating the unity of

morality. The course which the discussion has taken has been largely
determined by the wish to supplement what Peters says about the cognitive
aspects of education. It was argued that while there is a necessary link
between education and what he calls 'cognitive perspective', there is
nothing conceptually odd about refusing to value either of them. On the
contrary it was suggested that hostility to cognitive perspective is
characteristic of some familiar ways of viewing the world. The suspicion
naturally arises that perhaps some fairly coherent set of ideas and
attitudes may underlie the support for it. It is easy to accept that this
is indeed the case and, when one takes into account the tone and content
of Peters's remarks as well as the nature of the opposition, a convenient
label comes readily to mind. Concern with cognitive perspective is surely
typical of the outlook of 'liberal humanism'. Another reference to
education may help to underline the point of this suggestion. Cognitive
perspective is an essential feature of the concept and, in addition, it
is now being claimed that it represents a distinctively liberal humanist
attachment. If this is correct it would follow that in so far as one
values education one is subscribing to a liberal humanist view of things.
That some connection of this kind does exist is well recognised in
discussions of the subject. The history of education would provide ample
evidence for the claim that people who may conventionally be described
as 'liberal humanists' have been greatly concerned with its advancement.
The contemporary situation suggests a similar conclusion. No doubt there
are many Marxists and religious believers who have a genuine attachment
to education. But that merely testifies to the dominance of liberal
humanist values in this area. Nothing in the nature of their official
views would lead them to attach any intrinsic significance whatever to
it. On the contrary, what would seem to be required is that their attitude
should fluctuate according to whether it proves instrumentally
valuable for promoting the revolution or the power of the Church. In our
attempt to apply the distinction between moral and non-moral forms of
understanding it was found convenient to make use of the term 'humanism'.[1]
It was employed in a wide sense which, roughly speaking, embraced any
view of the world that refused to see its significance in religious terms.

1. See above, ch.2.

Hence we were able to deal with the intellectual fortunes of Marxism and
of Darwinianism under the same general heading. The discussion of educat-
ion has led us to include still more within the category of 'humanism':
we would now wish to speak of it as being rationalistic and individualistic
as well as merely secular in character. It was shown earlier that both
Marxists and Darwinians can be distributed between the moral and the non-
moral camps. It may be useful to inquire whether this is true of liberal
humanism also. It would be easy to illustrate the moral version from
any contemporary journal of organised humanism. The non-moral case however
presents the same difficulty as was encountered earlier. Because of what
appears to be a general movement from non-moral to moral forms of unders-
tanding it is difficult to refer to recent examples. But it is easy
enough to see what, in principle, would constitute one: suppose that
someone were to hypostatise 'Reason' or 'Liberty' and treat them as
members of an autonomous realm of Platonic entities. Some representatives
of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment perhaps come closest to exemplify-
ing this possibility. At any rate the mention of it is enough to establish
the conceptual point that the distinction between the moral and the non-
moral can be drawn with liberal humanism also. Hence to recognise this
viewpoint calls for no fundamental change in our concept of 'humanism'.
It merely enriches it by bringing important new material within its
scope.

      Nevertheless it must be admitted that the category which
is being denoted by the term 'humanism' is unsatisfactory in a number
of respects. For one thing it embraces a considerable diversity of views,
including representatives from each side of what would otherwise be
thought of as the quite fundamental distinction between the moral and
the non-moral. Besides its identity has to be defined in a negative way,
in terms of its exclusion of any kind of religious outlook. We remarked
earlier on the 'conventional' nature of the category and on the fact that
ascriptions to it are made 'loosely'.[1] It is now time to draw out the
implications of these hints and begin to refine the concept of 'humanism'.

