M O R A L P R I N C I P L E S

by

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SYNOPSIS

Words like 'rules', 'principles' and 'laws' show in ordinary usage a considerable degree of fluidity which makes it impossible to draw more than certain broad distinctions between them, and moral philosophers have generally shown a tendnecy to use these words in rather blanket ways which ignore even these broad distinctions. It is necessary therefore to explain at the outset the sense in which 'principles' is used in this enquiry. As used here, this term means certain requirements of a general nature belonging to a given subject-matter which conflict with one another in a systematic way and without indicating a defect in their formulation. This definition is not arbitrarily chosen but is claimed to apply to the main kind of general utterance in the field of morals.

At a further stage 'a moral principle' is defined stipulatively as a principle which contains a distinctive moral concept in its statement as constitutive of its scope, and it is maintained that all moral principles in this sense adduce considerations.

The chief antithesis of my position in this enquiry is constituted by what I call formalism, namely the view that moral principles are principles of a universal nature which are treated as the overriding principles of our lives. In rejecting this view I do not opt for what might easily be taken to be the natural alternative to it, i.e. the view that moral principles are the principles of human excellence. The alternative adopted by me is based on the notion of competing fields. By a field I mean a set of standards which apply to our conduct irrespective of our own choices; thus morality, self-interest and religion are fields in my sense. These fields compete with each other both by having border-disputes as well as by threatening one another with complete subjugation.

This enquiry is thus in part a plea that a major function of ethics is the study of the various moral concepts and of concepts belonging to other fields which are of importance in understanding the relation between morality and its rivals.

CHAPTER I

Rules and Principles

1. The possibility of using cognate words and expressions interchangeably seems to be implied by calling them cognates. One might indeed deny this under the influence of a theory of the 'mot juste', but when stylisitic or logical perfection is not the aim such a denial can only be absurd. And once general objections of this kind are disallowed, it seems possible to investigate in detail the usage of each of a set of cognates, in order to determine the many ways in which they are interchangeable. The set of cognates I shall be concerned with, more than any other, is the set of which 'rules', 'laws' and 'principles' are perhaps the most important members. Whatever philosophical value such detailed cartography may generally have, it seems to me that, in their case, for reasons which I hope to make plain later, it is best to keep certain questions of a logical nature constantly in mind, and to study their usage in piecemeal fashion, mainly in subordination to these questions.

One such question may be raised in the following way. There are certain features of the use of these words by moral philosophers, especially when preceded by the adjective 'moral', i.e. of expressions like 'moral rules', 'moral principles' and 'moral laws', which though seemingly trivial, are likely to repay

a deeper probing. Thus, very often, they have shown a preference for one of these expressions, as generally the most suitable, or, sometimes, they have avoided one of them almost completely. I shall briefly give a few examples in support of my claim. Both these features are to be found in Kant. He used, almost consistently, 'moral laws' as the preferred expression, and, negatively, completely avoided 'moral rules'. Bradley, though not clearly a deontologist like Kant, shows the same negative preference. Among the later utilitarians, Sidgwick showed a fairly strong preference for 'moral rules'.[1] Other examples can no doubt be found in the history of ethics. But perhaps the best illustration is provided by comtemporary British ethics. There is a widespread preference for 'moral rules',[2] and a universal avoidance of 'moral laws'.

It would be highly implausible to maintain that choices of this nature are made on stylistic grounds. Being rather blanket choices, they betray an insensitiveness to the distinctions of ordinary speech: considerations of style would therefore demand just the opposite. Nor can they be explained solely as referential devices, used to refer indifferently to any member of a large class. No doubt the need for such reference sometimes arises, and I shall

1. See his History of Ethics.
2. Mr. R. M. Hare's use of 'moral principles', though untypical, is no less single-minded. See his Language of Morals, passim.

myself use 'requirement' or 'standard' for this purpose. But it is not so frequent as to explain such systematic choices. And, moreover, why should the choice of such devices diverge in such systematic ways between writers from different schools? I shall now maintain that there are only two ways of making a general choice between these expressions; one legitimate, and another the source of a good deal of confusion. And, further, that when the choice is not quite general, as it is in the above examples, but departs clearly from ordinary untheoretical speech, it is to be explained in one of the same two ways. It may either be made in terms of an ethical theory, sometimes backed in turn by a more general philosophical theory, or to claim application for an independently valid logical distinction. Obviously, this is too brief a statement to establish a clear difference between the two; I shall however try to do so in the course of this chapter.

In illustration of the first way, let us take the utilitarian predilection for 'rules' to refer to the general requirements of morality. Since writers opposed to teleological theories - and ipso facto to utilitarianism - do not, in the main, countenance 'rules' in moral contexts, is it not reasonable to assume that it is the preoccupation with a means-end model which determines the predilection? But a single explanation of this sort is not always available. What, for instance, does the current predilection for

'moral rules' reflect? I am inclined to think that it springs partly from a notion that moral requirements are, in an important sense, practical in character; and partly also perhaps from a philosophical theory of rules, derived ultimately from Wittgenstein; but I feel that possibly at the same time it is meant to stress their resemblance to rules which seem quite unmysteriously man-made. Where the choice lies between the other two expressions the position may be more complicated. A large number of analogies suggest themselves, and their resultant may not always point unmistakably in one direction. In Ross, for instance, the preference for 'laws' suggests a preoccupation with the notion of obligation; but does it also in Kant? Now it is not important that the explanations I have given should be correct; but it does seem to me that generally the correct explanations are of this kind; i.e. that generally they are explanations in terms of some special feature of an ethical theory.

There is no clear example, as far as I am aware, in the history of ethics of the second way of making a general choice. Kant came perhaps closer than any other moral philosopher in providing one. Let us recall his distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives. In the Grundlegung, as generally elsewhere, the former are called 'laws' or 'commands'; the latter being subdivided into 'technical' and 'pragmatic' imperatives, and called, respectively, 'technical rules' or 'rules of skill', and 'maxims' or

'counsels'[3]. Superficially it seems that his choice of 'moral laws' as the appropriate expression for moral requirements is also a choice in terms of an ethical theory, viz. his theory of the categorical imperative[4]. But underlying the imperativist phraseology is a logical distinction pertaining to a difference in importance which does not depend on any theory. No doubt the notion of importance often, though not necessarily illegitimately, finds applications which are not purely logical in character. Thus to the government of a poor country economy may understandably be a more important consideration than efficiency, just as financial gain might, though less understandably, rank higher in the calculations of a certain type of artist than the purely artistic qualities of his work. There is no lack of good reasons in such cases, but it is characteristic of them that the notion of importance is not applied as a logical notion. For the same reason the moral philosopher, in choosing between our three expressions, cannot, when he is not making a distinction between fundamental and derivative moral standards, appeal to it, without abandoning the logical impartiality of ethical theory. But Kant's division of imperatives can be construed as the application of a purely logical notion of importance. It is a logical truth for him that moral requirements are the highest kind of requirements, and that, ipso facto moral considerations override

3. Second Section. Abbotts translation (tenth edition, Longmans).
4. Kant's theory of the categorical imperative is discussed in chapter V.

all other considerations.

Can we also speak of some kind of precedence or over-ridingness as between Kant's two kinds of hypothetical imperative? The difficulty here seems to be that, while moral considerations bind us irrespective of our purposes, considerations of happiness or efficiency seem to hold only in the context of our purposes. Kant thought that happiness is something all men aim at, but he did not think that it was a necessary fact about human beings. But perhaps a simple dichotomy between analytic and synthetic propositions would not do here. The connection between what we understand by human nature and the pursuit of happiness seems to be quasi-logical, even if it is not analytic in a straightforward way. On the other hand, there seems to be nothing necessary about the interest we show in skills of various kinds. But whether this would give us a logical distinction similar to the one we have already drawn is highly doubtful.

Now the construction I have put on Kant's distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is probably not faithful to his intentions. It is in fact quite possible that his choice of 'moral law', like Ross's, was intended to emphasise the importance of the notion of obligation in morality. But there is, nevertheless, an advantage in my suggestion that such an interpretation is possible is in itself quite significant. This is obscured by the fact that

morality is itself one of the terms of the distinction; i.e. since the distinction (as here interpreted) refers to the precedence of moral considerations over non-moral ones, there is no genuine question of its application within morality. (And, for the same reason, no real possibility of extending it elswhere exists).

Here I want to anticipate a possible objection. It might be said that the fact that certain requirements are the highest kind of requirement does not imply that they are the requirements of morality; that, therefore, Kant's distinction, as I interpret it, may still have application. There are two reasons why this objection must be overruled. Firstly, for Kant the expressions 'highest requirement' and 'moral requirement' imply each other; that is, what is to be done unconditionally must, for him, be what is morally required. Secondly, in ordinary speech also we rule out the possibility of asking 'Why ought I?' only when an action is held to be morally required.

I want to draw a distinction which does not suffer from this defect, i.e. a distinction none of whose terms is tied to any particular subject matter. I shall define a way of using 'rules' and a sense of 'principles' which will enable us to make a genuine choice of the second kind between our three expressions. It will, moreover, give a distinction which is, as I believe, extremely rich in its possibility of application. But to ensure that it is

in fact so, certain difficulties will have to be overcome. Before I begin to do so I want to do Kant justice, especially after having submitted him to a somewhat Procrustean procedure.

In distinguishing between three kinds of imperatives, and in selecting different terms from our set of cognates for each of them, Kant showed a commendable willingness to observe distinctions - a virtue not as common among philosophers as may be believed. His choice of 'moral laws', even if my interpretation of it is not faithful to his intentions, served, in its setting, to mark off what is distinctive about morality as an aspect of 'practical reason'. A deceptively similar belief about the 'practical' character of morality has led in recent ethics to just the opposite result. It is claimed that moral language is best studied as part of a much larger sphere, with which it is supposed to share many important characteristics, the sphere, namely, of 'practical discourse' (Nowell-Smith) or 'prescriptive language' (Hare). Though there is something to be said for this view, it has in practice meant too great a stress on the analogies in a large and heterogeneous collection of types of speech - as if the wood alone mattered and the individual trees counted for little. Against such a background of theory it was hardly to be expected that the temptation to extend a central choice indiscriminately would be resisted. An amusing example of it is provided by Hare's use of

'principle' when he calls 'One ought never to put magenta cushions on top of scarlet upholstery'[5] a principle. A certain moral earnestness, reminiscent of Kant, is perhaps behind his choice of 'moral principles', as though the acceptance of a moral requirement was always an occasion of great moment. And no doubt there are occasions of no less moment in other fields. But why the fact that magenta cushions do not go with scarlet upholstery should be called a principle fundamental to the art of interior decoration is quite mysterious.

2. The distinction which I want to draw between 'rules' and 'principles' is not a distinction which is clearly reflected in the ordinary usage of these words. It is, however, closely connected with some of their important uses. The distinctive function of 'principle' - i.e. the function which marks it off from its cognates - lies in the fact that in many of its uses, it has retained a large part of its original Latin sense (principium - beginning). The Concise Oxford Dictionary article on 'principle' begins with its use to mean a 'fundamental or primary element', as when in the ancient world water 'was held to be the first principle of all things'; and proceeds to list two analogous uses for 'a fundamental truth as basis of reasoning' and 'general law as guide to action'. I do not wish to suggest that these definitions are quite clear

5. Op.cit., p.156.

and precise; nevertheless, they do, each in its own way, involve a notion of importance, in a way which is not purely subjective - in other words, what is called a 'principle' in any of these ways occupies, in virtue of its relation to other elements in some scheme, implicitly or explicitly referred to, a position of importance. Can we, similarly, distinguish some characteristic feature of 'rules'? Now, as a result of the general fluidity of usage of these cognates, there is seldom any feature which we can ascribe to all uses of one of them; generally speaking, all we seem to be able to discern is one or more features which belong to one of them more than to the others. There is however, one feature of 'rules' which all its uses possess: it always makes sense to say of a rule that it has been broken. In the case of 'laws' and 'principles' it does not always make sense even to say that a law or principle has been observed or followed. But there is another cognate word - 'standards' - in whose case we can always say this. The difference between 'laws' and 'principles' on the one hand, and 'rules' and 'standards' on the other hand, we may here mark is that the latter necessarily involve the notion of success or failure, while the former do not. One of the differences between 'rules' and 'standards' seems to be this. In the case of the latter word, the notion of blame or praise from others seems to be closely involved. Thus I can have rules of personal convenience, but I cannot have

standards solely for my own desires and wishes.

