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ABSTRACT.

S.E. COURT.

NON-COGNITIVISM AND LIBERAL-INDIVIDUALISM. (Philosophy and Ideology in the History of Contemporary Moral and Political Life.)

This thesis is about the character of the non-cognitivist theory of ethics and its practical impact on contemporary moral and political life. It is suggested that non-cognitivism, understood as a distinct style of ethical theorising advanced most notably by Ayer, Stevenson, Hare and Mackie, has both a philosophical character, and an ideological character of a liberal-individualist kind. In the first four chapters the philosophical nature of the non-cognitivist account of ethics is critically examined. In chapters five and six it is argued, following MacIntyre, that there is a need to sketch out the historical context of the emergence of the theory in order to gain a complete understanding of its character. This is undertaken by drawing upon previously unpublished or unavailable material by such thinkers as Duncan-Jones, Barnes and Stevenson. In chapters seven and eight the ideological character of the theory is examined by indicating that philosophy and ideology constitute two logically different forms of understanding. It is suggested that the philosophical arguments advanced within non-cognitivism serve the purpose of giving coherent expression to a presumed ideological liberal-individualist conception of man and his relation to others in the world. Chapters nine and ten considers the implications for contemporary liberal theory of the non-cognitivist dominance of the moral philosophy and political practices of the Western democracies. It is claimed that the attempts of Dunn, Rorty and Rawls to justify liberal theory and practice are unsuccessful because non-cognitivism has effectively undermined the distinction between morality and prudence upon which such a justification is grounded. The conclusion reached is that liberalism is in a state of crisis.

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NON-COGNITIVISM AND LIBERAL-INDIVIDUALISM.

[Philosophy and Ideology in the History of
Contemporary Moral and Political Life.]

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1989.

3 1 OCT 1990

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

My intellectual debts are many, but I wish to acknowledge in particular Henry Tudor, my Ph.D supervisor, Professor Alan Milne, Dr David Manning and Dr Bob Dyson. They have all in their distinctive ways shaped my ideas on political and moral philosophy, and they have provided me with the essential encouragement to pursue my study thus far.

On the more personal level, I wish to thank my parents, Nelson and Shirley, and my brother, Jeremy, for all their emotional and financial support. Without their understanding and consideration I would not have been able to achieve what I have.

Finally, I thank Lynn Shepherd for her contribution to the editing of the manuscript.

1. The Philosophical Character Of Non-Cognitivism.

Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy has been governed for many years by a certain distinctive set of metaphysical presuppositions. These presuppositions have given rise to an essentially uniform treatment of questions concerning the objectivity of values, the status of moral judgements, the place of rationality in ethics, and the relation of moral thinking to other kinds of thinking. The orthodoxy thus generated may be called the *non-cognitivist* theory of ethics. Although the key metaphysical elements of this distinctive style of ethical theorising can be traced back to the writings of David Hume, it is in this century that the non-cognitivist approach has been expressed in a systematic and coherent fashion. It was first articulated in the 1930's by thinkers such as A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson, and their 'emotivist' formulations have subsequently been revised, most notably, by R.M. Hare and J.L. Mackie.

Hare has himself provided us with a useful classification of the different levels of metaphysical assumptions by which to establish the philosophical character of any contemporary moral theory. (1) These levels enable us to identify the non-cognitivist approach to the central issues which have concerned moral philosophical debate for some decades. We can specify these levels in the following manner:

(A) Cognitivism vs. non-cognitivism (epistemological)
(B) Realism vs. anti-realism (ontological)
(C) Moral judgements as expressing beliefs vs. moral judgements as expressing attitudes (psychological)
(D) Descriptivism vs. non-descriptivism (logical or conceptual)

On the epistemological level (A) non-cognitivism maintains, as its name announces, that there is no such thing as moral cognition or knowledge. The reason that there is no moral knowledge, according to this view, is that knowledge logically requires a real object set over

against the knowing subject: but there is no objective moral reality; consequently, as far as morals are concerned, there is nothing to know. This epistemological claim is attached to a related ontological thesis. For on the ontological level (B) non-cognitivism holds that ascriptions of value should not be conceived as propositions of the sort whose correctness or acceptability consists in their being true descriptions of the world because values are not found in the world, as genuine properties of things are. Put another way, non-cognitivism claims that moral judgements lack truth-status. They are not the sort of utterance which can be either true or false because there is nothing in the real world which makes them true, in the way that the physical conditions of the world make remarks about material objects true.

As John Dunn says, non-cognitivism presents us with 'an absolute conception of reality - a conception of how the world is which is in no way relativised to human cultural categories... a conception from which all anthropocentric properties have been purged.' (2) It is a view which is reflected in J.L. Mackie's contention that:

> If there were objective values, they would be entities, or qualities, or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else. (3)

This distinctly non-cognitivist argument is grounded upon the empiricist conception of reality and the conditions for knowledge. It assumes that sensory experience which is manifest within a class of primitive phenomena of consciousness (be it 'impressions', 'sense-data' or 'percepts') provides the only ultimate grounds for any rational belief in or knowledge of the natural world. According to this view, sensory experience is the only source of information from which we can infer how things stand independently from us, and we affirm those propositions, or true or false claims to knowledge, which stem from these sense-impressions.

The epistemological and ontological thesis advanced by non-cognitivists is related to their conception of the psychological and conceptual levels of moral thinking. The denial that moral (or any other) values constitute part of the 'fabric of the world' leads to the suggestion that on the psychological level (C) moral judgements express attitudes rather than beliefs. That is, moral judgements are understood to be the verbal expression of some interior state or sentiment of approbation or disapprobation which is necessarily *emotional* in character. These sentiments, tastes, attitudes, desires or prescriptions are ascribed value in expressed moral judgements, and constitute an affective and attitudinal reaction to the world which is *projected onto*, not found within it. Further, non-cognitivists argue that it is this reaction that provides us with the action guiding force, or inherent tendency to move us, which is a logically intrinsic feature of moral assertion. This contention is grounded upon the empiricist distinction between the active and the passive mode of judgement. It suggests that in our capacity as describers of the world we passively read off what we say from the facts (as displayed by our senses) according to a set of rules or definitions that we have given to our words: while in our capacity as judges of value we are active in the sense that we are responding or reacting emotionally to those facts, and perhaps making a bid to exert control over the emotional dispositions of others.

We can see how this psychological distinction between the active and the passive mode of judgement is related to the non-cognitivist understanding of the conceptual level of moral discourse. For the non-cognitivist argues that because value ascription is active, it follows that moral utterances do not pick out any descriptive features of the world. This is to assert that, on the conceptual level (D), there is a clear distinction between the descriptive and expressive functions of language. This distinction gives rise to the idea, central to non-cognitivist thought, that there are two contrasting kinds of meaning that words can have: on the one hand 'descriptive' or 'cognitive' meaning; on the other 'evaluative' or 'emotive' meaning. The cognitive meaning of a word is conceived as consisting in its systematic individual contribution to the truth conditions of sentences in which

it occurs; while emotive meaning is conceived as attaching to words by virtue of their systematic contribution to the aptitude of a sentence for expressing or evoking dispositions of the will, and thus for influencing the behaviour of those addressed.

This opposition is represented as an absolute one. The evaluative meaning of a word is not held to play any part in determining the truth conditions of sentences containing it. As such, the 'peculiarly ethical' meaning of a word contained within a sentence is said to relate to an emotive or evaluative component which is always logically distinguishable from the descriptive component. It is held, in other words, that particular moral claims such as 'arson, being destructive of property, is wrong' unite the factual judgement that arson destroys property with the moral assertion that arson is wrong. The factual component of this sentence can be agreed to be either true or false through an appeal to rational criteria or the evidence of the senses; but the moral judgement, being non-rational, can never be shown to be true or false through any appeal to the relevant facts of the case.

This idea of moral judgements, understood not as statements of fact but as expressions of the moral orientation of the individual, leads to the suggestion that the attitudes which we express, or the principles which we adopt, are logically unconstrained by the facts. According to the non-cognitivist view no amount of descriptive agreement as to what the facts are can determine the evaluative content of any moral principle which we may consequently choose to adopt. Given any state of affairs we are free to adopt any attitude we please, and feel whatever we like about it. As Rorty puts it, the idea is that 'once "all the facts are in" nothing remains except 'non-cognitive' adoption of an attitude - a choice which is not rationally discussible'. (4) It is a view which is reflected in Hare's reference to 'the conviction, which every adult has, that he is free to form his own opinions about moral questions', and his assertion that 'we are free to form our own moral opinions in a much stronger sense that we are to form our opinions as to what the facts are.' (5)

This distinctly non-cognitivist approach to the epistemological, ontological, psychological and conceptual levels of moral thinking is

derived, most notably, from David Hume. We find within Hume's complex body of ethical writings certain elements concerning the distinction between reason and sentiment, and fact and value, which have been to a significant extent applied by non-cognitivists in the construction of a systematic framework for discussing the 'metaphysics of morals'.

Hume wrote, of reason and taste:

> The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation. (6)

As Blackburn puts it, Hume's idea is that the world proper, the sum totality of facts, impinges upon us. In straightforward judgement we describe the facts that do so. But in addition to judging the states of affairs the world contains, we may react to them. We form habits, we become committed to patterns of inference; we become affected and form desires, attitudes and sentiments. (7) Such a reaction is 'spread on' the world by thinking and talking as though the world contains states of affairs answering to such reactions. However, this is grounded upon an illusion: it is to fail to recognise that the sort of discourse, most notably ethical, which expresses an affective and attitudinal reaction to the world is not descriptive of genuine properties of things in the external world.

Hume's ontological conception of value is related to what we can classify as the epistemological, psychological and conceptual levels of his conception of morality. For he contends that:

> Reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood. Truth or falsehood consists in a agreement or disagreement either to the *real* relations of ideas, or to *real* existence of matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. (8)

For Hume, then, it is the faculty of reason which determines what can count as true or false ascriptions of either purely analytical statements or statements of fact. It follows that ascriptions of value, which do not primarily employ the reasoning faculty but rather express sentiment, do not qualify as true or false claims to knowledge.

Further, Hume observes that:

> Since morals... have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows that they cannot be deriv'd from reason: and that because reason alone... can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason. (9)

Hume's contention is that morality is essentially a matter of the passions, not reason. It follows that moral utterances relate on the psychological level to the active rather than the passive mode of judgement. They are judgements which are uttered with the intention of influencing people's minds and behavioural actions. Further, this mode of judgement relates on the conceptual level to a form of discourse which is expressive rather than descriptive. It is, in other words, to be clearly distinguished from scientific discourse which aspires to state our knowledge of the world by providing an adequate representation of it. For scientific discourse employs reason and is consequently morally or spiritually dead, or, as John McDowell puts it, 'motivationally inert'. (10)

This absolute distinction between passion and reason, coupled with the notion that desire causes the motivation for action, leads Hume to assert that the sentiments provide us with the reasons for acting although they are not themselves rationally determined. Rather, they constitute the source of all the potentially justifying considerations which can be appealed to. This view is reflected in Stevenson's contention that 'reasons serve not to bring our attitudes into being but only to redirect them... our reasons will not *give* us attitudes' (11).

The non-cognitivist therefore, following Hume, ascribes the place of reasoning in ethics in purely practical terms. Moral action is explained as the application of instrumental reasoning for the calculation of how best to satisfy expressed attitudes, desires or wants. These expressed sentiments are taken to be in no sense intrinsically reasonable. Rather, it is to denote moral reasoning as a matter of the conjunction of factual beliefs about the existence and character of objects of expressed desire, with expressions of the agent's desires. This is to argue that when a person acts we can present the action as a conclusion from a major premise of the form 'I want such-and-such', and minor premises of the form 'So-and-so is such-and-such; here is some so-and-so.' As MacIntyre notes, it is this contention that all practical (including moral) reasoning proceeds from a sentiment expressed in the form 'I want' which captures the sense of what Hume meant when he said that 'reason is the servant of the passions'. (12)

This Humean notion that reason is the servant of the passions is applied by non-cognitivists to suggest the logically inconclusive nature of ethical disagreement. For the non-cognitivist, we may provide a complete list of supporting reasons for those factual beliefs which purport to justify the adoption of a particular moral principle, and we may engage an opponent in providing a similarly exhaustive list of reasons which he believes to be supportive of his conflicting moral principles. However, there must come a stage when no further reasons can be given, and nothing more can be said. Fundamentally, to use Stevenson's terminology, it is an 'agreement in attitude', rather than an 'agreement in belief', which needs to be achieved; and such an agreement requires an emotional rather than a rational willingness to accept the same moral principle.

Hare says that where a disagreement in attitude or a conflict of will persists then we can only ask our opponent

> to make up his own mind which way he ought to live; for in the end everything rests upon such a decision of principle. He has to decide whether to accept that way of life or not... If he does not

> accept it, then let him accept some other, and try to live by it. (13)

In other words, for Hare, our only recourse is to invite our opponent to show how his adopted way of life is instrumentally reasonable, or request him to indicate how the expressed desires which his accepted way of life is designed to satisfy can best be satisfied (and perhaps only satisfied) within the lifestyle or set of ethical principles of conduct he has adopted. For Stevenson, we have the additional (albeit psychologically contingent) recourse of attempting to exert our influence upon him through the persuasive force of rhetoric, rather than continue futile rational demonstrations.

Non-cognitivism presents, therefore, a conception of morality itself as a kind of partisanship. As Lovibond puts it, it advances the view that all moral agents must voluntarily stand up for their values in the face of competition from the rival values endorsed by others. (14) Individuals are pictured as struggling to defend their own moral convictions, either within an institutional framework, or (possibly) by a trial of brute strength. Such a struggle is deemed inescapable because it is a necessary feature of moral life that, given any state of affairs, the individual is free to choose whatever principles he wishes to adopt in the satisfaction of expressed desires and wants. There is no comfort to be found in appealing to any objective or external public moral authority which stands independently from those expressed preferences, simply because there is none. Rather, the establishment of any moral system depends upon a community of individuals setting up those standards which express shared individual attitudes. Such social co-operation is possible but, Hare says, we must recognise that ultimately 'we have to make our own decisions of principle' and, by implication, tolerate the decisions of others. (15) We must recognise that the final basis for adopting any moral principle rests upon the free choice of the individual to agree with the standards expressed within a moral community, and accept that our moral responsibility is based upon our individual free will to arrange our lives as we see fit for the satisfaction of our own individual purposes.

This conception of moral experience is grounded upon a series of central related assumptions. It assumes that the individual moral agent can separate himself from the particular context of the moral practice which he finds himself located within, and have the ability to specify his individual purposes independently from that context. This assumption presupposes that there exists some notion of the self which stands apart from whatever intersection of social roles we happen to occupy. As such, it is to conceive of the significance of any communal moral practice in terms of the sum total of individually expressed and shared attitudes which informs it. In other words, it is to understand the sense of communal moral practice as the product of shared individual moral experiences which are themselves grounded upon a prior self-identity. This notion generates the idea that morality is a matter of individual choice, in that an individual has a 'free floating commitment' to whatever standards he agrees with, and volunteers to be constrained to follow.

This notion of the individual possessing a free floating commitment to moral obligations of his own choice is based upon a particular conception of moral rationality; one which, as we have seen, is instrumental in character. For the non-cognitivist assumes that the rational individual is one who acts in such a way as to maximise his utilities, and gains as much satisfaction as is possible relative to his output of resources. According to this view, the value of the activity is *constituted* by the satisfaction which the agent gains from it. Further, it is this purely technical conception of rational moral action which leads the non-cognitivist to suggest that the *content* of an individual moral agent's beliefs and obligations can be anything whatsoever so long as it satisfies individual desires, wants and needs. Thus we find Hare acknowledging 'the logical possibility of people becoming fanatics without self-contradiction', and Hume dramatically insisting that:

> 'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin to prevent the least uneasiness of ... a person wholly unknown to me. (17)

In this view, then, the condition of what constitutes rational moral behaviour is satisfied so long as the moral life of the individual is conducted in a sincere, coherent, considerate and purposeful manner towards the fulfilment of the individual's preferences, desires, wants and needs.

Accordingly, as Lovibond notes, we can see non-cognitivism as an attempt to set morality on a firmer or more psychologically accessible basis. (18) Rather than seeking with Kant and his followers to represent the requirements of morality as binding upon any rational being *qua* rational, non-cognitivism says that morally acceptable behaviour is commended by our reason (where it is so commended) in the same way as any other kind of behaviour: namely, as a means to satisfying the desires we actually have. It is to deny that the requirements of morality rest upon any conception of what is intrinsically rational. Rather, it is to suggest that these requirements reflect the contingent psychological fact that people happen to share, to a large degree, the same basic physical desires, wants and needs, and wish to co-operate with each other towards their fulfilment. It is to assert that the motivation or spontaneous desire for co-operative action enables individuals to invent and abide by those conventions or rules of morality which best utilise their resources and make possible the satisfaction of preferences within a community. This is how distinctly moral activity is 'institutionalised' within certain social conventions and legal practices.

Admittedly, the non-cognitivist conception of morality is secured at the cost of founding it on something contingent: what Nagel calls the 'fortuitous or escapable inclinations' to defend the cause of justice, liberty, or whatever. (19) However, the non-cognitivist insists that this contingency, which can destabilise moral motivation, is generally counterbalanced by the fact that we always have available to us the means to punish those who break the rules which encapsulate our communal moral practices. There will, no doubt, be those who lack the desires which make it rational to behave morally and decently, but the rest of us, who do possess these desires, can defend ourselves against the delinquents by means of any sanctions (psychological or physical) that may seem appropriate. In this way we shall constitute, Hume says,

the 'party of human kind against vice and disorder, its common enemy' (20).

Given this brief sketch of the philosophical character of non-cognitivism, it is apparent that what is most central to its assessment of the nature of moral experience is its conception of the relationship between facts and values. For non-cognitivists maintain that facts and values are logically distinct. They assume, as Wiggins notes, that there is a clear distinction between facts, which are 'what we discover already in the world', and values, which are 'what is invented or, by thinking or feeling or willing, somehow put *into* (or *onto*, like varnish) the factual world'. (21) Further, it is the acknowledgement of this distinction which non-cognitivists have taken to be of the utmost significance for our understanding of the form of valid deductive reasoning in ethics.

The purported significance of this distinction was first articulated by Hume, who claimed to have spotted a common procedure in every day moral reasoning which was greatly mistaken. He observed, in a now famous passage, that:

> In every system of morality which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning... when, of a sudden, I am surprised to find that, instead of the usual copulations of propositions 'is' and 'is not', I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an 'ought' or 'ought not'. This change is imperceptible, but it is, however, of the last consequence. For as this 'ought' or 'ought not' expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observed and explained and, at the same time, that a reason should be given for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others which are entirely different from it. (22)

Hume's observation is that this imperceptible shift within deductive moral reasoning from the employment of 'is' propositions to 'ought' propositions amounts to a fallacious procedure. In order to clarify

what Hume held to be the nature of this logical error, it is necessary to take a preliminary glance at the nature of deductive reasoning. Deduction is a process of necessary inference, in that valid deductive inferences have the characteristic of being self-evidently or necessarily such. That is, if a deductive inference is valid, we shall find that to deny it and simultaneously to affirm the premises from which it is derived is to utter a self-contradiction. For example, to say that 'all men are mortal' and that 'Socrates is a man', and yet deny the conclusion which follows from these premises, namely, 'Socrates is mortal', is to utter a demonstrable nonsense. Further, the process of deduction is a process of pure analysis, in that an examination of the premises is sufficient to yield all the elements of the conclusion: there is no need to import any additional material into the sequence of reasoning. As such, an inference will not be self-evident or valid unless all the evidence for its validity is already contained somewhere in the premises from which it is held to follow.

Given these remarks, it becomes clearer what Hume's observation amounts to. He observes that all previous moral arguments were presented in the form of deductive moral reasoning: that is, they were arguments which purported to reach certain evaluative conclusions or 'ought' propositions which were necessarily inferred from or entailed by certain factual premises or 'is' propositions. An example of this form of argument is, for instance, to suggest that since it is a fact that human beings tend to desire the condition of happiness, therefore we ought to act in a way which is appropriate to the satisfaction of this state. In other words, it is taken to be a necessary inference from the relatively incontestable fact that people seek happiness that happiness is therefore a good thing, or something which we ought to value morally. Hume's point, however, is that this type of ethical reasoning is fallacious because there exists no shred of evidence in favour of any evaluative conclusions as to what ought to be done within purely factual statements. To take our example, it remains possible to accept the fact that human beings tend to seek happiness whilst refusing to acknowledge that happiness is a good thing. No logical contradiction has been committed. As Hume would argue, there may indeed be good *psychological* reasons for pursuing happiness, but giving these

reasons is not a matter of engaging in any formal logical demonstration by which one arrives at certain evaluative conclusions that are deduced from purely factual premises. This is because statements of fact and statements of value belong to logically distinct categories, and therefore no necessary inference between them can be made. It is never logically possible, Hume contends, to arrive at an evaluative conclusion which is deduced from purely factual statements or 'others which are entirely different from it'. Consequently, any attempt to do so does not constitute the legitimate employment of deduction as a process of necessary inference, but rather amounts to the committing of a logical error.

The Humean distinction between facts and values, and its implications for our understanding of deductive reasoning in ethics, has been restated in various ways by non-cognitivist writers. The contribution of Hare is, in this respect, notable because he provides an analysis of the nature of moral judgements which relates directly to his understanding of the form which moral deductive reasoning must take.

Hare contends that moral judgements are *prescriptive* and *universal* in character. That is, they possess the two logical properties of 'prescriptivity' and 'universalisability'. A prescriptive utterance is of the type 'let so-and-so be done', and Hare takes such an utterance, if sincere, to express a desire or preference. Moreover, he claims that every preference can be expressed in a prescription, so any agent who has preferences is in a position to make prescriptions. As such, he suggests that the function of moral principles, as preferences expressed in moral judgements which have prescriptive force, is to guide conduct. Further, he contends that a particular moral judgement must refer to a moral principle or imperative which is universal in character, in that it is taken to apply to all relevantly similar persons in all relevantly similar circumstances. He writes that:

> all value judgements are covertly universal in character, which is the same as to say that they refer to, and express acceptance of, a standard which has an application to other similar instances. If I censure someone for having done something, I envisage the

possibility of him, or someone else, or myself, having to make a similar choice again; otherwise there would be no point in censuring him. (23)

Hare's claim, then, is that all particular moral judgements relate to a general moral principle or imperative which takes the form of a universal prescription. Further, they are said to be universalisable in virtue of the meaning of the word 'ought', because it is taken to be a necessary feature of the form of moral language that 'ought' statements either constitute or relate to universal prescriptions. As such, Hare contends, in a manner which is drawn from Kant, that this notion of universalisability is an innate or necessary presupposition of moral reasoning. This contention stems from the logical point that the notion of rationality itself is partly constituted by the principle of universalisability, or the maxim 'similar treatment for similar cases'. To ignore this maxim would be to act inconsistently, and to deny it would be to utter a self-contradiction, as a man would be acting if he insisted that, in a single and isolated case, 2 + 2 = 5, instead of 4.

For Hare, then, the effect of making a universal prescription, or judging that I ought to do a certain thing, is to accept that anyone else ought to act similarly in similar circumstances. In particular, I accept that this ought to be the case if I were at the receiving end of action. In considering what I ought to do, therefore, I must consider what it would be like to be the other people affected. I must, in other words, have an impartial sympathy or concern for the predicament of others. Hare equates this 'ought' or prescriptive judgement with the making of evaluations, as distinct from the relaying of descriptions. He assumes, as Bernard Williams notes, that 'the prescriptive does something, namely telling people to act in certain ways, which the descriptive, in itself, cannot do'. (24) That is, he claims that the 'action guiding' force of evaluative prescriptions most clearly indicates their logical distinctiveness from descriptive facts. For although Hare does not deny that facts are relevant to questions of value, (in that the act of making an evaluative judgement will involve some assessment of two or more concrete factual alternatives, and their anticipated consequences, in best achieving the moral ends of the

action prescribed), he contends that these factual considerations cannot, in themselves, logically entail the acceptance of certain evaluations over others. This is how Hare restates Hume's point about the 'non-derivability' of 'ought' conclusions from 'is' premises.

Hare goes on to insist that for any reasoning in ethics to be deductively valid the premises of the argument must include at least one evaluative statement in conjunction with factual statements, in order to generate an evaluative conclusion. He assumes, in other words, that any example of valid deductive reasoning in ethics must take the following sylllogistic form:

> Major premise (Universal 'Ought' Principle) eg. 'X-ing is wrong'.
> Minor premise ('is' statement) eg. 'Y is a case of X-ing'.
> Conclusion (Particular 'ought' judgement) eg. 'therefore, you ought not to Y'.

In short, it is to suggest that valid deductive reasoning in the sphere of morals is perfectly possible, given only that there is a prior consensus or agreement between the reasoning parties over such evaluative first principles as 'X-ing is wrong'. Given this prior agreement about specified moral rules or principles, there is no logical problem. All that is then needed is the procedure of the settlement of certain practices - that indeed 'Y is a case of X-ing', etc.

The problem arises, of course, when the reasoning parties fail to agree to these evaluative first principles. In such a case, according to Hare's account, this disagreement about values cannot be rationally resolved through an appeal to logic. No party can formally demonstrate to another that certain evaluative conclusions are necessarily inferred by purely factual considerations. As a consequence, no party can prove the 'nonsense' of the other moral standpoint, if that standpoint is consistently and coherently held. Rather, all that he can indicate is that the other's moral standpoint constitutes the 'wrong sense', and conflicts with his own moral understanding; and all he can do is show his abhorrence to the attitudes represented by that conflicting moral standpoint.

2. The Form of Ethical Language.

It has been indicated in the previous section that what lies central to the non-cognitivist theory of ethics is a distinctly empiricist conception of the relationship between facts and values, and reasons and tastes. It has been shown how the characteristic shape of the non-cognitivist thesis depends upon a particular philosophical understanding of facts and values as analytically distinct phenomena; a distinctiveness which is taken to be apparent at the epistemological, ontological, psychological, and conceptual or linguistic levels of moral thinking. It is not surprising, therefore, to observe that critics of this theory have been concerned most notably to question and undermine, at all the relevant levels of thinking, the non-cognitivist account of this distinction. It is to an examination of these critical arguments which we now turn.

Non-cognitivism maintains that moral concepts such as 'right', 'good' and 'duty' are expressed in statements which contain separate normative and descriptive components. Such expressions, according to this account, involve a combination of straightforward empirical description with an 'expressive' kind of speech-act which is uttered to commend or prescribe something of value. Thus Stevenson says that 'ethical definitions involve a wedding of descriptive and emotive meaning'. (1) For the non-cognitivist, therefore, a statement such as 'X is courageous' can be resolved into, firstly, a 'value-neutral' description that X has a certain property or complex of properties, and secondly an expression of a favourable moral orientation towards that property on the part of the speaker. As such, these two components of a moral judgement are taken to be analytically distinct. This leads to the claim that it always remains possible, in principle, to specify the evaluative meaning of a moral term such as 'courageous' without prejudice to the extension of the concept. It is to suggest, in other words, that we could have a concept such as 'courageous' which was predicated of exactly the same descriptive range of actions and persons

as currently, but without our actually having any positive moral attitude towards 'courageous' actions and persons as such. Thus Hare asserts that whilst 'it is true that' in our current moral language 'there is no single evaluatively neutral word which... can be used to describe (courageous) actions without committing the describer to any evaluation', it is nonetheless logically possible that 'we *could* have such a word'. (2)

Typically, then, non-cognitivists hold that when we feel impelled to ascribe value to something, what is actually happening can be disentangled into two components. They maintain, as McDowell puts it, that competence with an evaluative concept involves, first, a sensitivity to an aspect of the world as it really is (as it is independently of value experience), and second, a propensity to a certain attitude - a non-cognitive state which constitutes the special perspective from which items in the world seem to be endowed with the value in question. (3) Given the disentangling, we can explain the character of value experience in terms of the occupants of this special perspective making value judgements in which they register the presence in objects of some property they authentically have, but enrich their conception of this property with the reflection of an attitude. The logical possibility of the disentangling manoeuvre here envisaged always being effected, and the separation of description and commendation which constitutes it, leads to the important claim that we are free to prescribe or commend what we will, whilst being relatively unfree as regards what factual observations we make.

In Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (1985), Bernard Williams provides us with a forceful criticism of the non-cognitivist conception of the distinction between facts and values in ethical discourse. (4) He suggests that the distinction, 'such as it may be', is mislocated in non-cognitivist thought because it is not 'primarily logical', and is still less to be 'found in the use of words'. (5) For the purposes of his argument Williams focusses upon Hare's prescriptivist formulation of the non-cognitivist theory. His first objection relates to the prescriptivst insistence that all evaluative terms necessarily function at the level of prescibing action. At first glance, Williams claims, this insistence 'seems false to the spirit of many aesthetic

evaluations' in that, for instance, 'it seems to require our basic perspective on the worth of pictures to be roughly that of potential collectors'. (6) Further, he argues that 'even within the realm of the ethical, it is surely taking too narrow a view of human merits to suppose that people recognised as good are people that we are being told to imitate'. (7)

For Williams, then, it is not at all obvious that every evaluation is linked to action. We have good reasons to doubt whether it is the case that in all instances of value ascription what is being expressed is a preference to act upon the judgement made. Specific examples, such as appreciating a work of art or admiring a person's virtuous qualities, do not seem to suggest that the desires expressed in such appreciation or admiration are necessarily manifested in the actions of buying the picture or imitating the virtuous, even if it is physically possible to do so. Williams' point, then, is not primarily related to the empirical observation that we are often in no position to act upon an evaluative preference that we have made. Rather, it relates to the logical claim that it is not necessarily contradictory to acknowledge that something is valuable and yet not translate that judgement into consequent action.

However, when Hare explains the notion of the prescriptive force of evaluation, he writes that:

> if we say [of a certain hotel] that it is better than the one on the other side of the road, there is a sense of "better than" (the prescriptive sense) in which a person who assented orally to our judgement, yet, when faced with a choice between the two hotels (other things such as price being equal) chose the other hotel, must have been saying something he did not really think. (8)

Thus, for Hare, to think something 'better' in the prescriptive sense is necessarily to prefer it, and wish to act in a manner which fulfils that preference. If a person recognises a quality which something possesses, and favourably values that quality, then he is logically committed to act towards the fulfilment of his preference for it. For example, if a person recognises the merits of a hotel and is

favourably disposed towards those merits, then he must choose to reside in that hotel rather than another, given that he can afford to do so. According to this account, therefore, there is no distinction between assessing the qualities of something in a favourable manner and preferring it. To assess something favourably *is* to prefer it, and to wish to act in a way which satisfies that preference. This leads to the claim that if a person purports to prefer something, but fails to choose it, then he 'must have been saying something he did not really think': that is, the alleged preference is insincerely held. For it follows that a person cannot *intelligibly* assent orally to a judgement which specifies a favourable assessment of something, whilst refusing to articulate a preference for it, and refusing to manifest that preference in an appropriate action.

Williams takes issue, as we have seen, with the prescriptivist account of the necessary connection between favourable assessment and action. He also questions the purported relationship between favourable assessment and preference. He suggests that there is a distinction between assessment and preference, and argues that it is one which applies to Hare's own example of the hotel. He writes that:

> I can distinguish between the merits of a hotel, and what I, for perfectly good reasons, happen to prefer. "I simply don't like staying at good hotels" is a intelligible thing to say. (9)

The fact that this statement is a perfectly intelligible, although perhaps a rather eccentric thing to say, accentuates, Williams claims, 'the basic weakness of the prescriptive account of the evaluative'. (10) It demonstrates that this account makes indistinguishable the notions of assessment, preference and action: notions which should be carefully separated.

He makes the point that:

> For many kinds of thing, you can distinguish between thinking that a given item is good of its kind and liking, wanting and choosing that item; moreover, your ability to make the distinction shows that you understand that the merits of the thing in

> question may go beyond your own interests or powers of response. (11)

As Williams points out, it is possible to assess something, and recognise that others are in a more knowledgeable position to judge the merits of something, without assuming that your own interests, preferences, choices or 'powers of response' are necessarily relevant to the making of this assessment. It is this possibility which the prescriptivist account fails to acknowledge.

These difficulties make us wonder, Williams says, whether there are 'serious problems... about how much work the distinction between *is* and *ought* can be made to do' (12). This is because the prescriptivist account of the fact/value distinction rests precisely upon the dubious claim that all evaluative assessments express action guiding preferences, whilst all descriptions do not perform this function. As Williams notes, the prescriptivist claims that any moral concept can be analysed into a descriptive and a prescriptive element: in that such a concept is, as it were, guided around the world by its descriptive content, but has a prescriptive flag attached to it. In other words, it is the descriptive content which is said to be 'world guiding', in that a concept such as 'promising' may be rightly or wrongly applied in the world by a user of the concept who is appropriately or misappropriately informed by the facts of the situation. And it is the evaluative element that is said to be 'action guiding', in that a concept such as 'promising' provides reasons for action. Therefore, as Williams puts it:

> prescriptivism claims that what governs the application of the concept to the world is the descriptive element and that the evaluative interest of the concept plays no part in this. All the input into its use is descriptive, just as all the evaluative aspect is output. It follows that, for any concept of this sort, you could produce another that picked out just the same features of the world but worked simply as a descriptive concept, lacking any prescriptive or evaluative force. (13)

Williams suggests that the basic weakness of the prescriptivist account of the descriptive and the evaluative is most acutely manifested in the notion, cited above, that it is always possible to produce a purely descriptive equivalent of a moral concept which operates, in ordinary language use, at both the descriptive and evaluative level. He observes that:

> critics have made the effective point that there is no reason to believe that a descriptive equivalent will necessarily be available. How we "go on" from one application of a concept to another is a function of the kind of the interest that the concept represents, and we should not assume that we could see how people "go on" if we did not share the evaluative perspective in which this kind of concept has its point. An insightful observer can indeed come to understand and anticipate the use of the concept without actually sharing the values of the people... but in imaginatively anticipating the use of the concept, the observer also has to grasp imaginatively its evaluative point. He cannot stand quite outside the evaluative interests of the community he is observing, and pick up the concept simply as a device for dividing up for a rather strange way certain neutral features of the world. (14)

Williams is, then, sceptical about the possibility of always being able to provide a purely descriptive equivalent of an applied moral concept. He argues that which makes the application of a moral concept an intelligible performance is the 'function of the kind of interest that the concept represents'. In other words, a particular moral concept is always employed within a communal moral practice or institutional context which necessarily has an 'evaluative point', and which commits its participants to a distinct moral vocabulary.

This point is, I suggest, correct, and we can restate it in the following manner. We can say that the nature of a moral practice, and the application of a moral concept within it, presupposes an evaluative interest which determines the activity of the practice and defines the sense of the applied concept used within it. This is because the

meanings of our moral concepts are closely meshed with, and determined by, the linguistic moral practices and shared evaluative interests which specify how we intelligibly apply them in our ethical discourse. This is to recognise that if a community did not have such a shared evaluative interest then there would not be any distinctly moral concepts at all.

This point effectively undermines the prescriptivists account of the descriptive and the evaluative. It leads to the suggestion that it might be impossible to grasp fully the meaning of an applied moral concept unless one shares, or least understands, the evaluative interests of the community which employs it. Put another way, it is to question the possibility of whether a disinterested and impartial observer can fully capture the sense of a used moral concept without attending to its evaluative point. More crucially, it is to question whether an observer can provide a purely descriptive equivalent of a moral concept which is adopted in a particular practice. This is because the meaning of a moral concept is inextricable from evaluative concerns. It follows that any attempt to pick out the features of an ethical concept in a purely descriptive manner would fail to retain the essentially evaluative point, purpose and meaning of the concept, as applied by participants in a practice.

The significance of this point can be illustrated by an example. There are in various communal practices many different applications of the concept of a queue. The different meanings of the notion of queueing depends upon the particular set of evaluative ideals or portrayals of moral relationships between persons which determines the outlook of the participants in a community. In many cases, these evaluations constitute different politically ideological perspectives which determine the sense of the activity of queuing. We find that within a society which is shaped by liberal-individualist principles there is a concept of a queue which is stated in terms of the maxim 'first come first served', in the sense that the first person who joins the queue is understood to be entitled to first admittance to a public building, and so on. Likewise, a society that is shaped by socialist principles specifies that the infirm or aged have the right to first admission, whatever their initial position in the queue. We can also

imagine a society shaped by Conservative principles which gives privileged treatment in the queue to the landed gentry or aristocrats; or a society shaped by National Socialist principles which denies that Jews have any status in a queue at all.

The point is that the function or purpose of queueing depends upon the evaluative interests of the practitioners engaged in the activity of queueing. This is because the specific meaning of the concept of a queue is determined by particular ideological understandings of the nature of the moral relationships between persons. It follows that an observer of these practices must comprehend or fully understand the evaluative interest of a community which employs the concept of queueing in a particular way. What he cannot do is provide a purely descriptive equivalent of these queueing activities quite independently of these evaluative concerns. Any such description would indicate that people are choosing to line up together in an orderly fashion, but this descriptive account of events would not amount to a complete characterisation of what a queue is. This is because the activity of people choosing to line up together in an orderly fashion is an unintelligible performance unless it is informed by the evaluative interests which give it its ethical sense. For it is these evaluative concerns which *constitute* what is taken to be the function or purpose of a queue. There exists no notion of a value-neutral concept of a queue, and therefore there is no description of it which is available to the observer. We may note that this point relates as much to the practitioners themselves as to the observer. They also need to comprehend the evaluative point of their activity to be able to understand its ethical purpose and describe its application.

This illustrated point can be used to refute the prescriptivist claim that it is possible, without loss, to disentangle the descriptive and the evaluative. As McDowell notes:

> if the disentangling manoeuvre is always possible, that implies that the extension of the associated term, as it would be used by someone who belonged to the community, could be mastered independently of the special concerns which, in the community, would show themselves in admiration or emulation of actions seen

> as falling under the concept. That is: one could know which actions the term would be applied to, so that one would be able to predict applications and withholdings of it in new cases - not merely without one sharing the community's admiration (there need be no difficulty about that), but without even embarking on an attempt to make sense of their admiration. (15)

McDowell suggests that it is not at all clear how an observer or member of a community can grasp the descriptive content of an applied concept without benefit of understanding the 'special perspective', or evaluative interests, which shape how participants in a moral practice see things as they do. There are, he says, no purely descriptive equivalents of applied concepts available which we can master independently of the special concerns of the community which uses them. As such, there are no means by which we can state the class of actions which appropriately apply to a moral term without comprehending the evaluative sense in which these actions have an appropriate application. Therefore it is not possible to disentangle the descriptive from the evaluative.

This line of criticism exposes a basic weakness in the prescriptivist theory. It is a weakness which, as John Searle observes, is based upon the prescriptivist conception of a descriptive fact. Searle notes that this account rests upon the 'classical empirical... picture of the way words relate to the world'. (16) It is a picture which treats all descriptive statements about matters of fact as being of the same type: that is, as statements which satisfy the criteria of objective truth by more or less accurately representing the features of the fabric of the world. However, he points out that there is a distinction to be made between two orders of fact: 'brute' facts and 'institutional' facts. Brute facts are physical descriptions which are expressed in statements such as 'my car goes at eighty miles an hour'. Institutional facts are facts about social relations and social positions, and they presuppose an institutional arrangement of some kind or other. For example, the statement 'Jackson has five dollars' expresses an institutional fact, in that it presupposes the institution of money.

Searle maintains that this distinction makes a difference because:

> though both kinds of statement state matters of objective fact, the statements containing words such as...'five dollars' state facts whose existence presupposes certain institutions: a man has five dollars, given the institution of money. Take away the institution and all he has is a rectangular bit of paper with green ink on it. (17)

Thus, for Searle, whereas a descriptive statement such as 'a man has a bit of paper with green ink on it' constitutes a 'non-institutional' or brute fact, a descriptive statement such as 'Jackson has five dollars' constitutes an institutional fact, in that it presupposes a institution or 'system of constitutive rules' which 'constitute (and also regulate) forms of activity whose existence is logically dependent on the rules'. (18) It follows that we cannot provide a purely descriptive or brute fact equivalent of an instituional fact, because an institutional fact is always related to certain rules of a practice which create the possibility of placing that fact in its institutional context.

Further, Searle contends that the distinction between brute and institutional facts relates to ethical language as much as to other forms of discourse. He argues that the prescriptivist account of description and evaluation in ethics is flawed because it fails to attend to the logical grammar of evaluative (including moral) language, and fails to give us any coherent account of such notions as commitment, responsibilty and obligation within that discourse. This is because the prescriptivist account does not acknowledge, and fails to appreciate the consequences of, the notion of institutional facts as applied to ethics.

He observes that most of our central moral concepts generate institutional facts about social relations and positions. They are not simply descriptive, but are also necessarily evaluative and prescriptive. Part of what they describe are the obligations and responsibilities that people incur, and the rights that they possess, in virtue of the social relations in which they stand and the social

positions which they occupy. As Milne notes, this point leads us to recognise, for instance, that

> you cannot say that someone is a husband, a priest or a Member of Parliament, without saying something not only about what he ought to do but about what he is entitled to do and how he is entitled to be treated. (19)

Searle himself illustrates this point by taking the example of the concept of 'promising'. He asserts that:

> promising is, by definition, an act of placing oneself under an obligation. No analysis of the concept promising will be complete which does not include the feature of the promiser placing himself under or undertaking or accepting or recognising an obligation to the promisee, to perform some future course of action normally for the benefit of the promisee. (20)

In other words, part of what it means to recognise something as a promise is to grant that, other things being equal, it ought to be kept. It is to suggest that to make a promise is to put oneself under an obligation to do the promised act, and recognise that everyone ought to do what he is under an obligation to do.