1. See above, p.13.

Essentially this will be achieved by getting rid of its non-moral
elements. We shall argue for a close conceptual link between morality
and a body of ideas and attitudes that may be called 'humanist' in a
somewhat technical, but perfectly appropriate, sense. A useful hint is
provided by the example of moral assessment, that method of assessment
which is founded ultimately on considerations of human good and harm.
Its connection with the idea of k 'humanism' is obvious enough. If a
person saw no reasons for taking such considerations into account, and
instead gave priority to accentuating the elements of order in the world
or to serving the interests of supernatural beings who spoke to him in
dreams, it would be hard to see what substance could be conceded to his
claim to be a 'humanist'. Moral assessment is the natural expression of
a humanist outlook in the sphere of practical reasoning. It must consti-
tute a common element between our old category of humanism and any
possible refinement of it we might wish to suggest while retaining the
name. But the transition from the one to the other has a more complex
aspect. The discussion of education has served its purpose in putting
us on the track of the insights needed to complete this account of
morality. But it still has a directly useful part to play in exploring
the relationships between the two kinds of humanism. For each may be
said to 'overlap' with it, though, significantly, the common ground is
different in the two cases. The 'old' humanism overlaps with the feature
of cognitive perspective and the new with 'the educational point of view',
which is identical in the sense already described with the viewpoint of
morality. The pattern of relationships here is a complicated one. It is
worth noting, in particular, that a person may be a 'humanist' in either
sense without valuing education as a whole, for he may regard one or
other of its components as a positive evil. Besides he may be convinced
of the worthwhileness of education and yet it would be misleading to
call him a 'humanist'. For in so far as he operates any systematic mode
of practical assessment it may be of an aesthetic or religious, rather
than moral character. The lesson so far as the concept of education is
concerned is that its complexity prevents it from being the inevitable
accompanyment of any particular world-view. This does not affect the

usefulness of the concept for present purposes. One might describe its role in metaphorical terms by comparing it to a bridge between two countries which is half owned by each. It serves the function of connecting them while it cannot be assigned in its entirety to either. In what is perhaps an analogous way the concept of education has eased our transition from the 'old' to the 'new' humanism while retaining its identity and independence. Its stake in that concept is part of what gives each its 'humanist' character. In this fact lies the source and explanation of the general connection between humanism and education which has been widely recognised in discussions of these matters.

So far we have been considering suggestions which, however useful as guides, must in themselves be inconclusive. The essential points may now be made quite simply. Moral assessment is necessarily tied to human interests while moral understanding takes the world of human actions to be autonomous and self-justifying. It was suggested earlier that the adoption of individual codes of assessment may be regarded as a half-way stage in the development of individual morality.[1] We are now in a position to set this remark in a wider perspective. To stop at assessment creates a sense of incompleteness because it suggests a failure of nerve or of insight at a crucial stage. The primacy for human claims for decision-making has been accepted but the larger significance of actions continues to be located in external sources such as divine purposes or the laws of history. The natural course of development has been arrested because of a loss of confidence in the possibilities afforded by human existence, or an inability to see what is intimated by the steps already taken. To complete the process there has to be a resolve to trust the world of human activities to generate its own distinctive kind of significance and a refusal to allow that it needs any supplement whatever from outside. That is, moral understanding must be developed as well as moral assessment. When this stage is reached a person's code of assessment may be described as 'humanist' because it takes human interests to be fundamental in practical reasoning, while his mode of understanding is 'humanist' because

1. See ch.5. esp. pp.78-88-

it confines itself to the human framework in achieving its ends. Morality, one may say, is a distinctively humanist institution in the sense that it is an expression of complete confidence in the resources made available by human existence. If one takes moral assessment and moral understanding together they may now be seen as a systematic response to an important aspect of experience. The unity of morality consists essentially in the fact that it is a coherent and comprehensive attempt to deal with the intellectual problems raised by the world of action.

In suggesting the term 'humanism' for this body of ideas and attitudes one is no doubt departing to some extent from conventional usage. Of course it may be said that, provided one grasps the significance of what is being referred to, the labels hardly matter. Certainly it would be unwise to pretend that anything vital hinges on the particular one we have chosen. Nevertheless it is highly suitable for the purpose and one would be reluctant to give it up. It conveys very well the distinctive nature of the enterprise and its use can be given a persuasive rationale. Let us therefore consider in more detail how great a strain would be put on conventional usage by retaining it. This line of enquiry will have the additional advantage of enabling us to tie up some loose ends left over from the discussion. Perhaps the most obvious point of difference is that while there is some tendency for the conventional use of the term to be associated particularly with a secular view of the world ours would include 'humanised' versions of religious belief. It has already been shown that some forms of religious understanding come within the realm of the moral.[1] It was also remarked that even a superficial acquaintance with the evidence indicated that in this area a general transition from the non-moral to the moral has characterised the last century or so. At the very least the investigations entitled us to suggest that it might be rewarding to approach the data with this hypothesis in mind. We shall now try to complete the picture by considering the case of moral assessment. The vital points to be made are conceptual ones, but as before we shall try to make them more vivid by drawing in an uncontroversial

1. See ch.2. pp.14-19.

way on the history of ideas.