There is thus this broad difference between 'rules' and 'principles'; the latter is characteristically connected with the notion of importance;[6] while the former regularly involves doing without implying a necessary connection with praise and blame. Against this background of difference we may draw our technical distinction between them.

To take 'rules' first. There is a class of types of rules in whose case conflict between two rules within the same body of rules[7] is rare and if such conflicts are found to arise in certain cases, the body of rules is deemed to be more or less defective. Standard examples of this class are the official rules of sport, the rules of mathematics and the rules of logic. Mr. D. J. O'Connor, in his paper on Validity and Standards[8] calls such rules 'constitutive

6. Professor Austin has pointed out that 'doing an action', as used in philosophy, is a 'stand-in used in the place of any (or almost any?) verb with a personal subject'. He asks: 'is to think something, or to say something, or to try to do something, to do an action?' It is, like 'thing' or 'quality', a 'dummy'. (A Plea for Excuses; Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society, 1956-57). But 'doing' or 'doing something' raises fewer difficulties than 'doing an action'. Thus to say something, to take one of his examples, is, in a perfectly good, non-philosophical sense, to do something. Similarly, where thinking involves reasoning, thinking is 'doing' or 'doing something' though we often contrast the two.
7. In the case of mathematics a rule may forbid what is jointly permitted by two or more rules; but for the sake of simplicity I shall ignore this possibility.
8. Aristotelian Society, Proceedings, Vol.LVII. 1956-57.

rules'. But his characterisation of them differs from mine. He ignores certain important differences between them and, as a result, attributes more to the class as a whole than can legitimately be done. Thus, with respect to the possibility of remedying conflicts between rules belonging to any member of it, he treats official rules of sport as the paradigm to which the others conform. He says: 'Because such rules are, in this way, constitutive of the activities to which they relate, they are only exceptionally, if ever, conflicting or indecisive through vagueness. If they do turn out to be so the defect can always be remedied by amending the rules.' Now it is certainly true of games like cricket or chess (to take his examples) that conflicts of rules do not arise in them, and that if they did ever arise, they could be remedied; but to say that this is true also of mathematics and logic is quite misleading. The discovery of paradoxes within his system may lead a logician to despair (as, according to Russell, Frege was by the discovery of the class paradox); and in mathematics sometimes the remedying of such defects may come after generations of effort.

For O'Connor not only is the absence of conflict essential to such rules, but so also is the absence of 'indecision through vagueness'. This makes the class defined by his expression 'constitutive rules' much narrower than the class which my use of 'rules' defines. The reasons why I want to use 'rules' in my way can

be made explicit only in stages. But there is some similarity between the purpose of his distinction between rules which are 'constitutive' and those which are not, and the purpose for which I want to draw a distinction between 'rules' and 'principles'. He wants to show that only in the sense of constitutive rules can we speak of validity in a standard sense; whereas I am concerned to show that it is inappropriate to speak of 'moral rules', where 'rules' is understood in either the sense of his 'constitutive rules' or in my sense of 'rules'. He thinks that only rules which lack both these conditions, i.e. which are imprecise and conflicting, can serve as 'evaluative standards'; for to put forward an 'evaluative argument'is to 'offer evidence that the facts under consideration satisfy rules of the latter type'. Since I want later to question the distinction between evaluation and description, as it has been recently applied, and which, in its current form O'Connor seems broadly to accept in this paper, it is not necessary for me to question this view directly. But an important reason which leads him to adopt such stringent requirements for 'constitutive rules' must here be examined. 'It is worth noting', he says, 'that this sort of conflict and indecision arises where the subject matter antedates the rules and standards for its evaluation. (Men had conduct, language, social disputes, dogs and plants long before they had moral rules,

grammar, law, dog shows and botanical classification, the respective devices for their ordering)'. This passage exhibits, in a more acute form, the same mistake as the passage I have criticised above: he attributes to a whole set what is true only of some of its members. Only in the case of the last two of his examples, viz., botanical classification and dog shows, is it true without qualification that the 'subject matter antedates the rules and standards for its evaluation'. Men could have 'conduct' only by having rules (do animals have 'conduct'?), even though the first rules were moral only in a rudimentary way. Similarly, social disputes imply juridical procedures, though not of the sophisticated kinds we have in the modern world. And does not justice partially 'define' morality just as much as the L.B.W. rule defines cricket? No doubt men had language before formal grammar, but on what grounds can we assume that an artificial language could, like a calculus, have precise and consistent rules without becoming a device of limited application? O'Connor is led to force, in this way, a simple pattern on complicated cases by a deeper fallacy. He fails to realise that vagueness and mutual inconsistency, or their opposites, are not contingent properties of rules, but depend essentially on the field to which they belong, and on their function within it. I shall try to show that imprecision and mutual clash are essential to the rules of morality

(or moral principles as I shall call them) in virtue of the nature of morality. And, for this reason, in making claims of this nature in any given case, one claims to be in a position to characterise, to an important degree, the logical nature of the field concerned.

That the degree of precision attained by a rule depends on its function within its field may be seen by considering some of O'Connor's examples of 'constitutive rules'.

He contrasts legal requirements with rules of sport. 'Many of the characteristic disputes of the law', he rightly observes, 'are carried on by methods of reasoning which are typical of disputes in valuational matters'. But the contrast between such characteristic legal disputes and disputes over rules of sport may not always be sharp. Thus, two of the official rules[9] of cricket, viz. 45 and 46, are concerned with the 'duties of the umpires'. They are, inter alia 'the sole judges of fair and unfair play, and the final judges of the fitness of the ground, the weather and the light for play in the event of the decision being left to them'; and if they disagree 'the actual state of things shall continue'. Now though these rules are quite precise in defining the authority of the umpires, the matters over which such authority is exercised are, by their very nature, subject to dispute. The need for this 'last court' is thus as obvious in cricket as it is in law. And

9. Or 'laws of cricket' as they are called. Official Rules of Sport and Games, 1950-1951 (Nicholas Kaye).

there may be - indeed there are - 'divergent precedents' for settling questions about 'the fitness of the ground' etc. (Yet we have no last court, not even a first court, for mathematical disputes).

O'Connor thinks that the satisfaction of certain constitutive rules is always a precondition of the application of evaluative standards. 'And even in such primarily evaluative activities as assessing conduct or judging dogs, there are constitutive rules which must be satisfied before we turn to evaluation, though for the most part such rules remain in the background and unnoticed. It would, for example, violate the constitutive rules of Cruft's Show if a dog were entered which had not been registered with the Kennel Club. Such a dog would not qualify for a prize, however well he conformed to the standards of his breed. And so in the field of ethics, apes, infants or maniacs do not qualify to have their conduct evaluated in accordance with any principles of morals.' Now it is a truism that before anything can be rated in a certain way it must be eligible for such rating; but there is no obviousness about the need to satisfy criteria defined in terms of constitutive rules. The examples he gives are again mixed. It is obvious that, though the ordinary criteria of a dachshund are neither precise, nor perhaps even consistent, the Kennel Club cannot operate with such criteria. And we do not experience any

hesitation in recognizing apes and infants, though these latter are rather question - begging examples. But surely maniacs come in a very different category. Where 'maniac' is not used loosely as a term of abuse, but to exclude someone from the community of moral agents, the possibility of disputes and heart-searching is endless. Here there is no possibility, as there is in framing rules of entry for dog shows, of ending our difficulties by fiat.

But the relation between the general requirements that are held at any time to operate in a field and that field itself is a matter of systematic investigation. Here we may recall a famous saying of Aristotle. In the Nichomachean Ethics, he says, '. . . it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician as to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs' (I,3). It seems to me that the value of what he says in this passage has been exaggerated. That we should only look for the degree of precision which a subject admits is quite indisputable, if not obvious, but the real difficulty is to determine whether or not the precision we happen to be content with is essentially what the subject admits of, and, whether, when our expectations have been belied in a given case, this was due to an over-optimistic estimate of the potentialities of the subject or a failure of ours.

We may now see how the two conditions I have stipulated for rules (in my sense), namely, that conflict between them should be infrequent, and that such clashes should be deemed to be defects in the body of rules to which they belong, may be expected to operate. A body of rules which was intended to meet the second condition, but failed to meet the first, may have to be discarded altogether, just as a garment with many holes in it may not be worth mending. But this is not necessarily so. Thus conflicts of laws are frequent, and since it is one of the aims of legal reform to make such conflicts less common, this must be held to be a defect; nor, moreover, is this aim always achieved by replacing such laws by entirely new ones. Laws then cannot be called rules in my sense; but the difference between the two is not so great as it is between laws and O'Connor's 'constitutive rules'. They occupy an intermediate position between my rules and principles (as I shall define this word), since, though they conflict frequently, there seems no limit to the possibility of reducing such conflicts.

3. I shall now explain the sense in which I intend to use 'principles'. There are, often, certain general requirements in a field which conflict with one another in a systematic way, in virtue of their subject matter and their function in that field, and therefore without thereby indicating a defect in their

formulation. Rules of batsmanship ('Play with a straight bat'), the maxims which guide historians, and general requirements of morality like 'Be just', 'Be truthful' etc. may be taken as representative examples. I must here point out that I am using 'requirement' as the word is ordinarily used, without intending to place it on either side of the current dichotomy between 'normative' and 'descriptive' uses of language. In my use of 'principles' therefore, principles are neither coincident with, nor a sub-class of, 'evaluative standards' (whatever that expression means).

Broadly speaking, we may distinguish two kinds of application of 'principles' in my sense. A principle may be a general recipe which is not meant to be followed without exception, and one which may therefore be ignored without necessarily committing a fault; such recipes being the best that can be hoped for in the field concerned. Thus we are told to play with a straight bat and, also, to try to demoralise a bowler, even by hitting him against the spin, when he has gained a psychological upper hand over the batsmen. In our dealings with one another honesty is said to be the best policy; but we are also advised not to expect too much from people. These recipes are genuine examples of the principles of batsmanship and the art of <u>savoir faire</u>, not just because they frequently have exceptions and often

give conflicting advice, but also for the following further reasons. They deserve to be called principles because they are what the nature of the fields in which they occur would lead us to expect. If we could formulate rules which work in the way in which the rules of say, mathematics or engineering work we should not be playing cricket (or be practising the art of living). Nor are they merely beginners' guides which can be expected to be replaced by sets of, rules which dovetail into each other. For the expert is here in the same boat as the novice; and if he comes to possess an infallible skill in such matters he ceases, ipso facto, to be expert in batsmanship or savoir faire. The second kind of application may perhaps be best illustrated from the field of morals. Here certain fundamental ends like justice, benevolence, loyalty etc. are accepted, and the principles in which such virtues are enunciated cannot be regarded as merely recipes (except on some philosophical theory).

A question that arises here is, whether, scientific laws like, for instance, Snell's law are principles in my sense. No simple answer to this question seems, however, to be available. On a view like Popper's[10] it seems that they are neither rules nor principles (in the way I use these words). Not being 'falsifiable' (by the possibility of producing counter-instances) in the way scientific

10. See his Logic of Scientific Discovery, especially Chapters I and IV.

hypotheses are for him, they are in principle redundant; thus, if we accept his view of science, they cannot be principles, for to be principles in my sense they must be essentially connected with their subject matter (i.e. physics). Nor can they be rules, for when we operate with them we find that beyond certain well defined limits they simply do not work.