Searle's claim, then, is that certain evaluative commitments of obligation and entitlement are built into the logical grammar of a moral concept such as promising. Any agent who operates within an institutional practice or 'system of constitutive rules' that determines the sense of an applied concept such as promising is compelled to accept certain obligations, commitments, rights and duties. To comprehend and accept the practice of promising, and yet break a promise (without providing relevantly good reasons) is to act in an incoherent and unintelligible manner. It is to break the rules which are necessarily binding to the keeping of certain obligations.

It follows that any theory, such as non-cognitivism, which claims that an evaluative commitment to a descriptive moral concept is a distinct or separate issue misconstrues the logical grammar of moral

language, and provides an incoherent account of moral obligation. This is because the moral or evaluative sense of obligation is integral with the meaning of ethical concepts, and to engage, for instance, in descriptive performative acts of promising necessarily involves a positive evaluative commendation of it. The institutional fact of promising, in other words, contains both descriptive and evaluative elements which cannot be coherently separated.

This feature of the logical grammar of the moral concept 'promising' is equally present in other moral concepts. As Searle points out, the notions of 'respecting property' and 'truth telling' are other examples of an 'institutionalised form of obligation', such that, when we say 'one ought to respect property', and 'one ought to tell the truth', we are articulating our acceptance of certain presupposed 'constitutive rules' which necessarily bind us, within the grammar of our practice, to certain moral obligations.

In the light of Searle's distinction between brute and institutional facts, it is clear that the Humean idea that facts cannot entail values requires revision. This idea remains true of brute facts, in that a purely physical description neither says or implies anything about values, and therefore it follows that from what is the case there can be no valid inference as to what ought to be done. However, as Searle's example of promising shows, this is not true of institutional facts. The fact that a promise has been made entails that the promiser ought to do as he has promised. This is a necessary consequence because part of what it means to make a promise is to put oneself under an obligation to do the promised act, and it is a tautological premise of undertaking an obligation that everyone ought to do what he is under an obligation to do.

Milne illustrates the point as follows:

> The fact that a man is a Roman Catholic priest entails that he is not entitled to speak about any matter of which he has knowledge only from what has been confided to him in the confessional. This is entailed by the fact that in virtue of being a priest, he is under a obligation never to betray the secrets of the

confessional. Part of what it is to be a Roman Catholic priest is to be under this obligation. (21)

This example illustrates the conceptual point that to have a morally relevant social position in a community entails the undertaking of certain obligations, duties and rights which form a constitutive part of that social identity. To claim that the descriptive sense of what a person is can be established independently of the evaluative sense of what that person ought to do is to misinterpret the nature of the understanding. Likewise, to suggest that there is no formal relationship of entailment from what a person is to what a person ought to be is to provide an incoherent account of how moral obligations and rights function within our moral understanding.

It is to be noted, however, that Hume's logical point about syllogistic reasoning in ethics still stands. It remains the case that an evaluative conclusion can only be validly inferred from premises which include an evaluative statement. But institutional facts, when fully stated, necessarily include evaluative statements. Hence from institutional facts, although not from brute facts, evaluative conclusions can be validly inferred.

We can see, then, that there are good reasons to doubt the prescriptivist (and therefore non-cognitivist) account of the descriptive and the evaluative. As Williams notes, we should be sceptical about the significance which non-cognitivists place upon the relationship between facts and values in ethical discourse. His contention, we recall, is that the fact/value distinction, such as it may be, is not primarily logical, and is still less to be found in the use of words. Nor is it something which is revealed to us by a philosophical analysis of language.

Williams supports his contention by pointing out that a great many of our specific ethical notions, such as 'treachery', 'promise', 'brutality' and 'courage', seem to express a union of fact and value, in that they articulate both factual and evaluative concerns which appear to be inextricably related. These notions, he says, 'certainly do not lay bare the fact-value distinction'. (22) It follows that we are unjustified in assuming that this distinction, which is concealed in our

ordinary moral language use, is nonetheless there to be discovered. He writes that:

> If there is some fundamental distinction of fact and value, it is certainly not a universal feat of humanity to have recognised it - it is instead a discovery, and achievement of enlightenment. But then there is no good reason to suppose that our ethical language, insofar as there is any well-defined thing, *already* presents the distinction to us. It may be it does not present anything of the sort, either suggestive of such a distinction or concealing it; it may be a mistake to think that language can embody distinctly metaphysical beliefs. (23)

For Williams, then, there is no good reason to believe that ethical language reveals to us the fact-value distinction. Although there may be such a distinction, at the ontological and epistemological levels, it is not something which is made apparent in the way we use ethical concepts in ordinary language. The metaphysical distinction between facts and values, if there is one, remains a separate issue which should be distinguished from our enquiry into the form of ethical language. And it is doubtful whether such a distinction could be either explicitly or latently embodied within ethical language. He concludes that

> either language does not disguise the fact-value distinction, or else the linguistic theorist has managed to penetrate the disguise. But neither of these options is correct. What has happened is that the theorists have brought the fact-value distinction to language rather than finding it revealed there. (24)

Williams' suggestion is that linguistic philosophers, including most notably the prescriptivists, have imposed the fact-value distinction upon language, and have provided an explanation of the function of moral discourse in those terms. But it is a distinction which is simply not recognised within the ordinary use of moral concepts. It follows that if the prescriptivist account of the fact-

value distinction is correct, then we must be 'engaged in a fraudulent or self-deceiving business of reading our values into the world.' (25) We must be pretending not to recognise, or at least failing to comprehend, the fact-value distinction within our ethical language. If this were so then 'our language is likely to be deeply implicated' (26) because it is not a distinction which is to be 'found very near the surface of language'. (27) But then of course Williams suggests that our ordinary ethical language is not implicated in this respect. Rather, it is the imposed fact-value distinction, and the prescriptivist explanation of language associated with it, which is misconceived.

The root of this mistake lies, he says, in the urge to 'impose on ethical life some immensely simple model' by which to explain the character of all evaluative language. (28) This urge is generated from the false metaphysical assumption that there is a single and uniform analysis of all moral language 'as such' which is available to us. In other words, the errors of prescriptivism ultimately relates to the unwarranted assumption that there is a clearly defined structure and universal character to all ethical language. It is this assumption that leads the prescriptivist to make the overweening contention that the character of this language, and the distinction between facts and values within it, can be discovered through philosophical analysis alone. One remedy to this 'persistent deformation' of ethical language, Williams suggests, is to 'attend to the great diversity of things that people do say about how they and other people live their lives'. (29) We must limit ourselves to the task of comprehending how actual moral languages are shaped by different cultural practices. This involves, Williams says, a degree of sociological explanation, rather than pure logical analysis of the sort envisaged by prescriptivists. It is an approach which

> is at least potentially closer to some understanding of the social and historical dimensions of ethical thought than some other approaches, which see it entirely in terms of an autonomous and unchanging subject matter. (30)

What conclusions are we to reach from our present discussion? One is that the emphasis which prescriptivists (and more generally non-cognitivists) place upon the fact-value distinction in ethical language is in many ways unjustified. This is because it does appear that moral concepts employed in ordinary ethical language often function in a way which makes any clear distinction unintelligible. Consequently, the 'disentangling manoeuvre' envisaged by prescriptivists is frequently analytically impossible to perform. As such, we can conclude that the prescriptivist style of linguistic analysis is mistaken to impose upon ethical language a fact-value distinction which is, on many occasions at least, not to be found within the ethical practices of our own and different cultures. Therefore, the prescriptivist approach to the study of ethical language is at fault in not paying sufficient attention to the way in which different people, in the same and different sociological environments, use moral concepts and moral languages in different ways.

We must be careful, though, to be clear about the significance of all this. We can agree with Williams that prescriptivism is wrong to assume that the fact-value distinction is always apparent in ethical language without suggesting, as he appears to, that it is never apparent. We shall observe at a later stage, for instance, that the ethical language of liberal-individualism acknowledges a distinction between facts and values. That is, we shall identify the *ideological* sense in which the practitioners of Western liberal democratic regimes understand the fact-value distinction to be apparent in their moral language. Consequently, we will show how prescriptivism does provide an accurate analysis, not of ethical language 'as such', but of liberal-individualist language. This is overlooked by Williams when he insists that prescriptivism persistently deforms every variety of ethical language.

This point leads to another consideration, one which relates to Williams' suggestion that the diversity of moral languages is such that no single analytical explanation of the form of moral language can be attempted. We can agree here that attention to the 'social and historical dimensions of ethical thought' is important to linguistic analysis. We can also agree that prescriptivism fails in this task

because it operates upon a 'simple model'. But we do not have to conclude from this that no such investigation into the form of all ethical language is possible. Rather, what we have to do is specify, amongst other things, the form of the ideological understandings which inform and shape the differing social and historical contexts of diverse cultural moral practices. In doing this we can see how it is intelligible to speak of the form of ethical language 'as such' by indicating how all ethical understandings, and the languages that express them, are determined by socially and historically contingent practices: practices, that is, which are themselves often and to a large degree shaped by ideological conceptions.

This is one of our major tasks. We shall undertake it in detail at a later stage, and in so doing we shall specify more fully the character of non-cognitivism as a philosophical and ideological understanding. For the moment, however, we shall return to our examination of the detailed philosophical arguments of non-cognitivism.

3. The Place of Sentiment and Reason in Ethical Life.

It has been noted that David Hume is in many central respects to be regarded as the founder of the non-cognitivist style of ethical theorising. For it was Hume who achieved two notable things the acceptance and purported significance of which have to a great extent shaped the character of non-cognitivism. The first was the discovery of the logical gulf between statements of fact and statements of value. The second was the invention of a distinct 'theory-schema' which clearly distinguished sentiments and reasons in ethics. It is this 'theory-schema' which severely limits the kind of ethical theory which is available for non-cognitivists to construct.

The nature of Hume's 'theory-schema' can be outlined in three stages. The first stage involves a logical claim that some action-guiding force is a logically intrinsic feature of moral assertion, such that when I say, for example, 'killing is wrong', I am in some sense moved to act in an appropriate way, and wish others to be similarly moved to act. It is the presence of this action-guiding force which is held to distinguish evaluative assertions from judgements of other kinds; judgements, that is, which relate exclusively to facts. The second stage, or consequent problem arising from the first logical claim, is to address the question of how we are to explain how moral (as evaluative) assertions can possess this intrinsic power to guide actions. The third stage, or strategy for solving the problem, is to treat a moral judgement as the verbal expression of some interior state whose practical expression is the action towards which the moral judgement in question is presumed logically to move us. For Hume, this interior state constitutes a sentiment of approbation or disapprobation which is necessarily emotional in character.

Although this Humean notion of a sentiment has been revised within non-cognitivist writing, in that, for example, Stevenson talks of 'attitudes', and Hare talks of 'prescriptions', 'choices' or 'commitments' to some practice of universalisation or principle of maximisation, it is

nonetheless a notion which has remained central to their kind of ethical theory. Further, it is this notion of a sentiment, attitude or prescription which is understood to be absolutely distinct from the notion of a reason. According to the Humean theory-schema, sentiments are in no sense rational in character. Rather, they generate the reasons for action by providing the guiding force which it is the task of practical reasoning to fulfil by specifying the best means to achieve the desires and purposes that are expressed in moral judgements.

It shall be argued that this conception of the relationship between moral judgements, moral emotions and moral actions is misleading because it is grounded upon an unintelligible account of the contrast between attitudes and beliefs, and sentiments and reasons. It shall be claimed, in short, that the Humean account of this distinction presents us with a false dichotomy. But in order to make this claim clearer it is necessary, firstly, to specify in greater detail the implications of the adoption of the Humean theory-schema for our understanding of the psychological level of moral thinking.

In an article entitled 'Moral Sentiments' Bernard Harrison writes that

> we normally think of our emotions of approbation and disapprobation, and for that matter of our choices, commitments and prescriptions, so far as they have a bearing on morality, as responses to moral considerations of one sort or another. (1)

However, according to Hume's schema, there are no such things as 'moral considerations'. There is nothing which arises antecedently to the spontaneous incidence of approbation, prescription and the act of choice. It follows therefore that the specific sentiments which we express, and the choices and prescriptions which we make, are not to be classified as being 'moral' in virtue of being responses to moral considerations of one sort or another. Rather, according to this view, we classify some of our sentiments, prescriptions and choices as being 'moral' because we choose to call precisely those sentiments, prescriptions and choices 'particularly moral' ones, and wish to distinguish them from 'non-moral' ones.

This is to suggest, in other words, that the attribution of a 'moral' significance to a particular set of sentiments and choices is essentially a matter of the collective choice of individuals within a community. It is to argue, as Hume contends, that the particular significance attached to certain objects is simply the product of a desire to baptise some of our feelings and motivations with the name 'moral'. For Hume, we are mistaken if we feel that we have to act in response to anterior moral considerations. Most notably, there are no objective values which are found in the world that compel us to accept an external moral authority of some kind or other. To recognise this is to understand our moral arrangements as the product of shared attitudes within a community of individuals whose flexibility in choosing their moral standards is unfettered by any anterior moral considerations of whatever kind. And this in turn leads us to see that we are ultimately free to choose our moral principles in an absolute way, taking absolute responsibility for them.

There are a number of separate issues that relate to the Humean treatment of 'moral considerations'. It is possible, for instance, to accept the Humean rejection of the notion of objective values being 'part of the world' without contending that there is no sense whatsoever in which moral obligations relate to anterior moral considerations. As such, it is possible to accept the Humean grounds for denying any ontological or epistemological status to moral values, without being necessarily committed to the view that on the psychological and linguistic levels of moral thinking agents have the freedom to select whatever ethical principles they choose.

We mention this in passing because it is important to recognise that the notions of 'objective values', 'moral considerations' and 'freedom to choose moral principles' raise distinct issues within our assessment of the plausibility of the Humean theory-schema. We can accept aspects of this account whilst rejecting, or at least qualifying, others. Indeed, we shall argue that the Humean ontological and epistemological thesis of value does need some important qualifications, whilst there are good reasons to reject the psychological and linguistic implications which are held to follow from it.

However, what concerns us at the moment is the difficulty in seeing how the adherent of Hume's theory-schema can satisfactorily explain, in his own terms, how it is that we come to define distinctly moral concepts in a moral language. The difficulty arises from the fact that adherents of Hume's account have persistently failed to provide any precise characterisation of the feelings or attitudes which are taken to count as 'particularly moral' ones. As MacIntyre notes, 'all attempts so far to identify the relevant types of feelings or attitudes have found it impossible to avoid an empty circularity.' (2) When pushed to specify the kind of approval which is to count as an instance of a specifically moral sentiment, the adherents of Hume's theory-schema have either remained silent or have entered a circular argument by identifying the relevant kind of approval as moral approval - that is, the type of approval expressed by specifically moral judgements.

Circular arguments may not be vicious, but they leave one with a sense of unease. In this instance, the uneasiness becomes more severe once it is acknowledged, following a point made by Wittgenstein, that we cannot give sense to a term just by attributing it to some chosen set of objects, unless we can explain what the attribution is supposed to achieve: what we are supposed to do with the term once we have got it attached to these objects, what use in sentences we project or anticipate for it, and so on. This point raises a problem for the devotees of the Humean theory-schema. For they would insist that the sole purpose, function, use or achievement in adopting the term 'moral' is to distinguish some of our emotions, prescriptions and choices from others. However, they are unable to provide a satisfactory explanation of the nature of this achievememt because they fail to identify in any informative way the precise kind of approval which relates to the term 'moral'. Therefore, we wonder whether a complete and more importantly plausible account of how distinctly moral terms relate to specific kinds of approval can be satisfactorily given within the confines of the Humean theory-schema. Further, as Harrison notes, we are left with the uneasy conclusion that the term 'moral' has, on these terms, very little meaning indeed. (3) Likewise, it seems unconvincing to suggest, as adherents of the Humean theory-schema insist, that there is no sense

whatsoever in which our sentiment of moral obligation is a response to 'moral considerations' of one kind or other.

Something, then, seems to have gone awry with the Humean account of moral terms and moral considerations. We shall argue that the root of the problem lies in the assumption that sentiments are logically prior to and absolutely distinct from reasons in ethical life. This assumption involves a conceptual error that leads to a serious misplacement of sentiments and reasons in ethics. We can show this by analysing the nature of a moral practice.

As Harrison points out:

> moral practices, such as turn-taking, or promise-keeping, or mutual aid in distress, or co-operation for private ends, generate on the one hand moral claims and on the other moral relationships. (4)

This is because to be engaged in a moral practice is to be obliged to respect the claims of others to be treated in a manner appropriate to the practice in question. As a result it is to understand the nature of the relationship between persons which is specified by that practice. Therefore, to uphold a particular moral relationship is to fulfil a particular moral obligation within a moral practice.

Further, our understanding of the nature of a particular kind of moral relationship is always shaped by an ethical vocabulary or range of 'moral notions' which determines the character of a particular moral practice. For example, to understand yourself to be in a business relationship with someone else presupposes that you have grasped the meaning of the moral notion of a 'contract', and that you honour your obligations in terms of this notion. To disregard such contractual obligations is to commit an appropriate kind of 'wrong-doing' which either indicates your failure to comprehend the obligations which are inherent within the practice, or manifests your contempt for the moral relationship between businessmen and clients. If it is the latter then you are maintaining an exploitative and not a moral relationship.

It follows that the establishment and upholding of any distinctly moral relationship is based upon an acceptance of and commitment to an

obligation to follow certain rules of conduct which are laid down in a moral practice. Acting in the appropriate manner constitutes the practical expression of that obligation, and manifests an affirmation of the commitment to that relationship. Likewise, the moral judgements which we make are bound up within, and are intelligible in terms of, a given moral practice.

Some moral notions are appropriate to a particular set of moral practices, and are inappropriate to others. For example, the concept of benevolence is appropriate to a practice such as friendship but is inappropriate to the practice of justice. We can see that two friends ought to be benevolent to each other, but it would be inappropriate for a judge to be benevolent towards a person whom he was convicting. He should be fair rather than benevolent. However, it can be shown that the concept of *trust* is applicable to all moral practices. As Harrison notes:

> trust... and trustworthiness constitute essential logical conditions for occupancy of any of the relationships defined by moral practices. (5)

This is because, as Kant pointed out, no moral relationship can be maintained without a commitment to the concept of trust. We can illustrate this by taking some of Harrison's examples. If we cannot trust each other absolutely not to cheat at cards, then we are not related to one another as fellow players, but as card-sharp and sucker. Likewise, if we cannot trust each other absolutely not to betray a common cause then we are not related to one another as fellow citizens but as opportunists who have certain political interests in common. The point is that a moral relationship is always constitutive of a mutual recognition between persons of the moral claims generated within a practice; and such recognition necessitates the making of an absolute commitment to avoid the relevant kinds of 'wrong-doing' that are required for trustworthiness.

It may be suggested at this stage of the argument that it is always possible for an agent to *pretend* to make such a commitment of trust whilst in fact pursuing his own ends which may conflict with

those specified in the moral relationship in question. This is to suggest that an agent may deceptively exhibit his mastery of the rules of conduct that generate the moral obligations which are upheld in a moral practice whilst in fact keeping his own individual ends 'in view'. It is to be noted that to state this claim is not to make the obvious practical point that a degree of deception is possible within moral practices. It is not to draw upon the observation that, for example, a Trotskyist can infiltrate the Labour Party with the intention of using the organisation to pursue different moral ends from those specified within the Labour Party Constitution. This is because although the Trotskyist is capable of misleading one group of persons who mistakenly believe him to be affirming a committed relationship with them, he is nonetheless standing in a moral relationship with another group of persons (ie. fellow Trotskyites), and he identifies his own moral ends in terms of that relationship. We are quite clearly capable of this sort of deception because it is always possible to affirm one moral relationship wholeheartedly whilst insincerely affirming another.

However, the claim described above is stronger in that it suggests the possibility that any moral relationship *whatsoever* can be insincerely affirmed by an agent who has a clear view of what his own *individual* ends are. It is this 'egoistic' claim which is far more contentious. Further, it is a claim which is integral to the Humean theory-schema. In order to show this, we need to examine the assumptions that inform the 'egoistic' claim.

Harrison remarks that the egoistic claim is grounded upon the central assumption that

> it is possible to specify an individuals ultimate, or primary, goals without reference to any moral role or relationship in which he may stand to others. (6)

This is to contend, in other words, that the individual agent has an understanding of his moral goals that stands quite independently of the making of an ethical commitment. It is to assume that an agent enters into a moral relationship and performs the actions which are appropriate to it with a logically prior grasp of his own ends, and

with the intention of satisfying those aims in the best possible manner. It is this notion of prior individual purposes which generates the claim that an agent can sincerely, or more crucially, insincerely affirm a moral commitment to a practice which best suits his individual desires, wants and needs. For it is to conceive of morality itself in purely instrumental terms: that is, as a battery of devices for securing the benefits of co-operation in the pursuit of specifiable ends without reference to the devices in question.

However, is this egoistic claim, and the instrumental conception of morality and moral reasoning consequent on it, plausible? Harrison suggests not. He points out that many of our ultimate ends or goals are in fact specifiable only in terms of moral relationships. Our desire to have friends, our need for respect within the community, and so forth, are goals specifiable in terms of such moral notions as friendship and community respectively. It simply makes no sense to claim that these ends are specifiable prior to, and independently of, the particular moral associations within which they are placed. I cannot, for instance, express the desire to have friends without grasping the meaning of the concept of friendship, as employed in the particular communal practice within which I find myself.

This point appears to be true for a great many of our ultimate goals. It looks as though the only realm of 'self-goals' which can be stated without reference to any moral relationship or practice whatsoever are such reflexive behavioural habits as eating food, sleeping, taking exercise and seeking warmth. Quite clearly, the substantive content of such individual goals is extremely slight. It seems that in order to have a substantial content of ultimate goals which are recognisably moral in character we must already be participants in moral practices of some kind or other. Indeed, we may say that such practices determine the sense in which we understand ourselves to have particular primary goals, such as having friends and gaining respect in our community. Without such practices a great many of our ultimate goals would not have any moral significance for us.

The importance of this point can be examined in a different way. According to the egoistic claim, the answer to the question 'why commit myself to morality with all the consequent restrictions and

discomforts?' is that it is to my *advantage* to do so. In saying this, it is assumed that the identification of an advantage is made prior to moral association, and generates the freedon of the agent to 'opt out' of any moral practice which fails to secure it. However, we can see that this notion of an advantage is misconceived. This is because the desires, purposes and goals that makes the identification of an advantage, related to their satisfaction, possible is determined by the moral association in which one participates. It is only in terms of such associations or practices that any sense and substantive content can be attached to the notion of goals, and the concept of an advantage which relates to it. Therefore, as Harrison suggests, the answer to the question 'why commit myself to morality with all the subsequent restrictions and discomforts?' is not that it is to my advantage to do so, but rather that I have *no choice* but to make such a commitment, because if I do not, the concept of advantage itself will in consequence be so exhausted of content as to retain scarcely any meaning for me. (7)

Our critical assessment of the egoistic claim has important implications for any consideration of Hume's theory-schema because it is a claim which is integral to it. That is, the theory-schema admits of the possibility of an agent being capable of specifying his ultimate or primary individual goals, as expressed in sentiments or desires, prior to the making of a moral commitment. Likewise, it is to picture the individual as being capable of freely choosing to enter and depart from whatever moral association best satisfies them. In other words, according to this view, our commitment to a moral practice is determined by the prior specification of desires which are sought as ends to be instrumentally fulfilled by the best possible means available within a moral practice. And this is to assume that the adoption of a moral relationship is always contingent, in that we possess the flexibility either to uphold it, whether sincerely or not, or abandon it according to the instrumentally reasonable calculation of whether it proves to be conducive to the pursuit of our individual ends. We can see, then, that although adherents of the Humean theory-schema argue that there are good instrumental reasons for committing

ourselves to morality, in that, most notably, the effects of social conditioning and the anticipated consequences of sanctions tend to prevent us from breaking the rules of a particular moral association, they nonetheless have to acknowledge the possibility that the egoistic option is always logically available to us.

It follows, therefore, that the objections levelled at the egoistic claim are equally applicable to the Humean theory-schema. However, we need to demonstrate how the weaknesses of the egoistic component that is central to the theory-schema expose problems which relate more generally to the Humean account of the relationship between sentiments and reasons, and the freedom to choose and act in ethical life.

As Milne notes, the contention that evaluative terms express emotion is not in dispute. (8) However, what is in dispute is the nature of the logical relationship between evaluative terms, moral judgements and emotions. As we have seen, adherents of the Humean theory-schema insist that the emotions expressed in moral judgements are logically prior to the making of those judgements. However, as Milne observes, it is a feature of the 'highly specific character' of the emotions that what we feel on a given occasion depends on our understanding of that occasion, including both our understanding of what we are doing and of what is happening to us. To take Milne's example of a moral understanding: when I say 'Apartheid is unfair', I am clearly expressing my indignation at it. The question, though, is whether I am indignant about it because it is unfair, or whether I am calling it unfair because I feel indignant about it. Milne suggests that the answer is the former. That is, I am feeling indignant about the system of apartheid because I understand it to be unfair, in the sense that it requires some people to be treated more favourably than others in the absence of any relevant differences between them. Put another way, I have identified the system of apartheid to be contrary to my moral understanding of what constitutes fair treatment, and it is this fact which makes me feel indignant about it. Indignation, in other words, is a specific emotion which is characteristically felt about unfairness. It follows that if I did not take apartheid to be unfair I would not feel indignant about it.

The point is that the feeling of indignation *presupposes* an understanding of unfairness. Therefore, my feeling of indignation presupposes that I have identified an example of unfairness, whether real or imagined, which I feel indignant about. It follows that my moral judgement that apartheid is unfair is *logically prior* to, although psychologically contemporaneous with, my feelings of indignation about it. If this was not so, then the fact that my feelings about apartheid are those of indignation rather than some other emotion would be unintelligible.

The general conceptual point to be made, then, is that our moral feelings presuppose moral judgements, and not vice versa. Adherents of the Humean theory-schema fail to acknowledge this because they insist, in effect, that the opposite obtains. As such, their analysis of the place of the sentiments in ethical life is erroneous. Further, the confusion of their position becomes more apparent when we attend to the other half of their analysis; that is, their account of the place of reasoning in ethics.

It will be recalled that the Humean account takes reasoning in every area of human life, including the ethical, to be purely practical. According to this view, an agent who provides a good reason for participating within a particular practice is one who specifies in some way that he wants to engage in this practice because it is the best means of achieving his individual ends. Therefore, all reasoning directly relates to and depends upon the specification of individual desires.

MacIntyre notes that this account of practical reasoning fails to recognise the significance which is attached to our introduction to the world of actual practices. That is, it fails to acknowledge that our introduction to a world in which we, for instance, play baseball and chess, study history and mathematics or learn farming or cooking, is an introduction to areas of human life in which 'I want' and 'It pleases me' cease to have any role in giving or having reasons for acting in one way rather than another. (9) Let us consider the example of chess playing. We can ask our opponent 'why did you move your bishop rather than your rook?' and he may reply that 'it was the only way to avoid checkmate'. This is a good and indeed conclusive reason for any chess

player who understands that it is his task to avoid defeat. Therefore, the Humean notion that something is added to the giving of reasons by saying 'and moreover I wanted to avoid checkmate' is erroneous because it is unnecessary to make this addition to an already complete explanation for the move. This is because, as MacIntyre says:

> what makes 'Moving the bishop is the only way to avoid checkmate' a good reason for a chess player to move his bishop has nothing to do with the desires of individual chess players. What determines it to be a good reason are the rules that define and constitute the game of chess. Those rules create an area of human life and subject matter within which and about which there are criteria determining objectively - that is, independently of the desires, attitudes and preferences of any particular person - what is and what is not a good reason for action. (10)

As MacIntyre points out, what is true of chess is true of all practices. That is, contrary to the Humean view, there is no way of presenting the rules of any practice as somehow or other deriving from and ministering to those 'direct passions' in individuals which (allegedly) antedate all participation in practices.

The point, then, is that it is the rules constituting a practice which provide us with good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, and not the individual desires which we happen to have. This leads us to recognise that there are (at least) two distinct species of reasoning which are not distinguished in the Humean scheme. The first type relates to the rules which constitute a practice, and may be called *constitutive* or *non-instrumental* reasoning. The second type is practical or instrumental reasoning. We need to examine the relationship between these two distinct species of reasoning in order to show how they relate to the sentiments in ethical life.

The distinction between non-instrumental and instrumental reasoning can be made clearer by discriminating between the notions of 'making' and 'doing'. To be a participant in a practice is to be engaged in 'making' and upholding the rules of obligation which constitute a relationship between persons. Further, it is the particular

type of relationship in question which determines the type of action that we, in 'doing', understand to be appropriate to its maintenance. Take, for instance, the example of an application of the moral practice of friendship. A man punches another man who has insulted his best friend in a pub. He punches the man because he feels angry with him, and such anger is felt because of his sense of friendship for his friend. In other words, the 'doing' of the performed act of violence, and the anger felt, is reflective of the 'making' of the relationship of friendship.

Now it may have been, on this occasion, extremely unwise to have done such a thing, because the act of punching may do little to resolve the problem of the confrontation that arises from the initial insult. It may have been much wiser just to have ignored the insult. There may, in other words, have been good instrumental reasons for not reacting in the way that the man did. However, the fact that the act of violence may be considered irrational, or at least not rationally advantageous, in this instrumental sense, does not imply that there were no good reasons whatsoever for its occurrence. Rather, there were good *non-instrumental* reasons for acting in the way in which the man did because there was a need for him to exhibit or practically express in an appropriate manner his commitment to the relationship of friendship between himself and his friend. Indeed, if the man had not responded in this violent fashion, or at least had not felt great anger at the insult, then we may call into question the degree of commitment to the friendship which he professes to have for his friend.

This example illustrates a number of related points. Firstly, it shows how the expression of a sentiment or emotion can be seen as constituting a reason for action. The anger felt at the insult of his friend constituted a non-instrumental reason for the man to perform a violent action because the action constituted an appropriate response to an insult which offended a moral relationship. Although the action may in fact have been instrumentally unreasonable, this consideration was a separate matter and secondary to the moral issue at stake. The moral issue was that the man, in acting in the way he did, understood that the relationship of friendship was in need of some defence.

The second point that this example illustrates is that our sentiments are themselves determined by, and gain significance in terms of, those rules or practices which 'make' moral relationships. The sentiment of anger felt by the man was caused by his prior conceptual understanding of the nature of the relationship of friendship to which he had committed himself. If he had not possessed this conception of what the relationship of friendship amounted to, and what obligations it committed him to, then the anger that he felt, and the action which he took, would have been unintelligible in terms of this conception. If he had, for instance, reacted similarly upon hearing one stranger insulting another stranger, then we would need to specify some other reason for his feelings and actions. We could not explain his motives in a way which relates to his conception of friendship.

It follows that the man's feelings and actions can be seen to be rational if we can see an intelligible, and not merely a causal, connection between the initial insult to his friend and his reaction to this. This connection is provided by the conception of friendship. It specifies a conceptual, and not merely a causal, relationship between an action, the type of sentiment felt about it, and the physical reaction to it. Further, such a relation is only intelligible to us, as observers, if we share or at least understand the practices, conventions and relationships between persons which are being upheld.

The third point which this example illustrates is that the employment of non-instrumental or constitutive reasoning is always *logically prior* to the employmemt of instrumental reasoning. The man recognises the 'ends' of his moral commitment to be understood in terms of his relationship with his friend, and he acts in a way which he considers to be the best means of practically expressing or satisfying those ends. If he did not appreciate those ends then he would have no moral reason to act in this particular manner. Likewise, if he did not act in this way, then his reaction would not be intelligible in terms of affirming the relationship of friendship.

We can see, then, that it is the moral ends and constitutive reasons of moral activity which are logically prior to the giving of practical reasons for action. This is because those ends determine the parameters of what can count as an intelligible practical response to a

given situation. Further, such reason-giving deliberations do not involve the additional specification of individual desires or purposes. Rather, these desires and purposes are a constitutive aspect of the reason-giving process. Therefore, to take our example: the question 'what am I to do?', when asked on an occasion like this is not, as Graham notes, the question 'by what means may I achieve my purposes and desires?', but 'what does friendship require of me?'. (11)

It is clear, then, that the Humean theory-schema is inadequate in a number of major interrelated ways. Most centrally, it presents a false dichotomy between sentiment and reason because sentiments are not absolutely distinct from reasons, but do themselves constitute non-instrumental reasons for action. This point tells against the Humean assumption that reasoning in ethics is purely practical because we can see that non-instrumental reasoning has a central place in ethical deliberation, and the employment of practical reasoning is secondary to it. Further, such practical reasoning does not, as the adherents of the Humean theory-schema assume, specify individual desires and purposes which are prior to a moral commitment. Rather, it specifies how best to satisfy the obligations of that commitment. We can see that these conceptual errors of the Humean view lead to a misconceived and indeed unintelligible account of the place of sentiment and reason in ethical life. They are also, as we shall see, confusions which relate to the notions of 'moral considerations' and 'freedom of choice' that were mentioned at the beginning of our discussion.

Harrison writes that:

> The 'act of will' which commits me to morality is... one which, as Wittgenstein suggests (Tractatus), alters "the limits of the world": changes the world for me as a whole... once I have made it, the world indeed becomes for me "an altogether different world": one in which, although no physical change may have taken place, there are suddenly morally significant facts and relationships. (12)

Harrison's point is that a commitment to a particular set of ethical beliefs constitutes the acceptance of a particular 'world view' which

may be incommensurable with others. Further, it is this commitment to a specific moral way of life, as expressed in a rule-following practice, which determines what are morally significant facts, and states the obligations which the committed have to honour in the upholding of a moral relationship.

We find, then, that different cultural or moral practices are reflective of coherent bodies of ethical conviction. What makes rule-following practices intelligible are the ethical understandings which inform them. For example, the specific convention of upholding the obligation to honour contracts is based on an ethical conception of what it is to keep a promise. It is this ethical conception which makes intelligible, for the adherent, the moral sense of engaging in the rule-following practice.

The point, then, is that it is our ethical beliefs, as reflected in rule-following moral practices, which confer significance upon our moral deliberations on what ought to be done. They determine what moral considerations are relevant to us. Further, these considerations are logically prior to, and specify the range of, those emotions which constitute an appropriate response to them. This is because our commitment to a particular moral 'world view' generates moral considerations of what obligations we ought to honour in the upholding of moral relationships; and it is these relationships which determine the type of emotional response to them which is appropriate. For, as Harrison remarks:

> One effect of entering this changed world is that new kinds of emotional response become logically accessible to me. They include such 'moral sentiments' as reproach and remorse. To reproach is to speak, as it were, on behalf of a moral relationship. My friend may complain if I say or do something hurtful to him, but complaint is not reproach: reproach is an appropriate response, not to hurt, but only to betrayal, or to some other species of wrong. (13)

Harrison's point is that certain types of sentiment are made logically accessible to us by certain kinds of moral concepts and

relationships. For example, the sentiment of feeling indignant is appropriate to the moral concept 'unfairness', whilst the emotional response of disgust is not. It follows, therefore, that adherents of the Humean theory-schema are mistaken to assert, in effect, that our emotional responses are logically prior to, and confer significance upon, these concepts and relationships. Rather, the opposite obtains. Consequently, they are wrong to dismiss out of hand the notion of moral considerations. This is because, as Harrison notes, moral sentiments are emotions which are aroused by some moral consideration or other. They are not emotions which, merely by being felt towards something, confer moral significance upon the thing in question. There are such no emotions, for the simple reason that that is not how things become morally significant. (14)

These criticisms of the Humean theory-schema also bear upon the assumption that moral agents are in some absolute way free to choose whatever moral principles of conduct they wish. For it will be recalled that this notion of freedom of choice presupposes that our sentiments are felt prior to the deliberative undertaking of moral commitments, and that the primary individual goals which are expressed in our moral judgements are specifiable independently of the particular social situation within which we happen to find ourselves. It is, in other words, to picture moral agents as being capable of disengagement from their social milieu, and being able to make an individual moral choice which is detached from it.

We can see, however, that there are severe problems with this strong assertion of freedom of choice. The major difficulty with it lies in the fact that the intelligibility of all moral sentiment and action is determined by a linguistic and therefore social context of one kind or other. It follows that the idea that one can detach oneself from any moral relationship whatsoever, in order to make some sort of unencumbered autonomous moral choice, is unintelligible because it is only in a social practice that a chosen action has any meaning. Likewise, it is only within a social context that any full substantive conception of moral self-identity is possible. Therefore, there is no sense in which a specifiable self-identity, and a set of ultimate goals which permits the making of choices, is available

logically prior to, and independently from, any entry into a moral relationship of one kind or other.

This leads to the suggestion that the degree of freedom which is possessed by any moral agent is limited. It is to recognise that we are able to criticise or depart from one moral association only if we simultaneously relocate ourselves in another one. The logical point is that all conversions or changes in moral commitment rest upon a shift from one moral 'world-view' to another. Criticism and change is possible at the practical level because our moral conventions are frequently pluralist, in that they are the product of many distinct moral view-points, and we are able to locate ourselves in terms of different but commensurable approaches to life. Therefore, we have a limited degree of freedom or flexibility to criticise our own conceptual understandings, as expressed in rule-following practices, and we are able to judge our understanding in relation to conflicting but not irreconcilable approaches to life. However, what is not logically or practically possible is the freedom to criticise or change our own moral view-points from a totally detached and neutral standpoint. It is not conceivable, in other words, to divorce oneself totally from all the conceptual schemes and moral practices which are available to us, and make an individual moral choice from such a privileged position. Rather, this moral choice is always dependent upon a frame of reference which is shaped by such conceptual schemes and practices. Further, it is these schemes, practices and social contexts which determine, at the psychological level of moral thinking, the range of felt sentiments and reasons which are logically and practically available to us. The Humean theory-schema, as adopted by non-cognitivists, fails to account for this. Does, however, the non-cognitivist analysis of the epistemological and ontological levels of moral thinking fare any better? It is to this issue that we now turn.

4. Objectivity in Ethics.

An ontological enquiry, which seeks to state the objects that constitute the world, is bound up with but distinct from an epistemological enquiry, which seeks to determine the conditions for our claims to knowledge of that world. The distinction between these two kinds of investigation is, for our present purposes, important. This is because there are good reasons for accepting, with qualifications, the Humean theory-schema or non-cognitivist ontological contention that all values are 'non-objective', whilst rejecting the empiricist epistemological thesis about the status of our knowledge claims which relates to it. In order to show this, we need to provide a critical examination of the empiricist theory of knowledge upon which the non-cognitivist conception of value is built.

The empiricist theory of knowledge is grounded upon the ontological contention that there exists a world of material objects which is independent from us. This world is taken to be accessible to us because it is presented via our sensory experiences. It is a world which is mirrored in our perceptions or raw 'sense-data'. Further, these perceptions are organised within 'conceptual schemes' or coherent theoretical interpretations which enable us to provide a more or less accurate description of the features of this world.

The empiricist observes that we all tend to have strikingly similar perceptual representations or sensory experiences of the world. As a consequence, we usually share the same descriptions of this world, as presented within our conceptual interpretations of it. For the empiricist, it is this shared agreement with a uniform set of categories of sensory experience which enables us to *infer* that the world which is represented is the world 'as it really is'. Further, it is this inferential relation between representation and reality which generates any claim to objective knowledge of the world. This is because any such claim involves an assertion to have an accurate

representation of those material objects which we can infer to be constitutive aspects of an independent reality.

The empiricist, then, contends that there is a distinction to be made between the world of material objects, which exists entirely independently of the mind's cognitive access to it, and the 'conceptual scheme', which is the means by which the mind puts a particular construction or interpretation upon it. It is the world of material objects which constitutes the *absolute foundation* of knowledge, because it is what is known to us to be 'given' through the process of inference. In other words, it provides the founding bedrock which is self-evidently the case, and which cannot be doubted. It follows that, according to the empiricist view, it is the task of the epistemologist to elucidate those ultimate, self-evident and incontrovertible propositional statements which represent this foundational 'given'. Put another way, the epistemological task is performed by postulating those synthetic or empirical claims which satisfy truth-conditions by virtue of their correspondence with the facts, or relations between objects, which obtain in the world.

There are, however, major difficulties with the empiricist theory of knowledge. The central problem relates to the notion of the independent foundational 'given'. As Williams remarks:

> If... we try to form some idea of a world that is prior to any description of it, the world that all systems of belief and representation are trying to represent, then we have an empty notion of something completely unspecified and unspecifiable. (1)

This is because all that we can state are those descriptions or representations of the world which *we* have. There simply are no means by which to be able to specify the contents of the world 'as it really is' which is independent from our descriptions or representations. In other words, all we have available to us are our particular conceptually schematic representations of the world: we have no access to any another description which is independent from these conceptual schemes. Therefore, the notion of the foundational 'given' is something which is unspecifiable and 'empty'. This point is important because it will be

recalled that the empiricist wants to insist that our notions of objectivity and knowledge are grounded upon this idea of the 'given' world. It becomes difficult to see, however, how the notions of objectivity and knowledge can possibly relate to a conception of the world which is empty, unspecified and unspecifiable.

This problem can be approached from another angle. The objection can be made that the empiricist notion of the 'given' adds nothing to our ordinary understanding of what counts as the evidence of science. This is because all that can possibly count as evidence for something being true are those empirical propositions which are applicable piecemeal to our ordinary, revisable judgements that operate within our particular scientific conceptual scheme. Donald Davidson makes this point when he contends that any propositional sentence which we make in our language is true by virtue of the fact that it relates to those judgements which presuppose our particular conceptually schematic acceptance of the world as 'a recognisable place of homely objects'. (2) That is, our conception of truth is placed firmly upon that which is 'familiar to us': namely, our conceptual understanding of cognitive sensory experience. It follows, therefore, that there can be no further notion of truth or evidence as the fitting of all those judgements to an ultimate immutable 'something' that is 'given'.