        The first point to be made is that the use of what one
might call a distinctively religious style of practical assessment does
seem to belong to forms of religious belief that have reached their
most characteristic stage of development outside of modern Europe. The
idea of a deity whose ways are inscrutable and whose wishes must be met
whatever the cost in human terms is familiar enough in the Old Testament.
It is present in, for instance, the story of Job and of Abraham's
attempted sacrifice of Isaac. In some of its forms at least the practice
of human sacrifice may be seen as an extreme expression of the willingness
to put divine interests first. It is surely reasonable to associate this
practice with the more primitive varieties of religious belief. One
might argue that in the evolution from religious to moral styles of
assessment the advent of Christianity marks an important stage. Thus, it
may be said,that the fundamental idea of 'incarnation' represents a
coming together of the divine and the human in an entirely new way.
Moreover, some of the sayings of Christ seem to point forward unmistakably:
'The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath', 'Inasmuch
as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have
done it unto me', and, of course, 'Love thy neighbour'. No doubt the
later history of Christianity did not always live up to the promise of
these remarks. But in the modern period, at least among more sophisticated
believers, attachment to anything one could call a distinctively religious
mode of assessment has not had a prominent place. For the sense of tension
between divine and human interests in the making of practical decisions
has lost much of its urgency. Instead there is a tendency to emphasise
that the promotion of human welfare is the form that God's purposes
take in the world. Thus, the possibility of a conflict of interests is
removed: serving one's neighbour is what counts as serving God. And,
significantly in the present context, the notion of 'Christian humanism'
is acceptable in a way that would have seemed at least paradoxical at

most periods in the past. Perhaps at this point we may bring to an end
the attempt to pick out some uncontroversial elements from a particular
theme in the development of religious belief. Enough has been said to
suggest that the historical background of the contemporary situation
incorporates a movement from the non-moral to the moral in the case of
assessment as well as understanding. That this should be so fits in with
the claim that moral understanding and moral assessment constitute a
single, coherent intellectual structure. Moreover our historical common-
places have the effect of suggesting that the development of moral versions
of assessment preceded that of moral understanding. Putting the point in
the crude terms to which the enquiry has limited us, it can be said that
a crucial step for one was taken with the advent of Christianity, while
the other had to await the post-medieval period in Europe. However much
an historian of ideas might wish to refine this chronology it seems
unlikely that the order of sequence could be altered. This too is what
our general argument would lead one to expect. If one thinks of the whole
process in terms of the development of man's self-confidence, the
willingness to give priority to human interests in practical reasoning
falls naturally into place as a preliminary step. It is in itself a
significant achievement and it points the way forward to the next stage
in which the elements that are constitutive of understanding are made
to correspond. Thus at the heart of the development of what we have
called 'humanism' there is an intelligible inner process, a movement
of ideas. When the stage of moral assessment has been reached the 'logic
of the situation' drives one on to moral understanding. It is the working
out of what is intimated by the progress already made and of what would
be demanded by the free play of ideas. In modern Europe, with many
exceptions and set-backs, the life of the mind has on the whole been
allowed the freedom to take this natural course. But there is nothing
inevitable here. The development of our concept of morality conforms to
a rational pattern but the process as a whole remains contingent and
vulnerable. It is always liable to be arrested or reversed by forces
which have little regard for the operations of reason, and this is, of
course, a theme for which history can supply many illustrations.

This chapter has been concerned to draw together the elements of our fundamental distinction and so reveal the unity of the concept of morality. It has argued that this consists essentially in the fact that, taken together, the elements constitute a coherent and systematic approach to a particular area of human experience. Its distinguishing characteristic is an insistence that the inherent resources of the area in question are sufficient for its purposes. Reasons which justify individual actions and interpretations of the multiplicity of actions that go to make up a persons life must alike draw their content and inspiration from within. It was suggested that this may be regarded as a 'humanist' approach. Of course, the label one chooses is of little significance in itself. All that really matters is an understanding of what it denotes. Nevertheless this usage is particularly convenient, and some considerations that tend in its favour have been advanced. If it is accepted one can now say that morality is a distinctively humanist form of consciousness: it is the response of humanism to the demands of the practical world.

Bibliography.

Abreviations.

A.& U.	George Allen & Unwin.
C.U.P.	Cambridge University Press.
ed.	Edited.
F.& F.	Faber & Faber.
O.U.P.	Oxford University Press.
P.A.S.	Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society.
P.B.A.	Proceedings of the British Academy.
P.Q.	The Philosophical Quarterly.
P.R.	The Philosophical Review.
R.K.P.	Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Supp.Vol.	Supplementary Volume.
Tr.	Translated.
Vol.	Volume.

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