Nor do they seem to satisfy my requirements of a principle if we take Mr. Toulmin's view of them. His view is expressed in the following passage: 'Since the parts which different laws of nature play are so very different, one cannot expect them to have many features in common. But one such feature they do have; and it is one which, in the case of Snell's law, proved of the first importance. They do not tell us anything about phenomena, if taken by themselves, but rather express the form of a regularity whose scope is stated elsewhere; and accordingly, they are the sorts of statements about which it is appropriate to ask, not "Is this true or not?", but rather "To what systems can this be applied?" or "Under what circumstances does this hold?"[11]. There are two reasons why, if this account of scientific laws is accepted, we cannot call them 'principles'. Firstly, I use 'principle' in a way which permits us, as a rule, to ask 'Is this principle valid?' as a meaningful question; secondly, the scope of a principle can never be stated

11. The Philosophy of Science. p 86.

fully, i.e. the types of instance in which it is to be followed form an open class. But, nevertheless, in an important respect scientific laws are like my principles. The fact that they do conflict is not a defect in them.

I have said that principles conflict in a systematic way in virtue of their subject matter, while mutual clash in the case of rules is deemed by us to be a defect in their formulation. The question may naturally be raised why, in drawing my distinction between rules and principles, I should thus introduce an asymmetry in my criteria; why, i.e., do I relate the possibility of (systematic) conflict in the latter case to their subject matter alone without making the same stipulation in the case of the former also? In seeking to eliminate conflicts in such cases we assume or presuppose that the idea of treating conflicts as defects makes sense; so, in a sense, there is at one remove a connection even here with the relevant subject matter. The asymmetry then is only at a certain level. But the main advantage I secure in framing my definition of rules in the way I do is that it enables me to define a wide enough class for my purposes. Now the point of linking the possibility of conflict with the subject-matter in the case of principles is that, then, the idea of modifying or abandoning a principle on the ground that it conflicts with another does not, in consequence of its position in the field in which it occurs, make

sense. I want, in other words, to claim that there are certain fundamental entities in a number of fields which play the part they play only by being entities which conflict in the way I have described. In saying this I am not, of course, pretending to justify fully the precise form I give to my distinction; the only adequate justification it can be given is by showing that, in the form in which I make it, it is extremely rich in application. But some more light can be thrown on it even here by examining a notion which is of some relevance to this enquiry, namely, the notion of a 'rule of thumb'.

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary explains it as follows: 'A method or procedure derived entirely from practice or experience, without any basis in scientific knowledge; a roughly practical method'. As so often with dictionary explanations, this account is too wide to exclude certain applications of the expression which we should regard as inappropriate, at least when we use it with care. But, even as it stands, it reveals some of its distinctive features. Thus it would not be a sufficient condition of calling a rule a rule of thumb that we cannot always apply it successfully (as we cannot always apply Snell's law).[12] But what it fails to take into account is that we expect a minimum of intelligibility even from rules of thumb.

12. Though scientists seldom call scientific laws rules, they can be given the form of a rule by treating them as rules of calculation. The law $Ke=\frac{1}{2} MV^2$ can be treated as a rule for calculating kinetic energy.

For suppose a farmer found that if the village idiot looked morose, the weather on the following day was nearly always dull; that would not give him a rule of thumb for predicting the weather. Another essential element in this notion is that the possibility of a more efficient procedure must be recognised before we can take a rule to be a rule of thumb.[13] If a game very much like cricket were played, in which the tallest player's twenty-two paces determined the length of the pitch such a rule would not be a rule of thumb because it could not, even conceivably, be improved upon. Very often we speak of a rule of thumb only because a better procedure, though it is known to exist, is not to hand or is too inconvenient in the actual situation. (I am inclined to think that this is its standard use).

Three conditions seem therefore to be necessary for calling a procedure a rule of thumb:

i A more efficient procedure must be believed to exist or to be discoverable.

ii It must be intelligible in terms other than mere success.

iii Even frequent failures must not count against its status as a rule of thumb.

Now why is 'Always play with a straight bat' not a rule of thumb?

13. We call the farmer's weather lore rules of thumb because we think the Meteorological Office is equipped with a better technique. But could such rules have been called rules of thumb two thousand years ago, when the possibility of a science of meteorology was not seriously entertained?.

It fails to satisfy the first condition in consequence of the fact that, as far as we can say, any teaching of sound batsmanship must include it. It is not a provisional recipe but one which describes an important factor in the scoring of most runs; though that does not mean that it is always obeyed when a good score is made; merely that it can be ignored only when there are grounds for ignoring it.

The conclusion I want to draw from this brief excursion into rules of thumb is not the obvious one that we are not entitled to quarrel with our tools when none better are visualised. It is rather that when we claim to deal with a subject matter in a systematic way we cannot, in the same breath, disclaim any important connection between our pursuit and our quarry. When speaking of rules of thumb we explicitly leave such connections aside, but the search for them is not the monopoly of scientists. And when we have discovered the best that seems to be available in our field, we have done as much as the scientist can do in his own. In short, if what I am saying is not riddled with fallacy, there is no <u>prima facie</u> ground for holding that the category of principles (as I define it) has not many applications.

4. Having given my distinction between rules and principles a fairly precise formulation I shall now comment very briefly on certain aspects of Wittgenstein's view of rules which are of relevance here. He uses 'rules' in a sense very similar to the sense

in which I propose to use this word. Thus the various language-games described in The Brown Book all employ 'rule' in this way; and the same applies to the rules described in the Investigations. In the latter book he argues, as he did earlier in The Blue Book, that all the possible ways of understanding a rule cannot be called its 'interpretations', for what makes it possible to talk of interpretations is the fact that there is a form of behaviour which is observed in actual practice. He says: 'This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases'. (I,201).

Again: 'To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (uses, institutions)' (I,199). Wittgenstein is not simply identifying a rule with a uniformly

observed custom, for that would be to make a crude behaviouristic reduction of rules, to 'abolish logic' as it were. Rather: 'It is one thing to describe methods of measurement and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call "measuring" is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement'. (I.242) But his thought here is not easy to understand. At times he seems to make the connection between rules and agreement in behaviour far too close; for instance when he says, 'Disputes do not break out (among mathematicians, say) over the question whether a rule has been obeyed. People do not come to blows over it, for example. This is part of the framework on which the working of our language is based (for example in giving descriptions)' (I,240). But it is not necessary for me to quarrel with Wittgenstein over so cardinal an element in his philosophy; what I propose to do is rather to show that his famous saying 'What has to be accepted, the given,-is so one could say - forms of life' (p.226), applied as it is by him uniformly to rules, cannot mean the same when applied to principles. In other words, if we assume that a principle is not a mere collection of consistent rules,[14] then adopting a principle is not adopting a form of life in the way in which adopting a rule is.

Suppose I was teaching someone a rule of chess - say, the rule that the bishop moves diagonally - and, however much I explained to

14. As Hare seems to. See Infra, Chapter III.

him, he never quite caught on to it. I should in that case be left with only one possibility, I could ask him to observe different players at play, and every time a player moved a bishop I could say 'Look'! 'This is how it is moved.' This is exactly the sort of example Wittgenstein gives. But now suppose I wanted to teach someone the principle 'Play with a straight bat', and that explanations alone did not, as they naturally would not in such a case, prove sufficient for the purpose. What sort of possibility is left to me here? If I were to ask my pupil to observe a 'practice', the practice, namely, of batsmen playing with straight bats, what might I achieve? Suppose the players I asked my pupil to watch always played with a straight bat; i.e., with them playing with a straight bat was an absolute principle. This would be a self-defeating lesson; for its very success would be the failure of its purpose and I should have only taught him a rule. The explanation of our difficulty is that a different notion of sameness is involved in 'principles' from the one which is involved in 'rules'. Wittgenstein rightly points out that the criteria of sameness vary from rule to rule. But it has to be noticed that this variability of criteria does not alter the fact that, in relation to forms of life or customs, they are criteria of the same logical kind, whereas the criteria of sameness in principles stand in another, and far more complex, relation to

conduct. While it is true that we obey principles in the same way in which we obey rules it is a mistake to assume that the criteria for saying that a principle is accepted are of the same kind as the criteria for saying that a rule is accepted. I might accept the principle 'Help the needy' without in any way feeling obliged to share my limited means with all my impecunious neighbours, for the simple reason that there are other not less important principles which I also accept.

Rules, like principles, differ not only in being of various kinds,[15] but also in belonging to different fields and activities. To disobey a rule one accepts is, unless extenuating circumstances are pleaded,[16] to incur a certain kind of blame, i.e., the blame which is attached to failures in the activity or field concerned. But to disobey a principle may not give rise to a corresponding kind of blame, even when the principle is accepted and no defence is offered. This may be expressed in political terms by saying that, ideally speaking, each rule is, within the field to which it belongs, independent and self-sufficient - a temporal monad as it were; while principles enjoy only a shared sovereignty.

It must in fairness be said here that Wittgenstein did not find a place for the category of principles in his philosophy in

15. These two terms will later be distinguished. See Chapter V.
16. This needs some qualification. We do not usually blame people for disregarding a rule they profess when it is purely agent-regarding, unless it relates to a standard of prudence which we accept. See Chapter V.

part at least because he showed, at least in his published works, little interest in ethics. There is however some indication that he thought that it was essentially redundant in ethics and aesthetics. In his third article on Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33 (Mind, Jan. 1955), G. E. Moore reports him as saying that in these fields reasons are 'of the nature of further descriptions', as in a court of law' 'where you try to "clear up the circumstances" of the action which is being tried, hoping that in the end what you say will "appeal to the judge" '. There is however another, and perhaps incompatible, suggestion that in aesthetics reasons take the form of an appeal to an 'ideal', i.e., to a particular which serves as the exemplar to which the work of art in question is claimed to conform. Miss R. Meager, in her paper The Uniqueness of a Work of Art[17] takes up this suggestion and argues that, in both aesthetics and morals, we employ rules in which an ostensive model is appealed to, and that this is the characteristic form of reasoning in these fields.

'Given a highly complex object to be evaluated for its own sake and not functionally with some general end in mind, like Rosie or a symphony, it seems perfectly rational to refuse to commit oneself to generalisable evaluations of particular characteristics, however precisely defined. On the other hand it seems an adequate acknowledgment of the demand of reason for consistency and general evaluations rather than avowals of atomic particular preferences,

17. Aristotelian Society, Proceedings, Vol.LIX. 1958-59.

to provide a general principle of the ostensive form "Anything sufficiently closely reproducing the features of Rosie, in the excellent way and excellent combination in which they are manifested by her, is lovable". These features may then even be isolated for special mention, like the characteristic movement of the bass in Wittgenstein's example. "Anyone insouciante in a way sufficiently like Rosie has a good chance of being lovable." "Any passage in a work resembling this one sufficiently closely where the bass moved as much as this bass moves has a good chance of being spoilt". But the force of these comments as general principles of evaluation clearly resides in the model, and not in the general value of the characteristics mentioned'. It seems to me that Miss Meager is here assimilating morals far too closely to aesthetics, and her example of Rosie and her young man is hardly a case of moral appraisal. It may be noticed that her 'ostensible general principles' resemble my 'rules' and that consequently, she shows, in illustrious company no doubt, a strong tendency to treat principles as largely redundant to morals.

In the next chapter I shall discuss an approach to moral principles - what I call the formalist view of moral principles - which constitutes the main antithesis of my position in this enquiry. If I succeed in refuting it, I shall have given some justification for trying to develop a view along the lines of my theory. Another important purpose I hope this negative undertaking will serve is to

remove what is perhaps the strongest temptation to confuse the distinction between rules and principles which I have drawn in this chapter.