The major problem, then, with the empiricist notion of the foundational 'given', and the associated conception of truth and knowledge as corresponding to it, is that it rests upon a purported distinction between the independent reality and the conceptual scheme which cannot, in fact, be made. More specifically, it is a distinction which we cannot conceptually demarcate. It is, of course, highly probable that an external world does exist independently from us. However, this is a truth the absolute certainty of which we are not capable of discerning because all that we have cognitive access to are those descriptions or representations of a world which presupposes our particular conceptually schematic interpretations of it. In other words, we cannot distinguish between those of our beliefs which may be *actually true*, and those which are merely *true to us* by virtue of the fact that we share them within our particular conceptual scheme. It follows that our process of logical inference is itself determined

within our particular conceptual scheme, and does not infer something 'given' which stands outside it. As Crispin Wright remarks: 'there is... no content to the idea of something's *really* being a consequence of some set of statements over and above its following from them by *our* procedures of inference'. (3) Consequently, 'there is no ulterior concept of correct inference lurking behind our actual procedures of inference to which they are answerable'. (4)

The point, then, is that our claims to knowledge or truth, and our procedures of logical inference, do not constitute conceptual understandings which relate to an 'unshiftable foundation', or correspond with an independent reality. Rather, they simply relate to the conceptual schemes which we use. This is important because it indicates the need to reject the empiricist theory of knowledge which does assume the notion of correspondence with reality. We must, therefore, provide an alternative account of knowledge.

As Sabina Lovibond insists, our lack of access to any distinction between those of our beliefs which are 'actually true', and those which are merely 'true to us', raises important questions about our understanding of the status of knowledge and truth claims. She writes that

> No such distinction can survive our conscious recognition that some human authority has to *decide* the claim of any proposition to be regarded as true - and, accordingly, that the objective validity of an assertion or an argument is always at the same time something of which human beings (those human beings who *call* it 'objectively valid') are subjectively persuaded. (5)

Lovibond's point is that our assessment of what is true is inevitably a human matter which is not grounded upon any absolute, independent foundations. Likewise, our appreciation of 'objectively valid' arguments is not something which is ultimately impersonal. Rather, it is inter-subjective. How is this so?

The first point to note is that our conceptual schemes, and the significance that we attach to them in interpreting the world, are determined by our particular linguistic practices. These practices are

characterised in terms of following rules, and it is these rules which enable us to make sense of the world and our actions within it. Consequently, they enable us to decide what amounts to a right or wrong action, a true or false statement, or a correct or incorrect inference. As Wittgenstein remarks:

> The words 'right' and 'wrong' are used when giving instruction in proceeding according to a rule. The word 'right' makes the pupil go on, the word 'wrong' holds him back. Now could one explain these rules to a pupil by saying instead: 'this agrees with the rule - that not'? Well, yes, if he has a concept of agreement. But what if this has yet to be formed? (The point is how he reacts to the word 'agree')
> One does not learn to obey a rule by first learning the use of the word 'agreement'.
> Rather, one learns the meaning of 'agreement' by learning to follow a rule. (6)

Wittgenstein's point is that a practitioner within a particular linguistic practice first learns how to follow a rule. This learning enables him to agree with others about the application of the rule. It is this agreement on rule-application which determines how *we* proceed to argue, think and infer, and it enables us to decide whether a particular statement, argument or utterance is valid or not. This procedure, Wittgenstein claims, applies equally to matters of epistemology as it does to any other rule-following practice. Further, the procedure is never impersonal: it does not relate to something outside our rule-following practice. Rather, it amounts to what *we* agree upon to be the correct application of a rule. As such, it generates what *we* understand to be a true, objective or knowledge claim.

In other words, Wittgenstein argues that the notions of 'objective knowledge' and 'truth' are in themselves *anthropocentric* in character. They are notions which relate to human conceptual categories of understanding that operate within a 'language-game' of some kind or other. He writes that 'it is what human beings *say* that is true or

false; and they agree in the language they use'. (6) It is this agreement which makes possible our claim to objective knowledge or truth.

Take the example of colour perception. In Wittgenstein's view, it is the possession of a shared conceptual apparatus of perception which underlies the use of colour-predicates, and it is our agreement with respect to attributions of colour which makes objective discourse about colours possible, even though the agreement itself is not what we are talking about when we say that an object has a particular colour. Wiggins supports this view when he writes that:

> pillar boxes, painted as they are, *count* as red *only because* there actually exists a perceptual apparatus (eg. our own) which discriminates, and learns on the direct basis of experience to group together, all and only the *de facto* red things. (8)

It is, in other words, our sharing of a perceptual apparatus, and the agreement generated therein, which enables us to call pillar boxes red. However, the attribution of the colour red to pillar boxes cannot be used to infer that pillar boxes *are* red quite independently of our attribution. It is not the case, as Wiggins notes, that 'we may see a pillar box as red *because it is red*'. (9) Redness is not a 'relational property', in the sense that it relates to the quality of something 'given' which is independent from us. Rather, it is a 'relative property', in the sense that what we call red depends upon our conceptual apparatus of perception.

Therefore, as Wiggins states:

> the category of colour is an *anthropocentric category*. The category corresponds to an *interest* which can only take root in creatures with something approaching our *own* sensory apparatus. (10)

As Wiggins says, this 'interest' amounts to our desire to organise our sensory experience in such a way as to be coherent for us. This involves, for instance, calling things red and distinguishing them from

other colour-objects. In order to do this, we must have managed to agree that certain things count as red; and this, in turn, depends upon our sharing the same colour sensory apparatus. Other sentient creatures, who do not see pillar boxes as red, have a different sensory apparatus from us. However, this does not mean that their perceptions are *mistaken*. It is not the case that they have failed to make the correct inference that pillar boxes are red quite independently of all various conceptual schemes of perception. Rather, it means that their colour categories are *different* from ours, and that they see and interpret the world differently. They are not wrong to do so, because colour is not a category which relates to something that is ultimately and incontrovertibly true.

This argument has been called the 'anti-foundationalist' theory of knowledge. We need to see how it relates to our consideration of the notion of objectivity in ethics. The first point to note is that the anti-foundationalist view undermines the basis upon which the non-cognitivist distinction between facts and values, and objectivity and subjectivity, is established. This is because the anti-foundationalist insists that our factual and evaluative interests and discourses are on the same objective footing: that is, they equally relate to human conceptual practices. As such, Wiggins claims that any talk of the fact-value distinction is 'spurious' because of the 'non-existence of any relevant or useful notion of 'factual' by which to make' or establish it. (11)

Midgley supports this claim by arguing that all we can possibly count as a fact is that which is the result of *assimilating* our experience into a conceptual scheme, where 'at each stage of assimilation *choices* arise about the standards on which we shall group and interpret data'. (12) In other words, we choose to accept a particular theoretical account which best organises our experience within a conceptual scheme. (13) For Midgley, this process of 'explanation by specification' goes on '*just as much* in contexts that would naturally be called factual as in undoubtedly evaluative ones'. (14) Therefore, our factual or scientific discourses are, like our evaluative discourses, a matter of choosing to accept explanations

which make most coherent our experiences in the world. This anti-foundationalist argument, then, amounts to the claim that there are no means available to us by which we can distinguish facts and values, or the notions of objectivity and subjectivity. This is because our factual and evaluative discourses are built upon the same ground: namely, rule-following practices within which reasoning, knowledge and truth - as conventional canons of evidence - presuppose a shared conceptual understanding of one sort or other.

We may feel, however, that the anti-foundationalist thesis, although correct in many central ways, has overstated its case. For it is a commonplace assumption that there must be *some* kind of distinction between the objective facts and subjective values. This assumption is supported by the fact that, as Wittgenstein remarks, it seems intuitive to ask the question: 'where do we get our concepts from - if not from something independent of us?'. Also, as Wittgenstein says, it remains clear to us that the formation of some of our concepts - concepts which we call scientific - 'can be explained by facts of nature'. (15) This leads us to wonder whether there is some way in which we can express the distinction between facts and values, and the degrees of objectivity and subjectivity which relates to these notions.

Williams provides a plausible account of how this distinction may be articulated. His central contention is that whereas

> science has some chance of being more or less what it seems, a systematised theoretical account of how the world *really* is... ethical thought has no chance of being everything it seems. (16)

Williams grounds this contention upon the possibility of resolving disagreement through 'convergence of opinion'. As he remarks, when convergence of opinion towards an acceptable or shared scientific theoretical account is achieved, 'the best explanation of the convergence involves the idea that an answer represents how things are'. (17) This theoretical convergence is possible, Williams argues, because all scientific investigators can, despite their different perceptions, have a common 'absolute conception' of the world. Put another way, scientific investigators can possess common beliefs about

some features of the world from which 'we can reasonably claim to represent the world in a way to the maximum degree independent of our perspective and its peculiarities'. (18) This leads to the claim that scientific investigators can reach an understanding of the world that is as objective as possible: one which is to the maximum degree independently and impartially related to their particular perspective.

By contrast, Williams contends that ethical thought is never capable of such convergence of opinion as to 'how things are'. We have, he says, no 'coherent picture of how it might happen' that such convergence would be achieved. (19) This is because there exists no possibility of forming an 'absolute conception' of the ethical world which parallels that of science: an ethical world 'where a range of investigators could rationally, reasonably and unconstrainedly come to converge on a *determinate* set of ethical conclusions'. (20) This is not what ethical activity is about. Rather, he says, ethics is concerned with reflection on the excellence of life, and this reflection

> does not itself establish the truth of judgements... instead it shows that there is a good reason (granted the commitment to an ethical life) to live that life. (21)

Williams' point is that ethical reflection amounts to a rational evaluation of how best to live a life; and convergence of opinion in ethics constitutes a rational agreement which supports the commitment to that ethical life. However, this convergence is a practical, not a theoretical achievement. It is not, like scientific reflection, based upon a theoretical representation of how things already are. Consequently, unlike science, ethics is not the kind of enquiry that is a candidate for objective knowledge or the discovery of truth.

In drawing the distinctions between ethics and science, Williams enables us to place both the empiricist and anti-foundationalist conceptions of objectivity in a better perspective. Firstly, we can agree with the empiricists and non-cognitivists that values are non-objective in the sense that they do not constitute part of the 'fabric of the world'. However, we need to qualify this by recognising the anti-foundationalist point that the empiricist theory of knowledge is

based on false assumptions. In short, we can acknowledge that science and ethics are equally grounded in conceptual schemes, and that science is not privileged in its access to the 'given'. Williams himself makes this point, but also shows how the anti-foundationalist thesis blurs the distinction between science and ethics. As Williams claims, science should never be totally equated with ethics. Science does have a greater claim to objectivity because the conceptual schemes and practices within which it operates can converge upon some 'absolute conception' or representation of the world. Therefore, a scientific investigation into the facts is more objective than an ethical reflection upon values, *not* because it relates to the 'given', but because it is capable of providing a generally shared conceptually schematic explanation of the world which is to the highest possible degree independent of particular perceptions. Ethics can never achieve this. This is because, as we shall explain later, different ethical reflections are characteristically underpinned by ideological assumptions that are incommensurable with others, and which create, not represent, moral reality.

5. MacIntyre On Emotivism

It has been our purpose so far to offer a critical examination of the philosophical nature of non-cognitivism. However, this analysis has its limits because we need to establish the historical and social context within which the theory emerged in order to fully grasp the character of the non-cognitivist position. This historical enquiry involves a consideration of the emotive theory of ethics, and raises questions about the relationship between philosophy and history.

In his book entitled After Virtue Alasdair MacIntyre has provided us with a challenging and controversial analysis of the emotive theory of ethics. He offers a sociological assessment of ethical emotivism as a defective form of moral understanding which has to a large degree shaped the character of Western social and political experience in this century. He also suggests that this achievement constitutes a 'moral decline' which can be traced back to the failure of the eighteenth century 'Enlightenment project'. These claims are presented within the main body of a thesis which is both complex and ambitious, and in order to make a critical appraisal of MacIntyre's arguments, we need to discern the interrelated themes which are of direct relevance to the question of the character and significance of ethical emotivism. The first is a discussion of the immediate historical context of the emergence of the emotive theory, and involves the claim that it is only possible to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theory if an account of this historical context is given. The second involves the contention that the emotive theory has had a profoundly dominant influence upon shaping the character of contemporary moral, social and political experience in the Western World. The third, clearly related to the first, involves a general methodological suggestion that any satisfactory philosophical analysis of a body of ideas cannot be conducted in a way that is independent of a study of those historical considerations which relate to their expression.

I. Historical Context

MacIntyre's discussion of the immediate historical context of the emergence of ethical emotivism rests upon two initial observations. The first is that:

> In the eighteenth century Hume embodied emotivist elements in the large and complex fabric of his total moral theory; but it is only in this century that emotivism has flourished as a theory on its own. (1)

The second is that the historical context within which emotivism flourished was restricted to the specific academic philosophical circles of the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford in the 1930's.

MacIntyre argues that the conceptual implications of the specificity of this historical context were overlooked by the emotivist thinkers themselves. It was a central feature of the emotive theories advanced in this period to claim to have described the nature and form of *all* evaluative, and hence particularly moral judgements. Emotivists understood themselves to have analysed the universal character of ethical discourse in terms of the expressions of preference, attitudes and feelings, and had concluded that all moral judgements are neither true nor false and all moral disagreement is rationally interminable. MacIntyre rejects this emotivist claim because he denies the possibility of *any* theory being able to provide a universal description of all ethical life, past, present or future. Rather, he argues that any such purported theoretical achievement is technically impossible because any body of ideas, whether philosophical, theoretical, scientific or political, necessarily stands relative to the contingent historical features of its emergence. This is to assert that the intelligibility of any theoretical claim is only made possible within the parameters of the historical milieu of its articulation. According to this historicist view, any theoretical explanation which purports to be 'universal in scope' is simply deluding itself. It is attempting the impossible task of reaching a theoretical understanding which goes beyond the limits of what it knows to be intelligible;

limits set by the historical grid of its understanding. For MacIntyre, the proponents of the emotive theory of ethics were victims of such a delusion.

If MacIntyre is correct to disregard the emotivists' claim to be addressing the question of the universal character of morality as such, then it follows that they were, albeit unknowingly, addressing the question of the character of morality as conceived in the 'historically specific conditions' of their time. (2) As he says:

> We ought therefore to ask whether emotivism as a theory may not have been both a response to, and in the very first instance, an account of *not*, as its protagonists indeed supposed, moral language as such, but moral language in England in the years after 1903 as and when that language was interpreted in accordance with that body of theory to the refutation of which emotivism was primarily dedicated. The theory in question borrowed from the early nineteenth century the name of 'intuitionism' and its immediate progenitor was G.E. Moore. (3)

There is nothing controversial in MacIntyre's contention that we are compelled to understand the emergence of emotivism as primarily a reaction to the moral theory of G.E. Moore. As he points out, Moore's Principia Ethica (1903) was greeted with extreme enthusiasm by people such as John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Desmond McCarthy, Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry and Lowes Dickinson, and Moore's ideas on ethics became a quite extraordinarily dominant influence in their writings on philosophy, literature and art up until the late 1920's. What had attracted them to the theory, MacIntrye argues, was that in arguing that 'good' is the name of a non-natural property, and that a proposition declaring this or that to be 'good' could be known to be true through intuitive reflection of what state of affairs best produced the most 'good', Moore had provided an impersonal or objective justification for certain actions. Further, in the sixth and final chapter of Principia Ethica, Moore had spelt out just what type of action he took to be the most valuable or ethical, when he states that 'personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments include *all* the greatest,

and *by far* the greatest goods we can imagine...'. This was, for Moore, the 'ultimate and fundamental truth of Moral Philosophy'. It is to realise that the pursuit of friendship and the contemplation of the beautiful in nature or in art are the most important and perhaps the sole justifiable ends of human action.

MacIntyre suggests that it was this specific contention which attracted the group of intellectuals who were known as the 'Bloomsbury set' and their associates. It offered a philosophical justification of their own lifestyle and activities where personal intercourse and discussion of the beautiful were most highly valued. Not wishing to accept that their aesthetic activities were merely reflections of their own life preferences, Moore's theory provided an objective reassurance that this lifestyle was appropriate to 'the Ethical' and 'the Aesthetic'. Keynes provides us with an insight into the way this group sought to discuss questions relating to ethics and aesthetics. By following Moore's prescriptions in precise fashion, observers were asked to discern the presence and absence of the non-natural property of 'good' in relation to a given proposition. Where two observers disagreed, it was suggested that either the two were unwittingly focussing on different subject matters, or that one had perceptions superior to the other. This procedure purported to provide the theoretically correct manner of reaching an answer or resolving a dispute. However, MacIntyre notes that:

> of course, as Keynes tells us, what was really happening was something quite other: 'In practice, victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility' and Keynes goes on to describe the effectiveness of Moore's gasps of incredulity and head-shaking, of Strachey's grim silences and of Lowes Dickinson's shrugs. (4)

MacIntyre's contention, then, is that the disciples of Moore were doing something quite distinct from that which they purported to be doing. Their 'resolution' of ethical and aesthetic disagreement really amounted to the dominance of one will or expressed preference over the

wills or expressed preferences of others. This bare psychological confrontation was clothed in the theoretical language of 'intuitions' and the discernment of non-natural properties.

Further, MacIntyre acknowledges that it was the insight of the emotivists to expose this philosophical disguise. He characterises the emotivist response as taking the following form:

> these people take themselves to be identifying the presence of a non-natural property, which they call 'good'; but there is in fact no such property and they are doing no more and no other than expressing their feelings and attitudes, disguising the expression of preference and whim by an interpretation of their own utterance and behaviour which confers upon it an objectivity that it does not in fact possess. (5)

As such, the emotive theory was an accurate description of the nature of moral utterance at Cambridge and elsewhere after 1903. It correctly reflected the sociological reality of the form which moral language took at this time. However, emotivists were confused in purporting to provide a universal theory of meaning. As MacIntyre says:

> It is, I take it, no accident that the acutest of the modern founders of emotivism, philosophers such as F.P. Ramsey (in the 'Epilogue' to *The Foundations of Mathematics*, 1931), Austin Duncan-Jones and C.L. Stevenson, were pupils of Moore; it is not implausible to suppose that they did in fact confuse moral utterance at Cambridge (and in other places with a similar inheritance) after 1903 with moral utterance as such, and that they therefore presented what was in essentials a correct account of the former as though it were an account of the latter. (6)

Consequently, MacIntyre says:

> Emotivism thus understood turns out to be, as a cogent theory of use rather than a false theory of meaning, connected with a

specific stage in moral development or decline, a stage which our own culture entered early in the present century. (7)

This assessment of the historically specific conditions which shaped the character of emotivism is accurate enough. It can be further substantiated at a later stage by indicating how writers such as Duncan-Jones and Stevenson were self-consciously reacting against Moore's views. It can be also be shown that MacIntyre is correct to point out that 'in other places with a similar inheritance' an emotivist response to ethical intuitionism was evident. The fact that both W.H.F. Barnes and A.J.Ayer were pupils of Prichard at Oxford confirms MacIntyre's contention that:

> there is an Oxford history beginning from Prichard's intuitionism to parallel Moore's Cambridge history and indeed .. wherever something like emotivism is found to flourish it generally is the successor theory to views analogous to Moore's and Prichard's. (8)

For the moment, however, we shall attend to MacIntyre's second major argument, which involves an assessment of the social context of the emergence of the emotive theory.

II. Social Context.

MacIntyre insists that the discussion of the historical context of the emergence of the ethical emotivism is of more than just academic interest. It also raises significant social and practical issues. This is because, he contends, 'we live in a specifically emotivist culture': one in which 'to a large degree people now think, talk and act *as if* emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint may be'. (1) Thus we find that 'a wide variety of our concepts and modes of behaviour - and not only our explicity moral debates and judgements - presuppose the truth of emotivism, if not at the level of self-conscious theorising, at least in everyday practice'. (2)

MacIntyre begins his sociological assessment of the practical significance of emotivism by making the general contention that there is always an important conceptual relationship between moral theories and social contexts. He says that

> A moral philosophy - and emotivism is no exception - characteristically presupposses a sociology. For every moral philosophy offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social world. (3)

MacIntyre's claim is that any moral theory is necessarily attached to some conception of personal identity, motivation, intention, reasoning or action which either obtains or can obtain in the world. However, he notes that the philosophical proponents of emotivism have failed to specify the conception of man which they must presuppose. He suggests, therefore, that we must perform this task for them because 'we have not yet fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be.' (4)

What is, MacIntyre asks, the distinctly emotivist conception of the self? He says that:

> the specifically modern self, the self that I have called emotivist, finds no limits set to that on which it may pass judgement for such limits could only derive from rational criteria for evaluation and.... the emotivist self lacks any such criteria. Everything may be criticised from whatever standpoint the self has adopted, including the self's choice of standpoint to adopt... To be a moral agent is, on this view , precisely to be able to stand back from any and every situation in which one is involved, from any and every characteristic that one may possess, and to pass judgement on it from a purely universal and abstract point of view that is totally detached from all social particularity. Anyone and everyone can thus be a moral agent, since it is in the self and not in social roles or practices that moral agency has to be located. (5)

Implicit within the emotivist view, in other words, is a conception of the socially disembodied self which is the sole authority in the making of moral judgements. Given that there are no independent rational criteria by which to establish any objective justification for ethical claims, it follows that morality comes from within the realm of self-deliberation. Further, as MacIntyre observes, 'it is in this capacity of the self to evade any necessary identification with any particular contingent state of affairs that some modern philosophers ... have seen the essence of moral agency'. (6) It is certainly an assumption which is made by emotivist thinkers. They understand themselves, as analytic philosophers, to have uncovered the 'timeless truths' about the moral predicament by specifying how all moral agents, past, present and future, are free to assess their moral condition.

MacIntyre argues that this central assumption is misconceived. He contends that rather than specifying in some 'universalist' way the real structures of the moral self, what the emotivists are really doing

is presupposing a particular conception of man which relates to the historically specific considerations of a distinct social episode. As such, the emotivist moral theory is itself dependent upon an implicit acceptance of a particular conception of moral agency which has emerged within the context of modern social history, and which has been reflected in modern philosophical thought.

MacIntyre provides us with an impressively detailed analysis of how this modern social context came to be conceptualised in Western philosophical thought. One striking feature which can be drawn from his examination is the similarity between the emotivist and the 'liberal-individualist' view of moral agency and the ethical life. In particular, the emotivist notion of freedom of choice appears to be identically expressed in liberal-individualist thought. And this notion presupposes an epistemological conception of the relationship between facts and values which is assumed by both emotivism and liberal-individualism. As MacIntyre says:

> for the liberal individualist, questions of fact are settled independently of what anyone wants or chooses, whereas questions of value (including moral value) are settled only by the individual choosing and standing by some particular set of principles which best satisfy his desires. It is to picture the individual confronting the objecting facts with a freedom to make such evaluations as he wishes in the realisation of individual purposes. (7)

It looks, therefore, as if there is a close connection between emotivism and liberal-individualism. As we shall see, this connection is based upon the fact that emotivism presupposes an evaluative conception of man which is recognisably liberal-individualist in character. It is a conception of moral agency which includes, most centrally, the idea of the individual being free to choose his own ethical standards.

It is an observation of this kind that makes theorists such as MacIntyre and Charles Taylor suspicious of the emotivist position. As Taylor says, they 'want to accuse the Hares and Stevensons of ... trying

to ram through their own ethic of disengaged freedom under the guise of an independently established, rationally undeniable meta-ethic.' (8) In other words, they assert that emotivist, or more generally non-cognitivist thinkers are not providing a 'value-neutral' and objective meta-ethical analysis of the nature of morality, but are rather articulating their own evaluative prejudices of what morality ought to resemble.

This sort of accusation has considerable force. However, we need to be clear about the significance which people like Taylor and MacIntyre wish to attach to it. An examination of MacIntyre's views about the relationship between philosophy and ideology will enable us to delineate the implications of this argument for our understanding of the character of emotivism or non-cognitivism.

MacIntyre argues, we recall, that any moral theory presupposes a sociology, in that it presupposes a particular conception of man which is both descriptive and normative. In saying this he assumes that much of what we call philosophy is ideology. He contends that a good deal of what is characterised as ideology 'not only overlaps with the proper concerns of philosophy, it *is* philosophy.' (9) This is to recognise that it is

> a defining property of an ideology that it does not merely tell us how the world is *and* how we ought to act, but is concerned with the bearing of the one upon the other. This involves a concern, explicit or implicit, with the status of statements of moral rules and of statements of expressing evaluations. (10)

MacIntyre, then, wishes to blur the distinction between philosophy and ideology. He argues in effect that either label can be attached to a theoretical enquiry which involves the making of statements about the nature of things and the issuing of prescriptive recommendations for conduct in the practical world.

Two relevant points emerge from this argument. The first is that, according to MacIntyre, emotivist or non-cognitivist moral philosophy is ideological in character. We shall see that there is a sense in which this is true; but not, strictly speaking, MacIntyre's sense. This

is because MacIntyre has an inaccurate conception of the nature of an ideological understanding. The second point is that MacIntyre denies that a philosophical investigation can be purely analytical and non-prescriptive. This claim is unjustified because his characterisation of philosophy is misconceived. Let us attend for the moment to the second issue.

MacIntyre says that 'the notion that the moral philosopher can study *the* concepts of morality merely by reflecting, Oxford armchair style, on what he or she and those around him or her say is barren.' (11) This view strikes us as being unnecessarily harsh. It overlooks the fact that it remains perfectly conceivable that a moral philosopher can examine the validity of ethical arguments without introducing his own normative assumptions into the enquiry. This type of detached reflection is possible, and it constitutes the appropriate mode of investigation which we call philosophy. It is to reach an impartial understanding of the form of arguments presented by people who share a normative practical life, without presupposing any evaluative conceptions or morally relevant concerns as to how this life is to be led. Therefore, although we may agree with MacIntyre that the emotivists or non-cognitivists have failed to provide a value-neutral philosophical analysis of ethics, the very possibility of doing so is not to be discounted. The suggestion, then, is that MacIntyre is not justified in blurring the distinction between philosophy and ideology, because his conception of philosophy is misplaced. The circumstance that a great deal of past 'moral philosophy' has not been purely analytical does not mean that *all* moral philosophy, properly understood, is necessarily non-objective in character.

We need to specify how ideology is distinct from philosophy. Our suggestion is that any theoretical explanation of morality that does either implicitly or explicitly presuppose an evaluative conception of man and generates practical recommendations for conduct constitutes an ideological understanding. It is distinct from philosophy because it is a conceptual understanding which is based upon an evaluative portrayal of ideal moral and political relationships. This portrayal forms the moral and political identity which attracts committed adherents to conceive of themselves in these terms, and act in a way which is

appropriate to it. As such, an ideological understanding is 'ideal' rather than 'real'. It does not constitute an enquiry into the nature of things which is capable of issuing either true or false descriptive statements about moral or political experience. Rather, it amounts to an irreducibly evaluative conception of an experience which is *created*, not represented, within the vocabulary of the understanding.

More needs to be said about this, but it enables us for the moment to show how MacIntyre's conception of ideology is mistaken. It identifies his error as taking at face-value the claims of ideologists to be describing the world in a normatively significant manner. This is because ideological claims to provide an accurate theoretical representation of the descriptive nature of moral and political experience are illusory. And it is precisely this illusion that makes an ideological argument different from an authentic philosophical enquiry. This is not to deny that ideological understandings are often presented in the form of a philosophical argument. When this occurs, however, it is the philosophical argument which attempts to give convincing and coherent expression to a presumed and logically prior evaluative portrayal of human relationships. The philosophical expression is always distinguishable from the ideological portrayal. It is this distinction which MacIntyre unjustifiably elides together when he characterises moral philosophy and ideology as sharing the same descriptive and normative concerns. He fails to recognise that the evaluative or moral concerns of the ideologist can be clearly demarcated from the purely analytical concerns of the philosopher.

The inadequacies of MacIntyre's views on moral philosophy and ideology bears directly upon our consideration of the character of ethical emotivism. For it will be recalled that MacIntyre asserts that emotivism constitutes, in a normatively significant way, an accurate description of our cultural understanding. In saying this, however, he has not made clear how this 'description' has become intelligible. He has failed to specify that it is only intelligible because it is grounded upon an ideological portrayal of ideal human relationships which is appropriate to the liberal-individualist tradition of discourse. In other words, he has not shown how the emotive theory itself, and the culture which it 'describes', is informed

by a distinct ethical understanding which is non-descriptive. It follows that emotivism can only count as an accurate description of our modern ethical experience because it reflects how certain people ideologically conceive themselves in the world and act within it. This conception is not in itself descriptive; it does not represent features of an independent moral and political reality. Rather, it creates the sense in which adherents of the emotivist view believe it to be descriptive of their ethical and political world.

This point effects our assessment of MacIntyre's rejection of emotivism as a form of ethical understanding. He argues that the emotivist description of moral life is defective because the conception of the self which it presupposes is erroneous on both descriptive and moral grounds. For MacIntyre, the emotivist self has 'suffered a deprivation, a stripping away of qualities that were once believed to belong to the self.' (12) It is a self which is 'lacking any necessary social identity' and therefore does not have a coherent 'social embodiment'. (13) It is to be contrasted, he says, with a type of social identity that was manifested in the past, because:

> In many pre-modern, traditional societies it is through his or her membership in a variety of social groups that the individual identifies himself or herself and is identified by others. I am brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe. These are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidently, to be stripped away in order to discover 'the real me'. They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties. Individuals inherit a particular space within an interlocking set of social relationships; lacking that space, they are nobody, or at least a stranger or an outcast. To know oneself as such a social person is however not to occupy a static and fixed position. It is to find oneself placed at a certain point on a journey with set goals; to move through life is to make progress - or to fail to make progress - towards a given end. (14)

For MacIntyre, this pre-emotivist type of social identity involves a 'conception of a whole human life as the primary subject of objective and impersonal evaluation, of a type of evaluation which provides the content for judgement upon the particular actions or projects of a given individual'. (15) It involves, in other words, a conception of the self as being partly constituted by the social practices within which it performs. As such, MacIntyre argues, it is better than the emotivist notion of the subject because it provides a more accurate description of how the individual relates to his normative moral life. The emotivist view of the self is therefore to be rejected, he says, on the grounds that 'it would generally be a decisive refutation of a moral philosophy to show that moral agency on its own account of the matter could never be socially embodied.' (16)

However, we have been suggesting that the emotivist conception of the self does not strictly speaking constitute a description at all. Rather, it constitutes an ideological portrayal which is neither true nor false. It follows that MacIntyre's attack on emotivism is partially misdirected. For although there are good *philosophical* reasons for rejecting the emotivist view, and favouring the 'socially constitutive' notion of the self which MacIntyre advances, these philosophical considerations cannot decisively *refute* it. The emotivist view belongs to a kind of moral philosophy that cannot be decisively refuted at all because it has an ideological character which is immune from philosophical criticism. We may agree with MacIntyre that the emotivist conception of the self is philosophically implausible and even morally repugnant, but there are no grounds upon which our arguments can conclusively refute it. Indeed, in assuming that the pre-emotivist conception of the self provides a better description and ethical evaluation of moral agency, MacIntyre is himself engaging in a distinctly ideological argument. He is attempting to refute the claims of emotivism through the provision of philosophical considerations, but this attempt amounts at bottom to an ideological rebuttal of views which are morally incompatible with his own. His argument is on these grounds inconclusive.

There is, however, a great deal of truth in MacIntyre's treatment of the social context of emotivism. In particular, he is correct to

claim that emotivism is not, as it assumes, a value-neutral enquiry into the form of all ethical life. However, MacIntyre fails to specify the distinct senses in which emotivism constitutes an ideological and philosophical achievement that relates exclusively to the doctrine of liberal-individualism. We have made a preliminary attempt at this task, but it will be necessary to perform it in greater detail at a later stage. There remains, though, a final issue which is relevant to our present discussion. It relates to MacIntyre's sociological claim that emotivism reflects to a large degree the specific character of the modern age; an age which he takes to be individualist in nature.

This sociological claim is overstated. A variety of explicitly anti-individualist political doctrines have emerged in the modern age, and have contributed to the shaping of contemporary political life. Marxism, Nationalism, Conservatism, National Socialism and Fascism are prime examples. All of these doctrines are founded upon 'socially constitutive' conceptions of the self. The Marxist notion of class, the Nationalist idea of the state, the Conservative view of a tradition, and the National Socialist conception of race, are all based upon conceptions of a social identity which are understood to determine the character of the individual. All these doctrines have in different ways rejected the liberal-individualist notion of the socially disengaged person. It is difficult therefore to see how MacIntyre can justify his sociological claim. For we find that the emotivist conception of the self is most clearly associated with a liberal-individualist view which has not been the sole ideological competitor in the shaping of modern politics. Indeed, it was precisely at the time of the emergence of emotivism in the early 1930's that the ideologies of Stalinism, National Socialism and Fascism made their greatest practical impact on European political life.

MacIntyre chooses partially to ignore this issue by not considering the phenomenon of National Socialism and Fascism at all. We suspect that he dismisses them out of hand for not being credible descriptions of the human condition. In short, he simply discounts their claims to be treated as serious political doctrines, and therefore fails to consider how they may be seen to be the expressions of conceptions of man which actually existed in the political world of

Germany and Italy. Also, when he refers to the phenomenon of Soviet Communism, he assumes that it is a distorted understanding which has betrayed the ethical message in the writings of Marx. For he insists that 'the barbarous despotism of the collective Tsardom which reigns in Moscow can be taken to be as irrelevant to the question of the moral substance of Marxism as the life of the Borgia pope was to that of the moral substance of Christianity'. (17)

MacIntyre's dismissal of National Socialism, Fascism and Soviet Communism is highly dubious. We need to accord these doctrines the necessary degree of academic respect in order to explain fully how they came to make the practical effect that they did. Whatever their conceptual inadequacies may be, it remains an indisputable fact that they have a central place in shaping the political character of the modern age. They succeeded, at different historical moments, in capturing the imagination of large numbers of people who became committed to the political cause which they represented. They have clearly had a significant practical impact on the political conceptions of modern man. Consequently, the emotivist or liberal-individualist view of the individual can only be understood as partially reflecting the social context of persons in the ethical and political life of this century.

It is of course possible to insist that the terms 'emotivist' and 'the modern age' refer exclusively to the predominantly liberal-individualist culture of the contemporary Western Europe and North America. MacIntyre, however, wishes to say more than this. He makes the interesting point that the philosophical arguments of Nietzsche and Sartre include the emotivist contention that moral judgement amounts to the self-expression of freely chosen preferences. Therefore, MacIntyre argues that although Nietzsche and Sartre worked within different intellectual and cultural traditions they 'both conceded the substance of that for which emotivism contended.' (18) In saying this, MacIntyre appears to assume that the emotivist view is the outcome of a variety of different modern philosophical traditions. This suggests that emotivist conclusions were drawn from a uniform conceptual schema or set of philosophical suppositions. For MacIntyre's point rests upon the assumption that Nietzsche, Sartre and the Anglo-American

emotivists were asking, admittedly under different philosophical guises, the same ethical questions within a single intellectual undertaking.

We can question this assumption that there was a uniform ethical development which is identified as being 'modern'. For it is equally plausible to argue that although Nietzsche, Sartre and the Anglo-American emotivists reached *similar* ethical conclusions, these resemblances were the outcome of asking different ethical questions within radically distinct traditions located in specific intellectual contexts. This raises the issue of whether the philosophical discourses of "Modernity" can be characterised - in a way which is sensitive to their historical contextuality - as a uniform project at all. And this has implications for MacIntyre's thesis that emotivism is the culmination of all aspects of modern Western philosophical thought. We shall examine this claim in greater detail at a later stage, but we have seen how it appears to be exaggerated. For we have shown that MacIntyre's thesis has, with revisions, a considerable force in connecting emotivism with the philosophical expressions of liberal-individualist ideology. However, we have also seen how MacIntyre overstates the practical impact of emotivism upon the plural identities of the modern age.

III. The History of Ideas.

MacIntyre's discussion of the relationship between ethical theory and its historical and social context, and his assessment of the character of ethical emotivism, can be further examined by considering his general methodological understanding of what it is to study the history of ideas. It is an approach which is elaborated upon in greater detail in both his 'Postscript' to the Second Edition of After Virtue (1985), and in an article entitled 'The relationship of philosophy to its past', which appeared in Philosophy in History (1984).

MacIntyre states that what lies at the heart of the issue of how to study the history of ideas is the question of the relationship between philosophy and history. As he points out in the 'Postscript', it remains an 'academic orthodoxy' within the Anglo-Saxon tradition of analytical philosophy to conceive of the philosophical and the historical forms of enquiry as quite distinct: the one never contributing to the knowledge of the other. According to this orthodox view, any philosophical investigation into a particular subject-matter is undertaken quite independently from any historical examination of the specific conditions which set it in its context. As such, MacIntyre argues, this conception of philosophical analysis is based upon the assumption that the appropriate criteria of rationality and truth, which it is the task of the philosopher to discover, can be applied to a given subject-matter in a way in which does not conceptually relate to the construction of a historical narrative. In this account, the validity or non-validity of certain theoretical claims can be established without attending to any historically relevant considerations. Thus we find that, as MacIntyre says, 'the historian of ideas is assigned the task of recounting the rise and fall of ideas', whereas 'it falls to the philosopher to determine by the best rational methods what is in fact true'. (1)

This orthodox view has been assumed by many of those theorists who wish to criticise MacIntyre's claim that a full understanding of the philosophical character of emotivism requires a historical

examination of its emergence. For instance, William K. Frankena insists that 'I can, if I have the right conceptual equipment, understand *what* the view is without seeing it as the result of an historical development; and, so far as I can see, I can also assess its status as true or false or rational to believe without seeing it as such an outcome'. (2) Frankena also contends that MacIntyre's assessment of emotivism as a defective form of understanding is itself based upon the distinction between analytical philosophy and history. He writes that;

> MacIntyre's own arguments against emotivism are drawn from analytical philosophy; and his claim that modern attempts to justify morality *fail* and *had to fail* is a claim that can be established only by analytical philosophy, not by some kind of history. (3)

MacIntyre, however, argues that these objections are misplaced. The first one rests upon a false view of the relationship between philosophy and history, and the second one is based upon a misinterpretation of his methodological approach. He seeks, therefore, to clarify his position when he says that:

> I am committed to maintaining that although arguments of the kind favoured by analytic philosophy do possess an indispensable power, it is only within the context of a particular genre of historical inquiry that such arguments can support the type of claim about truth and rationality which philosophers characteristically aspire to justify. (4)

MacIntyre, then, does not deny that rational arguments possess an 'indispensable power' in exposing the confusions, inconsistencies and implausibilities of certain theoretical claims. However, he insists that what counts as a rational argument, as employed within philosophical analysis and elsewhere, is always dependent upon particular historical conditions. The standards of rationality and truth which make a philosophical analysis possible are always determined by the historical development of ideas. Therefore, the tools of critical

analysis which a philosopher has at his disposal at any given moment are related to the historical context of their use. As such, the type of claim about truth and rationality which is appropriate to philosophical enquiry is related to those considerations which are relevant to an historical enquiry.

MacIntyre asserts that it is this connection between philosophy and history which the adherents of the orthodox view have overlooked. In particular, it is a connection which Frankena fails to acknowledge in his conception of the task of the moral philosopher. For it is a position which, MacIntyre says, rests upon two false assumptions. The first is that there exists a general and timeless standard of truth and rationality which it is the task of the philosopher to discover. The second is that it is possible to specify through pure analysis a single subject-matter which possesses a universal theoretical status.

It is the second assumption that MacIntyre seeks to contend with when he stresses:

> the importance of the undeniable fact... that the subject matters of moral philosophy at least - the evaluative and normative concepts, maxims, arguments and judgements about which the moral philosopher enquires - are nowhere to be found except as embodied in the historical lives of particular social groups and so possessing the distinctive characteristics of historical existence: both identity and change through time, expression in institutionalised practice as well as in discourse, interaction and interrelationship with a variety of forms of activity. Morality which is no particular society's morality is to be found nowhere. There was the-morality-of-fourth-century-Athens, there were the-moralities-of-thirteenth-century-Western Europe; there are numerous such moralities, but where ever was or is *morality as such* ? (5)

It is to be noted here that philosophers of the orthodox view do not dispute with MacIntyre the undeniable sociological fact that there has never been in our world of cultural diversity a single *practical* understanding of 'morality as such'. However, it is a characteristic

feature of their position to assume that it is possible to provide a correct *theoretical* analysis of the nature of all these various practical moral understandings. The emotivists, for example, purport to have described the universal character of all moral discourse, past present, and future. This is to claim that the subject-matter of 'morality as such' has a recognisable *form*, although its specific *content* has varied from epoch to epoch, and culture to culture.

MacIntyre argues that this claim depends upon the first false assumption noted above. It presupposes that there exists a general and timeless standard of truth and rationality by which to judge the validity of theoretical claims advanced in various ethical theories irrespective of the different historical and cultural contexts in which they are set. This involves, for MacIntyre, the making of the 'universalist error', because all moral philosophy, and all the conceptual tools at the disposal of the moral philosopher, presuppose a sociology. He insists that any ethical theory advanced by a moral philosopher, and any critical analysis of that theory by another moral philosopher, is always ultimately based upon a practical ethical understanding which is adopted in a particular historical period. He says that:

> any particular morality has as its core standards by which reasons for action are judged more or less adequate, conceptions of how qualities of character relate to qualities of actions, judgements as how rules are to be formulated, and so on. Thus although there is always more to any particular morality than the philosophy implicit within it, there is no morality allegience to which does not involve some philosophical stance, explicit or implicit. Moral philosophies are, before they are anything else, the explicit articulations of the claims of particular moralities to rational allegience. And this is why the history of morality and the history of moral philosophy are a single history. (6)

In saying this MacIntyre blurs the distinction between ethical theory and practice. For he insists that any theoretical explanation of morality constitutes the articulation of a practical ethical

understanding which is historically specific. He takes this point to be a refutation of the orthodox view of the distinctions between theoretical analysis and practice, and philosophy and history. However, let us consider the assumptions which inform it.