CHAPTER II

The Formalistic Fallacy

1. The naturalistic fallacy is often taken to be the principal source of error and confusion in ethics. If it is of the type of an ordinary logical fallacy, as has generally been claimed, it is a matter for surprise that it should have attracted so much attention. It seems to me that the importance of this fallacy has been exaggerated, and that this has led to a fallacy of a graver kind which, though it differs from the former in implying no simple logical mistake, is nevertheless related to it. Very roughly, and in quite general terms, I shall characterise it in the following way: it consists in holding that the distinctiveness of ethical judgments is to be seen not so much in their subject matter as in being of a certain form (namely, the universal form), or in involving reference to judgments in this form, and in possessing a characteristically superior status in relation to certain other kinds of utterance with which they form a special class(often called the class of 'value-judgments'). I shall call it the formalistic fallacy.

The preoccupation with the naturalistic fallacy has resulted in a denial of any essential content to morality because in practice this fallacy arises most frequently in discussions of words like 'good', 'ought' and 'right', which have no necessary connection with any specific content. It was natural therefore to assume that these

are the most distinctive moral words (and these are the words most moral philosophers have been mainly concerned with since the naturalistic fallacy was brought into prominence by G. E. Moore).

Both these notions (namely those of the naturalistic fallacy and of the formalistic fallacy) connect themselves with what may be called the problem of demarcating (to use a term which Popper uses in another connection) the sphere of the ethical. Thus that the naturalistic fallacy was originally intended to serve this purpose is plain in G. E. Moore's Principia Ethica. For him goodness is the simple, non-natural quality which defines the ethical, and the naturalistic fallacy arises when an attempt is made to describe this quality in non-ethical terms, whether natural or metaphysical. I shall argue at a later stage that some later versions of this fallacy connect themselves with the same problem, though not so directly as in Moore.

But the formalistic fallacy connects itself directly, and quite generally, with that aspect of the problem of demarcation which naturally suggests itself in an enquiry such as ours, viz., the problem of the criteria or distinguishing characteristics of those general requirements of morality which are called 'moral principles', 'moral laws', 'moral rules', etc. (I shall henceforth call them 'moral principles', postponing the defence of the assumption thus implied that the category of principles applies to them at a later

stage). It is this form of the problem that I shall be principally concerned with in this chapter. The advantage of beginning in this way is that we shall in fact be dealing with a question which, apart from being of central importance to our enquiry, can be sharply defined, and provides, moreover, an early opportunity of introducing in a precise form the notion of the fallacy, namely the formalistic fallacy, which plays a role in my position analogous to the role of its better known counterpart in a large number of present-day ethical theories. Towards the end of the chapter I shall state my own definition of a moral principle. This is the definition I want to recommend, largely on philosophical grounds; but I shall not be able to explain its full significance, nor to defend it adequately, till later. When doing that, and in criticising certain views opposed to mine, I shall suggest that certain attempts to distinguish the ethical are vitiated by a heavy formalistic bias. I shall not however claim that they are completely formalistic in character.

In recent discussions of the problem of the criteria of moral principles attention has tended to be focused on the characteristic of universality, which provides an indisputably formal criterion. Largely as a result of this, moral philosophers have generally failed to see that there are other criteria which

are of equal, if not greater, importance, and with a status not easily assigned. In claiming that the importance of the former criterion has been exaggerated I shall draw attention to a mistaken criterion of moral principles which, though not so obviously formal in character, deserves to be so considered. This will involve me to some extent in the difficulties of the notion of logical form; nevertheless I shall not attempt to define logical form. I shall, without attempting to define the class of formal criteria, claim membership of it for a certain putative criterion of a moral principle.

Mr. E. A. Gellner, in his paper "Ethics and Language"[1], distinguishes a class of 'rules or plans of action' which are capable of being 'formulated with the help of a symbolism employing only predicates, individual variables, operators and logical connectives'. He labels these as of 'U-type' as against those of 'E-type' which cannot be formulated without 'personal reference'. In his paper on 'Universalisability' Hare accepts this distinction and puts forward reasons for the view that a moral judgment involves reference (implicit or explicit) to a rule or principle of the former type. He points out that it is important to see what Gellner's account of U-type rules and principles excludes and what it permits.

1. Aristotelian Society, Proceedings, Vol.LV. 1954-55.

Thus: 'Roughly speaking, proper names (in the ordinary, not the logical sense), personal pronouns (but not the pronoun "one", nor the pronoun"I"as it is used by some legal writers), and all token-reflexive expressions are excluded'.[2]

I have claimed above that universality is an indisputably formal characteristic. We may now show this quite easily without involving ourselves in the problem of logical form. The distinguishing characteristic of a U-type rule (or maxim or principle) lies in the fact that its statement involves no reference to particulars. Since E-type rules are just the type of rules which do involve such reference, we can say that within the class of rules, maxims, principles etc. there is a division between those which involve reference to particulars and those that do not. We can eliminate all mention of rules etc. and say, further, that within all discourse there is a distinction between particular involving and non-particular involving utterances. And this is a paradigm case of difference in logical form.

2. I shall distinguish two forms of the formalist position in respect of moral principles; they may generally, and very roughly, be characterised by the nature of a common question they seek to answer. The question they are answers to is not so much 'What kind of principles are moral principles?', but rather 'When does a

2. Ibid.

principle become a moral principle?'. Undoubtedly these questions are not free from ambiguity, but there is a broad difference in the assumptions they suggest. The assumption underlying the first seems to be that the distinctiveness of moral principles lies in something intrinsic to them (though admittedly this is vague); whereas the latter seems to assume that a principle becomes a moral principle when it is held in certain circumstances or in a certain manner.

The constructive parts of this chapter are an attempt to answer the first question; the polemical parts, on the other hand, are in large part concerned to show the erroneousness of theories which take the latter as their starting point.

The two forms of formalism I want to introduce are to be distinguished as a stronger and a weaker thesis, mutually related in a rather complex way, and possess, as we shall see, one feature in common. I shall start with the weak form. It takes the seemingly simple form of claiming that any principle which satisfies the requirement of universality is capable of being a moral principle.[3] Since the question when the transition is made from a principle which is only capable of being a moral principle to a principle which is actually a moral principle still remains to be answered,

3. Generally no distinction is observed between rules and principles by those who commit themselves to this variety of formalism, but it could reasonably be assumed that, if they observed it, they would be formalists in respect of both.

the original answer has to be supplemented by an answer to the latter question. Whether the answer to this is also simple remains to be seen. The only direct avowal of such a position known to me occurs in a paper contributed by Mr. Jonathan Harrison to an Aristotelian Society symposium on 'When is a principle a moral principle?'. He writes: 'I am inclined to think that any principle can be a moral principle, provided that certain formal requirements are fulfilled. By this I mean that, for a principle to be moral, it does not matter what it enjoins, so long as, for example, it is general, applies to everybody and does not need proper names for its expression'[4]. The latter sentence expresses in a less precise form the universality criterion which Gellner states in the passage quoted earlier.

This variety of formalism faces a serious threat of incoherence when we seek a way of making the transition from principles which are only potential moral principles to those that are actually so. For the transition has to be made in such a way that the additional requirement stipulated in the process does not exclude any principle which satisfies the initial universality requirement, i.e., the requirement must be of such a nature that any U-type principle can meet it. And, furthermore, the transition must on no

4. Supp. Vol. XXVIII (1954) p.112. See also John C. Harsanyi, 'Ethics in Terms of Hypothetical Imperatives' (Mind, July, 1958)

account be viewed as the fulfilment of a second formal requirement, which the strong form of formalism stipulates in addition to the requirements of universality (which it shares with the weak form); for otherwise the distinction between the two forms would disappear.

These two essential conditions can be met only with some difficulty, and even then not satisfactorily. But before enquiring into the possibility of doing so I must explain the second variety of formalism. This will occupy me in a rather lengthy section. After illustrating it by an example in a further section I shall tackle the problem of establishing a genuine distinction between the two forms.

3. The stronger form of formalism, unlike the weaker form, attempts to provide the criteria for distinguishing actual moral principles from non-moral ones; not merely criteria for distinguishing potential moral principles. But it shares with the latter a belief in universality as an essential feature of both potential and actual moral principles. Thus the difference between the two varieties can only lie in their modes of transition from potential to actual moral principles. The stronger form makes this transition in terms of a mistaken view of the notion of overridingness or ultimacy. It seems to me that, if rightly understood, this feature of moral principles cannot function as a criterion for

distinguishing moral principles from other kinds of principles. A principle, in my view, does not become a moral principle by being an ultimate principle; rather, it is because certain principles are moral principles that they are ultimate principles. In other words, the ultimacy of moral principles is a consequence of their being moral principles. But in saying this I am not trying to beg any question; I am merely stating a counter-thesis which I want to establish against the formalist. I shall later try to show that ultimacy has been used as a criterion. I shall now argue that to employ it in this way is to employ it formally, and try thereby to determine as precise a sense of 'formal' as possible (which, in view of the importance I attach to the need to avoid the errors involved in the type of theory I want to attack, it is obvious I am obliged to do).

I have hinted earlier that the formalist's notion of over-ridingness is not a formal notion in an obvious sense. I shall now claim that it is so by a strong analogy with what deserves to be called a formal characteristic on a quite strict view of logical form. Now though I do not propose to attempt a definition of logical form I must point out that there are at least two ways of approaching logical form which are unsuitable for our purpose. An account of logical form may fail to make provision for certain distinctions which we want to be able to make. The Aristotelian view that all

propositions are of the subject-predicate form is an obvious example. Russell's definition of logical form in The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, suffers, at one level, from the same defect. He writes, 'I mean by the form of a proposition that which you get when for every single one of its constituents you substitute a variable'.[5] Russell takes it to imply that 'Desdemona loves Cassio' and 'A is the right of B' are of the same form, and the difference between them that one is intransitive and the other transitive is thus obscured.

On the other hand, an account of logical form may be unsuitable because of its connection with a special theory of meaning. Thus when Russell says that 'the constituents of propositions . . . are the constituents of the corresponding facts'[6], we are faced with the difficulty that the form of a proposition depends not on what it asserts, i.e., not on the various logical relations it can enter regardless of its truth or falsity, but on what is the case.[7] It may be recalled here that Wittgenstein's somewhat similar characterisation in the Tractatus of logical form as 'the form of reality' led him to relegate the ethical, and much else besides, to the realm of the 'inexpressible'. I shall therefore select a view of logical form which does not suffer from either of these defects. Mr. P. F. Strawson's account of logical form in his An Introduction to Logical Theory is just of this type and is likely, with an important

5. Logic and Language: Essays 1901-1960 (edited by Robert C. Marsh), p.238.
6. Loc. cit., p.248.
7. The ideal language in which the correspondence is taken to hold being a dream rather than reality, the notion of form now becomes idle.

emendation, to meet our requirements. In choosing it rather than any other I do not, however, wish to commend it as an essentially correct account of logical form from the general point of view of logical theory.

At the end of § 13, in the chapter on 'Formal Logic', Strawson writes: 'This account of logical form attaches the notion of logical form firmly to those classes of inferences, etc., for which formal logicians frame general principles or of which they give general descriptions. The classification of statements with respect to their logical form is made to depend upon the formal logicians' classification of inconsistencies and validities. This restriction of the meaning of "logical form" is historically correct. There are many other kinds of general logical resemblance and difference between statements which are of philosophical importance. But there is no point in blurring the distinction between different kinds of logical classification'. This passage affords a good indication of what is characteristic of Strawson's approach to logical form; but, taken as a general statement of his position, it is in need of supplementation. Since it is characteristic of his approach in this book that he is constantly raising questions of the relation between what transpires in logical systems and what corresponds to it in ordinary language, Strawson finds it necessary, in seeking to provide an account of logical form with respect to ordinary language of a degree

of strictness parallel to the actual practice of the formal logician, to explain (though not in detail) the mutual bearing of the procedures of formal classification in the two fields. As a rule, when the formal logician distinguishes a logical type there is, corresponding to it, a separate expression (e.g. 'not' or 'all') which performs a standard linguistic function (e.g. negation or generalisation). There are, in other words, 'representative verbal patterns' corresponding to the formal logicians' classification of validities and inconsistencies. Now this relation is not accidental. The existence of such patterns is 'almost a sine qua non' of our noticing the formal analogies which are the basis of the formal logician's classification. But even this is an understatement of the strength of the relation. For when the resemblances in the verbal patterns of valid inferences are sufficiently striking for us to speak of their sharing a common form, though there is no detachable framework of words for which we can lay down a logician's rule, there is an important difference between the role of the logician's rule in such a case and the cases where the representative verbal pattern exists. Take for example transitive relations. 'Ancestor of' and 'congruent with' are transitive relations, whereas 'loves', 'hates', 'amuses', 'is the square root of', etc., are intransitive. But there is nothing in language, except the 'descriptive meaning' of such expressions, to indicate whether 'xRy and yRz, $\therefore$ xRz' (i.e. the inference pattern

of transitive relations) applies in a given case. And so 'we must not think of ourselves as having discovered the general principle of this class of entailments'(p42); whereas we could say this in the former case. Though this distinction is fundamental to Strawson's account of logical form, he is unwilling to apply it on any clear-cut basis. On the first of the two accounts of logical form given by him we may say that two statements are of the same logical form in so far as they play similar parts in 'inferences (etc.) of the same general class' (p.50). The second, and more perspicuous, account of logical form is closely linked to logical formulae. Thus: 'We may say that two statements are of the same logical form when they could correctly be made by the use of sentences (i) which exemplify the same logical formula and (ii) in which the logical constants have the logical use which is the standard use for the given system of rules' (p.52). The demerit he sees in this account is that it places 'an unwanted restriction on our talk of logical form' (p.53); for it would not permit us to refer to those classes of statements for which no representative verbal pattern suitable for quotation in a logician's rule exists as having the same logical form. But if this limitation is not accepted then the reluctance he shows in applying the criterion that when a general description of what is common to a class of inferences is possible then there exists a 'formal analogy' between the members of this class, by which all inferences of the

transitive kind share a common logical form without restriction has been provided with no justification. Thus the move from the specific to the general (e.g., to take Strawson's own examples, from 'This is a cat' to 'This is an animal', or from 'This is green' to 'This is coloured') is as much valid on formal grounds alone as is the move from 'X is congruent with Y and Y is congruent with Z' to 'X is congruent with Z'. But he is less certain of the desirability of extending the application of the notion of formal analogy in the former case than he is in the latter. What needs pointing out here is that both transitivity and the relation specific-general are the concern of the formal logician. The source of his hesitation lies in his fear that the distinction between 'those cases in which the resources of language allow of the framing of genuinely representative verbal patterns suitable for quotation in entailment-rules and those cases for which no representative formula can be framed for a general class of entailments' may be blurred by 'the dictum that all inference is formal' (pp.54-55). Now while this fear is reasonable no good grounds of a philosophical nature can be given for drawing the line just where one's conservatism inclines one to.

We may now state Strawson's difficulty in the shape of a dilemma. He is not prepared to claim his alternative account to be fully adequate because this would exclude certain kinds of inference from the class of inferences which are valid in virtue of their form

alone, but which we should want on other grounds to include in it. But if he extends his account of logical form to cover these, by adopting instead his first account, then the grounds for restricting the scope of formal analogy become purely pragmatic.

I shall now bring our discussion of logical form so far into relation with the stronger form of formalism. I have said earlier that the formalist mistakenly takes overridingness to be a criterion, but that, when so taken, it functions (as I want to show) as a formal characteristic. Now while transitively relational statements yield a class of inferences which resemble each other formally transitivity itself cannot function as a criterion of validity (i.e. yield a 'principle of inference', in Strawson's terminology).[8] This means that between Strawson's 'extensions' and the mistaken view which treats overridingness as a criterion there remains this fundamental difference: such extensions can never yield a criterion, but we can always take overridingness to be a criterion; the mistake in the latter case being not that of falling under an illusion that there is a criterion when none in fact exists, but rather of misunderstanding the nature of moral principles.

As a result of this difference Strawson's way of extending the application of 'logical form' or 'formal' is quite unsuitable for my purpose; for what I need is an application of them in virtue of a feature which can function as a criterion. But this calls for an

8. They are not genuine extensions because there is only one step which properly constitutes an extension, and the further 'extensions' are merely consequences of this initial step.

important addendum to his account of logical form. I have spoken above of formal features or characteristics. Now Strawson does not speak in this way; he speaks only of formal analogies and inferences; or of statements and inferences being of the same logical form. We can no doubt give a description of most formal features in terms of his first account; such a description being of the form: a formal characteristic X of a statement is a characteristic of it which exists when that statement stands in logical relations R, S, T to other statements of type a, b, c, respectively. But such descriptions are not the only kinds of descriptions we need. The two formal features which are of special importance to me, and to which I want to relate by analogy the formalist's mistaken notion of overridingness, are primitiveness and derivability. Obviously these latter cannot be described in the way in which universality or conjunctiveness or disjunctiveness may be described. We can understand the concepts corresponding to them only by understanding the idea of a system, and they have their primary applications only within systems. To attribute either feature to a well-formed expression is not to attribute a set of logical relations with certain other well-formed expressions which hold whenever any such attribution is made. For suppose p is a primitive proposition in a system S. The attribution of this formal characteristic to p is in no way dependent on our being able to specify certain logical

relations which hold between every primitive proposition in that system and certain other propositions. For primitiveness is a property which applies to one proposition only because it applies to a set. The relation of derivability between such a set and the rest of the system to which it belongs is not a relation which can be specified in terms of a unique class of entailments and inconsistencies. There is indeed a unique class of entailments, etc. but this class is unique only to the given system and characterises only a special instance of derivability: it does not define derivability as such for the simple reason that this class varies from system to system.

The failure of Strawson's account of logical form to cover these two characteristics arises from its being solely in terms of the logical powers of single statements, without any reference to the notion of a system. It might be argued that these two characteristics are radically different from those which are covered by Strawson's definition, so that there is little point in trying to cover them by means of the same definition; even such divergent definitions as those of Russell and Strawson have this in common that they do not cover these two. But this objection can be met. In so far as Strawson's account is an account of what concerns the formal logician the decisive answer is surely this. In saying that, for instance, a proposition is primitive in a system we are implying

nothing about its content; and whose concern is it, if not the formal logician's, that certain propositions in a system he is studying are primitive? Nor is this notion so simple that it is exhausted by its analogy with the premises of an argument. For the concept of a primitive proposition involves the idea of a deductive system. And the set of propositions entailed by, or derivable from, a set of axioms is not necessarily finite; whereas an argument can have only the conclusions which are validly drawn from it. But this is not a subject we need pursue here.

The difference between the kind of formal analogy with which Strawson is concerned and the kind I am primarily interested in in this chapter may now be explained. There are certain classes of inference which are logically valid in the sense that the meaning of the expressions occurring in the statements comprising them ensures their validity, but there is no formal logician's rule on the basis of which we can discover them to be valid. But there is, nevertheless, an element of formal resemblance in each such case. The extension of the notion of formal analogy which this involves must not, however, obscure for us the difference between the formal logician's sphere and the sphere of the lexicographer. The analogy between overridingness and primitiveness, with which I am concerned, does not present such a danger. This is so for two simple reasons. First, there is only one concept whose analogy I am seeking in the formal

logician's doings, whereas the possibilities of formal analogy of the kind Strawson is dealing with are very extensive. Second, the property of primitiveness is clearly the formal logician's concern even though there are difficulties of including it in an account of logical form.Thus my concern is with a specific analogy with an undeniably formal attribute.

We may now see how formalism in its strong form, in taking overridingness to be a criterion of moral principles, treats it in a way analogous to the way the primitiveness of certain propositions function in a deductive system. For this variety of formalism claims that when a universal principle is taken as an overriding principle it is a moral principle. The fact that any U-type principle can be chosen as an ultimate principle corresponds to the fact that in a deductive system any well-formed formula can be taken as primitive. The relation between ultimate and non-ultimate principles corresponds, in a number of ways, to the relation between the primitive propositions of a system and the theorems derived from them. Both are asymmetrical in the following way: in both justification or validation is possible only in one direction. Both are symmetrical in this respect. When we decide upon our axioms we have determined what can be derived, and when, on the other hand, we have certain theorems to be proved then only within a certain range can our choice of axioms be made; similarly in choosing our

ultimate principles we put certain restrictions on our choice of non-ultimate principles, and, correspondingly, only certain sorts of ultimate principles can validate a given set of non-ultimate principles. The broad analogies here do not hide the divergencies; the possibility of noticing negative analogies is almost quite as strong as the possibility of noticing positive ones. But I do not intend to claim that the two notions are strictly parallel.

An obvious complicating factor which restricts the possibilities of comparison between them is my distinction between rules and principles (and the conjoined claim that the category of principles is rich in application). But the analogy, in the form in which I have stated it above, is not affected by this distinction. It becomes stronger if we accept a view of principles which takes them to be a species of rules (which on my view would be a mistake). On a view which preserves the distinction between them the relationships between the class of overriding general requirements and the class of non-overriding general requirements are rather more complex (as we shall later see); but the broad analogy we are here concerned with remains substantially unaffected by this additional factor. I shall now proceed to give examples of philosophical arguments in which the formalist thesis in its strong form is used. I propose to do this by examining, firstly, a passage from Hare's The Language and Morals. Since he holds a reductionist view of moral

principles this illustration will be in terms of an example rather favourable to me. But this need not be misleading if it is made clear that the general claim is not as strong as the illustration seems to imply.

4. Commenting on the utilitarian theory of justification and a view such as Mr. Toulmin's that 'an act is justified directly by reference to the principles it observes, and these principles in their turn by reference to the effects of always observing them', Hare says: 'The truth is that, if asked to justify as completely as possible any decision, we have to bring in both effects - to give content to the decision - and principles, and the effects in general of observing these principles, and so on, until we have satisfied our inquirer. Thus a complete justification of a decision would consist of a complete account of its effects, together with a complete account of the principles which it observes, and the effects of observing those principles - for, of course, it is the effects (what observing them in fact consists in) which give content to the principles too. Thus, if pressed to justify a decision completely,we have to give a complete specification of the way of life of which it is a part. This complete specification it is impossible in practice to give; the nearest attempts are those given by the great religions, especially those which can point to historical persons who carried out the way of life in practice.

Suppose, however, that we can give it. If the inquirer still goes on asking "But why should I live like that?" then there is no further answer to give him, because we have already, ex hypothesi, said everything that could be included in this further answer[9].' Though I do not, at this stage, propose to discuss the problem of moral justification, the approach to it which underlies this passage can be shown to lead to highly paradoxical results. In showing this I shall be showing an analogy between a formal system and 'a way of life' which Hare's position here assumes.