It can be suggested that MacIntyre has over-emphasised the significance of the contextualist point about the historically specific character of the notions of rationality and truth. This is because it appears that the orthodox conception of analytical philosophy can be defended without maintaining the admittedly highly implausible assumption that the standards of rationality and truth are general, timeless or ahistorical. Indeed, most contemporary philosophers who understand their enterprises to be purely analytical do not adhere to such a metaphysical view. Idealism and Rationalism are no longer popular positions. All that these philosophers need to show is that their philosophical activities are *distinguishable* from the contingent historical considerations which have shaped the development of their conceptual apparatus or tools of analysis. They need not be committed to the view that the notions of rationality and truth which provide this apparatus are ahistorical. Obviously this does need to be shown, but our point for the moment is that an attachment to what MacIntyre calls the 'universalist error' is not *necessarily* presupposed in the orthodox conception of philosophy.

The implications of this point can be illustrated in another way. MacIntyre maintains, for instance, that the emotivist thinkers are representatives of the misconceived orthodox conception of philosophy. What they are really doing, he says, is offering a theoretical explanation of the form of ethical language which in fact merely articulates the practical and historically specific moral understanding of our age. He extends this observation into a general claim that *any* ethical theorist is suffering from a mistaken self-description if he believes himself to be providing an analysis of 'morality as such' which is not practically and historically specific.

However, MacIntyre's general claim is only plausible if we assume that all moral philosophy is necessarily both descriptive and prescriptive in character, in that it amounts to a theoretical explanation of morality which presupposes certain normative

assumptions with intrinsic practical import. We have noted earlier that this assumption is unwarranted. This can be shown by briefly specifying the sense in which theory and practice are distinct. A theoretical explanation interprets practical events in the world. As Popper and others have shown, it takes the form of a hypothesis which is logically capable of verification or falsification. An authentic theoretical hypothesis, in other words, must be amenable to either confirmation or refutation according to the facts. Further, the theorist who posits such a hypothesis must be detached and ultimately disinterested. He must be prepared to abandon his belief in the truth of the theory in the light of conflicting evidence. If he fails to do so, then he has misunderstood the fact that the status of a theoretical explanation depends upon the provision of empirically contingent evidence.

By contrast, a practical understanding of the world involves an interested commitment to it. To believe in a set of ethical principles which are put into practice, for instance, constitutes the expression of emotional convictions which are far harder to abandon than theoretical beliefs. It requires a change in the conception of how you morally relate to others which is far more personally significant than a revision of your theoretical views. A rational allegiance to a theoretical explanation is therefore distinguishable from a fundamentally emotional and normative allegiance to a practical understanding of the world. The latter commits the adherent to act in a manner which is inappropriate to the former.

This distinction relates to MacIntyre's claim that all moral philosophy is necessarily both descriptive and normative. This is because if theory and practice can be clearly distinguished, then the descriptive and normative elements which may reside in certain types of 'moral philosophy' can be separated. MacIntyre fails to acknowledge this because he does not distinguish between philosophy and ideology. He fails to show that any moral philosophy which attempts, either explicitly or implicitly, to justify an allegiance to a practical ethical understanding is not purely philosophical in character but also has a central ideological element which is separable from it.

Despite these objections to MacIntyre's treatment of philosophy, we can agree with him on a number of points. There is a need to emphasise the relationship between philosophy and history, and abandon any conception of philosophy as an enquiry which employs universal or ahistorical notions of truth and rationality. Once it is acknowledged that contemporary philosophical enquiries are the outcome of changed perceptions about the character of a philosophical understanding, then it follows that the tools of analysis which are available to us are themselves shaped by the historical development of philosophical ideas. This is to recognise, for example, that our philosophical understanding of morality or mathematics is determined by certain conventional practices which relate to our history. Even propositions which are axiomatic, such as 2+2 = 4, are only true because they are 'necessary by convention': they constitute the fundamental rules of an intelligible way of looking at the world which is contingently dependent upon historical considerations rather than relating to an a priori metaphysical truth.

Ethical theorists such as the emotivists have been insensitive to these considerations. As MacIntyre points out, they have falsely assumed that a timeless criterion of truth and rationality can be employed to discover the form of 'morality as such' in the past, present and future. In saying this, however, we do not need to conclude that *no* understanding of 'morality as such' can possibly be given. We can assert, for instance, that all ethical understandings are determined by practices or 'forms of life' which are set in historical contexts. MacIntyre himself appears to support this claim, but he overlooks the fact that it is a purely *conceptual* claim which is the result of pure philosophical analysis. Further, it is a theoretical claim which need not be put to practical use. It does not assume any *practically* relevant norms, or make any prescriptive recommendations that are intended to effect a change of practical commitment in the world. Rather, it is to make a purely analytical claim that may be correct or incorrect. This indicates that MacIntyre is wrong to dismiss the possibility that philosophy can provide an impartial analysis, and is likewise mistaken to blur the distinction between theory and practice.

We can see, then, that MacIntyre's account of the relationship between philosophy and history is not entirely convincing. He is correct to point out the central error of the orthodox view by showing how the universal and ahistorical notions of truth and rationality which this view assumes is false. However, this error need not be inherent in our conception of philosophy as pure analysis. We can revise the orthodox view without totally abandoning the distinction between philosophical analysis and historical narrative.

Nonetheless, whatever the weaknesses of MacIntyre's position, it is to be noted that he provides an interesting account of how theoretical confrontation, resolution and development is possible within the discourse of what he calls our 'philosophical history'. In 'The relationship of philosophy to its past' he contends that:

> particular small-scale theories come to us for the most part embedded in larger bodies of theory; and such larger bodies of theory are in turn embedded in still more comprehensive schemes of belief. It is these schemes of belief which provide the framework of continuity through time within which the transition from one incommensurable body of theory to its rival is made; and there has to be such a framework, for without the conceptual resources it affords we could not understand the two bodies of theory as rivals which provide alternative and incompatible accounts of *one and the same subject matter* and which offer us rival and incompatible means of achieving *one and the same set of theoretical goals.* (7)

MacIntyre asserts that particular small-scale theories which generate local theoretical disputes are set within more general theories. These larger bodies of theory count as rivals because they presuppose a shared framework of belief which provides a 'common specification of subject matter and theoretical goals' (8) That is, it is this shared conception of a subject matter and 'stock of senses and references at the level of *Weltanschauung*' which enables rival theoretical accounts to compete with each other. (9)

MacIntyre takes this observation to be both empirical and logical; it constitutes a narrative account of how theoretical confrontations arise which is based upon the logical claim that unless theories purport to describe the same subject-matter they 'simply lack the logical properties which warrant us in classifying them as rivals'. (10) For although these theories are incompatible and incommensurable by virtue of the fact that they cannot both be true at the same time, they must always share a commensurable level of concepts and theoretical goals which makes communication and rival competition between them possible.

MacIntyre also contends that it is this shared framework of conceptual beliefs and theoretical goals which enables us to judge which rival theoretical account is 'rationally superior' to the other. As such, it enables us to explain the transition from one theory to another. He asserts that:

> what constitutes the rational superiority of one large philosophical standpoint over another is its ability to transcend the limitations of that other by providing from its own point of view a better explanation and understanding of the failures, frustrations and incoherencies of the other point of view (failures, frustrations and incoherencies, that is, as judged by the standards internal to that other point of view) than that other point of view can give of itself. (11)

Part of this involves revealing how the other theory is unable to resolve problems which by its own internal standards are recognised to be in need of resolution. This presupposes that both theories share the same theoretical goal, and seek to resolve any difficulties that frustrate its achievement.

MacIntyre does not relate his general account of the nature of theoretical disputes and resolutions in our 'philosophical history' to his specific treatment in After Virtue of the emergence of ethical emotivism and the demise of ethical intuitionism. It is, however, an account which is assumed in his assessment of the two theories. It might therefore be worthwhile to indicate how his general

methodological considerations comport with his approach to these theories.

We can see that the local theoretical disputes conducted by such thinkers as Stevenson, Duncan-Jones, Barnes, G.E. Moore and Pritchard constitute, in MacIntyre's account, the articulation of particular small-scale theories. These moral theories are embedded in larger bodies of theory which are characterised as ethical emotivism and ethical intuitionism, and which are in turn embedded in a still more comprehensive scheme of belief which is characterised as modern analytical philosophy. As such, both emotivism and intuitionism share, at the level of *Weltanschauung*, the same conceptions about the theoretical goals which can be achieved by offering the best explanation or description of the nature of morality. That is, the adherents of both theories assume that they are attending to the problem of accounting for the same subject-matter, namely, 'the ethical'. It is this shared assumption about the nature of the ethical as a single subject-matter which makes ethical emotivism and ethical intuitionism rival and incompatible theories, in that both accounts cannot be true at the same time.

It can also be shown that, in MacIntyre's view, ethical emotivism is rationally superior to ethical intuitionism. A plausible narrative account can be given which indicates how the emotivist theory accurately assesses the success and failure, and transcends the limitations, of the intuitionist view. Such an account can be sketched along these lines. The emotivists praise the intuitionist refutation of all 'naturalist' accounts of ethics, in that they acknowledge the intuitionist insight that any ethical theory which operates within the empiricist framework cannot be simply naturalist in character. According to the emotivists, therefore, the intuitionist theory as advanced by Moore and Pritchard gained the theoretical successes which it did because they exposed the weakness and failure of the previously dominant naturalist account of ethics. This success was accompanied at the practical level by the acceptance of this intuitionist view by those notable thinkers in the 'Bloomsbury group' who were convinced that Moore had provided them with a justification of their distinctive lifestyle.

The emotivists argue, however, that the intuitionist theory faces insurmountable difficulties on its own terms. The problem is that ethical intuitionism is rooted in a misconception of the function and use of ethical language. Most notably, the theory pays insufficient attention to the emotive aspect of the ethical life, and fails to recognise that ethical judgements constitute the non-cognitive expression of feeling. This failure is reflected in the intuitionist dependence upon an ontological thesis about 'non-natural properties' which is implausibly metaphysical, and cannot perform the theoretical task of accounting for the emotive function of ethical language.

It is to be noted that when intuitionist thinkers attempt to revise their own accounts in a way which accommodates the significance of the emotive function of ethical language they are reduced to confusion and indecision. We find Moore recognising in his 'Reply to my Critics' (1942) that Stevenson's analysis of 'emotive meaning' is powerful enough, if correct, seriously to undermine the plausibility of his own account, and yet remaining unsure whether to accept or deny Stevenson's point. And Moore's indecisiveness persists throughout the latter stages of his career. As C.D Broad comments in 1961,

> he is now inclined to think that moral disagreement *may* be nothing but oppositon of emotional attitude; but he is also inclined about equally strongly to think that it involves a logical conflict between incompatible beliefs. (12)

The emotivists of course assert that Moore's indecisiveness is unjustified. They insist that his reluctance totally to abandon the notion that ethical disagreement may be a matter of incompatible beliefs about an objective ethical truth is misplaced. It merely underlines the fact that the intuitionist theory is incapable within its own account of coherently recognising the emotive functions of ethical language.

We can see, then, that the emotivists have been successful in exposing the weaknesses and failures of the intuitionist theory. This is because the emotivist analysis provides an accurate description of the character of contemporary moral discourse. As MacIntyre says,

emotivism provides the best available explanation of the function and uses of our modern ethical vocabulary. Therefore, it is rationally superior to its intuitionist predecessor.

MacIntyre further contends that the 'Aristotelian' conception of ethics is rationally superior to the emotivist account. He supports this claim by arguing that the 'socially constitutive' notion of the self which is advanced in the Aristotelian account of the virtues is better than the emotivist conception of the free and socially disengaged subject. We have already seen that there are good philosophical reasons for agreeing with this argument. However, this argument does not in itself support MacIntyre's claim. In order to show this, we must attend to the underlying methodological assumptions which MacIntyre holds in making the claim. He appears to assume that the Aristotelian and emotivist accounts are rival theories, in that they purport to describe the same subject-matter, namely 'the ethical', and share the same theoretical goals. This assumes that the transition from the pre-modern to the modern philosophical understanding was not as radically disjointed as it may at first appear. Indeed, MacIntyre specifically insists that although the modern understanding became the dominant view, there remains in fragmented form an element of Aristotelian thinking in our contemporary culture. As such, he says, there is a possibility that we may be able to resuscitate the Aristotelian forms of moral thinking in a way which revises our predominantly emotivist conception of moral practices.

There are, however, a number of problems associated with these assumptions. Firstly, it is at least equally plausible to claim that there is little or no evidence that fragmented elements of distinctly Aristotelian ways of thinking have been maintained within our culture and philosophical history. This claim, if convincing, leads us to make the important conceptual point that MacIntyre is himself trapped within the predominantly emotivist grid of understanding: an understanding from which there is no escape to the Aristotelian view. Secondly, it is plausible to reject MacIntyre's assumption that the Aristotelian and emotivist theories purport to describe the same subject-matter. This is to deny that there is a shared conception of morality which has been translated through time from the Greeks to the present day. Rather, it

can be argued that Aristotle, his associates, and the emotivists are addressing radically different questions about entirely distinct conceptions of the nature of morality. For although there is a superficial sense in which all ethical theorists from Aristotle to the present day have employed common concepts - such as the 'good', and 'obligation' - these concepts have been accorded radically different meanings over time as their expression and reference has altered within historical developments. This point, if correct, undermines MacIntyre's claim that the Aristotelian view is rationally superior to the emotivist view because it questions the conditions upon which this claim can be intelligible. That is, it denies that we can speak significantly of the Aristotelian and emotivist accounts as rival theories which refer to the same subject-matter, namely, the ethical.

However, whatever the difficulties are in MacIntyre's treatment of emotivism, philosophy and history, it is profitable to take our lead from him and construct in greater detail a narrative account of the emergence of the emotive theory, in order to gain a clearer historical insight into its fundamental character.

6. The Historical Emergence of Emotivism.

I. Towards an Emotivist View.

MacIntyre suggests that a satisfactory understanding of the character and significance of ethical emotivism can only be reached through an examination of the historically specific context of its emergence. An assessment of this context reveals the nature of a controversy raised at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the 1920's and 1930's which constituted primarily a reaction to the ethical theory of G E Moore. It was this dispute which shaped the intellectual conditions in which the distinctly emotivist view of ethics came to flourish.

The response to Moore's ethical theory which provided the basis of the emotivist view was first articulated in The Meaning of Meaning (1923) by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards. The objection of these Cambridge academics to Moore's conception of the nature of the 'good' is captured in a passage which reads:

> It seems probable that this word (namely, 'good') is essentially a collection of homonyms, such that the set of things, roughly, those in connection which we hear it pronounced in early years (a good bed, a good kick, a good God) have no common characteristics. But another use of the word is often asserted to occur, of which some at least of those we have cited are supposed to be degenerations, where 'good' in alleged to stand for a unique, unanalysible concept. This concept, it is said, is the subject-matter of Ethics. This peculiar ethical use of 'good' is, we suggest, a purely emotive use. When so used the word stands for nothing whatever, and has no symbolic function. Thus, when we use it in the sentence, '*This* is good', we merely refer to *this*, and the addition of 'is good' makes no difference whatever to our

reference. When on the other hand, we say '*This* is red', the addition that 'is red' to 'this' does symbolise an extension of our reference, namely, to some other red thing. But 'is good' has no comparable *symbolic* function; it serves only as an emotive sign expressing our attitude to 'this', and perhaps evoking similar attitudes in other persons, or inciting them to actions of one kind or another. (1)

In saying that the ethical use of 'good' does not stand for the name of a unique, unanalysible concept, Ogden and Richards accuse Moore of being one of the philosophers who 'hypostatise their definiendum... by inventing a peculiar stuff, an intrinsic property, and then saying that let everything which possesses this be said to possess meaning.' (2) That is, their charge against Moore is that he is falsely committed to the view that our ethical concepts must refer to some substantive property which gives them meaning. In other words, Ogden and Richards observe that Moore's acquiescence with the referential theory of meaning, and his insistence that 'good' does not relate to natural properties, forces him to invent a 'peculiar stuff' or non-natural property which the name 'good' does stand for. However, they argue that this move is unconvincing because it fails to distinguish between the 'symbolic' or descriptive and the emotive functions of our language. As such, it fails to acknowledge that the function of our ethical concepts is 'purely emotive', and possesses a meaning which is non-symbolic or non-referential in character. This is to overlook the fact that ethical sentences are made 'not for the sake of their truth or falsity but for the sake of the attitudes which their acceptance will evoke.' (3)

Ogden and Richards' discussion of morality is, then, primarily based upon a distinction which they make between the descriptive and the evaluative functions of our language. According to their account, scientific discourse is descriptive and capable of issuing statements which satisfy truth-conditions, whereas ethical or evaluative discourse is a matter of expressing feelings, rather than stating truths.

This emotive theory of value is restated in the context of an analysis of the nature of 'aesthetic discussion' by F.P. Ramsey, the Cambridge mathematician. His views are first expressed in 1925, but

were published posthumously in the 'Epilogue' to The Foundations of Mathematics (1931). He writes that:

> What we really like doing is... to compare our experience; a practice which in this case is peculiarly profitable because the critic can point out things to other people, to which, if they attend, they will obtain feelings which they value which they failed to obtain otherwise. We do not and cannot discuss whether one work of art is better than another; we merely compare the feelings it gives us. (4)

Ramsey continues that 'about art one exchanges not information but feelings....[to] quarrel with a man's feelings, one can only have different feelings oneself, and perhaps regard one's own as more admirable or more conducive to a happy life.' (5) In extending this observation to all forms of understanding which are essentially evaluative rather than descriptive, he asserts that 'Theology and Absolute Ethics are two famous subjects which we have realised to have no real objects.' (6)

Another contributor to this line of thought is R.B. Braithwaite, a Fellow of Kings College, Cambridge, who criticises Moore's ethical theory in a way which he acknowledges to be drawn from the suggestions of Ogden and Richards. Braithwaite addressed the Aristotelian Society on March 19th 1928, giving a paper entitled 'Verbal Ambiguity and Philosophical Analysis' which was published in the Proceedings (1927-1928). In this paper he outlines Moore's argument for the contentions that 'good' is a simple, irreducible quality, and that ethical sentences about the 'good' are propositions about this quality. In making these contentions, Braithwaite suggests, there is something which Moore 'entirely neglects':

> This is the fact that most of the sentences in which the word 'good' or similar ethical words occur are not the expressions of propositions at all. Such sentences as the spontaneous 'That is good' before a picture or the irritated 'You are a naughty child' usually have no 'meaning' in the sense in which a sentence has a

meaning when it expresses a proposition which the speaker wishes to convey to the hearer. A great number of the sentences in which the word 'good' occurs are merely noises made either to 'purge' an emotion in the speaker or to produce directly a definite action or emotion in the hearer. They do not represent propositions at all: their object is not symbolic, but emotive. If I see something which attracts me strongly, the words 'Oh, that is good' may come out of my lips; but these are not the expressions of an ethical or aesthetic judgement: they are quite simply a sound which, owing largely to my education, takes the form of words that under other circumstances I might use with a symbolic meaning. The whole sentence is psychologically of the same nature of the opening 'Oh'. I am just expressing an emotion: I am not even expressing the proposition that I am feeling an emotion, although this may be deduced from the fact that I am uttering a sound. (7)

For Braithwaite, then, Moore's analysis of the nature of 'good' is inadequate because it neglects the specific character of evaluative expressions. This is due to the fact that Moore fails to address 'the uses of language Messrs. Ogden and Richards call 'emotive', and distinguish from the 'symbolic' or 'scientific' use in the direct expression of a judgement'. (8) Consequently, Moore fails to observe that 'our most frequent use of ethical words is only 'emotive' so that the sentences in which they occur do not represent propositions at all'. (9) As Braithwaite puts it, 'most apparent ethical judgements ... are not judgements at all, but expressions of emotions or volitions'. (10)

This kind of observation is clearly emotivist in character. Thinkers such as Ogden, Richards, Ramsey and Braithwaite paved the way in the 1920's for the emotivist view of morality to develop. However, it is in the early 1930's that systematic attempts to provide an emotivist theory of ethics emerge. In order to show this, we shall focus on the writings of Stevenson, Duncan-Jones, Barnes and Ayer by drawing upon unpublished or previously unconsidered material.

II. C.L. Stevenson.

Stevenson studied for his first degree at Yale between 1926-30. Although he majored in English Literature he attended the 'Philosophy B' course in his third year, and it was during this period that his thoughts on ethics took shape. He admits that he was 'at the time insisting, in a way more urgent than clear, that values must be objective.' (1) However, he came to reject any such attempt to place ethics upon an objective footing whilst still at Yale. This is revealed in a paper entitled 'Essay on the Pragmatic Proof of the Relativity of Truth', which is dated March 28th 1929. In this paper Stevenson rejects the idea that moral truth relates to some absolute, invariable quality which is capable of objective discovery. Rather, he insists that it is a pragmatic notion which stands relative to a particular practical situation. As such, he argues that it applies to those arrangements which best suit our purposes. Therefore, he says, the pursuit of moral truth is a matter of prescribing what ought to be done in the fulfilment of those arrangements which 'work' practically in our particular environment. This type of prescription constitutes, for Stevenson, 'the basis of a suggestion', in that if a man issues a statement and 'exerts sufficient pressure' upon others to accept it, then he 'will build up a general confidence among people that his statement is true potentially', and this will cause them to change their minds. (2) However, Stevenson says that this achievement is not a matter of knowing something to be true in the objective sense, and revealing that truth to others. Rather, it is a matter of persuading others that something which is desired is evaluatively worth pursuing, and this involves securing an agreement of attitude in the minds of others.

These notions of desire, prescription and persuasion are further developed in a paper entitled 'Arguments for Determinism', which is dated April 22nd 1929. Here Stevenson addresses the question of 'the relationship which determinism bears to all forms of moral judgement'. He asserts that all moral decisions to act are the result of a caused desire which predominates over other conflicting and lesser desires.

Why then, he asks, do we praise or blame ourselves and others when these caused actions are performed? He suggests that our feeling of remorse, for instance, amounts to the recognition that although our conduct was originally thought to be beneficial, it is shown on reflection to be neither beneficial to ourselves or others. In other words, our feeling of remorse involves an acknowledgement that we 'ought to have done otherwise' in correlating self-interest with the interests of others. Further, he argues, we praise or blame the actions of others because we 'recognise that even though everyone's action is caused, nevertheless our self-interest makes it imperative that we accept and reject nonetheless'. (3) That is, we praise or blame the action of others to the extent that our own self-interest is being either guaranteed or adversely affected. Stevenson also insists that this imperative to praise or blame takes the form of a persuasion. He writes that:

> Both blame and praise... look to the future, not to the past... The judged person cannot change his features, but his conduct he *can* change if only sufficient pressure is brought to bear upon him ... And blame on the one hand, plus praise on the other, is one way, at least, whereby such change may be brought about. (4)

Stevenson argues that it is this prescriptive or imperative function which is intrinsic to the nature of moral judgement. This is because, he says, a moral judgement is 'offered as a means of intensifying or cancelling those causations' which determine ethical conduct. (5)

We can see how Stevenson's ideas in 1929 indicate the genesis of a ethical analysis which constitutes the framework of an emotivist position. For the ideas present involve the notion that moral action implies the reconciliation of self-interest or caused desires with the common interest; the claim that the subject-matter of ethics is 'non-objective'; and the suggestion that moral judgements possess an intrinsic prescriptive function to persuade others to change their attitudes to fit your own.

It is worth noting that this collection of ideas owes a great deal to the thought of Ogden and Richards. Stevenson admits this when he

writes that 'in finding an explanation of values that would take the place of my 'objective' one, I was greatly influenced by a passage from The Meaning of Meaning, by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards'. (6) The passage in question is the one quoted earlier at length. Further, we can see that Stevenson's recognition of Ogden and Richards' contribution to ethical theory dates back at least as far as 1931. This is evidenced by the fact that Stevenson provides an assessment of the controversy between Ogden, Richards and Moore in a paper entitled 'The Nature of Good', which was dated October 19th 1931. This paper was written whilst he was embarking on a two year period of study for the Moral Sciences degree at Cambridge between 1931 and 1933.

Stevenson introduces the paper by acknowledging that 'Professor Moore's Principia Ethica is so exceedingly important a work, in my opinion, that any present day discussion of the 'good' could scarcely do better than build up around it as a centre of inspiration'. (7) And yet, he says, 'I find that my own conclusions, which it in part provoked, are in utter contradiction with it'. (8) Stevenson illustrates this point by means of a hypothetical example. He imagines a man who seeks the fulfilment of his desires by taking 'his place in the world in the company of others'. (9) This man, Stevenson argues, recognises that it

> becomes expedient for him to control the resultant desires of others, either that they may profit by his superior knowledge, or that he may gain his desired objects at their expense . This he finds he can do by suggestion. And the concept of 'good', which in process of suggestion attains its fullest meaning, is the means which he employs in bringing about his end. For he uses the word not merely to indicate the object of his own resultant desires, but as though it indicated the resultant of anyone's desires, regardless of how they were constituted. 'Good' thereby comes to have an imperative force, and to say 'That is good' conveys very subtly the meaning 'Consider that thing good'. (10)

For Stevenson, then, the word 'good' is 'an adjective applied to certain things, signifying that they are desired by the person who uses the word'. (11) However, he adds, this 'is by no means the whole

meaning of 'good', and indeed, the uniqueness of its meaning lies in the fact that it is *evocative of a certain attitude of mind* - namely, that of presuming for the sake of discussion that things which are the objective of resultant desires can be proved so independently of differences in persons. It is on this account that the concept of good becomes a social instrument, whereby one man may influence another'. (12)

Stevenson's point is that the purpose of employing the ethical concept 'good' is twofold: it is to specify objects of desire, and express a certain attitude towards those objects with the view to persuading other people to share the same attitude. It follows, he argues, 'that the goodness of a thing is not wholly open to objective test' because conflicts of desires between persons may not necessarily be resolved, and agreement reached. (13) Although certain conditions may obtain which make a discussion of ethical disagreement profitable, 'one can *never* be certain that these conditions will be realised' (14) That is, one can never be certain that an agent will be persuaded of the factual inaccuracies of his beliefs about his expressed desires, or will simply change his mind in the light of forceful persuasion about what is worth pursuing. It always remains a possibility that what is considered to be 'good for one may indeed be bad for another' and no agreement as to the desires to be fulfilled, and the attitudes expressed towards them, can be reached. (15)

In the light of this analysis of the nature of 'good', Stevenson suggests that G.E. Moore's notion that good denotes something simple and indefinable is misconceived. He argues that Moore's confusion lies in the initial fact that he considers the question '"Is so and so good?" to be asking whether it is possessed of a certain quality, whereas it is really asking for appraisement, in accordance with the evocative force in the meaning of the word good'. (16) As such, Stevenson says, Moore fails to recognise 'the unusual nature of the concept of 'good', necessitating, for analysis, a consideration of both the scientific and the emotive... use of words, of which Ogden and Richards write so illuminatingly. (17) It is this oversight which Stevenson argues must have been responsible for 'Professor Moore's being unable to analyse 'good' (successfully), and consequently, for his thinking it was a

"simple quality"'. (18) We find this point reiterated in his doctoral thesis (1935), when he writes that:

> it does not follow that 'good' refers to a simple quality. No one seems to be able to find this peculiar quality, and Mr Moore himself speaks of it in a hesitant manner, being led to *postulate* it, apparently, because he could find no better alternative. There is, indeed, a further alternative which Mr Moore overlooked, namely: that good may be indefinable not because it is used to indicate a simple quality, but simply because of its characteristic emotive meaning. (19)

We can see, then, that Stevenson had developed as early as 1931 a critique of Moore's theory which is based on emotivist lines and which drew upon the insights of Ogden and Richards. Further, his 'The Nature of Good' was quickly followed by a paper entitled 'A Consideration of Justice', dated October 26th 1931, in which he elaborates upon themes developed in previous papers. Stevenson's central concern in this paper is to discuss the basis of justice as the fair and impartial distribution of goods. He considers a hypothetical situation in which there are three people: two of whom are making conflicting claims about what is owed to them for their services; the other who, as judge, seeks to evaluate their respective claims on the grounds of what constitutes a just distribution of rewards. Stevenson argues that in an instance of this kind

> since all evaluation is subjective, then between any two parties whose values conflict, the decision of a third, however little the result of his decision may affect him directly, will always be simply another evaluation; and while it will in most instances be somewhere in between the evaluations of the two who conflict, it will by no means on that account be any more correct, necessarily. Indeed, of two such judges, one may incline far to one side, and one to the other, purely for reasons of their own temperaments. Now, if we are to use the concept of justice, in the case in question, I insist that such a concept should not be dressed up

> to appear as arising from some objective and incontrovertible premiss. It would depend upon a person's ideals perhaps, as governing his subjective evaluations, and insofar as other people did not have such ideals, by so much could he never *prove* his point. He would have to bring influence to bear upon others, until they came to share his ideals. (20)

Stevenson's contention is that any consideration of what constitutes justice in any particular instance can never be objective or rest upon some independent rational criterion of adjudication. Any such judgement is always partial, and is grounded upon some subjective evaluation of one kind or another. This evaluation relates to the particular ethical ideals of the person who acts as judge. It is not, he argues, something the correctness of which can be proven by a set of facts, because in holding an 'ethical attitude... there is nothing that compels a person to accept a conclusion, simply because it is a fact that it would be true'. (21) Rather, it is a matter of bringing one's influence to bear upon others by persuading them to change their attitudes to fit your own.

Stevenson notes, however, that there is another sense in which 'something like an objective standard for justice is to be found'. (22) He suggests that in examining how we reach this standard of justice in the adjudication of two conflicting claims

> we can deliberately suppress any subjective evaluation that may come to our mind, and seek only to point out what things are to the common interest to both parties. That is to say, if there is a mutual advantage in co-operation, it may well be the case that each side would profit by giving up many of its claims, rather than forego co-operation. Some sort of compromise would eventually ensue, perhaps, by bargaining. It would be the function of 'justice' ... to anticipate the result of actual bargaining... by some plan of compromise that will meet the approval of both parties, and enable co-operation to continue... A compromise will thus probably be reached which each party would acknowledge is just. (23)

Stevenson's argument is illuminating in at least two ways. Firstly, it expresses a conception of justice which is markedly Humean in character. Stevenson, like Hume, understands justice to be a 'human creation, shaped to human ends', which establishes standards of co-operative conduct. As such, the performance of justice is 'a matter of compromise, entered upon because of the advantages of cooperation, and where the resulting products of co-operative activity are divided according to the market value of services'. (25) Secondly, this conception of justice is distinctly liberal-individualist in character. For whilst asserting that there is no single objective criterion of judging what is either just or unjust, Stevenson argues that it remains possible to bargain for an appropriate compromise that is of mutual benefit to all. As we shall show later, these notions of non-objectivity, bargaining, and the possibility of securing a rational satisfaction of mutual interest through co-operation are all characteristic features of the liberal-individualist view.

However, leaving for the moment this issue, we can see how Stevenson's discussion of the nature of 'good' and 'justice' in these 1931 papers indicates the development of a recognisably emotivist or non-cognitivist theory. It is a theory which was largely worked out in detail in Cambridge quite independently from any other contemporary emotivist theorists, although it was based upon a critical examination of G.E. Moore's theory. This is unsurprising, given the considerable academic and personal importance of Moore's influence on Stevenson's thought. Moore tutored Stevenson in the 'Metaphysics' course during the Lent and Michaelmas terms of 1932, and the Lent and May terms of 1933. Further, Stevenson has indicated that Moore read and criticised a 'brief preliminary sketch', probably in 1933, of what became his doctoral thesis. It was this thesis, submitted at Harvard in 1935, which constituted a systematic exposition of the emotivist view. And although his later work does not concern us, it is to be noted that this thesis formed the basis of Stevenson's first published articles, which appeared in the journal _Mind_ in 1937 and 1938, and his most famous work, _Ethics and Language_, which was published in 1944.

III. A.E. Duncan-Jones.

Austin Duncan-Jones was educated at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge between 1927-31, where he studied for the Classics and Moral Sciences degrees. He was tutored, like Stevenson after him, by G.E. Moore, C.D. Broad and R.B. Braithwaite. As a result of his reflections upon Moore's ethical theory, and Braithwaite's critical assessment of it in 'Verbal Ambiguity and Philosophical Analysis', he wrote an article entitled 'Ethical Words and Ethical Facts', which was published in the October 1933 volume of Mind.

This article reveals Duncan-Jones' scepticism regarding Moore's account of the nature of ethical disagreement, and the meaning of 'good'. He suggests that the central problem with this account is that it does not recognise the fact that a moral argument between contending parties may well end in one saying to the other, not '*you are entirely mistaken*, but rather something such as *you belong to a different moral world from mine*'. (1) And he adds that:

> If one would be right in speaking in the latter rather than in the former way, it is difficult to see what sort of thing we are saying when we call anything good, and this difficulty is unlike those which have commonly been considered in ethics. (2)

Further, in discussing a particular ethical question where there is disagreement with another moralist, Duncan-Jones says that 'I confess that though I disagree with him I do not see clearly that there is any sense in which he is wrong or mistaken. At the most I should only accuse him of bad moral taste'. (3)

Although Duncan-Jones doubts the plausibility of Moore's claim that ethical disagreement is a matter of one party being mistaken about the nature of 'good' as a non-natural property, he is hestitant to reach any firm conclusions. He acknowledges a problem, but fails on his own terms to provide an answer. However, he does suggest that:

> Perhaps when we use sentences containing such expressions as *intrinsically good* or *worth having for its own sake*, although our words are not meaningless, the sort of sentences we use never express facts, so that if I say that a certain state of affairs would be and someone else says that it would not be intrinsically good we are not factually disagreeing; none the less each of us is saying something, and is not as Mr Braithwaite would have said, using words emotively. (4)

This reveals the extent of Duncan-Jones' indecision. For although he suggests that ethical disagreement is not something that can be factually resolved, he resists the emotivist conclusion that there is *no sense* in which a resolution can be made.

He was, however, shortly to resolve this dilemma by abandoning any attempt to try to explain the apparent interminability of ethical disagreement in a way other than in distinctly emotivist terms. As C.D. Broad reveals in an article entitled "Is 'Goodness' a Name of a Simple Non-natural Quality?", which was published in the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (1933-34), and read to the Society in June 1934, Duncan-Jones came explicitly to argue that ethical sentences do not express ethical propositions about facts precisely because what they *do* say is of 'emotive use'. Presumably Broad was able to make this change in Duncan-Jones' thought public in academic circles by reading a Fellowship dissertation, entitled 'Ethical Language; an examination of the use and meaning of ethical expressions', which Duncan-Jones submitted to Gonville and Caius College in the summer of 1933. This unpublished thesis was completed after 'Ethical Words and Ethical Facts' had been written, but before it was published in Mind.

In this thesis, Duncan-Jones begins his examination of moral language by stating that 'in forming my view of ethics I have... been more influenced by the writings of Professor Moore than by any other single agency'. However, he adds, 'there are many of Professor Moore's opinions about ethics, as there are not in other subjects, of whose truth I feel doubtful'. (5) Most centrally, Duncan-Jones expresses his scepticism about Moore's contention that the word 'good' denotes a simple, unique, indefinable quality or object of thought which has a

non-natural character. This contention, he says, runs contrary to his own empiricist 'prejudice' that 'everything in the world can be described or explained in a naturalistic way'. (6) That is, it conflicts with the empiricist assumption that everything which is capable of significance or meaning can be inferred, through the evidence of the senses, to be part of the physical fabric of the world. Quite clearly, Moore's notion of non-natural properties as objects of thought does not satisfy this empiricist criterion. And Duncan-Jones further adds that because it is a notion which cannot be given supporting empirical evidence, there is no available philosophical explanation which can show us that such a property exists in the world. As he says, because 'we do not find the sort of evidence we should expect for the occurence in the world of any such character', we are left in the uneasy position of simply asserting that such a non-natural character exists, rather than being able to demonstrate that it obtains in the world. (7)

Duncan-Jones asserts that there are other considerations which indicate the implausibility of Moore's ontological argument. These relate to our ordinary use of ethical language. As he points out, Moore assumes that his conception of 'good' as a non-natural property is the one which is ordinarily used in actual moral discourse. (8) [Although Moore insists that this assumption is not fundamental to his enterprise, because he argues that his analysis into the form of the object 'good' may be true quite independently of the contingent facts about ordinary language use.] For Duncan-Jones, however, this assumption is false because 'the word 'good' is never used in an ordinary sense to stand for a non-relational character of the sort described'.(9) This can be shown, he suggests, by observing the nature of moral debate. He claims that if Moore's assumption is correct, it follows that there would be a fairly complete agreement between people as to what judgements and actions possess or do not possess the non-natural character of intrinsic 'goodness'. However, he observes that

> there is no sort of agreement, either among philosophers or people in general, that certain things are good and that certain things are not; on the contrary, disputes about the value of this or that kind of thing are constantly occurring. (10)

And given the fact, he argues, that 'people's ascriptions of goodness conflict, we must conclude that either a large number of them are mistaken', because they fail to appreciate the existence of the non-natural quality which makes possible the resolution of their disagreements, or we must conclude that no such quality exists, either explicitly expressed or disguised in ethical debates. (11) Duncan-Jones, of course, favours the latter explanation. He can see no evidence which proves the existence of the non-natural property of intrinsic goodness; nor can he see why we should assume that this quality rests within our ordinary moral language. He therefore concludes that there is no positive reason to assert that our use of ethical words is classifiable, and our ethical disagreements are reconcilable, in terms of an appeal to the notion of a non-natural quality.

Having discounted Moore's intuitionist theory, Duncan-Jones addresses the question of whether naturalist theories of ethics fare any better in explaining the use and meaning of our ordinary ethical expressions. Given his general empiricist inclination to believe that everything in the world can be described and explained in a naturalist or scientific way, Duncan-Jones acknowledges that it is far more likely that a naturalist approach to ethics, which asserts that 'goodness is a character which can be mentioned in describing the things that happen', will be successful in this task. (12) Indeed, it is this possibility, he says, 'which leads me...to look for a naturalist explanation of the meaning of ethical words'. (13) However, as we shall see, it is within the confines of this 'naturalist approach' that Duncan-Jones' distinctly emotivist view emerges. We need, then, to examine his own theory, and show how he understands it to be consistent with naturalism.

He observes that

> it is pretty clear that people use combinations of words not only for the sake of making statements, but from various other motives. The motives for using words on any occasion are probably as a rule, and chiefly, desires to produce certain effects in some person or people who hear or read the words. Probably the effect which is most commonly desired is that the hearer or reader shall become aware of the statement which is being used... but other

effects are also often sought, and among those which are perhaps, after understanding, most commonly sought are that the hearer or reader shall act or feel in a particular way. (14)

In saying this, Duncan-Jones acknowledges that 'the distinction between the wish to make a statement and other motives resembles the distinction drawn by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards in The Meaning of Meaning'. (15) However, he argues that 'Ogden and Richards often write as though words spoken on a particular occasion exemplified one use or the other, but not both. It seems to me that most sentences are used from several kinds of motive.' (16) The point that Duncan-Jones believes Ogden and Richards to have on occasion overlooked is that the majority of sentences uttered in ordinary language possess two distinguishable components: a descriptive element which expresses a belief that a statement is true, and a non-descriptive element which expresses a feeling. These two components correlate to distinct motives for making an utterance; namely, issuing a statement and expressing a feeling. Although these motives are intended to affect the hearer or reader in different ways, they are normally both present in sentences uttered. It is therefore misleading to say that some sentences are 'purely emotive', because although they do have a distinct emotive use, this use is normally co-existent with a descriptive or referential use. As such, according to Duncan-Jones, Ogden and Richards are mistaken to assert that the ethical use of good is purely emotive. Rather, he claims, most ethical words such as 'right', 'good', 'ought' and 'duty' are used in sentences which have both emotive and descriptive elements, and which are 'particularly likely to lead to actions or feelings on the part of the hearer or reader.' (17)

What then, Duncan-Jones asks, is the criterion of meaning which is to be ascribed to these ethical sentences? He asserts that 'an expression or use of an expression has an accepted meaning if those who use it have the habit of responding, when they hear or read it, in a way appropriate to some element of the world'. (18) In other words, a sentence has meaning if, and only if, it refers to some descriptive element found in the world. In saying this, Duncan-Jones acknowledges that his analysis of meaning is 'based on the view of language

expressed by Wittgenstein in the words 'the proposition is a picture of reality' [Tractatus 4.01]' (19). However, he says, 'sometimes an expression has no accepted meaning at all, but is specially likely to give some sort of stimulus to action or feeling'. (20) That is, there are certain expressions that do not themselves refer to any objects in the world, but which nonetheless have an attitudinal effect on people. For Duncan-Jones, it is this type of 'meaningless' expression which is always to be found in ethical sentences.