It is essential to point out first of all that Hare prefers to use 'effects' in a way which excludes the possibility of saying that 'it is immoral, on certain sorts of occasion, to consider the effects of doing something'[10]. A writer is of course free to use a term in his own way so long as he makes it plain that he is using it in a special sense, and provided that good grounds can be given for doing so. Hare assumes that in deciding to do something - in deciding, say, that 'it is immoral to fail to right an injustice whose effects will maximise pleasure' - one always decided between different 'sets of effects'. Now this is true in one sense, but not in the sense in which Hare seems to understand it. When an action is described as falling under the principle that 'One ought

9. Op. cit., pp.68-69.
10. Op. cit., p.57.

not to fail to right an injustice . . . etc.' one is obviously claiming that the former sort of effect is better than the latter. But there might, in a given case, be other morally relevant effects. There might, for instance, be the possibility that in maximising pleasure under such circumstances one weakens the moral sensitiveness of the people, including oneself, one is hoping thereby to benefit. In practice such consequences are often not only present but are also known to be present. But this does not mean that in making one's decision of principle one has also taken into account all such effects. The point of saying that it is immoral, under such circumstances, to consider the effects is precisely to rule out of consideration such results. We are likely to take such a stand as a result of the importance we attach to the avoidance, or the performance, of an action (such as righting a wrong) rather than because we have already anticipated all the likely morally relevant results of doing what we thereby commit ourselves to. And when such a firm stand is taken the original description of the action ('failing to right a wrong whose effects will maximise pleasure') is not <u>ipso facto</u> declared to be a logically complete description (in its morally relevant aspects), however complete it might be in practice.

The need for preserving the distinction which Hare questions may be brought home by the following further argument. It is

logically possible for some one to follow a moral principle in a way which precludes the possibility of its yielding before another moral principle.[11] For example, some one might believe that on no account is human life to be taken. Let us call such a principle a master moral principle. (Logically there is a fundamental difference between such a principle and a principle like the Greatest Happiness Principle. The latter is intended to function as a higher-order rule in which ordinary moral principles - taken in this case to be like rules - have their raison d'être; whereas the former has no such function). We might say that, in terms of what is obligatory under a principle, as against what is morally relevant, a master principle can be stated in terms of a single description of an action ('killing' or 'punishing an innocent man') if we use 'effects' in the ordinary way (i.e., in a way such that we can distinguish between an act and its foreseen consequences). It is a sufficient explanation of our master principle 'Thou shalt not kill' that it forbids killing regardless of the consequences; so that even when the circumstances include an anticipated and, on its own account, unwelcome result we are still forbidden from making an exception. Such a description is of course not possible in the case of a non-master principle. For what we

11. Cf. G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', Philosophy, January, 1958.

are required universally to do in obedience to it is not simply describable as telling the truth or being just; obviously the multiplicity of description here required is in principle endless. But if we adopt Hare's use of 'effects' it becomes impossible to draw a distinction between these two kinds of principle, and what we can be forbidden absolutely is only actions which contain in their description mention of every morally significant element which the agent expects to arise when confronted with an actual situation of choice. We cannot always abstain simpliciter from taking human life; often someone who kills anticipates consequences which, if they existed alone, would be quite desirable. What a master principle lays down is not that no undesirable result will arise from following it absolutely, but that, however undesirable these results might be, nothing will count as outweighing the undesirability of breaking it.

But this difficulty is only a symptom of the extreme formalism of Hare's position. The following fundamental disanalogy between a formal system and a 'system' formed by a class of moral principles in conjunction with a class of general requirements towards which the former may play a justificatory role will have occurred to the reader. Once the axiom and rules of inference of a system are given, the system is already completely determined, all its theorems being thereafter derivable

mechanically. In the latter kind of 'system', however, there is no strict relationship of this kind. Broadly speaking we may say that the framework of the moral requirements we call moral principles leaves us a wide sphere of choice. But it would seem that on Hare's view of moral principles this cannot be so, and the analogy with a formal system becomes much closer when we notice that for him a 'complete' justification of a decision involves 'a complete specification of a way of life'. In fact in one respecta decision, and by the same token a moral principle, forms an even more integral part of the way of life to which it belongs than a theorem does of the system in which it occurs; for it is possible that a given theorem may be derived without involving in any way one of the axioms of the system concerned.

Another paradoxical result of Hare's position is this. Since the content of a principle consists for him of the effects of obeying it, it follows that two very different societies can have no common moral principles,[12] for even when they express some of their moral principles in the same verbal form this will not mean that they have any principle in common.

I shall argue in the next chapter that the content of a moral principle has nothing to do with its effects, and that it can vary only as a result of changes in the applicability of a predicate

12. For a similar view cf. Toulmin's The Place of Reason in Ethics, pp.152-153.

occuring essentially in its statement. On my view this can happen only as a result of an additional moral principle's coming or ceasing to be held. But this will not involve me in formalism in view of the fact that for me all moral principles are essentially tied to some one or other predicate belonging to a special set of predicates.

Hare uses 'way of life' as though it was synonymour with 'life in accordance with a moral code'. But ordinary speech provides little justification for such a use. The historical persons who figure in the great religions as 'models' were not always, and sometimes did not pretend to be, guided by moral considerations alone. Thus it would be very strange indeed to claim that Abraham's 'sacrifice' was made on moral grounds. The only explanation of this identification is this. For Hare, apart from universality, the most essential characteristic of moral principles lies in the special status they possess in relation to other principles (etc.) which govern our actions, rather than in any category of actions they may require of us. It might be argued that by 'way of life' Hare surely means 'human way of life', and that since moral principles are for him 'architectonic' of a way of life, they must be distinguished, at least as a class, by some determinate content. But Hare denies himself the right to use this argument by making comparisons between different ways of life logically impossible.

For this means that, providing we are prepared to accept the implications of our respective choices of principles, we are always entitled to call them 'moral principles'. If, on the other hand, we restrict our choice of principles by adopting a conception of human excellence, it will always make sense to say that one way of life is better than, or not as good as, another (since it conforms more or less successfully to this conception).

5. We may now consider the question, raised earlier, whether the weak form of formalism can make the transition from principles which are merely capable of being moral principles to those which are actually so, without becoming indistinguishable from the strong form and without debarring any principle which satisfies the initial universality requirement from qualifying as an actual moral principle. Harrison (who, as we have seen, holds the weak form of formalism) gives two separate and rather inconsistent answers to it. I shall start with the second of them. Distinguishing between ultimate and derivative moral principles he says that, while not any principle can be an ultimate principle, any derivative principle can become a moral principle. This may happen in the following way. Derivative moral principles are 'contingent and variable' in that, if we take an ultimate principle as supplying the major premise of an inference, then it is always possible that in consequence of the truth of a factual minor

premise it becomes our duty to obey a principle which seems *prima facie* to be clearly non-moral in character. 'It could be my duty to act on the principle "Do not walk on the black lines on the pavement", if, as Mrs. Foot suggests, other people were so peculiarly constituted that this distressed them, or if doing so detonated explosive charges' (p.125). The difficulty with this answer is that it involves either abandoning the universality requirement or virtually abandoning the very claim it sets out to establish. If the facts which justified the derivative principle were variable in such a way that they obtained only in certain parts of the world then the principle would not hold as a universal principle. But if they are facts common to our world then the original claim becomes rather empty and all we are being asked to concede is that it is possible to imagine a change in our world such that it would be our duty to act on such a principle.

The other answer which Harrison gives is this. He says: 'Though I may be (linguistically) eccentric, I personally would say that a man who exhibited signes of remorse when he stepped on the black lines of the pavement, tried to persuade others not to tread on them, tried to make unlined pavements by law compulsory and so on, did hold this as a moral principle. It is true that I should also say that he was very probably mad, but why should not insanity manifest itself in moral as well as in factual delusions?

And though we may think his moral views erroneous, is he otherwise so very different, logically or psychologically, from ourselves?' (p.113), Harrison is here taking what may be called the criteria of assent to a moral principle (remorse, etc.) to be the criteria for deciding whether a principle is a moral principle. But this answer is hardly consistent with the previous answer. Normally we apply such criteria only on the supposition that the principle in question is in fact a moral principle, and the only question they settle is whether the agent sincerely accepts it as such. But in this form they are of no use in answering the present question. If, on the other hand, they are understood in the sense in which Harrison seems to take them then the latter answer is imcompatible with the former. For on the former answer a principle may have to be called a non-moral principle because it cannot be derived from any ultimate moral principle; though, in terms of the latter view, it deserves to be called a moral principle because it satisfies all the criteria of assent.

But the weight of Harrison's preference is in favour of the first answer (in which the criteria of assent provide the transition from potential to actual moral principles). Harrison's appeal to the notion of an impartial observer is here of relevance. He attaches great importance to it as a means of distinguishing between correct and incorrect moral principles. Now however fruitful

this notion may otherwise be, its value for this purpose is curtailed to the minimum by Harrison's formalism. If what is important about its application as a criterion is the idea of an infallible judge it becomes an empty notion like that of divine grace. For now, though all universal principles can become correct moral principles, this can only happen miraculously, so that any principle of this type can be elected by such an observer, just as divine grace can descend on the unworthiest of us. If on the other hand its significance lies in the infallible reactions of such a being on the basis of certain criteria, then clearly we must have some idea of what such criteria can be. This rules out certain principles as incapable of being those which an impartial observer would adopt. The only way in which Harrison can preserve his formalism (and with him we our distinction between the two varieties of formalism) is by resort to a highly odd way of distinguishing between correct and incorrect moral principles. He has now to say that all U-type principles are moral provided they are sincerely believed to be so, the correct ones among them being those that an impartial observer would adopt on the basis of certain criteria.

Since the weak form survives as a bare logical possibility the only serious claimant to our attention now is the strong form.

6. I cannot, without stating the showing the strength of my own

alternative view of moral principles, hope to expose the full extent of the error in the formalist thesis. But I have already, in explaining and illustrating it, shown some serious faults in it. I shall now draw a further consequence of it to show that it runs radically counter to our conception of morality. Whether the revision of some of our fundamental concepts implied thereby is defensible at a more fundamental level is a question I shall not examine; if fully examined it would have to be the subject of another enquiry.

We have seen that for Hare a set of moral principles determines a way of life very much like the way in which to give the axioms and rules of inference of a system is to give that system. Now, as I have said, this is not the correct way of looking at moral principles. But if a set of moral principles cannot determine a way of life uniquely then the question arises in what relation they stand to a way of life for the formalist. For, since his view of a moral principle is in terms of form alone, how can moral principles govern a way of life as 'architectonic' to it? In other words, how can the office of governor belong to them when they are quite free to have, in terms of the formalist account, any content? The obvious answer ot this question is that the office belongs to them not singly but as a set. But this gives rise to the further question whether some of our moral principles are

essentially of a certain nature, i.e., whether some at least must be 'about' certain sorts of actions. In answering this latter question we have to remember that the formalist has initially placed no restriction on what a moral principle can be about. We must not therefore use the first 'about' in such a way that this initial lack begins to disappear. We must, furthermore, see the concession which our definition seems to contain against a background of analogy with formal systems. Formal logicians are usually interested in systems of a certain degree of 'richness'. But, though richness and power are not formal attributes, nor are they material attributes in a straightforward sense; we might therefore say that the formalist's primary concern is with principles of a certain degree of richness, and the only content which moral principles can possess essentially as a set is the content which 'govern' and 'life' can provide. And this is surely insufficient to provide us with a sense of 'moral' such that there exists a broad distinction between moral requirements, the requirements of prudence, and requirements which have their source in some great fear such as the fear of divine wrath.

7. I shall now sketch a radically anti-formalist view of moral principles, whose defense I shall postpone to later chapters. It will largely be in the shape of a few rather rapid steps leading to a definition of 'moral principle'. The definition I propose to

offer was suggested to me by a reading of Mrs. Foot's contribution to the Aristotelian Society symposium referred to earlier. In thus acknowledging my debt to her I do not, of course, want to claim that she would endorse the simplification and modification I practise on her views.

I shall begin by pointing out that Harrison's sole objection against Mrs. Foot's anti-formalist position rests largely on a misunderstanding. Disagreeing with her contention that only a 'background' can make some principles, like the one about the lines on a pavement, into moral principles he says: 'The trouble with what Mrs. Foot says is that it is at least bordering on circularity. If the "background" of a principle consists of other moral principles, then what are we to say about them? Must we say that they are not really moral principles because they themselves have no background, or must we go on finding backgrounds for backgrounds ad infinitum? Similarly, it cannot be true that a principle can be moral only if it has a connexion with moral principles, for how, in this case, would we establish whether the principles with which it was connected were moral?"'[13]. The charge which Harrison makes here - whether we take it as a charge of circularity or as a charge that an infinite regress is involved in Mrs. Foot's position - largely fails, and can be shown to be easily avoidable, if we consider some of the things she

13. Loc.cit., pp.112-113.

actually says. She points out on page 108 that words like 'honesty', 'sincerity', 'murder', 'stealing', 'ostentation' and 'treachery', or the concepts (which I shall later call the 'moral concepts') corresponding to them play 'an important part' in 'making it possible for us to grasp another man's views on matters of right and wrong'. 'Concepts of this kind', she continues, 'enable a man to connect new, and possibly surprising, applications of "good" or "bad" with one particular set of other cases - to say, i.e., that wearing bright colours is bad in the same way as boasting. And each expression of this kind carries with it a special way of looking at something; it is wrong to think of these terms as having a descriptive element of their own, but an "evaluative" element in common. We understand the kind of reaction that a man has against something if he uses the word "treachery" for instance. (We might think of the case in which he said that it would be treachery to hide the truth from someone who had asked to know if he was dying). This explains why it is so often a concept rather than a superior principle which turns some odd-sounding principle into something we can understand enough to call it a moral principle. We are often right to feel that we do not really know what a men's moral principles are until we are supplied with a concept of this kind, and for this reason understanding what someone says about what is right and wrong is not like understanding an order' (italics mine). Mrs. Foot's

suggestion that it is the presence of a moral concept, rather than a 'superior' principle, as background to an 'odd-sounding principle' which accounts for our 'understanding' a principle as a moral principle does not necessarily invite the objection that, on such a criterion, even those principles which we do 'understand' to be unquestionably moral in character must also have some moral concept as background. The regress may easily be avoided by pointing out that the question of background arises either in cases which are odd, or on those in which a moral concept, though easily supplied, is not mentioned; in other cases there is no need to supply such a background because the principle itself mentions a moral concept. Thus the first step in my progress towards a definition of a moral principle is to stipulate what exists in this passage only as a likely line to take: viz., a principle can be a moral principle only in virtue of a connection with a moral concept.

The definition which suggests itself at this stage - that a principle of U-type is a moral principle when it contains a moral concept as 'background' or when a moral concept occurs essentially in its statement - is liberal enough to cover most uses of 'moral principle' in ordinary speech. But the definition I want to adopt in this enquiry is much more stringent and would be rather arbitrary without strong grounds of a procedural or philosophical nature. It is precisely on such grounds, namely as a means of isolating the more

important aspects of certain problems and as an illuminating way of looking at morality, that it is chosen. I shall arrive at it in two further steps, the first of which is the more important, while the second is necessitated largely as a consequence of it.

The major step towards my definition is taken by means of the following stipulation: a moral principle must, in its statement, contain mention of a moral concept as constituting its scope. The best examples of principles which meet this stipulation are provided by those principles which specify one of the main moral virtues ('One ought to be generous', 'One ought to keep one's promises', etc.). Now though I do not intend to use 'moral concept' in such a way that only concepts of this class qualify as moral concepts, my use of it is strict enough to exclude Mrs. Foot's examples of 'odd-sounding principles' from the class of moral principles. I must now draw attention to a distinction, firmly embedded in our language, which puts a limit on the range of the class of moral principles. We distinguish between what might be called a requirement of morality and what is required, or becomes a duty, on moral grounds; and to preserve this distinction is as important as that we draw it at the right point. We cannot admit that it is a significant distinction and yet give it no application whatsoever. Once however an application is given to it the mere presence of a background to what can be stated in the universal form ceases to be a sufficient

condition of its being a moral principle, unless we are prepared to say that any form of action that can be described in universal terms, and which it is our duty to perform on moral grounds, is a moral principle. That such a position would be highly paradoxial does not imply that the distinction must be drawn in such a way that my stipulation issues as a necessary consequence from it. But the question what criteria operate in the customary distinctions between general requirements of a political, economic or educational nature and the requirements of morality which are taken to deserve being called moral principles is not an easy one, and I am not sure I know the answer to it. The following may perhaps be of some help in answering it.

When a form of behaviour is taken intrinsically to be morally indifferent, we feel no strong inclination, however certain we might be of its having morally significant results, to see it as the subject-matter of a moral principle. Thus someone may be quite convinced that a vegetarian diet makes men less aggressive than they would be on a non-vegetarian one. If this is a purely morally indifferent means-desirable moral end situation then I am inclined to think the facts of our speech do not provide any strong grounds for upgrading vegetarianism to the level of a moral principle. But a Hindu would not, of course, see it in this way; for him meat-eating is morally repugnant, and vegetarianism morally becoming,

regardless of their results. And someone might, for a similar reason, be a socialist; i.e., he might see a socialist form of social organisation as intrinsically valuable, whether or not it increased human welfare. One good ground then for assigning to certain social, economic or educational standards the status of moral principles is that they seem to involve morally significant elements as more than causally dependent results.

Another possible ground for applying the distinction between a requirement which is made moral by having moral grounds for it and a requirement which is itself moral strictly is this. In the case of one of Mrs. Foot's 'odd-sounding principles', that one ought not to walk on the lines of a pavement, a possible ground was that there were explosives under it which might thereby detonate. Now it is of course possible that such a situation exists in a certain part of a city and even that we temporarily live in a world in which all pavements are affected in this way. But this would only yield some spatially or temporally limited moral principle. We might indeed imagine ourselves being permanently in such a world. But if the other features of the world remained unchanged this would be a fact which belonged to it rather capriciously. On the other hand there are facts which belong intimately to our world or to us. It is such facts, rather than any facts, which incline us to take certain principles to be moral in character. For example, a

moral principle which forbade corporal punishment would, quite unexpectedly, have to rest on facts of the former kind.[14]

It is clear from these examples that in ordinary speech what counts as a ground of morality often contains an empirical element; in other words, what constitutes such a ground would lose some or all of its force if certain facts were otherwise than they are (e.g. it is conceivable that certain forms of corporal punishment did not do any harm). It is precisely for this reason that I do not propose to use 'moral concept' as coincident with 'a possible ground of morality', as the latter expression may be taken to function in ordinary language. My use of it is such that the validity of a moral concept does not depend on the nature of any empirical fact. Moral principles represent therefore for me an a priori element in morality (in the sense in which perhaps Kant used 'a priori'). But even so they form, as we shall see, a class of rather diverse elements. The gain to be made by viewing moral principles in this way lies in the resulting isolation of the distinctively ethical in terms of its distinctive concepts (the moral concepts) from elements which obscure it and confuse us into asking the wrong kind of questions about it. Problems like the nature of moral justification

14. Yet we do not normally consider 'Do not burn people' to be a moral principle. 'Burning someone' falls with such ease under 'hurting someone' that there would be gross redundancy in having an extra moral principle 'Do not burn people'.

which, as traditionally conceived, is really a collection of distinct problems) and the scope and function of morality take thereby a clearer aspect. Now a device which makes certain terminological innovations would be purely procedural if it merely facilitated a task which could also be done without them. But my recommendation is not purely procedural in this way. Behind it are important logical reasons, some of which are discernible even at this stage.

The second further step is necessitated by the first in the following way. Saying that a moral principle is a universal principle in whose statement a moral concept occurs as constitutive of its scope covers quite well our major moral principles. But there are other moral principles of an a priori kind which can be covered by this definition only by taking a somewhat artificial view of the function of moral concepts. Thus suppose we define flattery as a form of striving to attain from another by unfair means something that one wants, namely the form which consists in inducing in him an estimate of his own worth which is higher than what the agent would sincerely ascribe to him.[15] Clearly on this definition flattery always implies deception and the question arises how the former can be a moral principle if we already subscribe to 'Do not deceive' which also

15. Professor Acton has pointed out to me that a man could be flattered in respect of his real deeds. But, though this gives an indication of the complexity of the concept of flattery, I am inclined to think that one could not flatter without deceiving in some way. One need not tell a single falsehood in order to deceive.

forbids what it serves to forbid; for would it not then be necessarily redundant? Now this is a situation which occurs often, and the appearance of paradox can be dispelled only by a correct approach to the problem of the relation between specific and more general moral principles. The form of answer I want to give it is, that, in a more specific moral principle the moral concept of the more general principle behind it is modified in some important respect so that we have a new moral concept.

Thus flattery is a different moral concept from deceit; whereas lying and lying to one's grand-mother do not differ by being two different moral concepts. But though the difference between the two cases is intuitively acceptable, its rationale is far from obvious- why do we consider 'Do not flatter' a moral principle but not 'Do not lie to your grand-mother' (assuming that we already have 'Do not deceive' and 'Do not lie' as moral principles)? Now if moral principles behaved like rules there would be no better case for treating it as a moral principle than there is for treating the former as one; both would be equally redundant. The function of the moral concept which occurs essentially in the statement of a moral principle being to name a consideration,[16] the difference we are here concerned with must really be the difference between the relation which obtains between

16. See Chapter III, section 3.

deception and flattery and the relation between lying and lying to one's grand-mother *qua* considerations. If some special situation of responsibility were necessarily involved in one's dealing with one's grand-mother, as they are in the dealings between a doctor and his patient, then one would indeed have strong grounds for treating 'Do not lie to your grand-mother' as a moral principle; but this is not so. Take on the other hand 'Do not lie to a dying man'. Here an important new element seems to be necessarily involved. A more complete example would perhaps be 'Do not lie to your enemies'.[17]

Therefore, logically speaking, it is not enough that a moral principle contains a moral concept as constitutive of its scope; for if we are to avoid redundancy we must stipulate that no moral principle can do the job which another moral principle already does; i.e., each moral principle must essentially contain a moral concept which is in some way distinctive of it.

We have now arrived at our definition of a moral principle. A moral principle is a universal principle which contains in its statement a moral concept belonging to it in its own right as constitutive of its scope. As may have already been noticed, my expression 'constitutive of its scope' avoids involvement in the

17. Some further indication of the complexity of the inter-relations of moral concepts will be given by my discussion of the problem of conflicts of duty in section 3 of the next chapter.

dispute between those who hold that moral terms are essentially 'evaluative' or 'prescriptive' and those who hold, on the contrary, that they are descriptive in a fundamental sense of 'descriptive'. I shall later interpret my definition in a way rather sympathetic to the latter approach. In doing this I shall naturally venture into territory of a highly controversial nature. But I do not see how I can avoid taking sides in such a dispute when it is necessitated by a main task of our enquiry.

I can now make good the claim I made at the beginning of this chapter that the division between formal and material criteria with respect to moral principles is not exhaustive. If my definition of a moral principle is justified philosophically we can see that the last step towards it bears on a requirement which cannot be assigned to either of these two classes. That a moral principle must have a certain kind of content is clearly a material requirement, as the stipulation that it should be universal is formal in character. But that its content should be distinguished by a unique moral concept is not a matter of form or of content. It is a stipulation of a logical nature, in the broad sense of 'logical' in which that word is used nowadays.

CHAPTER III

Moral Concepts and Moral Principles I

1. The definition of a moral principle I have just given hinges on the notion of a moral concept, a notion which is far from clear. It is therefore incomplete in all but form, and we are confronted with the task of explaining what a moral concept is. But I cannot hope to perform this task by giving a definition; for even among concepts that are taken to be centrally and indisputably moral there are fundamental differences, and a characterisation of this group alone presents many difficulties. Taking the entire class of moral concepts as a whole, we find ourselves in territory large parts of which are in constant and systematic dispute. We are, in other words, dealing with a title which is rather more widely claimed than it is conceded. It must, moreover, be plain by now that for me a large part of ethics is an enquiry into this larger class of concepts - into their functions, their modes of formation and application, their development and modification, the complicated pattern of interrelations into which they enter, and so forth. It would be folly to try to anticipate the main results of such an enquiry; but one thing can be said in advance of it which may be expected to come out unfalsified. It would not make possible what was impossible initially on logical grounds; the very disputedness of the notion of a moral concept rules out the possibility of a definition which is at once precise and neither too wide nor too narrow.