However, he claims that

> Most people are not aware that some expressions have no accepted meanings, and suppose that they are doing the same sort of thing in using such expressions as in using expressions with accepted meanings from a desire to produce understanding. It is the easier for them to make this mistake, because as a rule a sentence in which an expression with no accepted meaning occurs has some meaning, to which the expression in question does not contribute. (21)

His point is that it is a common error to assume that the complex of all sentences are purely descriptive or relate to elements which have referential meaning. This misconception is particularly apparent in many people's understanding of the linguistic structure of ethical sentences. He clarifies this confusion by explaining that:

> The word 'good'... is in certain of its uses a word with no accepted meaning... Consequently such a sentence as *to lower the rate of income tax would be a good thing*, if it exemplfies one of the uses of the word 'good' which have no accepted meaning, has no meaning as a whole, because not all the words in it are capable of contributing to its meaning; but it has some meaning, namely that income tax is in force. (22)

Emotivists have tended to argue that this analysis of ethical sentences undermines the naturalist approach. This is because it reveals that naturalists make the common error of assuming that

ethical sentences are purely descriptive. Rather, these sentences possess a non-referential, emotive element, or what Duncan-Jones calls a 'meaningless use', in conjunction with an descriptive element which does have meaning in virtue of the fact that it is used to refer to some feature of the world. We may therefore be surprised, at first glance, to observe Duncan-Jones contending that 'if it is admitted that there are expressions with no accepted meanings, a fairly convincing argument can be used to show that most or all ethical expressions are of this sort, so that ethical naturalism is probably or certainly true'. (23) This statement appears paradoxical to us because emotivist theories have become clearly distinguished from versions of naturalism, such as utilitarianism or orthodox subjectivism. However, we can explain his comment by noting that at the time of writing no such clearly delineated distinction was apparent to Duncan-Jones. Indeed, it was precisely because his emotive views were being formulated in 1933 that he was in no position to attach self-consciously the term 'emotivist' to his theory, and draw the relevant distinctions of approach between it and naturalism. Within the context of his writing, there were only two alternative approaches to ethics: the naturalist approach, which was consistent with his general empiricist principles; and the non-naturalist approach, which was exemplified in the theory of G.E. Moore. Duncan-Jones was clearly committed to the former approach, and he assumed that his theory constituted a revision within that tradition. It was only at a later stage that emotivism established itself as a distinct tradition of its own.

In noting this, however, we should not assume that Duncan-Jones was unaware of the *conceptual* differences between his view and previous versions of ethical naturalism. For he makes a number of points against the naturalist theories of the past which are clearly characteristic features of what was to become recognised as the distinctly emotivist view. He points out, for instance, that the *expression* of feeling or moral approval which is intrinsic to an ethical judgement does not necessarily imply that the thing approved is *believed* to be good by the agent who makes the judgement. He writes that 'all we can say is that when someone says that something is or would be good, he very probably is as a matter of fact in favour of the

thing he calls good'. (24) But it is equally possible that an agent wishes to deceive people by suggesting that what he approves of is a good thing, whilst in fact not believing that this is so. The point, for Duncan-Jones, is that there is a logical distinction between expressions of approval and beliefs about approval which is overlooked by naturalists, who tend to equate the two notions. Thus we find utilitarians arguing that 'to call something good is to say something about the amount of happiness that will result from it', and subjectivists arguing that to call something good 'is to say something about the speaker's attitude to what he calls good, for instance that he approves of it'. (25) The reason for this, Duncan-Jones argues, is that naturalist theorists assume that ethical judgements solely articulate, in some purely descriptive sense, a quantitively measurable property (eg. 'happiness' or 'belief about approval') which finds expression in that judgement. This error can commonly be made, he says, because there is a descriptive element in all ethical judgements; but there is also an 'expressive' element which cannot be reduced to any descriptive level of understanding. Ethical naturalists fail to see this.

These criticisms of the various varieties of ethical naturalism enables us to see how Duncan-Jones resolves the dilemma which he raises in the concluding passage of 'Ethical Words and Ethical Facts'. For he retains the naturalist point that ethical sentences 'do say something' which is factual, in the descriptive sense that an object which is approved to be a good thing is always specified in the sentence, whilst he explains the inconclusive character of moral dispute by showing that this description is always made in conjunction with an emotive element which cannot itself be reduced to a description, and which cannot be said to say something factual at all.

He extends this analysis of ethical sentences and ethical facts into an examination of ethical reasoning. Given that there are no peculiarly ethical facts which refer to a quality that can be conceived as being intrinsically good it follows, he says, that there is nothing which can be considered as 'intrinsically reasonable' or necessary grounds for adopting one moral point of view over another. There is, for instance, 'no sense in which we talk about reason in which the

expression we use stands for a non-natural character' or necessary ethical truth. (26) Therefore, he suggests:

> no ethical fact or ethical truth, whether necessary or not, could be a reason for someone to act in a certain way by itself; it could only be a reason if also the person concerned wanted to do what was right or good. (27)

In saying this, Duncan-Jones is assuming that ethical reasoning is instrumental rather that intrinsic in character. As such, he is adopting Hume's account of moral reasoning; for he assumes that a particular moral action is reasonable if it best satisfies the fulfilment of individually expressed wants or desires. This is because what is reasonable for a certain person depends upon that person's wishes. Therefore, he claims that:

> it is not open to us to call behaviour of which we disapprove unreasonable, simply because of moral objections to it; no kind of behaviour can be discovered to be reasonable or unreasonable simply on moral grounds; whether behaviour is reasonable must depend upon the desires and wishes of the person who behaves. (28)

This point, Duncan-Jones says, implies that what counts as a sensible expression of those ethical words which articulate an intention to act in a reasonable manner depends upon the contextual circumstances of their use. He claims that

> in such circumstances these expressions are used in a great variety of senses, and the exact sense in which an expression is used depends upon the interests and aims which the people among them it is being used have in common, or the interests and aims on the part of each other which they are familiar with; so that since an indefinite variety of interests and aims is possible, there is no way of giving an exhaustive catalogue of the senses in which expressions can be used. (29)

For Duncan-Jones, then, the sense of moral reasoning and action depends upon the particular use of ethical expressions which are familiar to us in 'a certain community of interest or purpose'. (30) It is a claim which rests upon the non-cognitivist or Humean account of the place of reasoning in ethics. Consequently, as we shall see, it presupposes the liberal-individualist notion that our collective moral understanding is the sum total of individually expressed preferences.

IV. W.H.F. Barnes.

W.H.F Barnes studied for the Literae Humaniores degree at Oxford University between 1930-32. Whilst seeking regular academic employment he was invited to address a meeting of the Jowett Society at Oxford on November 8th, 1933. The paper which he gave, entitled 'Is there a Realm of Values?', raised considerable interest because it expressed an emotivist view of the nature of evaluative judgements. Amongst those present at the meeting was Duncan-Jones who, in his capacity as co-editor of the newly founded journal Analysis, asked for a copy of the paper for the purposes of publication. The published extract was renamed 'A Suggestion about Value', and appeared in the March 1934 volume. Although the extract was only 150 words long, it nonetheless constituted one of the first publicly accessible statements of the emotivist analysis of ethics.

Barnes explains that at the time of writing the paper he was engaged in reading Nicolas Hartmann's Ethics, and was concerned to reject Hartmann's notion that values exist in some sphere other than that of the natural world. He was also convinced by Moore's refutation of any naturalist explanation of value, but felt sure that Moore's notion of goodness as a non-natural quality fared no better. However it was, Barnes says, only as the day of the meeting neared that he struck upon a plausible alternative to both Hartmann's and Moore's theories, and made the suggestion that 'to say something is good is not to predicate a characteristic but to *express* approval'. (1) It is therefore worthwhile to examine in detail the arguments presented in the until recently missing Jowett Society paper, and draw upon Barnes' recollection of the historical context within which he made the emotivist suggestion.

Barnes introduces the paper by summarising Hartmann's thesis in Ethics as an attempt to prove the objectivity and absoluteness of ethical principles. He indicates that, for Hartmann, these principles are true because they relate to a plurality of values the concrete existence of which is manifest in their 'ideal essences'. (2) In showing

this, Barnes states that Hartmann's thesis rests upon a procedure of analysis which is to be characterisised thus:

> The objectivity of moral principles consists... in this, that they derive their authority always from a value. If it can be shown that values are genuine existent entities, then it will be shown that moral principles are objective, in the sense that their relativity rests upon the discernment of values that are absolute, not upon the relativity of values. (3)

For Hartmann, as Barnes explains, values are 'genuine existent entities' because they are essences, where 'Essences form a realm of entities... which is not less real, and in a way more real, than the world of existing things'. (4) For Barnes, however, this conception of value as the essence or common ideal property of a thing is false. This is because, he argues, our knowledge of the essence of a thing relates simply to our necessarily imperfect and contingent observations of 'what it is', and how it resembles similar existing objects. It therefore follows that this knowledge does not relate to some alleged property the form of which is perfect and eternal. As Barnes puts it, to know the essence of a table, for example, 'is simply to know what a table is: it is an imperfect knowledge of things not a perfect knowledge of an ideal entity'. (5) As such, he claims that Hartmann's notion that moral principles are objective and absolute is groundless because it is based upon a conception of ideal value essences which is mistaken.

Having dismissed Hartmann's thesis, Barnes focusses his attention upon the ethical theory of G.E. Moore. He offers a critical summary of Moore's position when he writes that

> Professor Moore maintains that goodness is a quality intuitively perceived. It is unanalysable and indefinable. He further adds that it is a non-natural quality . Reflection seems to show that it is a very puzzling quality. If a thing is to be good it seems it must be good in virtue of what it is. That is to say, it must first have its own completely determinate nature: then, and then only, will it be good. (6)

Barnes' point is that if Moore is correct in saying that goodness is a quality, then he must assume that an object is good in virtue of all its properties or its whole nature. For Barnes, however, this cannot be so. He asserts that 'if goodness is a quality it must be a part of the thing's nature. The thing cannot be good in virtue of its whole nature, for its whole nature includes its goodness'. (7) This point in itself raises problems for Moore's notion. But more importantly, Barnes says, 'the qualities of a thing are what make the thing what it is, whereas a thing must first be what it is if it is to be judged good'. (8) This point, coupled with the fact that 'it seems possible to give a completely exhaustive description of a thing's nature without mentioning whether it is good or bad', must cast doubt on the whole idea that goodness is a quality of an object. (9)

Barnes suggests that this doubt accentuates a more general deficiency in the arguments of both Moore and Hartmann. He writes that:

> The defect of... the theories so far considered... is that the goodness or value of anything is not considered to be in any way relative to the desires and interests of appraising subjects. And this seems difficult to maintain. It would involve maintaining that, however radically men's desires change, still what has been good would remain good. (10)

Barnes assumes that the goodness or value of something must relate in some way to the material and practical contingencies of human moral experience, as felt in desires, interests, and the like. It is this relationship which is not considered by theorists who conceive of values as being revealed to us a priori, and quite independently of our material circumstances as subjects. However, Barnes insists that the acknowledgement that goodness is relative to the desires and interests of men does not imply that 'naturalist' definitions of good are correct, where 'A is good' is taken to mean 'A is the object of my approval', or 'I take an interest in A'. (11) If this were so, then two people who maintain respectively that 'A is good' and that 'A is bad' would not be contradicting each other at all. This account, he says, is incapable of explaining all arguments about value. We therefore need to explain

arguments about value in terms which are not naturalist in character. Barnes proceeds to do so by making the emotivist 'suggestion', which was published in Analysis, and shall be quoted here in full. He writes that:

> Value judgements in their origin are not strictly judgements at all. They are exclamations expressive of approval. This is to be distinguished from the theory that the value judgement 'A is good' states that 'I approve A.' The theory that I am now putting forward maintains that 'A is good' is a form of words expressive of my approval. To take an illustration:- when I say 'I have a pain' that sentence states the occurrence of a certain feeling in me: when I shout 'Oh!' in a certain way that is expressive of the occurrence in me of a certain feeling. We must seek then for the origin of value judgements in the expressions of approval, delight and affection, which children utter when confronted with certain experiences...
>
> If all so-called value judgements are, in principle, expressions of approval, then they will only possess meaning in so far as the society in which they are used is agreed on what things it approves. And then 'good' and value will be terms which have meaning only by referring to the actual nature of the thing, not to any non-natural quality it possesses. Meanwhile it is worthwhile mentioning that many controversies arising out of value judgements *are* settled by saying 'I like it and you don't, and thats the end of the matter'. We are content to adopt this solution of the difficulty on matters such as food and drink, though even here we admit the existence of epicures and connoisseurs. Why are we not content to accept the same solution on all matters where value is concerned?
>
> The reason we are not so content seems to lie in the fact that the action of one man dictated by his approval of something is frequently incompatible with the action of another man dictated by his approval of something. Life in a society leads us continually to transfer our approval to different objects. Reflection upon that life leads to still further modifications. It is this

> opposition between the approval of one man and that of others which lies at the bottom of controversies about value. If I maintain 'A is good' against the contention 'A is bad' my attempt to prove the truth of my statement is not really what it pretends to be. I point out details in A which are the object of my approval. By so doing I hope that my opponent, when he becomes aware of these, will approve A: and so be ready to say 'A is good'. But what I have done is not really to gain his assent to a proposition but to change his attitude from one of disapproval to one of approval towards A. All attempts to persuade others of the truth of value judgements are thus really attempts to make others approve the things we approve. (12)

We can see that this published passage expresses most lucidly the central characteristic features of a distincty emotivist view. Most importantly, it contains the notion that value judgements are expressions of approval rather than propositions of fact, and the idea that disagreements about value are primarily reconcilable through attitudinal persuasion rather than factual demonstration. It is worthwhile noting that Barnes extends this analysis into a discussion of the standards of our social morality. He continues that:

> If all values are relative in this way (ie. if all values relate to expressions of approval) how then can we be justified in speaking of a moral standard? There seems to be an objectivity about moral values which distinguishes them from other values. Taken at their narrowest they are those ways of acting which everybody must approve of if organised society is to be possible. In so far as every man, in virtue of his membership of society, approves of whatever is necessary to maintain society, these values, though relative to the members of a society, are relative not to this or that man but to a standard man... There is no standard by which we can judge him. He may condemn himself for falling short of *his own ideals of conduct* but his ideals of conduct are no ideal essences: they are merely the internal signs that he himself is in process of transferring his approval from one set of things to

another. As he changes the standard changes because he is the standard. (13)

Barnes' relativist account of social morality is familiar enough to us. It is to claim that the ethical standards which a society adopts rest upon a collective choice of its members, who undertake to follow rules of conduct which they individually approve. Thus, according to this view, the moral standards of a particular society always relate to the exhibition of shared individual preferences, as set within a specific context. It follows that moral standards or general social rules of conduct are invented and mutable, not absolute and merely awaiting discovery.

Having given this account of social morality, Barnes turns to the issue of whether any philosophical theory which purports to indicate the objectivity of morality is plausible. Taking Hartmann as his prime example, he makes the point that any philosophical examination which generates prescriptive recommendations about moral life is not an authentic analysis of ethics at all, but is instead an example of moralising. In other words, he insists that any objectivist account of ethics does not constitute a pure description of moral experience but rather makes a prescriptive contribution to that moral experience which invites agents to approve of the same things approved of by the prescriber. Thus, Barnes claims that what the objectivist is really doing is 'simply analysing the situations, emotions, ways of acting etc. which he approves. His purpose in so doing is to induce in us the same feelings of approval as he has.' (14)

Barnes' contention, then, is that philosophers such as Hartmann fail to recognise that a theoretical account of the ethical world, and the making of prescriptive recommendations about the 'good life', are two logically distinct activities. As such, he says, you can do one or the other, never both, at the same time: or you can only do both if you recognise the difference. But it is a difference which, he claims, ethical theorists of the past have tended to overlook. This is because, he states:

> It is a characteristic of the great moral philosophers from Plato onwards, that they were intent on so presenting the nature of things as to win the approval of their hearers for what they themselves approved. All men are driven by a deep and inescapable desire to make others approve what they approve. (15)

However, he says, this desire to gain approval for what you value is inappropriate for the moral philosopher to seek.

Barnes further asserts that the objectivist ethical theorist is not only guilty of overlooking the distinction between analysis and prescription. He is also committed to an inappropriate monism. For, as he explains:

> If we were to speak of a Realm of Values we could only mean the exposition of a man's preferences in their systematic interrelation, including specification of the particular emotional quality that accompanies each act of preference. There will thus be not one, but many, Realms of Value. (16)

Barnes' point is that an objectivist cannot claim that the values he approves of are singularly valid. At best, they express one among many personal preferences. Therefore, although both objectivists and ordinary moral agents assume that their standards are absolutely true, it is the task of the moral philosopher to inform them that ethical understanding is in fact relative and plural. As such, he concludes that:

> morality is simply in the long run that set of ideas and approving attitudes which has triumphed in any particular society. And difficult as this view may seem, it is nevertheless implied every time we speak of the morality of the East, the morality of the 14th century, or the morality of Germany. Each is a morality, believing itself to be absolute, yet seen on examination to be relative. Ernest Barker has said: 'It is the essence of nationalism that a nation considers its civilisation to be Civilisation'. In a world where nationalism threatens to destroy civilisation a sound conviction of the relativity of all morality

is likely to be not so much a solvent of morality as a salutary check on its onesidedness. (17)

Barnes has recently given his own assessment of the historical context within which his emotivist suggestion was made. He has no doubt that G.E Moore's Principia Ethica was the major text which the early emotivist thinkers were responding to. The reason why Duncan-Jones, Stevenson and himself were all moving towards a similar position at the same time was because, he suggests, 'Moore had convinced us that there was no analysis of 'good' in empirical, or as he would say, naturalistic terms, and we could not accept his alternative of a non-naturalistic characteristic, goodness' (18) Likewise, Barnes did not accept the version of ethical intuitionism which was advanced by Professor Prichard, who was his tutor at Oxford in his undergraduate years. He explains that although his earliest views on ethics were shaped by Prichard's lectures and classes, and although he respected Prichard's rejection of all empirico-utilitarian analyses, he was convinced that Prichard's own account of good as an indefinable *sui generis* concept fared no better than Moore's. (19)

In other words, Barnes found Prichard's and Moore's rejection of the naturalist account of ethics convincing, but he rejected their own metaphysical views, and sought an alternative theory which was consistent with his empiricist viewpoint. He writes that:

> At the time, I held... that all knowledge and rational belief must relate to what the senses disclose or what goes on in my mind: but I was not inclined to blackball ethics and theology for membership of the empirical club, simply because they had no direct and single relationship to the evidence of the senses. Rather I hankered after showing that they had a looser, but still a justifying relationship to the world of the senses. (20)

Barnes' hankering in this respect was satisfied by making the suggestion that our ethical and theological understandings constitute the *expression* of desires which are disclosed through the senses. It was, he says, a notion which linked up with 'the attractive idea that...

a thing's being good is related to what we desire in *some* way', although not in a way which was describable in the naturalist manner. (21) In concluding this, Barnes acknowledges the possible influence of Ogden and Richards. He recalls that he had read The Meaning of Meaning during the period of making the suggestion, and he admits to the likely probability that it was his familiarity with their account of the emotive use of language in general which contributed to the emergence of his distinctly emotivist view. As he puts it, 'while I cannot be sure that this volume was the midwife which delivered me from the labour of producing the suggestion, I think it probably was'. (22)

V. A.J. Ayer.

A.J. Ayer's famous work Language, Truth and Logic, published in 1936, contained a short chapter entitled the 'Critique of Ethics and Theology' which expressed dramatically the emotivist view. It was the success of this publication, more than any other, which popularised the emotive theory and made it widely accessible to the public. However, Ayer's exposition of the emotivist account of ethics was not an original declaration: his analysis was presented later than the expressed views of Stevenson, Duncan-Jones and Barnes, and his ideas were shaped by other intellectual influences. Although at the time of publication he did not acknowledge any specific influences upon him, he has recently admitted that he was 'very likely to have been unconsciously influenced' by Ogden and Richards. (1) In particular, he recognises the distinct possibility that his claim that the function of an ethical word is purely emotive was drawn upon the distinction between the symbolic and the emotive uses of language which was made by Ogden and Richards in The Meaning of Meaning. Evidence for this connection is clearly indicated in the text, where Ayer states that:

> The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money', I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said 'You stole that money'. In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. (2)

This passage is markedly similar to the one quoted earlier from page 125 of The Meaning of Meaning. Also, Ayer's unoriginality is further confirmed by his indication that his view that moral pronouncements are expressions of emotion rather than statements of fact was suggested to him by Duncan-Jones. (3)

What was, however, distinctive about Ayer's contribution to the development of emotivism was his presentation of the theory in the terms of the philosophical dictates of 'logical positivism'. He

acknowledges, though, that the validity of the emotive theory does not depend upon the validity of the positivist principles with which he seeks to inform it. He writes, in the Introduction to the Second Edition of Language, Truth and Logic (1946), that:

> The emotive theory of ethics... has provoked a fair amount of criticism; but I find that this criticism has been directed more often against the positivistic principles on which the theory has been assumed to depend than against the theory itself. Now I do not deny that in putting forward this theory I was concerned with maintaining the general consistency of my position; but it is not the only ethical theory that would have satisfied this requirement, nor does it actually entail any of the non-ethical statements which form the remainder of my argument. Consequently, even if it could be shown that these other statements were invalid, this would not in itself refute the emotive analysis of ethical judgements; and in fact I believe this analysis to be valid on its own account. (4)

Ayer is correct to assert that the plausibility of the emotivist analysis does not depend upon the plausibility of his peculiarly positivist criteria of 'verification', 'significance', 'literal meaning' and so forth. The relationship between emotivism and logical positivism is contingent rather than necessary. This can be seen by the fact that other emotivist thinkers developed their ethical theories quite independently of their general philosophical regard for the analytical achievements of the positivist school. For instance, Stevenson writes in 1937 that his studies with Wittgenstein in Cambridge led him to an interest in the Viennese positivists which was by no means uncritical. This is because, he says, 'it seems quite obvious that a great deal of their logical rigour is gained at the expense of side-stepping fundamental and decently human difficulties.' (5) However, he does acknowledge that 'any speculative metaphysics will be idle unless the intellectual discipline and criticism of these men is taken seriously'. (6) Likewise, Barnes recalls that when positivists like Ayer took over his emotivist suggestion they used it to tread paths which he declined

to follow. (7) Also, Duncan-Jones states in his 'Ethical language' dissertation that he adheres to the general philosophical analysis of G.E Moore who was, of course, no positivist.

We can see, then, that the emotivist style of ethical theorising is not necessarily related to the specific doctrines of logical positivism. Rather, it relates to the broader doctrines of empiricism. Also, we can discern that Ayer had no direct influence upon the development of other emotivist theories. The work of Stevenson, Duncan-Jones and Barnes all preceded the publication of Langauge, Truth and Logic. Ayer's importance lies in his popularisation of the emotive theory in a controversial positivist language, rather than making an original theoretical contribution within the emotivist tradition.

Having outlined the historical context of the emergence of ethical emotivism, we need to address in detail the question of what are the conceptual assumptions which underpin its expression; it is necessary to establish the form of understanding which constitutes the emotivist, and more generally non-cognitivist account of ethics.

7. Non-cognitivism and Liberal-individualism.

It is our purpose in this section to specify in greater detail than was provided earlier the nature of the relationship between the non-cognitivist style of ethical theorising and the empiricist variety of liberal-individualist thought. For it has already been seen that the non-cognitivist thesis, set forth as a philosophical claim which purports to be objective, amounts at bottom to the contention that the final basis of choice for moral standards can only be an individual's agreement with, or admiration for, the attitudes which the standards express. However, this 'philosophical' claim, it shall be argued, amounts to a very particular *moral* position: an evaluative or ideological understanding of man, with intrinsic practical (including political) import, that deserves the title of liberal-individualism.

Our central contention, therefore, will be that non-cognitivism fails to provide, as it sets out to do, a purely descriptive analysis of the nature of morality. Rather, we shall see that non-cognitivism expresses an ideological evaluation, not observation, of that experience, and therefore fails to maintain the clear distinction, which it presumes to exist, between *philosophical* as opposed to *ideological* conceptions of man.

It will be recalled that non-cognitivism maintains that there is no such thing as moral cognition, knowledge or 'objective values'. Sabina Lovibond notes that this denial of there being such a thing as moral knowledge of a world of 'objective values' may be seen as an expression of the liberal-individualist notion of freedom, as the condition in which no one can order you about, in that no one can tell you that you are mistaken in your moral (or other) values. (1) There is a sense in which this claim is relatively uncontentious: the connection between empiricist philosophy (within which non-cognitivism is located) and liberal politics is a familiar one, and it is one which has been explicitly acknowledged, to a greater or lesser degree, by non-

cognitivist thinkers. Both Hare and Mackie have recently stated that their respective theories are to be understood as being expressions of, broadly speaking, a liberal variety of utilitarianism which protects personal freedom. However, what we need to specify is the sense in which the non-cognitivist expression of this notion of freedom is *ideological* rather than philosophical in character, and relates to an evaluative conception of man which is constitutive of the liberal-individualist ideological understanding as expressed within the empiricist rather than (most notably) the Kantian rationalist tradition of philosophical thinking.

Charles Taylor identifies three interrelated notions which are built into the distinctly modern conception of the subject and his relation to the external world, and which are fundamental to the 'epistemological tradition' associated with Western philosophical thought from the Enlightenment to the present day. He writes that

> The first is the picture of the subject as ideally disengaged, that is as free and rational to the extent that he has fully distinguished himself from his natural and social worlds, so that his identity is no longer to be defined in terms of what lies outside him in these worlds. The second, which flows from this, is the punctual view of the self, ideally ready *qua* free and rational to treat these worlds - and even some of the features of his own character - instrumentally, as subject to change and reordering in order the better to secure the welfare of himself and other like subjects. The third is the social consequence of the first two; an atomistic construal of society as constituted by, or ultimately to be explained in terms of, individual purposes. (2)

For Taylor, this picture of the subject has to be understood as something like a *moral ideal*. It generates the ideals of 'self-responsibility' and 'freedom as self-autonomy' which are basic to our civilisation or modern culture, in that, as Taylor remarks, 'to be free in our modern sense is to be self-responsible, to rely on one's own judgement, to find one's purpose in oneself'. (3) What this picture

amounts to is a conception of the free or autonomous, self-defining and self-responsible subject, possessing a transcultural and ahistorical rationality, capable of distinguishing himself from all natural and social particularity and objectifying the world, determining his own purposes (as reflective of his own natural desires) independently from that particularity, and standing in social arrangements by which these purposes, as manifest in instrumentally reasonable choices, are best satisfied.

It is fair, I think, to identify this picture of the 'unencumbered self' as liberal-individualist in character; or at least to acknowledge that the conception of the 'free rational man' is a central constitutive assumption of any 'individualist' understanding in general, and is most notably associated with the liberal-individualist understanding in particular. Further, we can see that the form of this understanding is ideological, in the sense that it amounts to an *evaluative portrayal of ideal moral (and political) relationships* which pictures the individual in a morally coherent world. That is, it is an understanding the form of which is the product of an ethical imagination: it *creates* a moral (and political) identity the sense of which is articulated in a particular vocabulary or language, and it has the persuasive force of generating moral and political commitment from persons who, as adherents, identify themselves in terms of that portrayal. As such, it is an understanding which possesses an intrinsic practical import in that it *prescribes* how we ought to conceive of ourselves in the ethical world, and creates the sense in which the actions of a committed adherent constitute the practical application of a set of beliefs.

It is a feature of any ideological understanding that it is irreducibly ethical or evaluative. The particular conception of moral identity articulated therein cannot be categorised in the same way as, for example, dentists, members of Sunderland Football Club or the Rotary Club. This is because the class of person located within an ideological identity is not classifiable in the same way as members of a professional, sporting or charitable institution. Indeed, an ideological identity does not fit any type of sociological description: it is not specifiable in terms of any social condition or performance. To suggest, for example, that the Marxist notion of the 'proletariat'

and the 'bourgeoisie' can be specified in terms of such (value neutral) sociological descriptions as the working and the middle classes is to miss the ideological sense in which, for the Marxist, the 'proletariat' are exploited by their 'bourgeois' manipulators. It is to fail to capture the sense in which these notions, as employed in Marxist ideological discourse, are constitutive of evaluative conceptions endowed with an ethical significance which elevates the portrayal of the ideal type beyond anything of comparable standing in the world which can be described in commonplace terms. (4)

The point to be drawn from this is that an ideological understanding conceives rather than perceives the world: that which is presented is an evaluation and not an observation. It is not, therefore, to be understood as providing a more or less accurate 'picture of the world' which is capable of verification or refutation. It does not, despite the claims of ideological thinkers of various persuasions, constitute an objective representation or description of some external moral and political reality which is capable of being either true or false in any referential sense. The committed adherent of a particular ideological portrayal does not find an independently 'given' moral and political world before him which he perceives from a particularly 'correct' or insightful viewpoint. Rather, he identifies himself within an ideological understanding, 'world-picture' or coherent imaginative portrayal of ideal moral and political relationships which creates the sense of what constitutes, for him, moral and political reality. (5)

Put another way, it is an understanding which specifies in a self-referential sense what a commited adherent 'believes in' rather than enabling him to 'believe that' something standing independent of and external to his moral and political experience is indeed the case. Thus the adherent may be said to have an objective knowledge of those beliefs which constitute the understanding, but not an objective knowledge in the sense of grasping or picking out some relevantly descriptive features of an independent and external moral and political reality which corresponds with that understanding or set of beliefs.

We can see the sense in which the liberal-individualist picture of the 'free rational' subject, and the notion of personal freedom which

follows from it, takes the form of an ideological understanding. For it is not to be understood as a purely descriptive characterisation of man which actually obtains, or is even attainable, in the world. Rather, it constitutes an evaluative moral ideal which is conceived within the liberal-individualist portrayal of ethical experience, not perceived in the world. Further, we shall argue that it is this moral ideal which lies at the heart of the non-cognitivist position. We need, therefore, to show how this evaluative conception of man is presumed and expressed in the non-cognitivist argument. Before we perform this task, though, we ought to be clear about the distinction between the philosophical and the ideological understanding, for this will enable us to specify the sense in which non-cognitivism relates to the empiricist variety of the liberal-individualist tradition.

Non-cognitivists have taken their characterisation of the nature of moral experience to be exclusively derived from a philosophical investigation. And in the earlier expositions of the theory, writers such as Ayer and Stevenson made the additional assumption that any philosophical enterprise, properly understood, serves a purely clarifying function which, being in itself value-neutral, generates no prescriptions or recommendations of a practical sort. The emotivist A.J. Ayer states this assumption most confidently when he writes that:

> The theory is entirely on the level of analysis; it is an attempt to show what people are doing when they make moral judgements; it is not a set of suggestions as to what moral judgements they are to make. And this is true of all moral philosophy, as I understand it. All moral theories... in so far as they are philosophical theories, are neutral as regards actual conduct. (6)

Ayer's notion is that a genuinely philosophical investigation into the nature of morality constitutes an attempt to specify the logical properties of moral concepts and clarify the meaning of ethical language which expresses moral experience. Such elucidation, in the words of Wittgenstein, 'leaves everything as it is': it makes coherent and consistent sense of that which is there, it does not suggest that which ought to be. (7)

Put another way, a philosophical investigation is to be understood as an examination of the validity of postulates or assumed conditions which make possible the issuing of descriptive statements or claims to propositional knowledge of that which is in the nature of things. This conception of the limits of philosophy, widely shared within the modern analytic tradition, remains, I think, the most plausible. In suggesting that any meta-ethical philosophical enquiry cannot generate prescriptions or normative recommendations of a practical sort relating to moral action or commitment, it provides a useful demarcation which makes clear the distinction between 'ethical analysis' and 'moralising', or philosophical and ideological understanding. (8)

This distinction can be stated in the following way. As applied to ethics, a philosophical enquiry constitutes an investigation into the validity of assumptions relating to the nature of ethical experience. Its task is to offer an analysis of descriptions of the moral condition, or ask 'second-order' questions relating to the validity of the 'first-order' or direct descriptions of ethical experience. By contrast, a particular ideological understanding idealises that condition in an evaluatively significant manner: it does not provide a descriptive analysis of ethical experience (which is capable of being either true or false) but rather creates a particular sense of that experience through an evaluative portrayal of ideal moral relationships. It does not investigate anything and is not therefore, strictly speaking, a theoretical understanding.

More specifically, it does not perceive the world and generate any technical knowledge about it which can be put to any instrumentally practical use. Nonetheless, it does possess an intrinsic practical import the evaluative sense of which is non-technical or non-instrumental: it provides the non-instrumental rational sense in which an adherent ought to affirm, in action, the relationship which is portrayed. It determines the sense in which any practical action undertaken by a committed adherent is intelligible or is appropriate to the affirmation of the relationship in question. That is, it possesses an intrinsic practical import in the form of prescriptions about how the adherent ought to conceive of himself and act in a manner which affirms the moral 'ends' of the relationship in question, although it

does not tell him what to do, or recommend in any precise technical way which 'means' he ought to adopt in the achievement of those 'ends'.

A philosophical enquiry, by contrast, does not possess this prescriptive function because it is not grounded upon any evaluative conception of ideal relationships which makes it possible to prescribe anything in an evaluatively significant manner. What follows from this is the suggestion that any attempt to engage in practical or normative moral philosophising does not constitute a legitimate application of what we have specified as a genuine philosophical enquiry, but rather amounts to an evaluative enterprise which is grounded, in all probability, upon a recognisable ideological understanding of some kind or other.

The point, then, is that philosophical descriptive analysis and ideological evaluation constitute two *logically different* forms of understanding. It follows that there is no strong logical relationship of entailment between them. There is no sense in which a philosophical enquiry can conclusively *inform* us of the validity or otherwise of an ideological portrayal, because such a portrayal cannot be tested. An ideological understanding is not in any conclusive sense justifiable through an appeal to philosophical reasoning, nor is it derived from philosophical reflection or grounded upon philosophical thinking. This is because the kind of reasons provided (whether good or bad) within a philosophical argument cannot necessarily compel an ideological adherent to either maintain or abandon his commitment. Although it is undoubtedly a contingent fact that philosophical reflection may change the mind of an adherent by undermining his intellectual confidence or enthusiasm, such a response is not the necessary outcome of a conclusion forced upon him by the logic or reasonableness of his philosophical argument. Because an ideological conviction is at bottom a matter of what one has been persuaded to 'believe in', rather than what one has been shown to be logically demonstrable, the exercise of philosophical reasoning cannot necessarily make a difference to it.

However, this is not to suggest that there is no relationship whatsoever between philosophy and ideology. It is not to suggest, furthermore, that it is a purely contingent historical fact that certain philosophical positions of the past have emerged at the same time as

their (seemingly) associated ideologies. Rather, the relationship can be stated in the following way. Where there is an instance of a recognisably ideological portrayal or 'moral ideal' being articulated within the main body of a philosophical argument and couched in a specific philosophical vocabulary, then it is the ideological component of the argument which is presumed, and stands prior to, the philosophical argument which attempts to give it *convincing and coherent expression* through the logical clarification and presentation of its meaning. The priority of a presumed ideological view over its philosophical expression establishes the weaker logical connection between the two understandings, in that if a particular ideological portrayal is presumed, then it broadly determines, and logically restricts, the range of concepts employed within a style of philosophical reasoning which can count as an intelligible expression of it. For example, any attempted philosophical expression of liberal ideological views must relate to, in the sense of making coherent use of, certain concepts which are special to the liberal ideological tradition, if it is to count as an intelligible expression of it at all.

Our contention is that this is the logical sense in which the non-cognitivist thesis constitutes an attempt to give convincing and coherent philosophical expression to a presumed evaluative conception of man (with intrinsic practical import) which is liberal-individualist, and ideological, in character. However, this claim needs to be substantiated by specifying in greater detail the fundamental characteristic features of the variety of liberal-individualism which historically relates to non-cognitivism, and showing how these features are expressed in the non-cognitivist argument. The task is to disentangle the ideological component, as distinct from the philosophical, which rests in the non-cognitivist thesis.

The variety of liberal-individualism which I have in mind is located in the empiricist, as distinct from the Kantian rationalist, tradition of philosophical thought. It is a tradition which has roots in the writings of David Hume, has greater elements in the work of Adam Smith, and finds more systematic expression in the works of such notable writers as J.S. Mill, Bertrand Russell and Isaiah Berlin.

David Hume is to be considered the founder of this tradition, and the central figure in its emergence. For although Hume's moral and political philosophy has a strong (perhaps dominant) flavour of sceptical conservatism, it is possible to discern a liberal-individualist element within the complex body of his work. Thus we find Hume emphasising both the liberal values of personal freedom and the impartial rule of law, and the conservative values of the importance of a ranked social order and a political constitution that reflects and upholds that order. Therefore, as Miller notes, Hume's ideological conception of man can be understood to be simultaneously liberal and conservative. (9) Whilst showing sensitivity to the influence of custom, convention and social hierarchy upon the moral agent, Hume nonetheless made the 'individualist' assumption that it was possible (although difficult) for people to abstract from their particular spatio-temporal position in arriving at moral appraisals. It is this assumption, coupled with the notion that morality is a matter of the passions, which formed the basis of a tradition of liberal-individualist thought which was, so to speak, *in the making* in the mid to late 18th century, and which found more systematic expression in the 19th and 20th centuries. (10)

R.G. Collingwood indicates the foundations of this understanding when he writes that:

> Liberalism... begins with the recognition that men, do what we will, are free; that a man's acts are his own, spring from his own personality, and cannot be coerced. But this freedom is not possessed at birth; it is acquired by degrees as a man enters into the self-conscious possession of his personality through a life of discipline and moral progress. (11)

Liberal-individualism, therefore, presents a picture of the autonomous man standing free in the world and undertaking full responsibility for his actions in it. This picture is founded upon the assumption that self-identity stands logically prior to, and independent of, any substantive social arrangement. Two related notions follow from this. The first is that the possession of this self-awareness of one's personal condition makes moral progress possible. The second is that

the condition of freedom (in the negative sense of lack of external restraint or coercion) is a necessary prerequisite of, and marks the possibility of, self-determination and moral self-development: it enables the individual to acquire the capacity to order his life to suit his personal wants and needs as manifested in self-chosen actions.

Therefore, for the liberal-individualist, (of the variety we have in mind) morality is grounded in 'enlightened' self-interest. Its rationale is constituted in terms of the specification of individual purposes or goals and the instrumentally reasonable satisfaction of desires. However, the liberal-individualist claims, the achievement of these goals can only be guaranteed within a social arrangement, established moral community, or civil association in which constraints are imposed whereby the pursuit of self-interest is restricted to that area of private life which does not adversely affect or harm the interests of others. It is the recognition of the need to constrain the pursuit of purely prudential gain through a system of mutual social co-operation which constitutes, for the liberal-individualist, the rational decision to honour the moral obligation, and impose the discipline, of self-restraint. Such obligation to respect the rights of others to pursue their own mutually restricted activities is manifested in the acknowledgement of the authority of civil laws which specify the conditions to be subscribed to in making choices and in performing self-chosen transactions with others. It is within a system of civil law that the individual freedom to act in a particular manner is protected, subject to the condition that any such action does not encroach unfavourably upon others.

The liberal-individualist, therefore, understands social activity and moral actions to be intelligible in terms of rule-following: that is, actions undertaken in accordance with the established civil laws which are *universally applicable* in the sense of stating equal treatment for all persons in all relevantly similar circumstances. The legal relationship between persons is equal and impartial: every citizen is equal before the law. Any infringement of those individual rights and freedoms which are protected by law (including the right to private property) constitutes, for the liberal-individualist, irrational, immoral

and unjust action. It is to break the rules upon which the mutually cooperative benefit of protecting individual purposes is established.

This characterisation of the fundamental features of a particular variety of liberal-individualism serves the purpose of highlighting the central notions of moral progress, the conception of moral obligation as the rational constraint of self-interest through the establishment of universal rules, and the idea of moral community as civil association, which are constitutive of it. Specific attention to the vocabulary used in non-cognitivist argument reveals how these notions are also evident preoccupations of the non-cognitivist position.

Stevenson discusses the case of moral agent A who believes that he is bound to follow a rule of conduct which has been given an external authority because it is grounded upon an 'objective value' and writes:

> My quarrel with A is not for his feeling bound in obedience to a rule of conduct... It is fortunate that we can bind the divergent aspects of our personality by feeling bound to a principle... My quarrel with A is only over his insisting that he didn't set up the rule, either as an expression of his own individualism, or as a consequence of his training. To deny this is only a defensive gesture of a man who must shelter himself from others influence. It cuts one off from all growth. (12)

Stevenson continues that the alternative open to A is to 'know what rule to set up by deciding what he would most want to do, independently of his training' (13): a decision which involves the 'emancipation from authority', 'finding one's self' and 'establishing an individual set of values' without 'pretending that such values are supported by the very nature of things' (14).

Likewise, Hare contends that:

> If I refuse to make my own decisions, I am, in merely copying my fathers, showing myself a lesser man than they; ... to become morally adult (involves)... learning to make decisions of principle; it is to learn to use 'ought'-sentences in the

realisation that they can only be verified by reference to a standard or set of principles which we have by our own decision accepted and made our own' (15)

Both Stevenson and Hare assume, then, that the movement towards a condition of moral adulthood, and the possibility of moral development or growth, necessarily involves the self-realisation that one has to drop any previous dependence on parental or more generally cultural authorities nurtured through the process of social training, and choose those principles which are appropriate to one's own desires, wants or needs. This notion of the possibility (and desirability) of emancipating oneself from those authoritative standards which restrict or frustrate the expression of mutually compatible individual wants is a particularly liberal-individualist assumption. It is reflective of the liberal concern for the achievement of a 'self-conscious possession of personality' which is deemed to be a necessary precondition for attaining the degree of self-responsibility or moral discipline which constitutes progress. Further, it is to make the liberal-individualist assumption that the achievement of moral adulthood generates individual recognition of the need for self-imposed restraints, as manifest in the undertaking of obligations to follow universal rules of conduct. For non-cognitivists have tended to assume that it is a characteristic feature of all moral understanding and action that rule-following adopted therein is in some sense make universal. How is this notion of 'universalisablity' built into the non-cognitivist style of ethical theorising?

Stevenson, following Hume, states the requirement of universalisability in terms of *psychological dispositions*: he argues that it is a contingent fact about our psychological 'make-up' that we make moral utterances in accordance with the specifications that what we say or do is always governed by an appeal to universal standards. (16) For Stevenson, this psychological requirement that our moral prescriptions are considered to be applicable in all identical circumstances in relation to all relevantly similar persons is what makes any moral system functional. It is what makes moral communication between persons possible; it establishes the degree of

trust which makes our moral life, in the pragmatic sense, workable. (17)

Hare, following Kant, makes the stronger claim that it is a *logical* requirement of moral discourse that any particular judgement of the form 'X ought to do Y' implies, in the sense that it is intelligibly translatable into, a universal prescription of the form 'X and others ought to do Y in identical circumstances'. For Hare, in other words, a moral agent is logically compelled - on pain of contradiction - to apply his adopted ethical principle universally and consistently in all identical situations which relate to all relevantly similar persons.

There certainly appears to be an element of truth in the suggestion that all moral practice is characterised, and is intelligible, in terms of the universal, that is consistent, application of rules. Wittgenstein has shown that the sense of all practices (including moral) is determined by the use of rules, and that our grasp of such rules is manifested in actions the appropriateness of which indicate our 'mastery of the practice'. A requirement of such mastery involves knowing how to apply consistently the rules which constitute practices. It is important to note, however, that Wittgenstein's point is purely conceptual: it indicates the sense in which the 'logical grammar' of any practice is shaped by the application of rules; and specifies the conditions, in terms of consistency, in which any rule-following utterance or action is intelligible. This point does not, in itself, presuppose any substantive notions, or generate any practical recommendations as to how we ought to conduct ourselves in a particular fashion. Likewise, Kant's notion of a 'categorical imperative' is, in itself, purely formal and hence empty: it needs to be applied to some substantive conception of man if it is to generate any practical consideration of treatment.

Our suggestion, however, is that the non-cognitivist adoption of the 'principle of universalisability' extends beyond this conceptual point and relates to a substantive notion which is recognisably liberal-individualist in character. In order to show this it is necessary to note that the principle of univeralisability, as expressed in the liberal-individualist understanding, is bound up with the 'Golden Rule' or maxim 'Do as you would be done by'. This is a moral or

evaluative recommendation: it requires that everyone shall be judged by the same standard by which he judges himself. Furthermore, this requirement presupposes that all individuals have specifiable interests or purposes which stand independent from particular social identities and seek equality of treatment in terms of these interests or purposes. It is to discount as irrelevant any discrimination between persons which relates to particular identities characterised in terms of sex, race, nation, social standing or class.

The point, then, is that the liberal-individualist adoption of the formal 'principle of universalisability' is set within the context of a substantive conception of man, and relates to the moral maxim 'treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself', which makes little sense outside of the context of a liberal-individualist conception of morality. A Marxist, for example, may indeed be formally committed in a way which relates to Wittgenstein's conceptual point about the consistent application of rules to treat equally, and expect to be treated equally by, those who he identifies within his moral practice to be fellow 'proletarians'; but it is precisely because of this notion of the primacy of the class identity (in the ideological sense) that he would expect to treat members of the 'bourgeoisie' in a different fashion from the way in which he expects to be treated himself. It is, therefore, only if the liberal-individualist ideological conception of man as rationally transcending all cultural particularities is assumed that the substantive notion of universal treatment in all relevant aspects (ie. relating to individual interests and purposes) has any practical sense. And it is this substantive notion of universalisability which is adopted by non-cognitivists, in that they assume the recognisably liberal-individualist conception of man specifying individual interests and so forth, upon which this notion is applied.

We can see then that this substantive notion of universalisability is *not*, despite the claims of the non-cognitivists, to be understood as a constitutive feature of *all* moral thinking. Rather, it is a feature of *liberal moral thinking*: it is a characteristic of a particularly liberal-individulist evaluative conception of morality. To assert, as the non-cognitivists do, that universalisability (in this substantive sense of treating equally

individuals who have identical interests and find themselves in identical circumstances) is of the essence of moral valuation is not to tell us what 'morality' means or how moral words are used. Rather, it is to prescribe a meaning for 'morality' and other moral words, and implicitly it is to prescribe a morality of a recognisably liberal kind. Likewise, it is to presuppose a substantive liberal-individualist ideological notion of equal treatment in terms of individual interests to which the formal notions of the consistent application of rules is attached.

This substantive notion of universalisability is reflected in the non-cognitivist conception of a *moral community*. Hare argues in Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method and Point (1981) that his theory of 'rational universal prescriptivism' establishes the *point* of a moral community. His idea is that our sense of moral obligation as constraint is generated from our capacity to place ourselves in others' exact positions through the application of the universalisability principle. For Hare, (echoing Hume) this capacity to have an 'impartial sympathy' for others' predicaments generates our sense of moral compulsion to wish for, and accommodate, the fulfilment of others' preferences or expressed interests. He writes that 'we retain, all of us, the freedom to prefer what we prefer, subject to the constraint that we have... to prefer that' which, if we placed ourselves in others' exact situations, we would imagine they would prefer. (18)

Further, Hare argues, it follows that any practical adoption of the universalisability principle leads us all to seek for the achievement of a 'total impartial preference' for those principles which are reflective of interests that are of general utility to all of us, or are constitutive of the common interest. (Where the maximisation of the common interest includes the protection of the individual to express preferences which do not adversely affect others). Thus, Hare concludes:

> In preferring what we prefer, morality compels us to accommodate ourselves to the preferences of others, and this has the effect that when we are thinking morally and doing it rationally we shall all prefer the same moral prescriptions about matters which affect other people (though in matters which we do not, we remain

free). Moral thinking is thus revealed as something that we have to do in concert, though each individual has to play his own part... Reason leaves us with our freedom, but constrains us to respect the freedom of others, and to combine with them in exercising it. (19)

For Hare, in other words, it is our capacity to have an impartial sympathy for the predicament of others, and our ability to reach a 'total impartial preference' for principles that are of general utility, which constitutes moral (as distinct from prudential) thinking or reasoning, and which makes possible the mutual co-operation within a moral community, and the obligations undertaken therein.

It is a conception of the rationale of morality which is also reflected in the writings of J.L Mackie. For Mackie conceives of 'morality in the narrow sense' as providing 'acceptable principles of constraint on action the general encouragement and widespread respect for which' will do the most to counter the dangers of individuals pursuing purely selfish goals at the expense of the common interest. (20) And, Mackie says, the point of morality (in this narrow sense) is the recognition 'that it is necessary for the well-being of the people in general that they should act in some extent in ways that they cannot see to be (egotistically) prudential and also in ways that in fact are not prudential. Morality has the function of checking what would be the natural result of prudence alone.' (21)

The non-cognitivist conception of the point of morality and the function of moral community may be seen as a reflection of the liberal-individualist ideological notion of a *civil association*. For it is to conceive the rationale for the formation of moral society in terms of the voluntary undertaking of individuals who seek mutual protection and co-operation to lay down moral rules of conduct whereby the common interest of all is guaranteed, including the freedom of individual expression of preference and action which does not infringe the interests of others. For the non-cognitivist, such co-operative tolerance of the interests of others is possible through the rational establishment of moral obligations (generated by the adoption of the universalisability principle) which transcend the considerations of

prudence. It is a view which is grounded upon the substantive liberal notion of 'universalisability' the moral sense of which specifies the conditions for consistent equality of treatment in terms of individual interests. The non-cognitivist conception of moral thinking and moral association, therefore, reflects the liberal-individualist emphasis of the importance of rules and obligations in all voluntary associations: whose purpose is to preserve the opportunity for every individual to join with others in rewarding relationships not injurious to others. It is to express the characteristically liberal assumption that the liberty and welfare of the individual and the justice and security of society depend upon there being clearly defined and enforced legal relationships between all of its members.

We have attempted to indicate the logical and historical manner in which the non-cognitivist style of ethical theorising is inseparable from a particular strain of liberal-individualist ideological discourse which finds expression in the empiricist philosophical tradition. This is not to suggest that non-cognitivism and this variety of liberal-individualism are synonomous or totally indistinguishable - an empiricist liberal thinker such as J.S. Mill was clearly not a non-cognitivist - but it is to declare the ideological sense in which the non-cognitivist approach to ethics since the Enlightenment is to be understood as being a distinctive style of philosophical reasoning which constitutes an expression of a presumed and recognisably liberal-individualist conception of morality.

It is clear that the force of this suggestion rests upon an acceptance of the distinction between philosophy and ideology which has been developed in this section. (22) For non-cognitivists would not be necessarily perturbed by the suggestion that their thesis can be characterised as reflecting a (broadly speaking) liberal-individualist conception of morality, so long as it is conceded that such an enterprise is not in itself the product of engaging in the type of 'moralising' which is inherent in ideological or evaluative discourse, but rather constitutes a philosophical analysis or clarification of the sense of 'the moral life' which is founded upon an accurate description of the nature of ethical experience. However, it is this concession

which is being denied. For we have suggested that the philosophical enterprise of non-cognitivism is based upon distinct ideological, not philosophical, assumptions: assumptions which include the notions of 'freedom as self-autonomy' and 'self-responsibility', and which constitute an evaluative portrayal of ideal moral and political relationships that is neither true or false in a descriptive way, the acceptance of which rests ultimately upon an act of faith or commitment, rather than philosophical justification. (23)

This amounts to the claim that non-cognitivism is to be understood as an ideological as well as a philosophical achievement. For although non-cognitivism has made an undoubted philosophical contribution to the logical clarification of issues relating to our understanding of the nature of moral experience, in that it has informed us, for example, of the metaphysical pretentions or fallacious beliefs in 'objective values' which have been intrinsic to the philosophical justification offered to support other ideological positions, it has also contributed, in the liberal-individualist ideological sense, to the rebuttal of other ideological stances incompatible with its own particular conception of morality. For instance, J.L. Mackie's expressed hope that 'concrete moral issues can be argued without appeal to any mythical objective values' is 'based on some conception of the flourishing of human life' which is itself ideological in character. (24)

What follows from this argument is the claim that previous philosophical disputes conducted in the modern non-cognitivist tradition have been intelligible because the debate has been grounded upon, and determined by, certain ideological assumptions which relate to a liberal-individualist framework or context. This is to assert the weaker logical sense in which non-cognitivism is related to liberal-individualism. As a final point, it may be suggested that a version of non-cognitivism could be formulated in the future which abandoned its attachment to the notion of self-autonomy and so forth, upon which its logical and historical connection with liberal-individualism is established. I doubt that this is possible. If non-cognitivism were to abandon its central conception of morality as a matter of individual free choice voluntarily to establish a moral practice which reflects

the shared attitudes of individuals, then it would, so to speak, lose its 'moral' or point. It would not constitute a revision of an established tradition of moral thought, but would amount to a radically different understanding.

8. Berlin and Russell.

It was noted in the previous section that a liberal account of ethical and political life is characteristically presented within a philosophical argument. And we have suggested that such a depiction takes the form of an ideological understanding which is expressed in a philosophical vocabulary: where the presumed ideological portrayal is to be understood as being logically distinct from, and standing prior to, the philosophical argument which articulates it. Further, it was contended that writers such as A.J. Ayer, C.L. Stevenson, R.M. Hare and J.L. Mackie, who are to be located in the non-cognitivist tradition of ethical theorising, have implicitly expressed and hence presumed the liberal-individualist ideological portrayal of moral agency in their philosophical analysis. Such expression is implicit because these philosophers do not understand themselves to be making, at least in their earlier writings, an explicit contribution to normative ethics or political understanding. (1) However, there are certain writers, of whom Isaiah Berlin and Bertrand Russell are good examples, who are explicitly concerned to advance liberal convictions: convictions which are expressed in philosophical arguments which are closely drawn upon the central assumptions of the non-cognitivist thesis.

Isaiah Berlin's notable achievement was to restate the liberal position in terms clearly drawn from the modern analytical philosophical tradition in which non-cognitivism has a central place. His purpose was to offer a critique of totalitarianism and its metaphysical assumptions. (2) This critique constituted an attempt to give liberalism a coherent and convincing expression within a fashionable philosophical vocabulary. It is necessary to outline the nature of this achievement.

Berlin's thesis is grounded upon two purported analytic truths. The first is the claim that it is an ineradicable feature of all human

experience that values are diverse and conflicting; not only in the 'non-cognitivist' sense that they stand relative to the expression of individual attitudes or desires, and thus conflict in relation to differences of feeling between persons or societies, but also in the sense that there is a tension between conflicting values in one individual consciousness. (3) For Berlin, it is an error to suppose that all goals, all virtues, all ideals held to be desirable by an agent can be compatibly ordered or united into a harmonious whole without loss. The second, related claim is that there are no overarching metaphysical standards of rational arbitration by which to resolve such conflicts of values between persons, societies, or within our own consciousness. This is because, Berlin says, questions of value are excluded from the realm of the determinately answerable: they are, in his view, ultimately contestable or, in modern parlance, incommensurable.

This conception of value relates to the non-cognitivist thesis in two central ways. It is to maintain that value-ascription constitutes an expression of feeling which rests ultimately upon an individual consciousness, and it is to deny the possibility of there being any 'objective values' which stand independently from such individual expression of feeling. Unlike the non-cognitivists, however, Berlin employs this conception of value to make a series of explicit recommendations for conduct which have practical import of a recognisably liberal kind. These recommendations can best be illustrated by attending to his concluding passage in the essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty', where he writes that

> It may be that the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity for them, and the pluralism of values connected with this, is only the late fruit of our declining capitalist civilisation: an ideal which remote ages and primitive societies have not recognised, and one which posterity will regard with curiosity, even sympathy, but little comprehension. This may be so; but no sceptical conclusion seems to me to follow. Principles are not less sacred because their duration cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, the very desire for guarantees that our values are eternal and secure in some objective heaven is perhaps only a

> craving for the certainties of childhood and the absolute values of our primitive past. 'To realise the relative validity of one's own convictions' said an admirable writer of our time, 'and yet stand for them unflinchingly, is what distinguishes a civilised man from a barbarian'. To demand more than this is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity. (4)

This passage reflects certain moral ideals associated with liberalism. It is built upon an ideal picture of the subject characterised in terms of the freedom of the individual to choose his own purposes without recourse to any metaphysical justification. For Berlin, the condition of moral and political immaturity is characterised as the outcome of an unenlightened, 'childish', 'primitive' or 'barbarian' dependence upon the notion of the objective values or eternal validity for our principles. To recognise the contingency, relativity and plurality of values (relative to diverse individual attitudes), and yet not shirk from this fact, is, Berlin says, the hallmark of moral adulthood and progress. It is what distinguishes the civilised man from the barbarian, or the liberal from the nationalist.

These notions of 'freedom' and 'moral maturity' are particularly liberal evaluations, and they have their place in the liberal ideological understanding. They are also, as we have seen, presumed within the non-cognitivist style of ethical theorising, and generate certain practical recommendations which relate to moral conduct. For we can see that the moral relativism which Berlin associates with moral maturity, and the reaction against non-liberal moral practices that follows from it, is also reflected in W.H.F. Barnes' statement, made in 1933 and quoted earlier, that 'In a world where nationalism threatens to destroy Civilisation a sound conviction of the relativity of all morality is likely to be not so much a solvent of morality as a salutory check on its onesidedness'. (5)

Where, though, Berlin differs from the non-cognitivists is in his explicit insistence that liberal political practice is supported by the arguments of philosophical value-pluralism. For Berlin, this theoretical

conception of value is only practically realisable within liberal society; an arrangement in which, as John Gray says

> moral conflicts are openly revealed and commended to us, not because it alone satisfies the demands of human nature, but because in it the competition of goods which is an unalterable feature of the human predicament is not shirked or evaded, but actively embraced. (6)

Berlin's assumption that there is a connection between theoretical value-pluralism and liberal practice raises the general question of what he understands to be the relationship between philosophical theory and moral ideals as manifested in practice. He partially illustrates his view on this issue when he writes that:

> It was, I think, Bertrand Russell... who remarked somewhere that the deepest convictions of philosophers are seldom contained in their formal arguments: fundamental beliefs, comprehensive views of life, are like citadels which must be guarded against the enemy. Philosophers expend their intellectual power in arguments against actual and possible objections to their doctrines, and although the reasons they find, and the logic that they use, may be complex, ingenious, and formidable, they are defensive weapons; the inner fortress itself - the vision of life for the sake of which the war is being waged - will, as a rule, turn out to be relatively simple and unsophisticated. (7)

Berlin's view, then, appears to be that a philosopher (of morals and politics) has certain 'fundamental beliefs' which he seeks to express in a formal argument. However, what is not made clear is how these 'comprehensive views of life' are related to philosophical theory: for is there a sense in which these 'convictions' are themselves philosophically informed?, and is there, for Berlin, a relation of entailment between the conviction and the philosophical expression of it?

This issue becomes clearer once it is noticed that Berlin takes certain 'fundamental beliefs' to be reflective of *true descriptions* of the human predicament. For when Berlin states his admiration for the convictions expressed by J.S. Mill in On Liberty, he writes, of Mill, that:

> he is saying something true and important about some of the most fundamental characteristics and aspirations of human beings. Mill is not merely writing a string of clear propositions (each of which, viewed by itself is of doubtful plausibility) connected by such logical links as he can supply. He perceived something profound and essential.. (8)

Now, what follows from Berlin's claim that certain convictions expressed by Mill reflect true descriptions of the human predicament is, I suggest, the assumption that a philosophical argument which is logically coherent can more or less accurately *show* these convictions to be true. And if this is correct, then there is a sense in which a plausible philosophical argument can be understood to *inform* us about the truth of the convictions expressed, and *entail* us (on pain of contradiction) to accept the convictions presented.

However, we have suggested that this view of the relationship between 'fundamental beliefs' and philosophical theory is not correct. For it is grounded upon the false assumption that certain 'comprehensive views of life' constitute true descriptions or accurate representations of the human predicament. Rather, we have argued that they take the form of an ideological understanding: that is, they constitute evaluative portrayals of ideal relationships, not pure descriptions of actual relationships in the world.

We can say, then, that Berlin's admiration for J.S. Mill's characterisation of the human predicament reveals his own commitment to the recognisably liberal portrayal. What Mill and Berlin 'perceive' to be 'profound and essential' is established *within* the liberal ideological imagination: it is not a perception or representation of something which is true independently of our acceptence of it. Rather, it is a conception of that which is *created* by the liberal mind.

Likewise, we can see that the conception of a 'moral conflict' which Gray associates with the liberal view is not reflective of 'an unalterable feature of the human predicament': it is rather a particular conception of 'moral conflict' specified in terms of competing individual purposes whose sense is established by the liberal ideological imagination; an imagination which creates the recognisably liberal sense in which we are to count it as unalterable, profound, essential, or true.

The general point to be made, then, against Berlin, is that our ethical and political convictions are ideological in character, and are constitutive of an ideal portrayal of the human predicament which creates, not represents, the significant manner in which a committed adherent views them. This is to claim, in other words, that an ideological understanding is *non-referential*, in that it does not refer to any describable features of an independently 'given' ethical and political world which we 'perceive', or more or less accurately represent, to be either true or false. Rather, it creates the evaluative sense in which we view certain features expressed within the ideal portrayal to be significant.

What follows from this is the contention that our ideological convictions are not to be understood as being informed by philosophical (or any other theoretical) argument, because such convictions are not, strictly speaking, the result of a theoretical understanding at all. That is, they do not offer a more or less accurate explanation of the nature of the real. Consequently, ideological commitments are not applied theoretical understandings which are put into practice. As such, the relationship between moral and political ideals and actions is not to be understood as a relation between (true) theory and practice. It is, however, precisely this point which is not acknowledged by Berlin when he argues that practical liberal society is justified in terms of the theoretical plausibility of value-pluralism.

Berlin's reference (quoted above) to Bertrand Russell is most appropriate in the context of our present discussion because Russell, like Berlin, was also concerned to show that our ethical convictions are philosophically informed. He wished to show that rigorous

philosophical investigation can reveal to us the truth or falsity of our fundamental moral and political beliefs. Most specifically, he argued thoughout his life that that the teachings of the empiricist tradition of philosophical thought provides sound logical reasons for the adherence to a liberal view of practical morality. Indeed, Russell suggested that philosophical empiricism and ethical liberalism are inseparable.

In his address to the National Book League in 1946, Russell delivered a short paper entitled Philosophy and Politics. In this paper he makes a series of points about the relationship between philosophical enquiry and political practice. He starts with the historical observation that 'Empiricism, broadly speaking, is connected with liberalism', and goes on to argue that the empiricist doctrine is logically superior to a variety of metaphysical 'idealisms' which have been used to support the 'dogmas' of Marxism and Nazism respectively. (9) Further, he argues that 'Empiricism... is to be commended not only on the grounds of its greater truth, but also on ethical grounds' (10), and concludes that:

> in our day as in the time of Locke, empiricist Liberalism (which is not incompatible with democratic socialism) is the only philosophy that can be adopted by a man who, on the one hand, demands some scientific evidence for his beliefs, and, on the other hand, desires human happiness more than the prevalence of this or that party or creed. Our confused and difficult world needs various things if it is to escape disaster, and among these one of the most necessary is that, in the nations which still uphold Liberal beliefs, these beliefs should be whole-hearted and profound, not apologetic towards dogmatisms of the right or the left, but deeply persuaded of the value of liberty, scientific freedom, and mutual forbearance. For without these beliefs life on our politically divided but technically unified planet will hardly continue to be possible. (11)

We can see that in running together empiricism and liberalism Russell has unwittingly revealed a truth and yet committed a conceptual

error. The error is to fail to recognise that a philosophical understanding such as empiricism is logically distinct from an ideological understanding such as liberalism. The unwitting truth is that empiricist philosophers have tended to presume the moral ideals of liberalism, and have expressed these ideals in their philosophical arguments; although not, of course, in the sense that Russell assumes. For the point is that the relationship between empiricism and liberalism is not, as Russell contends, a matter of the truth of this particular philosophical doctrine *informing* us of the truth of liberal convictions. Rather, it is a matter of the liberal convictions (which are neither true or false) being expressed in a particular philosophical vocabulary.

This general point can be related to the particular example of Russell's enterprise. Russell was an empiricist philosopher who, in at least a certain stage of his philosophical life, was attached to the non-cognitivist style of ethical theorising. In his book entitled Religion and Science, which was published in 1935, Russell indicates the outlines of an ethical theory which constitutes an early expression of the emotivist view. He writes that

> questions as to 'values' lie wholly outside the domain of knowledge. That is to say, when we assert that this or that has 'value', we are giving expression to our own emotions, not to a fact which would still be true if our personal feelings were different. (12)

The non-cognitivist character of value-ascription led Russell to observe that

> in a question as to whether this or that is the ultimate Good, there is no evidence either way; each disputant can only appeal to his own emotions, and employ such rhetorical devices as shall rouse similar emotions in others. (13)

For Russell, therefore, there are no objective values the knowledge of which can be appealed to in the resolution of ethical disagreement.

Rather, such disagreement reflects a conflict in desires which are not, in themselves, 'either rational or irrational', the resolution of which can only be achieved if one disputant is persuaded of the value of a desire expressed by another. (14) How then, Russell asks, is a moral life possible?

He argues that 'ethics is... an attempt by an individual to cause his desires to become those of his group': an effort which amounts to the indication of those desires which are in the 'general interest', in that it is only if certain desires are seen to be of common value that people will be persuaded to accept them as being valuable. (15) For Russell, therefore, 'ethics is an attempt to give universal, and not merely personal, importance to certain of our desires'(16). That is, it constitutes the attempt to appeal to those 'impersonal' desires which we all have, and which enable us to act in a manner which serves the social purpose of harmonising 'self-interest' and 'the interests of society' as a whole (17).

Russell assumes that this (non-cognitivist) characterisation of the nature of morality is an accurate description of all ethical experience, properly understood. However, as we have argued earlier, it is a conception of morality which rests upon certain liberal-individualist ideological assumptions. In other words, it is a conception which presumes an ideological portrayal of ideal moral relationships which specifies the notion of moral community as the sum total of individually shared desires, thus generating the idea that moral obligation to follow universal rules of conduct amounts to the constraint of those personal, selfish or prudential desires which cannot be harmonised with those impersonal, universal and hence 'moral' desires which make moral society possible. As such, it is a conception of morality which presumes the ideological assumptions of the particularly Humean variety of liberal-individualist thought.

We can say, therefore, that Russell's enterprise is to be understood as being both philosophical and ideological. Like the fellow non-cognitivists discussed earlier, his enterprise amounts to both a philosophical refutation of any 'objective value' conception of morality, and an ideological rebuttal of those ideological understandings (such

as Marxism and Nazism) which assume such an attachment to the notion of moral objectivity or realism in this metaphysical sense.

It is to be noted, however, that whilst Russell shares with non-cognitivists the assumption that this characterisation of ethical experience is purely descriptive (and, by implication, non-ideological), he appears to differ with them over the question of the limits of philosophy. For he seems to be committed to the view that philosophical investigations can generate explicit recommendations of a practical sort relating to moral and political action. In the concluding passage of his paper Philosophy and Politics he seems to be certain that the teachings of 'empiricist Liberalism' can specify in quite explicit detail how we ought to tackle the dangers of the modern world. For example, we ought to adopt the beliefs of 'the value of liberty, scientific freedom, and mutual forbearance', and act in a practical manner which defends them. However, this apparent assumption appears to be contradicted earlier in the paper when Russell expresses the 'modern' view of philosophy, with which he claims to 'have much sympathy': a view which suggests that philosophy is 'not required... to arrive at conclusions convenient to the government', and is not intended to influence the political convictions of people, or inculcate virtue. (18) That task, according to this view, 'should be left to parents, schoolmasters, and churches', not philosophers. (19) But it is difficult to see how Russell can consistently adhere to this 'modern' view of the limits of philosophy, and also explictly specify certain beliefs relating to practical political action which, he claims, are grounded upon the 'truth' of 'empiricist liberalism'. At the very least, a certain unexplained ambiguity or confusion appears to persist in Russell's thought.

9. Proponents of Liberalism: Dunn, Rorty and Rawls.

In the previous section we were concerned to show how in the recent past certain liberal thinkers have adopted the non-cognitivist conception of value to support their moral and political convictions. This raises two further related issues. The first is whether non-cognitivism remains a philosophical influence upon contemporary liberal theory. The second is whether it has had, and continues to have, a practical effect on the shaping of liberal-democratic social and political life. MacIntyre gives reasons to suggest that this is so, and he contends that the theoretical and practical impact of non-cognitivism (or what he calls 'emotivism') on liberal societies of the Western world has grave consequences. Before, however, we assess MacIntyre's argument, we must attend to the present discussion on the state of liberalism. For various notable commentators have been engaged in the task of specifying how modern liberalism is in a condition of crisis, and have sought to examine the possible future of the liberal understanding of moral and political life. The debate has focussed upon whether the distinctively liberal conception of the good life is grounded upon sound enough theoretical foundations, and can generate the epistemological and moral force necessary to justify practical political action in the world.

It must be noted from the outset, however, that any enquiry of this kind will be misplaced if it is based upon the mistaken notion that liberalism is theoretical in character. For we have seen that liberalism is to be understood as an ideology which does not, strictly speaking, constitute a theoretical understanding at all. Therefore it follows that it is erroneous to embark on any enquiry which seeks to assess, philosophically reflect upon, and resolve the theoretical weaknesses of the liberal position, if that enquiry is believed to be capable of conclusively informing us of the 'truth' of the liberal view through the provision of a new (and 'better') theoretical account of it.

This is because the liberal ideological position is not in itself theoretical, and is not, therefore, capable of being demonstrated as either true or false through any philosphical reflection. Nor is it the kind of account which, properly comprehended, specifies any practical recommendations or programmes of action which can be critically examined. Rather, the ideological character of liberalism is such that it constitutes a particular portrayal of moral ideals which motivate a committed adherent to act (in the non-instrumental sense) in a way appropriate to the upholding of a relationship between persons. It is this moral sense of affirming a relationship which is central to the liberal, quà ideological, view, and it is established quite independently from any elaborate theoretical arguments which may be employed in its defence.

What follows from this is the claim that there is no *necessary* sense in which the exposition of a theoretical weakness in an argument which attempts to justify liberal ideological convictions would undermine the confidence of the adherent, or endanger the future of liberalism as an understanding which motivates people to support a cause. It remains psychologically possible for adherents of the liberal portrayal to retain their commitment to it because their convictions rest ultimately upon an act of faith, not a belief in its theoretical plausibility.

The purpose of restating this characterisation of the form of ideology is to indicate the limits to what the debate on the future of liberalism can achieve: limits which, I suggest, have not been perceived clearly enough by certain writers. It is to contend that the future of liberalism rests ultimately upon the ability of liberal ideologists to capture and sustain the popular political imagination through the persuasive use of rhetoric in the political arena, and not upon the intellectual excellence of those political theorists who attempt to give the liberal understanding a detailed, coherent, and convincing expression. However, it is to be noted that although the success of the former is not logically dependent upon the achievement of the latter, there is nonetheless a connection between them. There is a contingent sense in which a particular type of political actor, one who is philosophically receptive, may feel that his ideological commitment to

liberal values is undermined by the exposure of the implausibility of the theoretical argument by which he seeks to justify it. It is this contingent possibility of the political disillusionment of the philosophically receptive audience which makes the current debate on the philosophical credentials of the various theoretical arguments used to defend liberal ideology both interesting and important. For it is to raise the question as to whether modern liberal ideological beliefs are being given the convincing theoretical expression which may support, at the psychologically contingent level, the ethical convictions of the committed. By way of answering this question, we shall firstly examine the arguments of John Dunn.

(I) John Dunn.

In an article entitled 'The Future of Liberalism' (1) John Dunn identifies (amongst others) two major varieties of modern liberal theory which are relevant to our present discussion. The first kind, which Dunn calls 'Cold War Liberalism', was advanced most notably in the 1950's by thinkers such as Berlin, Popper and Talmon. (Bertrand Russell could also be included in this list). It is a theory which concentrates primarily on the metaphysical assumptions of the 'totalitarian' political understanding, and seeks to identify the practical political possibilities which it is imperative to avoid, and which have not been avoided in actual political regimes within the Soviet bloc. Dunn argues that although as a style of social and political theory 'Cold War Liberalism' has a valuable negative appeal in specifying the range of what counts as politically prudent action, it does not generate any positive justifications for Western liberal-democratic practices. In short, it lacks positive moral force.

The second kind of theory, which Dunn calls 'Utopian Liberalism', emerged in the 1970's and is expressed most notably by John Rawls and Robert Nozick. As he points out, this Kantian style of liberal theory is utopian in the sense that it constitutes an attempt to construct an ideal or hypothetical situation - which Rawls calls the 'initial position' in a 'veil of ignorance' - from which it is possible to derive

certain rational grounds for conduct which all agents would accept despite their conflicting interests. Dunn insists that the weakness of this type of revived 'contractarian' theory, like its 17th and 18th century predecessors, is that it offers a purely abstract account of how ethical and political value should be conceived which does not, as a consequence, provide a convincing account of why 'human beings have good reason to act in the political settings in which they happen to find themselves' (2). That is, it is a tradition of liberal theorising which fails to guide the actions of political actors who find themselves in the specific political setting of Western liberal democracies.

For Dunn, therefore, both 'Cold War Liberalism' and 'Utopian Liberalism' lack sufficient practical moral and political force. He suggests that the underlying reason why this is so is that both styles of liberal theory appear to be based on morally anti-realist assumptions. This assumption is clearly apparent in 'Cold War Liberalism', where thinkers such as Berlin, Russell and Popper express their liberal views in the (broadly) empiricist philosophical tradition and associated non-cognitivist style of ethical theorising. Likewise, 'Utopian Liberals' such as Rawls appear to be committed, although for different philosophical reasons, to a rejection of moral realism. (3) Thus we find Rawls arguing, in typically Kantian terms, that our notions of moral fact, truth and objectivity are not independently given to us by 'the point of view of the universe', but are rather created within a suitably constructed social point of view. (4)

Dunn argues that this attachment to moral anti-realism makes a difference. He writes that

> The view that adult human beings can be and ought to be sovereign over their own lives is a very different view if it is grounded on epistemologically well founded claims about the nature of human rationality and the character of value for man than it can be if it is grounded merely on the presumption that there are no authoritative values external to human preference and choice to which the latter have any good reason to defer. The view that what the good for the human individual is is something which is

> ultimately and fully and solely up to that individual to see, to judge, and therefore to decide, is corrosive of any conception of external obligation and of society as a frame of non-discretionary responsibilities. (5)

Dunn's idea appears to be that both 'Cold War Liberalism' and 'Utopian Liberalism' have been guilty of overzealously rejecting the possibility of basing our sense of obligation and responsibility upon *some* version of moral realism. He wishes to indicate how the underlying assumption that there is no sense whatsoever in which human values relate to something external to the expressed desires or purposes of individuals has the consequence of placing these varieties of liberalism on very shaky ground. Referring to the Utopian variety, Dunn continues:

> To see society as a whole simply as a facility for the provision of individually acceptable experiences and to seek to reconstitute it in imagination so that it can furnish these to the largest possible degree will only be a morally commanding vision where the experiences which individuals happen to find acceptable have already been rendered (through effective socialisation) reasonably unrevolting to each other or where the force of human values has been so devastated that the idea of a vision possessing the force of *moral* command has become utterly incoherent. (6)

For Dunn, therefore, to adopt an anti-realist and individualist conception of value is to face a serious dilemma in attempting to sustain the moral force required to establish a clear sense of moral obligation amongst persons. For one of two conditions must obtain: either the moral force rests upon the contingent fact that people happen to be able to harmonise their 'self-interest' with the social good, in which case if and when such social harmony breaks down, then there is no sense of moral value or obligation which can be firmly distinguished from the purely prudential pursuit of self gain; or this harmony has already broken down and, in consequence, the danger of nihilism is realised, and the notion of a moral command has become incoherent. This must be, Dunn argues, the dilemma which most acutely

faces any liberal theoretical argument which excludes the possibilty of accounting for morality within some version of moral realism. It is only if liberal theory seeks a 'solid foundation in moral realism' (7) that these dangers can be overcome, and, in particular, 'Utopian Liberalism in any form' can be 'robust enough to stand the gales of the future'. (8) For what is needed, he suggests, is a prudential and sociologically sensitive liberalism which casts prudence as the central political virtue, but in a manner which sustains the collective sense of moral obligation in Western societies.

What, then, is the type of moral realism which Dunn is suggesting that liberalism should target in the possible achievement of this task? It is not one which is founded upon a metaphysically idealist or 'Platonic' conception of absolute value. (It is this kind of metaphysics which the liberal theoretical tradition, in both its empiricist and Kantian modes, has been at great pains to refute.) Nor is it one which can be stated along straightforward naturalist-utilitarian lines. Nonetheless, it would be a version of moral realism which established that 'what true human values are is valid apprehensions of key aspects of what is the case about human existence' (9). Now one obvious feature of human existence is its social dimension, and Dunn discerns the possibility of establishing a morally realist conception of value which relates to the social character of man and the social relations and environment which has (at least partially) shaped him. Thus he argues that 'the most promising approach.... would be to construct a liberal political theory in direct relation to the institutional substance of (and the distribution of power within) existing states.' (10) For what he wants is the formulation of a liberal conception of political value as a theory of modern politics which is not dependent upon a purely abstract and 'supposedly timeless meditation on the Form of the Good (or Just)' (11), and which avoids the difficulties of justification which is inherent in both the individualist or subjective views advanced by 'Cold War Liberalism' and 'Utopian Liberalism'. Such a theory would, for Dunn, have the advantage of justifying the practical actions of persons who find themselves occupying the actual social setting of Western liberal democracies, and providing the moral reasons for sustaining the relationships established therein. (12)

This variety of moral realism, therefore, is being required to perform the task of providing a theoretical justification for practical political action conducted within liberal democratic societies. Where, however, are its philosophical roots to be discerned? What Dunn appears to have in mind (although he does not specify this in any detail) is that these foundations relate broadly to what has been called the 'Wittgensteinian' notion of objectivity; a notion which explicitly rejects the traditional classification of what counts as a claim to objective knowledge in terms of a knowing subject who possesses a given 'self' standing independently from the external world of objects which he more or less accurately represents. Rather, this notion of objectivity (and the sense of moral realism which relates to it) presupposes that our conception of selfhood is (at least partially) socially constituted by the ethical, cultural, and ultimately linguistic practices within which it finds itself. Thus our claims to objective knowledge are specifiable in terms of our mastery of the linguistic rules which constitute these practices. According to this theory, the meaning of the linguistic practices is established prior to, and independently from, any individual appreciative understanding of them, and determines the possible range of intelligible individual responses to them. It is a view which is associated with the conceptual point that, within a particular linguistic practice, it is our communal sense of who 'we' are which stands prior to, determines, and (at least partially) constitutes our individual sense of who 'I' am.

It is this notion of the priority and independence of the communal understanding in relation to individual experiences of it which generates the sense of objectivity in terms of our individual mastery *of* something (that is, linguistic rules) which stands independently from us. According to this view, for example, the arithmetical rule that 2+2=4 is an objective truth which is determined by a convention: the sense of this truth has to be learnt by a subject who recognises its validity after being taught to master the practice of addition. Further, this process of learning to master the rules of a practice generates a sense of objectivity which, it is argued, is equally applicable to our ethical as much as to our scientific rule-following practices. This is because, it is claimed, although the nature

of our moral and scientific understandings differ in that they possess different substantive contents, and refer to different kinds of objects, they are nonetheless both based upon certain human practices of conventional rule-following which take the same *logical form*, and are therefore on an equal objective footing.

It seems plausible to suggest, then, that it is (at least broadly speaking) this notion of objectivity, and the variety of (moral) realism generated within it, which Dunn is requiring liberal theory to adopt. For he rejects the individualist and anti-realist arguments advanced in the two major varieties of contemporary liberal moral and political thought. And we can see that he is also implicitly rejecting the non-cognitivist conception of value that the 'Cold War Liberals' have tended to rely on. A similiar line of approach has been employed by Richard Rorty and Alasdair MacIntyre, who have both sought to undermine the theoretical plausibility of the liberal-individualist position by criticising the notion of the individual subject as being possessed of a given self-identity which is clearly distinguishable from the external world of objects. It becomes our task, then, to examine the arguments of Rorty and MacIntyre in detail, and consider Rawls' most recent response to criticisms levelled at his position. For it is important to note that in making these criticisms of Rawls' theory in particular and liberal-individualism in general, Rorty and MacIntyre differ radically about the question of the possibility of the liberal understanding *as such* being re-evaluated and justified within a suitably transformed theoretical framework.

(II) Richard Rorty.

Richard Rorty argues in an article entitled 'Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism' (13) that there is a need for the liberal understanding to break away from the metaphysical foundations of the 'Kantian' theoretical project associated most recently with such writers as John Rawls, Robert Nozick and Ronald Dworkin. Rorty, like Dunn, characterises this modernist Kantian project as an attempt to establish certain ahistorical rational moral principles of conduct which

individual moral subjects can appeal to whatever the particular spatio-temporal position in which they find themselves. As Rorty indicates, it is a project which presupposes that there exists some notion of the self-identifying subject who can distinguish himself from his particular talents, interests and views about the good. Further, it assumes that the moral subject is capable of engaging in moral deliberations (which establish rational principles of practical conduct) from an abstract point of view which is divorced from the particular historical context and cultural community within which he is located. Such a project, therefore, seeks to establish an ahistorical distinction between the demands of morality and those of prudence through an appeal to certain rational foundations which, it is claimed, reinforce our loyalty to the particular moral practices in which we engage.

For Rorty, this Kantian project is misconceived for a number of interrelated reasons. Most centrally, it rests upon a false conception of the self as possessive of an ahistorical rationality. He argues that we need:

> to think of the moral self, the embodiment of rationality, not as one of Rawls' original choosers, somebody who can distinguish her *self* from her talents and interests and views about the good, but as a network of beliefs, desires and emotions with nothing behind it - no substrate behind the attributes. For purposes of moral and political deliberation and conversation, a person just *is* that network, as for the purposes of ballistics she is a point-mass, or for purposes of chemistry a linkage of molecules. (14)

Rorty's point amounts to the claim that our conception of the moral self is constituted by the contingent arrangements of our moral practices, and our sense of rational moral deliberation and purpose is likewise determined by those practices. Just as the scientific practices of ballistics and chemistry determine the sense of what counts as the intelligible behaviour of a point-mass or molecule, the manifested behavioural expression of beliefs, desires and emotions is determined by a particular morally relevant rule-following practice which

constitutes the sense of moral selfhood. This is a view which, Rorty says, accepts the Quinean notion that:

> rational behaviour is just adaptive behaviour of a sort which roughly parallels the behaviour, in similar circumstances, of the other members of some relevant community. Irrationality, in both physics and ethics, is a matter of behaviour that leads one to abandon, or be stripped of, membership in some such community. For some purposes this adoptive behaviour is aptly described as 'learning' or 'computing' or 'redistribution of electrical charges in neural tissue', and for others as 'deliberation' or 'choice'. None of these vocabularies is privileged over against another. (15)

Rorty's point, then, is that our notion of moral deliberation, choice or purpose is set within a particular historical community whose rule-following practice determines the sense in which any adaptive behaviour counts as being rational or irrational. Admittedly the moral subject expresses *intentions* as manifest in deliberative choices which are not present in atoms, but our moral behaviour, just like scientific atomic behaviour, is intelligible only if one focusses on the practices which give it rational sense. Consequently, Rorty argues, reasoning in ethics is always dependent upon historically contingent practices, and does not relate to some abstract notion of ahistorical rationality assumed by liberal thinkers such as Rawls, Nozick and Dworkin.

Rorty's conception of the (moral) self is clearly, then, to be starkly contrasted with the Kantian notion of the subject who employs an ahistorical rational faculty by which to discover the sense of moral conduct independently from any historical particularity, and who engages in moral conversation with others who have the same moral sense in view. Michael Sandel makes a point which supports Rorty's view when he says that we cannot regard ourselves as Kantian subjects or Rawlsian choosers who constitute meaning on their own

> without great cost to those loyalties and convictions whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is

> inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular people we are - as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of this history, as sons and daughters of that revolution, as citizens of this republic. (16)

For Rorty and Sandel, therefore, any version of Kantian liberalism is defective in its perception of the primacy of alleged ahistorical rational foundations which purportedly support our actual sense of moral loyalty and conviction towards our moral practices. They argue that there is no such basis which generates and justifies the moral force of these loyalties and convictions. Rather, as Rorty puts it, the moral force consists *wholly* in the fact that as members of a particular community we share an overlap of beliefs, desires and emotions which enable us to identify ourselves for purposes of moral and political deliberation as fellow beings. Further, he claims, it is this network of shared convictions which supplies the distinctive features of a particular group; 'features which it uses to construct its self-image through contrasts with other groups'. (17)

Rorty states that this view of the ethical is to be associated with what he calls the 'Hegelian' tradition of moral thinking, as distinct from the 'Kantian'. He characterises this tradition, exemplified in the writings of Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche, as insisting on thinking of morality as 'the interest of an historically conditioned community rather than "the common interests of humanity"' (18). According this 'Hegelian' view, for instance, the Kantian notion of a transcultural and ahistorical rationality specifying some universally applicable moral value such as 'human dignity' is to be rejected. Also, from this perspective, the Kantian version of the distinction between morality and prudence is misconceived, because, it is argued, the transcultural and ahistorically rational foundation upon which it is built is non-existent.

How, then, is the distinction between morality and prudence construed, in Hegelian terms? Rorty writes that, for the Hegelian

> the morality/prudence distinction..... appears as a distinction between appeals to two parts of the network that is the self -

parts separated by blurry and constantly shifting boundaries. One part consists of those beliefs and desires and emotions which overlap with those of most other members of some community with which, for purposes of deliberation, she identifies herself, and which contrast with those of most members of other communities with which hers contrasts itself. A person appeals to morality rather than prudence when she appeals to this overlapping, shared part of herself, those beliefs and desires and emotions which permit her to say "We do not do this sort of thing". Morality is, as Wilfred Sellars has said, a matter of 'we - intentions'. Most moral dilemmas are thus reflections of the fact that most of us identify with a number of different communities and are equally reluctant to marginalise ourselves in relation to any of them. This diversity of identifications increases with education, just as the number of communities with which a person may identify increases with civilisation. (19)

For Rorty, therefore, any appeal to morality is determined by a particular communal sense of collective identity. To engage in moral, as distinct from prudential, deliberation is to identify oneself as a member of a community who follow a distinct set of rules: to break those rules is to 'marginalise' oneself and become alien to the cultural practice in question. Further, this self-identification with these rule-following practices is historically contingent and 'shifting' over time, and within a pluralist society different and conflicting forms of communal identification may be adhered to.

This fact, however, does not, for Rorty, undermine the endurance of a recognisably moral vocabulary or conceptual understanding between persons within a particular cultural tradition. The central virtue of 'intrinsic human dignity' is, for example, sustained as 'the comparative dignity of a group with which a person identifies herself' (20). Further, Rorty suggests:

Nations or churches or movements are, on this view, shining historical examples not because they reflect rays emanating from a higher source, but because of contrast-effects - comparisons

> with other, worse communities. Persons have dignity not as an interior luminescence, but because they share in such contrast-effects. (21)

Rorty pictures moral understanding, then, as being located within the historically contingent tradition of a cultural practice. He adds that:

> it is a corollary of this view that the moral justification of the institutions and practices of one's groups ..... is mostly a matter of historical narratives, (including scenarios about what is likely to happen in certain future contingencies) rather than of philosophical metanarratives. (22)

What Rorty means here is that our moral justification for our particular communal moral life is a matter of pragmatically calculating the general benefits to be gained by sustaining or departing from an attachment to those institutions which generate our practical moral understanding. This involves a critical examination of what we hold dear, or value, within our traditional culture, and such an examination is made possible through a historical narrative assessment of those conventions which have shaped our cultural identity. What we cannot do, Rorty insists, is to justify our particular moral practices in terms of philosophical 'metanarratives' which seek to deduce general principles of conduct that are transculturally and ahistorically applicable to all practices.

How does this relate to our discussion of liberalism and liberal societies? Rorty distinguishes between two types of contemporary liberalism: 'postmodernist bourgeois liberalism' and 'philosophical liberalism'. He characterises 'philosophical liberalism' as a collection of Kantian principles (including the notion of inalienable human rights) which amounts to a philosophical 'metanarrative' or story that purports to justify loyalty to, or breaks with, certain contemporary communities through the formulation of general abstract principles of conduct which these communities either satisfy or fail to meet. We have already seen how Rorty refutes the foundations upon which this

philosophical Kantian project is built. He argues that the Kantian 'buttresses' of accounting for morality and rationality in transcultural and ahistorical terms is a nonsense. By contrast, Rorty characterises 'postmodernist bourgeois liberalism' as 'the Hegelian attempt to defend the institutions and practices of the rich North Atlantic democracies without using such buttresses' (23). It is, Rorty says, an attempt to 'convince our society that loyalty to itself is morality enough, and that such loyalty no longer needs an ahistorical back-up' (24). Such an attempt can be successful, for Rorty, because it is possible to construct a historical narrative about what our liberal democratic communities have achieved in the past, and some scenario about what they might do in the future. It is the provision of this historical narrative which, Rorty hopes, can succeed in re-affirming the traditional communal identities which sustain our Western political practices. There need not be, and there cannot be, for Rorty, any philosphical justification of our Western cultural understanding through an appeal to a Kantian 'metanarrative'. It is not necessary, he argues, nor is it philosophically plausible, to employ the vocabulary of 'inalienable human rights' or an appeal to general rational principles. Rather, what is required is 'convincing our society that it need be responsible only to its own traditions, and not to the moral law as well'. (25)

Rorty is optimistic, then, about the possibility of sustaining a future political commitment to the traditional cultural values of liberal-democratic societies by constructing a pragmatic historical narrative. This optimism stems from a central sociological assumption. It is that

> Intra-societal tensions, of the sort which Dworkin rightly says mark our pluralistic society, are rarely resolved by appeals to general principles of the sort Dworkin thinks necessary. More frequently they are resolved by appeals to what he calls 'convention and anecdote'. The political discourse of the democracies, at its best, is the exchange of what Wittgenstein called 'reminders for a particular purpose' - anecdotes about the

past effects of various practices and predictions of what will happen if, or unless, some of these are altered. (26)

Rorty's contention that social and political life is primarily a matter of pragmatically resolving practical difficulties through an appeal to past custom rather than abstract principle is reflected in the writings of the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (who Rorty calls 'a post-modernist before his time') and echoes the politically conservative scepticism of David Hume. It is a view of the nature of moral and political discourse which, Rorty insists, is reflected in the style of deliberation conducted by 'postmodernist bourgeois liberals', who, unlike their Kantian contemporaries, avoid 'the formulation of general principles'. (27) As a consequence, he argues, postmodernist bourgeois liberals are far more adept than the Kantians in communicating their moral convictions in a pragmatic way which relates more closely to 'the moral consensus of the nation' or the practices and institutions of American citizens. The intellectuals of the Kantian liberal tradition have, Rorty contends, become separated from the actual practices which they have sought to justify because their abstract metanarrative theorising has had the effect of mislocating the issues that need to be resolved in the defence of these American practices. The appeal to general principles has not, and cannot, succeed. Rather, an appeal to traditional historical experience is needed, and, for Rorty, it is the historical narrative provided by the postmodernist bourgeois liberals which can secure the future of liberalism and liberal society.

Rorty's thesis is complex, and we need to examine his general conception of philosophy in order to specify his understanding of the relationship between philosophy and politics. For it is central to his project to establish what philosophy is *not*. In his major works Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature and Consequences of Pragmatism he develops the idea that philosophy is not to be understood as a 'natural kind' of discipline which has a fixed, essential and clearly demarcated subject-matter and cluster of ahistorical problems to resolve. Philosophy is not capable of discovering ahistorical 'Truths', or laying down certain theoretical foundations of knowledge which can be built up

into a coherent system of beliefs, because such 'Truths' and foundations are nowhere to be found. It is, for Rorty, a misconception of the nature of philosophy to assume that it can reach, or even aspire to, an epistemological certitude which is good for all time and all possible modes of experience.

Rorty observes, however, that this misplaced picture of philosophy has been sustained since the Enlightenment, and has been founded upon the myth of the transcultural ahistorical rational self. He shows that after Descartes (and Kant) the dominent metaphor of picturing the mind as a 'mirror of nature' (in the sense of the mind representing the external world) took hold, and philosophy became conceived as the discipline which focusses that mirror upon epistemological foundations. Both the empiricists and the idealists were captured by this metaphor of the 'mirroring' mind, although they interpreted it differently. For the empiricist, the mind was the purely *passive* recipient of a given objective reality, and for the idealist it in some sense *actively* shaped the contours of that reality, but on both accounts the mind represented or mirrored the world. As a result, Rorty notes, both empiricism and idealism understood philosophical enquiry to be the quest for those rational or logical foundations or ultimate objective grounds upon which to place our representational knowledge of the world. Philosophy, thus understood, became the analytical branch of science, and was seen to promise the indubitable foundations for all other modes of thought.

Rorty argues, like others before him (most notably Wittgenstein), that the notion of the 'foundational given' upon which this conception of philosophy is built is 'empty'. Consequently, he says, there is no strong 'correspondence' notion of 'Truth' available to us. Rather, 'truth' is, in the words of William James, 'the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief'. It follows, then, for Rorty, that we need to abandon our attachment to the mythical notion that 'Philosophy' is foundational in character, and is capable of the discovery of timeless 'Truths'. Rather, he argues that philosophy is, properly understood, like other modes of thought; a kind of narrative. It is a matter of the *edification* of the historically contingent experiences shared within a cultural traditon; and it is the task of the philosopher to engage, as a 'cultural critic', in a 'conversation' with

that tradition, and show us how our traditional cultural understanding enables us, in a pragmatic sense, to 'cope with the world'. Philosophical enquiry is then, for Rorty, *local*, not transcendental: it constitutes a historical narrative which edifies our cultural understanding of our world at a given moment by showing us where we have travelled and what we value; it does not discover certain foundations which place that knowledge on firmer ground.

It follows then that, for Rorty, philosophy cannot in any strong foundational manner justify or refute our understanding of the world. It has no privileged access to 'knowledge', in the absolute sense, and cannot conclusively demonstrate the absolute 'Truth' or Falsity' of our beliefs, because these absolutist notions of 'knowledge', 'Truth' and 'Falsity' are mythical. Rather, all that philosophy can do is express and edify those convictions which shaped, and have in turn been shaped by, our traditional understanding of the world as manifest in our cultural practices. For it constitutes a narrative which leads us up to 'where we stand at the moment', and makes clearer to us our knowledge of the world in the pragmatic way of edifying the ongoing process of reflective adjustment between various cultural needs and interests. This kind of narrative can never hope to resolve our philosophical problems, as it were, once and for all, because, for Rorty, no final metanarrative is available to us. For although philosophy may voice the main concerns of its own cultural epoch, it cannot set itself up as a master discipline of knowledge and truth.

Rorty observes that within our North Atlantic cultural tradition, 'we' are attached to, and identify ourselves in terms of, ethical and political values which can be broadly characterised as 'liberal' or 'social democratic'. These values, which include the familiar notions of representative government, freedom of speech and association, and the right to private property, are, as Rorty remarks, central to our ethical, political and social heritage. But, he argues, our political conviction toward these values and institutional practices cannot, and need not, be philosphically justified. In an article called 'From Logic to Language to Play' he writes that

philosophy, even though it is often inspired by politics, should not be thought of as a foundation for politics nor as a weapon of politics.... philosophy should try to express our political hopes rather than to ground our political practices. On the view I am suggesting, nothing grounds our practices, nothing legitimates them, nothing shows them to be in touch with the way things really are. (28)

For Rorty, therefore, political theory, like other kinds of philosophical enquiry, cannot perform the task of laying down any foundations by which to justify our political understanding as manifest in practices. No justification, in the sense of establishing or logically deducing what practical conclusions follow from fixed premises, is possible. All that is possible is a philosophical articulation of our convictions or hopes: hopes which are themselves 'ungrounded'.

Rorty's point, then, is that it is our political convictions or hopes which stand *prior* to their philosophical expression. In an article entitled 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy' (29) he insists that controversial philosophical claims about human nature or metaphysical theories of the self are not, in any foundational sense, relevant to the issue of articulating the convictions, settled habits and shared beliefs of those who identify themselves within the historical community that is committed to liberal constitutional democracy. Most notably the efforts of the Kantians to justify this commitment in terms of a foundational enterprise which is built upon a distinctive notion of rationality and the self is both pointless and misleading. For what is needed, and all that can be achieved, is the construction of a pragmatic narrative, rather than a metanarrative.

However, Rorty does concede that there nonetheless remains an urge within our present philosophical community to offer philosophical theories of the self which may serve political purposes. He admits that he is himself tempted to do so in the defence of liberal democracy. His point, though, is that nothing crucial depends upon such an achievement. This is because 'liberal democracy can get along without philosophical presuppositions'; although, he also suggests, 'a conception of the self which makes the community constitutive of the self does comport well

with liberal democracy'. (30) There is then, for Rorty, a sense in which, for the purposes of the articulation of liberal democratic values, a 'socially constitutive' conception of the self is a suitable alternative to the Kantian notion. But it is important to note, he insists, that this sense is not foundational, and that nothing crucial hangs on fleshing out 'our self-image as citizens of such a democracy with a philosophical view of the self'. (31)

The reason why this is so, Rorty claims, is that any effort to provide a philosophical view of the self which attempts to justify a set of political beliefs constitutes an articulation of a prior cultural image, not its foundation. Therefore, the philosophical achievement reached in this task is, properly understood, always a matter of edifying a presupposed cultural-political identity, rather than providing a justification of that identity. He tells us that:

> If ... one has a taste for philosophy - if one's vocation, one's private pursuit of happiness entails constructing models of such entities as 'the self', 'knowledge', 'language', 'nature', 'God' or 'history' and then tinkering with them until they mesh with each other - one *will* want a picture of the self. Since my own vocation is of this sort, and the moral identity around which I wish to build such models is that of a citizen of a liberal democratic state, I commend the picture of the self as a centerless and contingent web to those with similar tastes and similar identities. (32)

It is this notion of the 'socially constitutive self', coupled with his attachment to 'Deweyian pragmatism', which, for Rorty, provides the most appropriate philosophical expression of the liberal or social democratic view. It has the advantage of avoiding the foundationalist errors, and the liberal-individualist conception of the self, which is intrinsic to the Kantian project.

In an article entitled 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward' (33), Richard Bernstein raises an objection to Rorty's assessment of his position. For Bernstein suggests that Rorty is not simply constructing a picture of the self that fits with his prior liberal convictions, but

is, rather, '*arguing* against all notions of a centered and transcendental self'. Further, he says, of Rorty, that

> Whatever his *motivations* in coming up with a picture of the 'self as centerless, as historical contingency all the way through', he is arguing that this is a more perspicious - one is tempted to say a 'truer' - understanding of the self. (34)

Bernstein's suggestion is that Rorty is, despite his claim to the contrary, engaged in an argument with the Kantians over a philosophically contestable conception of the self. As a result, he says, Rorty must be committed to the assumption that his notion of selfhood is 'truer' in some absolute sense. We may add that if this assumption is held by Rorty (however latently) then it looks probable that, despite his denials, it is his philosophical view of the self which is the basis of his liberal convictions.

However, Rorty does, I think, successfully avoid this objection when he reiterates the point, in 'Thugs and Theorists: a Reply to Bernstein' (35), that 'we pragmatists think that the true is the good in the way of belief'. (36) That is, Rorty claims, what he holds to be 'true' in that which is, relative to his social democratic experience, most useful to the articulation of his social democratic beliefs. As such, Rorty insists, his conception of the self is true only in the pragmatic sense that it most clearly comports with his prior conception of a good society: there is no absolute sense of 'true' independently from those beliefs. Further, he insists that 'I do not know how to 'justify' or 'defend' social democracy' (37) through the presentation of this philosophical view of the self. He continues as follows:

> nor would I know how to defend my view of the self (to sceptics) without first making social democrats out of them. This latter fact is part of what I have in mind when I speak of 'the priority of democracy to philosophy'. I think Dewey showed us that we pragmatists can start from our social hopes and work down from there to theories about the standard philosophical topics (38)

in the sense that, for Rorty, Dewey would have endorsed Ungers use of the slogan 'everything is politics'. (39)

Rorty's insistence, then, is that his philosophical view of the self is bound up with and inseparable from his prior social democratic convictions. It is in no sense true independently from those beliefs. Rather, its only function is that it 'suits the political purposes of us social democrats'. (40)

It becomes necessary, therefore, to examine in greater detail Rorty's understanding of politics. He writes that 'we should think of politics as one of the experimental rather than of the theoretical disciplines' (41), and this view leads him to question the relevance of political theory upon political practice. For he conceives of practical political life as being conducted within traditions and involving the piecemeal experimental changes in policy and statute which articulate our critical reflections upon our cultural identity. Such experimentation is not, for Rorty, based upon any theoretical foundations from which practical solutions to problems can be logically deduced.

It can be seen that this conception of politics and morality has an intellectual antecedence in the work of Hume and Oakeshott, and Rorty appears to acknowledge it as his own. Rorty, like Hume (in his conservative moods) and Oakeshott, is sceptical about any attempt to base political society upon fixed rational criteria. We can see how Rorty's specific concern for the dangers and misconceptions of the Kantian liberal view of rationality reflects Oakeshott's critique of 'rationalism' in general when Rorty suggests that there is a need to 'envisage a social democratic utopia - a future for the human race in which Enlightenment liberalism is carried through to its limit, eradicating in the process the last traces of Enlightenment rationalism' (42). Further, echoing Hume, he says that 'I should like the sentiments of pity and tolerance to take the place of belief-systems (or of what Habermas calls 'the commitment to rationality') in bonding liberal societies together. I want a meta-ethics that follows up on Hume rather than on Kant' (43).

This attachment to Hume would seem to indicate a connection between Rorty and the 'Cold War Liberals' who are to be associated with

the Humean (and therefore non-Kantian) tradition of non-cognitivist moral theorising. Also, the anti-rationalist and anti-foundationalist tenor of Rorty's arguments indicates a connection with the Oakeshottian conception of politics as being, properly understood, non-theoretical in character. Indeed, the relationship between Rorty and Oakeshott is made more apparent when Rorty applies Oakeshott's notion of poetry as 'a conversation of mankind' to the discipline of philosophy (including political philosophy) itself. For Rorty argues that philosophy is to be seen as one kind of narrative (analogous to poetry) which is conducted within a conversation. Thus when Oakeshott says, in Rationalism in Politics, that

> in a conversation.... the participants are not engaged in an enquiry or a debate; there is no Truth to be discovered, no propositions to be affirmed, no conclusions sought,...(44)

we can see how Rorty applies this characterisation of the sense of a conversation to philosophy. For it fits Rorty's conception of philosophy as a discipline which cannot reveal to us any conclusive foundational Truths.

This discussion of the relationship between Rorty and Oakeshott is important, I think, because it has significance for our understanding of Rorty's conception of the place of ideology in political life. Where Rorty talks of the form of an ideological understanding, he explicitly identifies himself with the 'end-of-ideology' theorists whose views are, perhaps, most clearly expressed by the American Daniel Bell. The central contention of these theorists is that ideology is the product of sociological conflict, and that, once a cultural consensus is achieved, ideology becomes irrelevant to the conduct of political affairs, and has no place in political life. (For these theorists, such a condition had been reached in the North American society of the 1950's.)

However, it appears plausible to suggest that Rorty's own adoption of this sociological thesis is coupled with the acceptance of Oakeshott's kind of characterisation of modern ideological understandings as misconceived systems of 'rationalist' belief. For

Rorty assumes, in a manner which is at least similar to Oakeshott, that any ideological argument is a defective form of understanding which stems from some (false) rationalist view of human nature, and which mistakenly attempts to put its theoretical understanding into practice. Thus we find Rorty arguing that modern ideology is constitutive of, and belongs to, that 'enlightened' mode of thought which imagines that theory can rise above the conditional assumptions of its own time and place, the better to explain or reform them. Put another way, Rorty identifies a certain kind of theoretical explanation in which there is a failure to consider the conditional or temporal situation in which the theory is set; and he assumes that this feature marks out this kind of theory as being ideological in character. This is the sense in which we are to classify the Kantian meta-narrative (with its notion of an ahistorical rationality featuring so centrally within its assumptions) as being a major ideological explanation of the moral and political world.

For Rorty, then, ideologies are to be understood as misconceived rationalist theoretical explanations, and they have to be abandoned. In particular, Rorty insists that the ideological liberalism of the Kantian tradition has to be discarded by our own intellectual culture. But how is this practically possible? Rorty bases his hope upon the assumption, which is shared by the 'end-of-ideology' school, that the existing tradition of the North Atlantic liberal-democracies has generated, or at least could generate, a moral consensus of collective identity which makes the theoretical postures of any ideological view irrelevant. Thus he envisages

> a society which encourages the 'end of ideology'.... which takes reflective equilibrium as the only method needed in discussing social policy. When such a society deliberates, when it collects the principles and intuitions to be brought into equilibrium, it will tend to discard those drawn from philosophical accounts of the self, or of rationality. (45)

Rorty, then, contends that in the 'postmodern culture' which he envisages, all conflicting and controversial philosophical, theoretical

or ideological understandings of man will be abandoned; and what will remain is a historical narrative account of our communal identity which relates to our particular moral consensus or practice, and which enables us to achieve a reflective equilibrium that secures for us non-conflicting practical conduct. It is to suggest, in particular, that the philosophical/ theoretical/ ideological conception of the self which is expressed by the Kantian liberals should be replaced by the notion of communal identity which is expressed by the 'postmodernist bourgeois liberals'.

In saying this, Rorty is making the general assumption that any ideological conflict within a tradition of thought (eg. communism) is ultimately the result of differences in the interpretations of the orthodox philosophical or theoretical understanding of man which underpins that ideological tradition. One way to avoid this ideological conflict is to ignore any theoretical controversy, and, for Rorty, the achievement of this task is possible within the social democratic tradition. For he writes that 'one advantage we social democrats have always had over the radicals is that we have traditionally worried less about ideological purity, and have relied on what Rawls calls "overlapping consensus" '. (46) It is this fact which, Rorty argues, enables social democrats to concentrate upon the pragmatically experimental considerations in politics, as distinct from the theoretically inflexible ones. It is to suggest that it is possible within the social democratic tradition to avoid any ideological or philosophical conflict because that tradition can draw upon, in a pragmatic sense, the moral consensus which exists in actual social democratic practices.

His claim, then, is that because social democrats tend to agree about their practical objectives, this enables them to ignore any theoretical controversy which may hamper them. But at present this possibility is not being fully realised because there remains a theoretical dispute between the 'Kantians' and others which ought to be abandoned. It is this dispute which, for Rorty, articulates the crisis within liberalism; and it is a dispute which can only be avoided once it is recognised that there is nothing which can be theoretically resolved by it. Rather, what is needed, he claims, is that social

democrats (including himself) concentrate upon the practical political issues that unite the liberal or social democratic tradition. Because, he says, 'we all are working for a utopia in which equal access to a free press, a free judiciary, and free universities' (47) is sought after, it follows that 'differences in philosophical taste between us social democrats can easily be deferred until we have come a good deal closer to that utopia' (48).

Rorty's suggestions concerning the possibility of unity within the social democratic tradition appears plausible enough as an empirical claim about practical political conduct. For it does seem to be the case that social democrats tend to be able to co-operate with each other in the achievement of practical ends in a far more cohesive fashion than, for example, Marxists, whose ability to co-operate in practical political matters is noticably more restricted due to their paying obsessive attention to the intricate details of their various theoretical positions. However, as a conceptual point about the character of social democratic thought, it is to be questioned; for it amounts to the suggestion that there is something intrinsic to the social democratic tradition which enables it to avoid such ruptures. For Rorty assumes, as we have seen, that although social democratic thought of the past has fallen into the trap of engaging in theoretical disputes which have generated ideological conflicts, it remains possible for the social democratic tradition to transcend that ideological or theoretical conflict and recognise its irrelevance to the world of practical political life.

The reason why this conceptual point is mistaken, I suggest, is because it follows from a related number of erroneous assumptions. Firstly, it rests upon a mistaken conception of ideology as a kind of theoretical understanding which is put into practice. This conception fails to capture, I suggest, the nature of the form of an ideological understanding. For an ideological understanding constitutes, at bottom, an ethical portrayal of ideal moral relationships; and it is this ideal portrayal which always stands prior to any particular theoretical or philosophical expression of its sense. For example, the evaluative picture of the relationship between the 'proletariat' and the 'bourgeoisie', as presented in Marxist thought, stands logically prior

to, and is not synonomous with, its elaborate theoretical expression in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and so on. An ideological understanding, therefore, *primarily* constitutes an ethical, not a theoretical, achievement. The fact that committed adherents to an ideological portrayal tend to be immune to any indication of the theoretical and practical implausibility of their argument suggests, not that they have failed to see the theoretical errors of their position, but that such an indication of error is, in the ethical sense, *irrelevant* to their commitment to the understanding.

This leads to the point that a commitment to the ethical portrayal that constitutes an 'ideology' is sustainable independently from any refutation of the theoretical arguments employed to support it. Further, an ideological view, understood as being primarily ethical, does not generate any technical knowledge which can be put into practice in the world. Rather, it portrays how committed adherents ought to conceive of themselves: it does not specify in any technical detail 'what is to be done'.

The point, then, is that although ideologists employ theoretical arguments and make practical recommendations for political actions, such theories and prescriptions are not central to their ideological understanding. Therefore, although Rorty is correct to observe that certain ideologies present themselves as temporally non-specific and ahistorical theories, these 'rationalist' features are not, as he assumes, what is essential to the form of all ideological expressions of ethical conviction. Rather, these features are, as it were, the theoretical baggage which is carried by a tradition of ideological thought. In equating 'ideology' with (rationalist) theory Rorty is failing to appreciate that the ethical dimension of an ideological conviction constitutes the form of the understanding, and is prior to, and distinguishable from, its theoretical expression.

This is not, I think, merely to quibble with Rorty over the issue of what is the correct verbal definition of the term 'ideology'. Rather, it has significance for our understanding of the place of ideology in political life, and this, in turn, relates to our assessment of Rorty's own political arguments and moral hopes. For it leads to the second, correlative point that Rorty's own commitment to the ideals and

'utopian vision' of social democracy is itself constitutive of an ideological understanding. That is, his ethical commitment to these ideals is not, as he assumes, made any the less ideological because they are not purported to be based upon any theoretical foundations. This is because, as we have seen, Rorty's assumption that what counts as 'ideology' is rationalist theoretical understanding is mistaken. Rather, in expressing a commitment to a recognisably social democratic ethical portrayal, Rorty is making an ideological assumption about the moral and political world.

Let us put this another way. Rorty is quite correct, I think, to argue that our ethical convictions can never be justified, but only expressed, by a theoretical or philosophical argument: and he is likewise quite correct to point to the priority of our values (eg. democracy) over their philosophical articulation. However, he is wrong to assume that the ethical convictions of the 'postmodernist bourgeois liberal' are non-ideological in character because they are not purported to be based on theoretical foundations. The way in which the moral beliefs of the 'postmodernist bourgeois liberal' are expressed is certainly *different* from the way in which, for example, the beliefs of the 'Kantian liberal' are expressed, but the liberal beliefs which are shared by both the 'postmodernist bourgeois liberal' and the 'Kantian liberal' take the same form, and they are ideological in character.

The point, then, is that Rorty, like any other ideologist, does believe in a coherent body of ethical and political beliefs, and these beliefs take the form of an ideal portrayal of the moral and political relationships between persons. Further, he seeks to give this presumed portrayal a convincing and coherent philosophical expression. He believes that the social democratic ideals which he is committed to are most suitably articulated within the 'Deweyian pragmatist' philosophical tradition; a tradition which seeks to avoid any unmerited metaphysical presuppositions in its argument.

It is worth noting that a similarly anti-metaphysical articulation of liberal values was presented by the 'Cold War Liberals' in the 1950's. Therefore, we can see a sense in which Bernstein is correct to contend that Rorty's claim to have pointed up the irrelevance of any continued use of the out-worn philsophical (notably rationalist)

vocabularies of the past to justify our own liberal convictions is itself 'little more than an ideological *apologia* for an old-fashioned version of cold war liberalism dressed up in a fashionable 'post-modern' discourse'. (49)

What conclusions, then, can be drawn from this discussion of Rorty's assessment of the future of liberalism? Firstly, we can agree with Rorty that the kind of 'philosophical liberalism' which has been advanced within the 'Kantian rationalist' tradition rests upon a theoretically impoverished conception of the self, and it is to be rejected on philosophical grounds alone. Secondly, we can agree with Rorty that there are good reasons to suggest that the theoretical disputes conducted within the liberal tradition of discourse are irrelevant to the pragmatic issue of how liberals can sustain their commitment to their moral ideals in the future. For we can acknowledge Rorty's point that our political beliefs are prior to, and not dependent upon, their theoretical expression.

However, it has been argued that Rorty has failed to provide a correct account of the form of an ideological understanding, and, as a result, he has failed to locate the central place that ideology has in political life. Because Rorty's own ethical convictions are ideological in character, it follows that the possible success of the 'post-modernist bourgeois liberals' in uniting the intellectual community of liberals would itself be an ideological achievement. Likewise, the abandonment of the metaphysical presuppositions of the Kantian theorists would be done on ideological grounds, in the sense that the reasons for doing so would be contingently related to the practical issue as to whether the (philosophically receptive) citizens of the Western democracies could, or could not, continue to sustain their liberal commitments in terms of Kantian theoretical justifications.

The point is that Rorty, by incorrectly marginalising ideology as a defective form of theoretical understanding, underestimates its centrality in past, present, and more importantly, future liberal or social democratic political life. For it is the endurance of the ethical ideals of the liberal view which determines the future of liberal political institutions, and the 'moral consensus' which he wishes to draw upon is itself underpinned by that ideological belief.

Without sustaining a belief in these ideals, the practical point of defending these institutions would become unintelligible. Ideology is not, as Rorty assumes, something that can be transcended by the pragmatically minded 'postmodernist bourgeois liberals'; it is, rather, something which is central to their task of mapping out the future direction of the defence of liberal theory and practice.

The question becomes, then, whether the practical task of successfully achieving a future defence of liberalism is likely to be possible. MacIntyre, as we shall see later, thinks not. He does so because he believes that non-cognitivism (or 'emotivism') has had a disruptive theoretical and practical impact on our Western liberal democratic societies: an impact the consequences of which Rorty has overlooked. Before considering this issue though, we shall examine the arguments of Rawls.

(III) John Rawls.

It is worth noting in the context of this discussion of the future of liberalism that John Rawls has attempted to address the type of objection which theorists such as Dunn and Rorty have levelled against him. For Rawls has sought to deny the charge that his approach is too abstract, and fails to relate to the specific practical realities of political life in the Western liberal democratic societies. Indeed, Rawls has gone so far as to offer a defence of the liberal democratic constitutional regimes which resembles in many striking ways the approaches suggested by Dunn and Rorty.

In an article entitled 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical' (1985), Rawls argues that his analysis of justice does not depend upon any metaphysical or philosophical claims about 'universal truth' or the 'essential nature and identity of persons'. (1) Rather, he insists that his conception of justice is 'public' or 'political' in character, and rests upon the basic structure of the 'intuitive ideas' which actually obtain within the practices or cultural traditions of constitutional democratic regimes.

This insistence may strike us as being rather odd because it has become commonplace to understand Rawls' argument as being explicitly philosophical in character, and stemming from a recognisably Kantian notion of the self. Most critics have interpreted his major work A Theory of Justice (1972) along these lines. Perhaps, though, we should give Rawls the benefit of the doubt. For whatever the merits of suggesting that Rawls' presentation in 'Justice as Fairness; Political not Metaphysical' either constitutes a radical change of view, or merely amounts to a clarification of themes not fully articulated in earlier writings, it is clear that Rawls' latest argument must severely undermine both Dunn's and Rorty's previous classifications of Rawls within the 'Utopian Liberalism' and 'philosophical liberalism' traditions respectively. It is to dismantle their central contention that Rawls' enterprise rests upon an erroneous philosophical conception of the free, rational individual as the Kantian subject. Therefore it is of interest to examine Rawls' position in some detail.

Rawls says that it is his purpose to avoid, as far as possible, any controversial metaphysical or philosophical claims the validity of which stands independently from the 'public' conception of justice which he seeks to defend. Most notably, he wishes to distinguish his variety of liberalism as a 'political doctrine' from those 'comprehensive moral conceptions' of the good which spring from both the 'teleological' tradition of liberal thought (which seeks to establish the metaphysical validity of the 'One Rational Good'), and the liberalisms of Kant and Mill (which are grounded upon 'the moral ideals of autonomy and individuality'). He claims that these varieties of liberalism, based as they are upon certain metaphysical claims about the nature of the 'good' and the essential nature and identity of persons, are theoretically contestable, and are, as such, unable to provide the necessary practical justification for our actual democratic practices.

Echoing Berlin, Rawls starts from the observation that it is an incontestable social fact that our differing conceptions of the 'good' are conflicting and even incommensurable, and stem from our adherence to different moral and religious doctrines. It is these adherences which generate ethical disagreements the nature of which may be theoretically irresolvable. Further, he suggests, these theoretical disputes cannot be resolved *politically*. Therefore, he states that 'philosophy as the search for truth about an independent metaphysical and moral order', albeit important in itself, 'cannot... provide a workable and shared basis for a political conception of justice in a democratic society'. (2)

For Rawls, therefore, the limits of philosophy are such that no *practical* resolution of actual moral disputes in society can necessarily follow from it. Any effort to provide a philosophical theory which essays to place on a firm metaphysical basis, and theoretically resolve, our moral disputes, may fail; and, more importantly, no such effort can possibly secure practical moral agreement.

How, then, are we to secure agreement in social life? Rawls' contention is that we must 'look to our public political culture itself... as the shared fund of implicitly recognised basic ideas and

principles'. (3) It is these basic ideas and principles which provide our 'overlapping consensus' of shared 'considered convictions' : 'a consensus that includes all the opposing philosophical and religious doctrines likely to persist and to gain adherents in a more or less just constitutional democratic society'. (4)

Rawls' hope is to show how the principles of 'justice as fairness' are to be found within our constitutional democratic societies. In short, he wishes to demonstrate how these principles are deeply held convictions within our Western political culture. He restates the two principles of 'justice as fairness' as:

> 1. Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with a similar scheme for all.
> 2. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society. (5)

These principles, Rawls maintains, are based on a conception of 'society as a fair system of co-operation between free and equal persons'. (6) They constitute, he says, 'one of the basic intuitive ideas which...(is)... implicit in the public culture of a democratic society'. (7) They also relate, he says, to another basic intuitive idea: that of the concept of the person as free and equal.

Rawls goes on to specify this conception of the free and equal person in terms of three interrelated notions. Firstly, citizens are free in the sense that 'they conceive of themselves and of one other as having the moral power to have a conception of the good' (8), and they recognise each other to be 'capable of revising and changing this conception on reasonable and rational grounds, and they may do this if they so desire'. (9) What follows from this, he claims, is the recognition that

> as free persons, citizens claim the right to view their persons as independent from and as not identified with any particular conception of the good. Given their moral power to form, and revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good, their *public identity* as free persons is not affected by changes over time in their conception of the good. (10)

Rawls' suggestion, therefore, is that citizens of a democratic regime have a public identity as free persons - 'an identity as a matter of basic law' - which is sustained whatever their particular 'non-public' identity or conception of the good. Secondly, he argues, these free and equal citizens

> regard themselves as self-originating sources of valid claims. They think their claims have weight apart from being derived from duties or obligations specified by the political conception of justice, for example, from duties and obligations owed to society. (11)

Thirdly, he says that these citizens are 'capable of taking responsibility for their ends' in that they are 'capable of adjusting their aims and aspirations in the light of what they can reasonably expect to provide for'. (12).

It is not our major concern to assess in any detail the plausibility of Rawls' claim that his conception of 'justice as fairness' is something which is implicitly adopted as a basic cultural idea which relates to the actual conceptions of citizens in a democratic regime: citizens who 'conceive of themselves as free' in the three respects outlined above. (13) However, one point may be made. It is that when Rawls makes the distinction between the 'non-public' and the 'public' identity of the person in a democratic society, he appears to want to assert that however important and comprehensive in shaping 'a persons way of life' certain particular convictions about a conception of the good may be, these convictions are always distinguishable from the public identity of a free and equal citizen. This is certainly true of an ideologically committed liberal democrat,

who believes in the notions of rights and civil laws protecting free citizens and allowing them tolerantly to express different and conflicting views in the private sphere of life. However, this is clearly not so of *all* persons who are located in a democratic society. A committed Marxist, for example, finds himself as a matter of contingent historical fact living in a democratic society; but there is no ideological sense in which he identifies himself as a 'law abiding public citizen' in the Rawlsian manner, and there is no ideological sense in which he feels a commitment to the conception of himself as 'free' in the liberal view described by Rawls. Rather, his Marxist political convictions serve to shape his life in a way which makes the Rawlsian liberal democratic distinction between public and non-public identities irrelevant to him. Therefore, it looks as though it simply is not true, as Rawls appears to suggest, that all people in the liberal democratic regimes acknowledge a notion of freedom which rests upon a distinction between the public and the non-public spheres of life.

It may be suggested that this type of person (for example, a Marxist) does not form part of what Rawls calls the 'overlapping consensus' of rational belief and behaviour, and therefore does not qualify, on 'rational' grounds, as a member of that social culture. But to say this is merely to beg the question. For it rests fundamentally upon the assumption that the liberal democratic conception of a person as a 'free citizen' is in some sense more 'rational' and 'truer' than others. This is not so because the notions of rationality and truth, as related to ideological understandings, are *internal* to those belief systems, and therefore it follows that there are no external criteria by which to judge that one ideological view is better than another. Yet it appears that Rawls' analysis does rest upon an assumption of this kind.

The point, then, is that Rawls' contention that the two principles of 'justice as fairness' are reflected in the convictions of the citizens of the liberal democratic regime cannot simply be an empirical description alone. Rather, it must rest upon an ideological assumption that the liberal democratic man is, *qua* citizen, rationally

superior to others because he conceives of himself as free, and recognises the distinction between a public and non-public identity.

Leaving this point aside, we can now turn to another issue; that is, the examination of the nature of Rawls' procedure for justifying liberal democratic practices. His argument, restated, is that 'the conception of citizens as free and equal persons need not involve.... questions of philosophical psychology or a metaphysical doctrine of the nature of the self...(because)... no political view that depends on these deep and unresolved matters can serve as a public conception of justice in a constitutional democratic state' (14). Now, in proceeding in this manner, and in attempting to distance himself from any unresolved metaphysical matters that includes any attachment to the Kantian notion of the universal, ahistorical rational self, Rawls certainly appears to have dented the claims of those who had previously sought to characterise him as a Kantian 'contractarian' theorist, in sharp contrast to the 'communitarian' theorists.

Rorty has himself acknowledged this, and he now interprets Rawls' enterprise to be closer to the historicist strain in Hegel and Dewey rather than the transcendental foundationalist approach that is evident in Kant. As distinct from his characterisation of Rawls' position in 'Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism', in 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy' Rorty argues that Rawls is not committed to a false Kantian theory of the self, or is intent on providing some philosophical justification for liberal-democracy. Rather, he maintains that Rawls is seeking to give an 'articulation' (in terms of 'justice as fairness') to the intuitions, shared beliefs and settled habits of those who identify themselves with the historical communities committed to liberal constitutional democracy. For Rorty, then, Rawls' enterprise is 'pragmatic', not 'philosophical' in character.

We can agree that Rorty's re-interpretation of Rawls is plausible enough when we consider how Rawls defines the limits of philosophical justification and the sense of objectivity in the way which is closely akin to Rorty. For Rawls argues that he seeks to 'avoid the problem of truth and the controversy between realism and subjectivism about the status of moral and political values'; and he insists that his form of argument 'neither asserts or denies these

doctrines'. (15) Rather, he says that his argument 'recasts ideas from the tradition of the social contract to achieve a practicable conception of objectivity and justification founded on public agreement in judgement on due reflection'. (16)

Thus, for Rawls, the philosophical controversy about the status of value, although important, is not relevant to the task in hand, which is the practical justification of liberal democratic practices. For such practical justification amounts to the articulation, in a precise conceptual manner, of those intuitive ideas which are objective in the pragmatic sense of being 'believed in ' by those who are committed to the values inherent in liberal democratic practices. Such an articulation involves the adaptation of the notion of a 'social contract' in the 'original position'. But this notion only serves as a 'device of representation' which makes clearer our actual convictions in the liberal democratic world. It is not, for Rawls, to be understood as a philosophical conception which attempts to ground or metaphysically justify these beliefs: rather, it merely serves as an analytical tool which best articulates these beliefs. For Rawls, then, his argument is not to be understood as being 'foundational'. We can therefore see how Rorty is able to interpret Rawls' enterprise as an attempt to elaborate upon certain 'conceptual mechanisms' or 'theories' which fit in with, or comport with, our actual political intuitions; rather than attempt to justify or base them upon a Kantian metaphysical theory.

However, Rawls' argument runs into the same difficulty which we identified with Rorty's enterprise. For the problem is that neither Rawls nor Rorty adequately consider the place of ideology in their analysis. That is, in attempting to offer a 'pragmatic', rather than a 'philosophical' justification of liberal democratic political life, both Rawls and Rorty assume some sort of ideological conception of the person and his relation to the ethical and political world. In the case of Rawls, his notion of citizens conceiving of themselves as having a 'non-public' identity, and 'free and equal' status with others, presumes a liberal ideological conception of the self as possessing the 'moral power', 'self-origination' and 'responsibility' necessary to be capable of rationally choosing those conceptions of the good which reflect

individually specifiable desires, wants and needs. This conception may indeed avoid any explicitly Kantian association, but it remains ideological nonetheless. That is, it is a conception of ideal moral and political relationships between persons, and it is at the root of Rawls' analysis. As such, it is this presumed ideological view which is the basis of, and generates, Rawls' attempt to provide a practical justification of liberal democratic societies. For without this presumed ideological view, there would be no (moral) point in Rawls undertaking this enterprise.

Leaving this point aside, however, a crucial issue remains to be discussed. It is whether *any* 'pragmatic' justification of the beliefs and conventions of the liberal democratic societies is likely to be successful, at both a theoretical and practical level, in maintaining a future commitment to them. This issue is addressed by MacIntyre, who suggests that the influence of non-cognitivism as a correct theory of use is such that liberalism cannot hope to maintain its appeal in the future.

10. Opposition to Liberalism: MacIntyre.

MacIntyre's argument against liberalism, as expressed most notably in After Virtue and various subsequent articles, constitutes a serious challenge to any attempted contemporary defence of liberal democratic moral and political practice, such as that made by Dunn, Rorty and Rawls. For it amounts to the claim that, at both the theoretical and practical levels of justification, any such attempt is doomed to failure.

MacIntyre's argument opens with an observation about the character of contemporary moral experience. This experience possesses, he says, three central characteristic features. Firstly, the rival arguments endorsed by people in moral debate and disagreement appear to be *conceptually incommensurable*: that is, each argument is internally logically valid - the conclusions reached within them logically follow from certain premises - but each start from premises employing quite different normative and evaluative concepts. What follows from this, MacIntyre observes, is that there exists in our society 'no established way of deciding between these claims', and 'the invocation of one premise against another becomes a matter of pure assertion and counter-assertion.' (1) Put another way, moral disagreement is logically interminable because there are no good reasons or impersonal rational criteria available by which to settle a public argument.

This fact about contemporary moral life is, for MacIntyre, of the utmost importance. He writes that

> if we possess no unassailable criteria, no set of compelling reasons by means of which we may convince our opponents, it follows that in the process of making up our own minds we have made no appeal to such criteria or such reasons. If I lack any good reasons to invoke against you, it must seem that I lack any good reasons. Hence it seems that underlying my own position

there must be some *non-rational decision to adopt that position.* Corresponding to the interminability of public argument there is at least the appearance of a disquieting *private arbitrariness.* (2)

MacIntyre explains that this first characteristic of modern ethical arguments leads one to suggest that 'there is nothing to such contemporary disagreements but a clash of antagonistic wills, each will determined by some set of arbitrary choices of its own'. (3) However, MacIntyre notes, it is a paradoxical feature, and a second characteristic of such arguments, that they claim to be impersonal rational arguments. That is, they are arguments which purport to appeal to 'objective standards' or external criteria the alleged existence of which stands independent from the preferences or attitudes of the speaker or hearer. Such an appeal, as a third characteristic of modern ethical discourse, is couched in a conceptual vocabulary which employs such notions as 'rights', 'duties', 'justice', 'utility' and 'universalisability'. A conceptual vocabulary, that is, which is familiar to the liberal democratic tradition of discourse.

MacIntyre's central purpose is to 'construct a true historical narrative' which makes clear how it came about that contemporary moral discourse acquired this paradoxical nature. He wants to show how 'the characteristics of our own moral arguments' developed in this way, and how we are to explain 'most notably the fact that we simultaneously and inconsistently treat moral argument as an exercise of our rational powers and as mere expressive assertion'. (4)

For MacIntyre, such an explanation relies upon an appreciation of the impact of the emotive theory of ethics upon the public moral consciousness of the Western world. For it will be recalled that emotivism amounts to the theoretical claim that all ethical discourse, whatever the historical and social context of its articulation, amounts to the expression of personal feelings which can in no sense be rationally determined or resolved. This thesis has, for MacIntyre, whatever its plausibility, shaped the practical use of contemporary moral debate. He insists, we recall, that 'to a large degree people now think, talk and act *as if* emotivism were true.' (5) And he

continues that 'the specific character of the modern age' is emotivist because 'emotivism has become embodied in our culture' and has determined 'a wide range of our concepts and modes of behaviour', such that 'our explicitly moral debates and judgements presuppose the truth of emotivism, if not at the level of self-conscious theorising, at least in everyday practice'. (6) MacIntyre's sociological point, then, is that the modern moral agent is to be understood as an 'emotive man' in the sense that his practical moral activity amounts to the assertion of his own arbitrarily chosen principles of conduct which express his own personal feelings. How is it then, we may ask, that contemporary moral debate retains its superficial appearance of appealing to objective rational standards?

MacIntyre explains this phenomenon in terms of a historical narrative. He argues that the emotivist theory constitutes the culmination of the failure of the Enlightenment project: an enterprise which sought to provide some set of rational criteria by which to justify our ethical beliefs and moral practices. But this project, he argues, failed. Neither Hume nor Kant, who were the major philosophical figures of the Enlightenment period, were successful in the task of placing moral beliefs and practices upon solid ground. Further, MacIntyre posits that the reason why the Enlightenment project was *bound* to fail is that it was grounded upon certain premises relating to the notion of the self which could never have secured the necessary foundations for moral justification.

Emotivism is, for MacIntyre, the logical culmination of this failed enterprise. It is itself part of the Enlightenment tradition, drawing most heavily from Hume, and its contribution to that tradition is shown in the fact that it makes clear that no rational justification for moral belief and practice in the modern world can possibly be given within the conceptual apparatus of the Enlightenment project. That is, emotivism constitutes the end-point of a tradition of philosophical thought which was fundamentally flawed in its inception because it was based upon a false conception of the self; a self which, allegedly, stands apart from whatever intersection of social roles we happen to occupy.

It will be recalled that the emotivist theory of ethics received its greatest systematic expression and attention in the 1930's to mid-1940's by such writers as Ayer, Stevenson and Duncan-Jones. As an analysis of the meaning of ethical discourse, it quickly became unfashionable and was rapidly dismissed as inadequate within philosophical circles. However, MacIntyre argues, the 'cultural power' of emotivism as a 'theory of use' (rather than a 'theory of meaning') remains significant because it has retained its dominance in shaping the practical moral consciousness of the Western world. Also, at the theoretical level, MacIntyre says that

> emotivism did not die and it is important to note how often in widely different modern philosophical contexts something very like emotivism's attempted reduction of morality to personal preference continually recurs in the writings of those who do not think of themselves as emotivists. (7)

For example, R.M. Hare introduced the notion of 'universalisability' as a necessary logical principle for moral judgement by which to place moral reasoning on a firm footing. However, in so doing, Hare acknowledged the basic emotivist point that after an appeal to universal standards had been given, no further rational justification could be provided. Therefore, as MacIntyre remarks:

> The terminus of justification is thus always, on this view, a not further to be justified choice, a choice unguided by criteria. Each individual implicitly or explicitly has to adopt his or her first principles on the basis of such a choice. The utterance of any universal principle is in the end an expression of the preferences of an individual will and for that will its principles have and can have only such authority as it chooses to confer upon them by adopting them. Thus emotivism has not been left very far behind after all. (8)

Hare's theory, which attempts to provide utilitarian grounds for our moral standards in terms of the universalisability principle, is

not, as MacIntyre notes, to be regarded as the only major contribution to modern moral philosophy which springs from emotivist premises. Other theorists such as J.L. Mackie can be included. As such, there is a discernible tradition of moral theorising that we have called 'non-cognitivism' which presupposes the basic alleged truth of the emotivist analysis.

How, though, is this assessment of the theoretical and practical significance of emotivism relevant to MacIntyre's attempt to address the problems of justifying liberal democratic theory and practice? Its relevance is that MacIntyre believes that our attachment to emotivist ways of thinking in the modern age is fatal to any attempt to justify morally our ethical beliefs and practices. He contends that although there are contemporary liberal theorists, such as Rawls, Nozick and Gewirth, who may appear to be preoccupied with rejecting emotivist and subjectivist accounts of morality, they are nonetheless infected by the emotivist strain. These theorists have attempted, as MacIntyre says, to 'show that the notion of rationality itself supplies morality with a basis'. (9) However, he notes that all these attempts have failed; and this is because

> such writers cannot agree among themselves either on what the character of moral rationality is or on the substance of the morality which is to be founded on that rationality. The diversity of contemporary moral debate and its interminability are indeed mirrored in the controversies of analytical moral philosophers. (10)

MacIntyre's point is that the level of disagreement between contemporary theorists as to how to establish a rational justification for morality is indicative of a deep crisis in Western philosophical thinking. For it shows that these theorists cannot draw upon a conceptual vocabulary which provides any coherent and uniform notion of what constitutes 'morality' or 'moral rationality'. Rather, there is a plethora of fragmented concepts available; all of which, collectively, make the task of theoretical agreement impossible. This is why, for MacIntyre, the irreconcilable nature of contemporary moral debate is

mirrored in the theoretical or philosophical controversies of analytical moral philosophy.

How, though, has this current intellectual crisis come about? MacIntyre roots the problem in the fact that these contemporary analytical philosophers remain attached to the Enlightenment (and, as a consequence, basically emotivist) conceptual schema, which finds morality in individual choice or expression of preference. Crucially, however, these theorists have failed to appreciate, or have refused to acknowledge, the basic lesson which emotivism has taught us; namely, that no rational justification of this conception of morality is possible within the conceptual structure of this schema. What we find instead, as MacIntyre observes, is that a wide range of concepts, such as 'rights', 'duties', 'utility', 'justice' and 'universalisability', continue to be used by analytical philosophers to justify rationally our moral beliefs; but these concepts do not have any coherent source because they do not relate to any conception of morality or moral rationality which can possibly provide the basis for such justifications.

MacIntyre believes that this explains how the theoretical disputes of contemporary analytical philosophy reflect the paradoxical and indeed inconsistent character of modern ethical debate as an attempt to assert personal preferences and yet simultaneously appeal to external standards for their justification. For it reveals that professional analytical philosophers, no less than the ordinary moral practitioner, are deluding themselves by thinking that their conception of morality as personal preference can be given any external rational support.

This problem facing us cannot, MacIntyre contends, be overcome without totally abandoning the Enlightenment (and emotivist) conception of morality as personal preference. Whilst we continue to employ the tools of the Enlightenment project, he says, 'we have no good reasons to believe that analytical philosophy can provide any convincing escape from an emotivism the substance of which it so often in fact concedes'. (11)

For MacIntyre, the fact that there is an urgent need for such an escape is apparent in the desperate nature of the present crisis: a crisis which is symptomatic of a moral decline or the 'decay of moral

reasoning' that was consequent on the historical context of the inception of the Enlightenment project, and has reached its culmination in the modern emotivist age. Evidence of this decline is apparent, John Dunn remarks, in 'the chaotic heterogeneity of normative concepts touted in the Western arguments... the direct conflict of wills and sentiments, lightly cloaked by the invocation of standards, the authority and conclusiveness of which is now entirely bogus.' (12) The reason that any such appeal to these standards is fallacious, MacIntyre writes, is that 'in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in...(a) state of grave disorder. What we possess... are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts of which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived.' (13) We are, in other words, continuing to employ the past vocabulary and concepts of moral justification without recognising that the 'integral substance' of morality which gave these concepts their significance has become fragmented and in part destroyed. All that we are left with, MacIntyre says, is 'an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments.' (14) This process of fragmentation was a consequence of the attempt of Enlightenment thinkers to seek different conceptual approaches by which to address the problem of establishing a rational moral justification for our principles which is founded upon the 'individualist' conception of the moral person. But the culminating destruction of any homogeneous conceptual understanding of morality was hastened by the emotivist realisation that no such justification was possible within this schema.

MacIntyre wishes to assess what he takes to be the disastrous practical moral consequences of this process of conceptual fragmentation. He argues that the heart of the issue rests upon the fact that the emotivist theory has successfully obliterated the distinction between *manipulative* and *non-manipulative* relations in our contemporary social life; and he indicates how this theoretical obliteration is of the utmost practical significance for morality. He centres his argument on the contrast between Kantian ethics and emotivism. He argues that Kant is quite correct on one major issue because

> The difference between a human relationship uninformed by morality and one so informed is precisely the difference between one in which each person treats the other primarily as a means to his or her ends and one in which each treats the other as an end. To treat someone else as an end is to offer them what I take to be good reasons for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons. It is to be unwilling to influence another except by reasons which that other he or she judges to be good. It is to appeal to impersonal criteria of the validity of which each rational agent must be his or her own judge. By contrast, to treat someone else as a means is to seek to make him or her an instrument of my purposes by advancing whatever influences or considerations will in fact be effective on this or that occasion. The generalisations of the sociology and psychology of persuasions are what I shall need to guide me, not the standards of a narrative rationality. (15)

However, as MacIntyre remarks:

> If emotivism is true, this distinction is illusory. For evaluative utterance can in the end have no point or use but the expression of my own feelings or attitudes and the transformation of the feelings and attitudes of others. I cannot genuinely appeal to impersonal criteria, for there are no impersonal criteria. I may think that I so appeal and others may think that I so appeal, but these thoughts will always be mistaken. The sole reality of distinctively moral discourse is the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings.preferences and choices of another with it own. Others are always means, never ends. (16)

MacIntyre is, then, of the opinion that the Kantian analysis of the character of morality is superior to the emotivist analysis on the particular point of the distinction between 'means' and 'ends'. He believes that the distinction between morality and prudence is correctly to be discerned in terms of treating people as ends rather than as means, and of establishing a distinction between non-

manipulative and manipulative social relations. However, in contending this, MacIntyre makes two related points. Firstly, he insists that the Kantian theoretical approach is nonetheless bound to fail in its attempt to establish the distinction between means and ends upon a firm philosophical footing. This is because it is based upon a false conception of man as a transcendental rational being. Consequently, he claims, the recent Kantian theoretical arguments advanced by such writers as Rawls and Nozick have been unsuccessful. Secondly, and more interestingly, MacIntyre contends that the conceptual bankruptcy of the Kantian project is related to a practical problem. The problem, he insists, is that our contemporary understanding of practical social life is based, to a large degree, on the assumption that the emotivist conception of moral discourse is true. That is, it is widely presupposed within our culture that the social world, as 'seen with emotivist eyes' is the correct view. Consequently, it is a common sociological feature of our practical moral consciousness to believe that morality is a matter of expressing feelings and imposing our will upon others. As a result, MacIntyre claims that we no longer have a theoretically rooted understanding of the distinction between morality and prudence, or treating other people as ends rather than as means. This is reflected in our practical understanding because we act and behave in a way that reveals the degree to which any distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations has been obliterated. Therefore, MacIntyre argues that the Kantian theoretical attempt to provide us with a notion of moral, as distinct from prudential reasoning, is bound to have no practical effect on us. This is because we behave in a manner which indicates that we do not believe that there is a practically relevant distinction to be made between morality and prudence.

One of MacIntyre's central contentions, then, is that contemporary moral theory cannot provide us with a coherent and well-grounded conception of moral reasoning. For analytical philosophers are trapped within the confines of Enlightenment, and consequently emotivist, presuppositions. These presuppositions have, at both the theoretical and practical levels of modern ethical thinking, effectively

made it impossible to provide any intelligible account of moral, as distinct from prudential, reasoning.

In MacIntyre's view, then, the general picture looks bleak; and he draws his pessimism from the question of whether liberalism, as a theoretical and practical enterprise of rational moral justification, has any future. In order to examine MacIntyre's assessment of the possibility of this future, we need briefly to restate our placement of liberalism within its intellectual context, and specify its conceptions of moral reasoning.

MacIntyre notes that philosophical liberalism (or what he calls liberal-individualism) sprang from the Enlightenment project. Also, as he points out, it constitutes a distinctive tradition of philosophical argument because it has its source in an individualist notion of man and his relation to the external world which is based upon a particular epistemological conception of the relationship between facts and values. As such, it is a characteristic feature of liberal-individualism to maintain that questions of fact are settled independently from what anyone wants or chooses, whereas questions of value (including moral value) are settled only by the individual choosing and standing by some particualar set of principles which best satisfy his desires. It is to picture the individual confronting the objective facts with a freedom to make such evaluations as he wishes in the realisation of individual purposes.

It has been indicated earlier that liberal-individualism can be separated into two major varieties of thought within the Enlightenment tradition: namely, the 'empiricist' and the 'Kantian rationalist'. The empiricist variety classifies moral reasoning as a kind of practical or instrumental reasoning. According to this view, we behave morally so as to satisfy those individual purposes which would not be guaranteed satisfaction in a 'non-moral' or purely prudential social environment. The Kantian rationalist strain, by contrast, denotes moral reasoning as a distinctive intrinsically rational activity. From this perspective, we behave morally because we are compelled, by the dictates of reason, to recognise our moral duty to treat others as ends, never as means. Consequently our individual purposes are best satisfied within moral arrangements.

Both varieties of liberal-individualism, therefore, seek to justify the grounds for moral obligation upon a distinction drawn between morality and prudence. Admittedly, the Kantian version of the distinction is much sharper: moral and prudential thinking belong to two different species of reasoning. By contrast, the empiricist definition of the distinction is much looser: moral and prudential thinking belong equally to the species of instrumental reasoning. A distinction is nonetheless specified, drawn in terms of the notion that there are good instrumental reasons for co-operating with, and trusting, each other in social activities. It is the establishment of this mutually advantageous social trust, and the development of the notions of 'promise-keeping', 'sympathy' and 'altruism' that are associated with it, which is said to involve the employment of what constitutes 'moral', as distinct from 'non-moral', practical reasoning.

MacIntyre's contention is that both varieties of liberal-individualism fail in their attempt to provide the grounds for moral obligation. This enterprise fails because it is based upon a false individualist theory of the self, and is unsuccessful in maintaining the distinction between morality and prudence. The reason for this, MacIntyre contends, is that liberal-individualism operates within a conceptual schema the emotivist culmination of which has resulted in the obliteration of the distinction between non-manipulative and manipulative social relations. As a consequence the theoretical and practically applicable dichotomy between morality and prudence has become incoherent within the liberal-individualist understanding.

We can see that it is, according to MacIntyre's assessment, a profound irony and indeed a cultural tragedy that those non-cognitivist thinkers who have presupposed and attempted to justify the empiricist variety of the liberal-individualist conception of morality have relied on for their defence the emotivist analysis of ethical discourse which has effectively obliterated the possibility of such a defence. Thus we find writers such as Hare and Mackie, who have tried to construct a utilitarian foundation for moral obligation in liberal terms, failing in their task precisely because they have presupposed the emotivist premises which make any rational justification of moral practices impossible.

But according to MacIntyre's view the Kantian rationalists fare no better. Equally the attempts of Rawls and Nozick fail because their respective accounts of what is intrinsically reasonable moral action are theoretically conflicting and redundant. Their appeal to these standards is, at the practical level, effectively ignored by the unreceptive contemporary audience who think and act as though there is no distinction to be made between people conceived as ends and people conceived as means.

For MacIntyre, then, the current crisis in analytical philosophy reflects both the decay of contemporary moral life and the failure of liberal-individualism to find a way of justifying that life in distinctive ethical terms. It may, however, be suggested that the attempts of Rorty and Rawls to provide a pragmatic justification of the actual cultural practices of liberal democratic regimes have proved to be more successful because they have deliberately avoided the assumptions of the previous non-cognitivist and Kantian liberal enterprises. It will be recalled that Rorty seeks a situation in which 'Enlightenment liberalism' can be carried through to its logical limit whilst eradicating in the process the last traces of 'Enlightenment rationalism'. Likewise Rawls denies that his approach depends upon any metaphysical claims about 'the essential nature and identity of persons' based on the 'Enlightenment' notion of a transcendental rationality. We wonder, then, if Rorty and Rawls have paved the way for the successful denouement of the crisis which MacIntyre has described for us.

MacIntyre suggests not, mainly because he contends that these theoretical revisions of the liberal position can do nothing to resolve the practical difficulties that are inherent in our contemporary moral predicament. In particular, MacIntyre takes issue with Rorty's assumption that it is possible for the 'postmodern bourgeois liberal' to provide a justification of our liberal democratic practices by engaging in a cultural conversation that draws upon 'our common stock of conventions and anecdotes'. There is no possibility of this, he says, because there is in fact *no* common identity of moral persons upon which to draw upon. Rather, modern Western life is conducted within 'a society of strangers' and there is no actual practical communal consensus of shared moral beliefs with which to sustain any

distinctively ethical attachment to the conventions within which we operate. Consequently, there can be no possibility of constructing a theoretical justification of these conventions. As MacIntyre argues, 'there are too many rival conventions, too many conflicting anecdotes; and the repetition of assertions and denials does not constitute conversation'.(17) Therefore, 'what postmodern bourgeois liberalism exhibits is not moral argument freed from unwarranted philosophical pretentions, but the decay of moral reasoning'. (18) In other words, what postmodern bourgeois liberalism reflects is the fragmented and disjointed character of contemporary moral life; a life in which the distinction between moral reasoning and practical reasoning has to a large degree decayed and become obfuscated. The philosophical posturing of postmodern bourgeois liberals (or indeed anyone else) cannot, he says, disguise the fact that our notion of moral reasoning has become theoretically incoherent and practically inapplicable. He writes:

> That decay is unsurprising in a society whose world view ... obscures the connection between the possibility of moral reasoning and the exercise of a certain type of tradition-bearing community. Any particular piece of practical reasoning has rational force only for those who both have desires and dispositions ordered to some good and recognise that good as furthered by doing what that piece of practical reasoning bids. Only within a community with shared beliefs about goods and shared dispositions educated in accordance with those beliefs, both rooted in shared practices, can practical reason-giving be an ordered, teachable activity with standards of success and failure. (19)

MacIntyre's contention, then, is that practical moral reasoning is only possible within a 'tradition-bearing community' whose shared beliefs are manifested in cultural, social and political practices. It is these shared beliefs and practices that set the standards by which any thought and behaviour is to be considered rational and objective. Therefore, in order to think and act in a morally rational manner it is necessary to have grasped the sense in which such thought and action accords with the given cultural standards of what constitutes the

'good' or 'goods'. MacIntyre's point, of course, is that we have no notion of moral reasoning in modern society because we have no uniform set of ethical standards, or conception of the 'good', which can underpin any 'tradition-bearing community'. We do not live in a world that strictly speaking constitutes a moral community at all. Rather, we live in a world whose 'world view' has been shaped by the emotivist conception of ethical discourse; a world where 'moral' reasoning is conceived to be a matter of self-assertion and manipulative persuasion, and where the notion of achieving purposes for the end of some harmonious communal good is absent.

This state of affairs constitutes, for MacIntyre, a grave moral disorder. It may be overcome in the future, he says, if we resuscitate the concept of a practical *telos* that is nurtured in the 'Aristotelian' view of the moral virtues; a view which has survived, albeit fragmentedly, the ravages of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period. This suggestion need not concern us here. What does concern us is MacIntyre's contention that this state of affairs cannot be overcome in the future whilst we remain attached to the emotivist presuppositions which inform our theoretical and practical view of the world. For it leads us to conclude that liberalism cannot effect the changes that are needed. Indeed, according to MacIntyre's account, liberalism has largely *contributed* to the crisis that we find ourselves in. For MacIntyre, liberal-individualism and emotivism have reflected and contributed to the descent into nihilism that we are increasingly witnessing. We observe that in everyday practice 'emotivist man' finds no moral reasons for the distinctively ethical activity of pursuing 'the good life'. The practical consequence of this is that emotivist man is compelled as his culture faces deeper crisis to abandon his commitment to the liberal democratic practices which have shaped him. The decay of moral reasoning which has accompanied this decline in ethical and political conviction must make the attempts of Dunn, Rorty and Rawls to represent liberalism in a 'pragmatic' light quite futile. This is because the basic distinction between morality and prudence, which Dunn, Rorty and Rawls all assume to be established, has been obliterated.

Conclusion.

It has been established that the philosophical arguments of non-cognitivism, which amount to a particular account of the distinctions between facts and values, reasons and sentiments, and the notions of objectivity and subjectivity, are inadequate. This is ultimately because they rest upon a conception of the self and his relation to the world which is not philosophically sustainable. That is, there are good philosophical reasons to reject it. Nonetheless, it is a notion of the individual which dominates the history of contemporary moral philosophy and political practice of the Western world. Its articulation in philosophical circles was most prevalent in the 1930's, when emotivist theorists such as Stevenson, Duncan-Jones, Barnes and Ayer contributed to the emergence and popularisation of the non-cognitivist view. However, they fail to realise that the form which this conception of the self takes is not strictly speaking philosophical, but is rather ideological, and relates to the liberal-individualist understanding. As such, they fail to acknowledge that their philosophical arguments amount to the expression of the liberal-individualist ideological view. As a result, they fail to appreciate that their notion of the individual moral and political agent remains philosophically irrefutable, *not* because it is philosophically correct, but because it is ultimately immune from philosophical criticism. For although we can philosophically reject it, we cannot philosophically refute it. We can reject the logic of the theoretical arguments which support it, but we cannot philosophically deny its ideological sense. It is a notion which does, however, require ideological justification in the future.

We have, in this respect, shown how MacIntyre's rejection of the possibility of providing any successful future liberal-democratic justification of our Western political practices is presented in an argument which has great force on its own terms. For his claim that

liberalism is theoretically bankrupt rests upon a powerful rejection of the concept of the self which is associated with the recognisably liberal understanding of man. As we have seen, it is a conception of the subject which sprung from the Enlightenment, and is assumed in both the non-cognitivist and Kantian rationalist philosophical expressions of different varieties of liberal-individualist thought.

We have also shown, in the light of MacIntyre's criticism, that non-cognitivist liberalism is to be understood as particularly self-defeating. This is because it is based upon emotivist premises which effectively eradicate the distinction between morality and prudence that is central to the notion of individual free choice in moral, as distinct from prudential, affairs. As such, the non-cognitivist enterprise cannot successfully sustain the central liberal distinction between morality and prudence, as specified in terms of 'ends' and 'means', which it purports to support.

However, the Kantian rationalist justification fares no better. It does, admittedly, demarcate the means-ends distinction in clearer terms; but this demarcation is, at the theoretical level, dependent upon a false theory of transcendental rationality and the self, and is, at the practical level, obliterated by practitioners in liberal-democratic societies who no longer conceive of the distinction in these terms. For, as Macintyre argues, our practical experience in these societies has been to a large degree shaped by our understanding that the emotivist vision of the nature of moral discourse is the true version. It is a vision which, as John Dunn notes, does 'describe with considerable fidelity what most frequently occurs nowadays in most moral arguments in the western world'. (1) It follows, then, that if the impact of emotivism (understood not in terms of its claim as a false theory of meaning, but in terms of a correct theory of use) is as great as both Dunn and Macintyre believe, then its unmasking of the liberal enterprise's failure to justify theoretically and sustain practically the commitments of its adherents appears to be conclusive. We have suggested that this is so.

There are further difficulties which have been considered, and they relate to the efforts of Rorty and Rawls to evade these problems, and diffuse the crisis which faces contemporary liberalism. Both

writers, it will be recalled, attempt to side-step the issue of the theoretical problems that are inherent in the Enlightenment notion of the individual self, and which was previously employed to justify the liberal understanding. They attempt to do so by insisting that 'philosophical' conceptions of the subject are not relevant to the practical matter of defending cultural practices. This is quite so: philosophy and practical politics are indeed only contingently related to each other. However, there must always be some sort of *ideological* conception of the subject which is necessary for the continued commitment to a particular moral and political practice. This is because without some kind of ideological conception of the subject, our understanding of our moral and political practices becomes unintelligible, 'senseless' or pointless, and our practical commitment to our practices becomes impossible to maintain.

Liberalism, therefore, like any other ideology, needs a conception of the self if it is to preserve its unity as a recognisable tradition that sustains our identification with those practices which have been shaped by it. Without this adherence to a particular conception of the subject, our commitment to the future defence of our liberal practices would flounder and drift: it would amount to the decay of the liberal ideological tradition, and would lead, ultimately, to its decease.

Rorty and Rawls fail to address this problem. They fail to indicate plausibly how liberalism can survive as a body of thought which succeeds in justifying liberal-democratic moral and political practices, once that tradition is stripped from the Enlightenment conception of the self which has historically characterised it. It is, in this respect, an irony that Rorty denounces the 'neo-conservative' or 'libertarian' strain of contemporary American Republicanism which 'usually tell us that we need to recapture our sense of universal and objective moral values, and add that this means getting back behind both pragmatism and the secularisation of the Enlightenment to either 'natural law' or to a religious ethics'.(2) For it is a contingent fact that liberal ideology of the 1980s has been revitalised by ideas which have recaptured the political imagination of the West from precisely these 'neo-conservative' quarters. On this point Rorty has no practical reply, because he is unable to show how this practical commitment can

be sustained in any other, notably 'postmodern bourgeois liberal' or pragmatic, terms.

The point, then, is that however philosophically untenable the positions restated by the 'New Right' may be, their ideological achievement in revitalising the liberal tradition cannot be disputed. Whether this achievement can be maintained in a world in which moral and political conflicts are such that the notion of a moral consensus is becoming increasingly hard to defend is a difficult and speculative matter. We have suggested, following MacIntyre, that this looks unlikely; and we have argued that the reason why this is so is that the emotivist or non-cognitivist conception of morality has unwittingly accentuated the conditions which are likely to disrupt the achievement. As such, we can broadly agree with MacIntyre's assessment, although we have noted that he fails accurately to specify and account for the ideological dimension in this situation. We can say, then, that the possibility of an enduring and distinctly liberal ideological commitment to our Western practices is fragile. There is little evidence to suggest that the 'pragmatic' approach advanced by Rorty and Rawls can succeed in sustaining this liberal ideological achievement.

This point leads us to a final consideration. It is whether the pragmatic positions adopted by Rorty and Rawls amount to a recognisably liberal defence of social democratic practices at all. John Dunn, who is equally keen to separate liberalism from Enlightenment or rationalist premises, concedes that

> liberalism so conceived may well in practice in particular societies and at particular times entail a politics which describes itself as either socialist or conservative. Precisely because it casts prudence as a central political virtue, it is obliged to take its bearings as best it can by assessing the current configuration of hazards facing a society and the existing resources, moral and material, of which that society then disposes and which it must employ to meet these hazards to the best of its abilities. (3)

Now, this characterisation of a future 'liberalism' as pragmatic and flexible is shared by Rorty and Rawls. But we can question whether it is to be appropriately called 'liberalism' at all; and we can question whether the theorists who advance this view can be indentified as being recognisably 'liberal' in outlook. Rorty, for instance, appears to have a predominantly conservative disposition in political issues, and this relates to his admiration for Oakeshott. Thus we find that Rorty is generally sceptical about philosophical issues, that he conceives of politics as 'experimental', and that he rejects the forms of 'individualism' which have so clearly characterised the liberal tradition. Further, we note that he advocates the notion of the 'communitarian' self, and emphasises the importance of our practices or cultural traditions in determining our moral and political character. All this leads us to wonder whether what Rorty has in mind is the return of a political Conservatism - an understanding which, relative to the Western experience, defends liberal political practices on the pragmatic grounds that 'it works for us' - and not a revision of political liberalism at all. For if, as MacIntyre has shown, what counts as the recognisably liberal view is inescapably circumscribed within the emotivist or non-cognitivist framework, then it follows that the attempts of Rorty *et al* to resolve the crisis that faces liberalism cannot be a liberal resolution, but must rather be a Conservative one.

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5. C.L. Stevenson, Letter to Doctor R.F. Piper of Syracuse University, 1937.

6. Stevenson, Ibid.

7. W.H.F. Barnes, 'The Emotive Theory of Ethics', November 1986.

7. Non-cognitivism and Liberal-individualism.

1. S.Lovibond, Realism and Imagination in Ethics (Basil Blackwell, 1983) p.1.

2. C.Taylor, 'Overcoming Epistemology' in After Philosophy: End or Transformation? (Edited by Baynes, Boham, McCarthy, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England. 1987) pp.471-472.

3. Taylor, Ibid., p.471.

4. The Marxist would, of course, deny that his understanding of the relationship between persons is ideological in the sense which I attribute to him.

5. I am indebted to Dr. D.J. Manning for his views on the form of ideological understanding. See D.J. Manning and T.J. Robinson The Place of Ideology in Political Life (Croom Helm, 1985)).

6. A.J.Ayer, 'On the Analysis of Moral Judgements' in Philosophical Essays (MacMillan, 1954) p.246.

7. L.Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Basil Blackwell, 2nd Edition, 1963) 124, p.49.

8. Later expositions of the non-cognitivist theory exhibit a decisive shift away from this conception of the limits of philosophy. Both Hare and Mackie have recently engaged in normative ethics, and have justified this move in terms of the (purported) connection between theory and practice. Thus, we find Hare arguing in the Preface to Moral Thinking (P.v.) that if his ideas were understood, 'philosophers might do more to help to resolve important practical issues', and asserting that the practical implications of his theory are grounded upon the combined metaethical and normatively ethical elements within it. This claim appears to be grounded upon two assumptions: firstly, that his variety of ethical theory is a purely descriptive analysis of ethical experience (and is hence non-ideological): secondly, that certain practical recommendations or guidelines follow from it. Both these assumptions are to be questioned.

9. D.Miller, Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought (Oxford, 1981).

Miller makes the point that it may, strictly speaking, be a contextual error to apply the labels of 'liberal' and 'conservative' at all when analysing the political thought of mid 18th century Britain, because there is a sense in which the distinction between modern liberalism and conservatism only evolved as responses to the French Revolution. However it remains possible, I suggest, to identify those elements in Hume's thought which were later to become assimilated within these distinct traditions.

10. It is an understanding which has naturally generated a variety of utilitarianism which is underpinned by the liberal-individualist notion of personal freedom. See for example J.S. Mill's attempt to justify liberty in terms of the utility principle.

11. R.G.Collingwood, Preface to Guido de Ruggerio The History of European Liberalism (Beacon Press, Boston, 1959) p.7.

12. C.L.Stevenson, The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms (Harvard, Unpublished PhD Thesis, 1935) pp.142-143.

13. Stevenson, Ibid., p.144.

14. Stevenson, Ibid.

15. R.M.Hare, The Language Of Morals pp.77-78.

16. The notion of 'sympathy', or the benevolent concern for the predicament of others, is a central feature of Hume's moral theory.

17. C.L.Stevenson, 'Value Judgements: their Implicit Generality' in Ethical Theory (Edited by Norman E. Bowie, Hackett Publishing Company, 1983).

18. R.M.Hare, Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method and Point (Oxford, 1981) p.227.

19. Hare, Ibid., p.228. It is to be noted that Hare characterises a person who fails to adopt this form of critical moral thinking as a 'fanatic'. I take this characterisation to be ideological: it is to identify a type of person who fails to think and act morally in the appropriate liberal-individualist ideological sense.

20. J.L.Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977) p.165.

21. Mackie, Ibid., p.190.

22. It is a distinction which I think still holds independent of the issue as to whether or not, and in what sense, philosophical analysis

is itself to be understood as being always dependent upon the historical context of its articulation.

23. It may be suggested that this 'self-autonomous' conception of man is equally applicable to existentialist and anarchist ideological understandings, and that therefore non-cognitivism is related to these understandings as much as to liberal-individualism. I suggest that this is not so because the liberal-individualist, existentialist, and anarchist notions of self-autonomy possess different ideological sense as expressed in different philosophical traditions, and it is the liberal-individualist notion which is expressed in the philosophical vocabulary of non-cognitivism.

24. J.L.Mackie, Ethics p.199.

8. Berlin and Russell.

1. However, both Hare and Mackie have recently made their intentions more explicit by engaging in normative ethics of the kind which they refrained from doing in the early expositions of their theories.

2. This liberal critique of 'totalitarianism', as set out in the 1950's, was also notably expressed in different ways by Popper and Talmon.

3. Non-cognitivists have not, to my knowledge, attended to this second point, but it follows naturally from their conception of value.

4. I.Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (1958) in Four Essays on Liberty (Oxford University Press, 1969, Reprinted 1979) p.172.

5. W.H.F.Barnes, 'Is There A Realm Of Objective Values?' (unpublished paper 1933) p.25.

6. John Gray, 'On Negative and Positive Liberty' in Conceptions of Liberty in Political Philosophy (edited by Pelczynski and Gray, The Athlone Press, London 1984) p.344.

7. I.Berlin, 'John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life' (1959) in Four Essays on Liberty pp. 200-1.

8. Berlin, Ibid., p.201.

9. B.Russell, Philosophy and Politics (Cambridge University Press, 1946) p.7.

10. Russell, Ibid., p.26.

11. Russell, Ibid., p.27.

12. B.Russell, Religion and Science (London, Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1935) pp. 230-231.

13. Russell, Ibid., p.229.

14. Russell, Ibid., p.242.

15. Russell, Ibid., p.232.

16. Russell, Ibid.

17. Russell, Religion and Science p.241. Russell is not of course assuming the possibility of a 'perfect harmony' of interests. This assumption is metaphysical and Russell is hostile to metaphysics. His use of the term 'harmony' is purely metaphorical.

18. B.Russell, Philosophy and Politics p.8.

19. Russell, Ibid.

9. Proponents of Liberalism: Dunn, Rorty and Rawls.

I. Dunn.

1. J. Dunn, 'The Future of Liberalism' in _Rethinking Modern Political Theory_ (Cambridge University Press, 1985) pp. 154-170.
2. Dunn, Ibid., p.163.
3. R. Nozick has recently advanced a version of moral realism in _Philosophical Explanations_, but it is not clear how this notion relates to his utopian theory as developed in _Anarchy, State and Utopia_.
4. J. Rawls, 'Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory': the Dewey Lectures in _Journal of Philosophy_ (77, 1980) p.570.
5. J. Dunn, op. cit., p.162.
6. Dunn, Ibid., pp. 162-163.
7. Dunn, Ibid., p.162.
8. Dunn, Ibid., p.163.
9. Dunn, Ibid., p.162.
10. Dunn, Ibid., p.163.
11. Dunn, Ibid.
12. Dunn states that this version of moral realism is based on 'metaphysical foundations': I do not understand the sense in which this is so.

II. Rorty.

13. R. Rorty, 'Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism' in the _Journal of Philosophy_ (80, 1983) pp. 583-589.
14. Rorty, Ibid., pp. 585-586.
15. Rorty, Ibid., p.586.

16. M. Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice (New York: Cambridge, 1982) p.179.

17. Rorty, op. cit., p.586.

18. Rorty, Ibid., p.584.

19. Rorty, Ibid., p.587.

20. Rorty, Ibid., p.586.

21. Rorty, Ibid., pp. 586-587.

22. Rorty, Ibid., p.587.

23. Rorty, Ibid., pp. 584-585.

24. Rorty, Ibid., p.585.

25. Rorty, Ibid.

26. Rorty, Ibid., p.587.

27. Rorty, Ibid.

28. R. Rorty, 'From Logic to Language to Play' in Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association (June 1986) pp. 752-753.

29. R. Rorty, 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy' in The Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom: Its Evolution and Consequences in American History. (Ed. by M.D. Peterson and R. Vaughan, Cambridge University Press, 1988). Quoted in R. Bernstein, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward' in Political Theory (November 1987).

30. Rorty, 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy' p.9.

31. Rorty, Ibid.

32. Rorty, Ibid., p.36.

33. R. Bernstein, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward' in Political Theory (November 1987)

34. Bernstein, Ibid., p.557.

35. R. Rorty, 'Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Bernstein' in Political Theory (November 1987).

36. Rorty, Ibid., p.577.

37. Rorty, Ibid., pp. 577-578.

38. Rorty, Ibid., p.578.

39. Rorty, Ibid.

40. Rorty, Ibid., p.577.

41. Rorty, 'From Logic to Language to Play' pp. 752-753.

42. Rorty, 'Thugs and Theorists' p.571.

43. Rorty, Ibid., p.578.

44. M. Oakeshott, Rationalism in Politics (Methuen Press, 1962) p.197.

45. Rorty, 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy' p.20.

46. Rorty, 'Thugs and Theorists' p.573.

47. Rorty, Ibid.

48. Rorty, Ibid. p.573.

49. R. Bernstein, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward' p.556. We would not, however, want to use the distinctly Marxist sense of ideology which is employed by Bernstein.

III. Rawls.

1. J. Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical' in Philosophy and Public Affairs (Summer 1985, Volume 14, No.3) p.223.

2. Rawls, Ibid., p.230.

3. Rawls, Ibid., p.228.

4. Rawls, Ibid., pp. 225-226.

5. Rawls, Ibid., p.227.

6. Rawls, Ibid., p.231.

7. Rawls, Ibid.

8. Rawls, Ibid., p.240.

9. Rawls, Ibid., p.241.

10. Rawls, Ibid.

11. Rawls, Ibid., p.242.

12. Rawls, Ibid., p.243.

13. Rawls, Ibid., p.244.

14. Rawls, Ibid., p.230.

15. Rawls, Ibid.

16. Rawls, Ibid.

10. Opposition to Liberalism: MacIntyre.

1. A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* (Duckworth, Second Edition, 1985) p.8.

2. MacIntyre, Ibid.

3. MacIntyre, Ibid., p.9.

4. Macintyre, Ibid., p.11.

5. MacIntyre, Ibid., p.22.

6. MacIntyre, Ibid.

7. MacIntyre, Ibid., p.20.

8. MacIntyre, Ibid., pp. 20-21.

9. MacIntyre, Ibid., p.21.

10. MacIntyre, Ibid.

11. MacIntyre, Ibid.

12. J. Dunn, 'Identity, modernity, and the claim to know better' (1981) in *Rethinking Modern Political Theory* pp. 144-145.

13. A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* p.2.

14. MacIntyre, Ibid., p.10.

15. MacIntyre, Ibid., pp. 23-24.

16. MacIntyre, Ibid., p.24.

17. A. MacIntyre, 'Moral Arguments and Social Contexts' in the *Journal of Philosophy* (80, 1983) p.590.

18. MacIntyre, Ibid.

19. MacIntyre, Ibid., pp. 590-591.

Conclusion.

1. J. Dunn, 'Identity, modernity, and the claim to know better' in *Rethinking Modern Political Theory* p.144.

2. R. Rorty, 'Thugs and Theorists' in *Political Theory* (November 1987) p.574.

3. J. Dunn, 'The Future of Liberalism' in *Rethinking Modern Political Theory* p.169.

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