I claimed at the beginning of the previous chapter that the preoccupation with the naturalistic fallacy has lead to an opposite fallacy, that of formalism in ethics. But I did not explain what I meant by formalism in this context - i.e., generally in relation to ethics, as distinct from the question of the nature of moral principles - apart from saying that it consisted in taking the view that the distinctiveness of ethical utterance does not lie in its content, but in a certain combination of form and status. The meaning of this rather obscure remark may now be explained. Hare, as may be remembered, claims in his paper on 'Universalisability' that giving reasons for a moral judgment involves reference to a U-type principle. Since what makes a U-type principle moral is for the formalist not a matter of content, he cannot, without inconsistency, tie moral judgments to any specific content. All that he can claim is that each moral judgment must refer, or involve reference, to a specific kind of action; and that a judgment of the form 'X is wrong' must in this way be related to, say, an action which is describable as 'unkind' or 'unjust' (or, since he places no limit on what can be described as moral, 'stepping on the lines of a pavement').

But the question why this negative view of the content of morality should arise as a result of a preoccupation with the naturalistic fallacy still remains unanswered. I shall answer this question by commenting on two related theories of the nature of moral and

evaluative terms - namely those of Hare and Urmson - which employ a mode of insurance against this fallacy which denies (this is more clearly true of the former writer) to these terms any essential content. Both of these theories are based on a model which fits only a sub-class of them. The formalism of both these naturalistic fallacy obsessed theories is therefore much wider than the formalism in relation to moral principles we discussed in the previous chapter and covers a number of fields. The formalism now in question, we might say, applies to the fields of prudence, honour and etiquette no less than to that of morality.

Before discussing these theories in which the naturalistic fallacy is committed not only when the ethical is confused with the natural, but also when there is a confusion between the latter and the evaluative, a brief comment on G.E.Moore's original version of the naturalistic fallacy may not be out of place. Though goodness on his view stood for a quality, he used 'good' in a way close enough to its ordinary use to place only the fewest of limits on its possible range of application, so that the quality of goodness was a quality in so attenuated a sense that it was no genuine quality.[1] And so what distinguished the ethical could be a matter of content only in this rather marginal sense.

In Hare's theory a distinction is made between 'descriptive' and 'evaluative' meaning. Value terms, except in certain derivative uses, and terms used evaluatively have an unchanging evaluative function and a

1. See A. N. Prior, Logic and the Basic of Ethics, Chap.1.

more or less varying descriptive content. The naturalistic fallacy arises from a confusion of these two kinds of meaning; i.e., when from the presence of certain purely descriptive elements we infer the extistence of something good or bad. He thinks that 'good', 'right' and 'ought' are 'typical value-words'[2]. There is a radical separation between the possible criteria for applying 'good' and the meaning of 'good', so that one might teach its meaning to someone in terms of examples where one does not oneself know the criteria of its application.[3] Though he denies that other evaluative words are so loosely tied to their criteria as these words are to theirs, his view of the class of evaluative words is built on the assumption that the former group of words are its paradigm. Thus: 'Although with "good" the evaluative meaning is primary, there are other words in which the evaluative meaning is secondary to the descriptive. Such words as "tidy" and "industrious". Both are normally used to commend; but we can say, without any kind of irony, "too tidy" or "too industrious". It is the descriptive meaning of these words that is most firmly attached to them; and therefore, although we must for certain purposes class them as value-words (or if we treat them as purely descriptive, logical errors result), they are so in a less full sense than "good".'[4] It would seem that Hare is assuming in this passage that if a word can be used pejoratively without implying irony its primary

2. Language of Morals, p.79.
3. Ibid, pp.103-106.
4. Ibid, p.121.

meaning cannot be evaluative. But this can easily be shown to be a mistake, and the class of value-words which do not fail to be primarily evaluative by this test turns out to be actually rather narrow. One could say 'too generous' or 'too kind' or 'too honest' without irony, though how this is possible is a matter for investigation.[5]

Hare's view that there are varying degrees to which a word may be evaluative - some being evaluative in a more 'full' sense than others - links up with his assumption that when a value-word gets firmly tied to a descriptive content, so that its evaluative meaning ceases to be primary, the standard it may be used to express becomes 'conventional'. If this assumption is justified then the standards of morality could only be expressed by words which did not suffer from this defect, for otherwise we should have to face the alarming prospect of our moral principles becoming conventional and morality turning into an enslaving ritual. The best way to ensure that this does not happen is surely to see morality in terms of words which are evaluative in the fullest sense, namely in the sense in which 'good', 'right' and 'ought' are. Of these three 'right' and 'ought' clearly cannot be corrupted by the faults which 'tidy' and 'industrious'

5. One reason among others why we can speak in this way is perhaps this. Sometimes the claims of morality are waived in favour of those of self-interest, - though in doing so we cannot, as it seems to me, partially contract out of morality.

suffer from: one does not say 'He is too right', either pejoratively or ironically; and similarly 'Don't do too often what you ought to' is significant only as a counsel against a wrong kind of earnestness. Though 'good' can be used pejoratively in the way 'tidy' and 'industrious' often are, it can be made to fall into line by distinguishing between its 'inverted-commas' use and its primary use.[6]

The 'inverted-commas' use can exist only when the primary use exists. The latter being, in the words of the Oxford English Dictionary, 'the most general adjective of commendation', is dispensible only in the sense in which human existence is dispensible. I could on the other hand dispense with the evaluative use of certain moral words, like 'kind' and 'generous', simply because I could commend kindness and generosity in varying degrees by using 'good' or the other fully evaluative words, without adopting a use of either of the former words (i.e., of 'kind' and 'generous') which was evaluative.

On Hare's position an evaluative use of a word is constituted by the imperatives entailed by it. The over-all action - terminating character of imperatives ensures that the primary use of 'good' is essentially similar to that of 'ought' and 'right'.

The formalism implicit in this two-fold classification can now be explained. What are ordinarily taken to be moral predicates, and many

6. Op. sit., p.124.

evaluative terms, though presumably not so secondarily evaluative as 'tidy' and 'industrious', can be used purely descriptively while their evaluative function is allowed to fall into disuse. Therefore the autonomy of ethics, if it were hinged to these words, would be somewhat precarious. But we could not let the other kind of words become purely descriptive without having to invent new ones with similar functions; for these are functions implied by human existence - a man who did not follow any rules, who made no choices and decisions, being inconceivable. But this is to misconceive the autonomy of ethics. It does not consist in the fact that a man, so long as he is alive, must accept some standards which govern his life; on the contrary, it consists, as I shall later argue, in the existence of certain standards which apply irrespective of whether or not we follow them in our lives.

Apart from failing to give us the differentia of moral terms Hare's theory of evaluative meaning leads to an emasculation of them. Being a sub-class of the larger class of value-words, moral words are evaluative only to the extent to which they entail imperatives; for in so far as they do not they merely describe. To ensure that a moral word necessarily carried an evaluative force we should have to legislate that its use in 'too just' or 'too kind' is derivative (as in the case of the 'inverted-commas' use of 'good'). This would empty the primary use of all content that belonged to it essentially - for if it had any the word would immediately become capable of being used pejoratively. Since moral words are to have but one function, that of commending or

or condemning, albeit from a position of superiority, they would register nothing but what we put on a special pedestal or place in abject pillory.

We saw in the previous chapter that Hare's view that the content of a principle cannot be described without stating all the effects of observing it leads to the strange conclusion that two rather different societies cannot have a single principle in common. In the chapter in which the passage about the justification of decisions occurs Hare makes a comparison between moral instruction and instruction in driving, and claims to make his account of the latter sufficiently general to cover all the different ways in which 'a skill or any other body of principles' may be learned (p.68). I shall now quote the latter passage at length, for it provides considerable justification for the implications I have drawn above from Hare's theory of evaluative meaning.

> '. . . there are two ways of looking at driving instruction:
>
> (1) We establish at the beginning certain ends, for example the avoidance of collisions, and instruction consists in teaching what practices are conducive to those ends. According to this way of looking at them the principles of good driving are hypothetical imperatives.
>
> (2) We teach at first simple rules of thumb, and the learner only gradually comes to see what the ends are, at which the instruction is aimed.

It must not be thought that either (1) or (2) by itself gives a complete account of our procedure. What method we adopt depends to a great extent on the maturity and intelligence of the learner. In teaching African soldiers to drive, we might incline more to the second method; if I had my two-year-old son to teach, I should have to adopt the same methods as I now adopt for teaching him to refrain from interfering with controls, when I am driving myself. With a highly intelligent learner, on the other hand, we may adopt a method which has more of (1) in it than of (2).

It must not be thought, however, that method (2) is ever entirely without a place even in the case of the most rational of learners. It may be that the desirability of avoiding collisions is at once understood and accepted even by comparatively stupid learners; but there are a great many more ends than this which a good driver has to aim at. He has to avoid causing many kinds of avoidable inconvenience both to himself and to others; he has to learn not to do things which result in damage to his vehicle, and so on. It is of no use to establish at the beginning a general end, "the avoidance of avoidable inconvenience", for "inconvenience" is a value-word, and until he has had experience of driving, the learner will not know what sorts of situations are to count as avoidable inconvenience. The general end or principle is vacuous until by our detailed instruction we have given it content. Therefore it is always necessary to start, to some extent,

by teaching our learner what to do, and leaving it for him to find out later why. We may therefore say that although moral principles, which are normally taught us when we are immature, are taught largely by method (2), and principles of driving preponderantly by method (1), there is not an absolute division between the two sorts of principle in this respect.'[7]

It seems to me that Hare's parallel between moral instruction and driving instruction breaks down at least in one respect. It proceeds on the assumption that moral instruction consists in imparting an ability just as much as driving instruction, and since I think that this is not so I reject his claim to have made his account sufficiently general to cover all the different ways in which a skill or any other body of principles may be learnt. The success of moral instruction is judged primarily in terms of actual performance and not as knowledge of what to do.[8]

7. Op. cit., pp.66-67.
8. Professor Ryle, in his paper 'On Forgetting the Difference between Right and Wrong' (Essays in Moral Philosphy, edited by A. I. Melden), shows how in many contexts 'the notions of learning, teaching, and knowing lock in with the notions of caring, i.e., enjoying, admiring, despising, trying, avoiding and so forth' (p.156). 'There seems', he says, 'to be a sort of incongruity in the idea of a person's knowing the difference between good and bad wine or poetry, while not caring a whit more for the one than for the other; of his appreciating without being appreciative of excellences. When we read "We needs must love the highest when we see it" we incline to say, "Of course. We should not be seeing it if we were not loving it". The "needs must" is a conceptual one. At least in this field, the partitions are drawn between the Faculties of Cognition, Conation, and Feeling'. (p.152).

But I shall not press this criticism here. What is immediately relevant here are his reasons for holding 'the general end or principle' to be initially vacuous. He takes 'avoidable inconvenience' to be vacuous at the beginning of driving instruction, presumably because only when we begin to know what a driver can avoid within, say, the Highway Code does this end have any practical significance. It may be inconvenient for me to have to wait for the traffic to pass when using a road which crosses a number of main roads, but this is not an inconvenience which can be avoided. Therefore the force of the principle 'Avoid avoidable inconvenience' for the good driver in this sense can quite plausibly be said to be in the specific kinds of inconvenience he actually avoids. But Hare is wrong in supposing that this is so becuase 'inconvenience' is a value-word. For the same situation would exist if we had a principle like 'Avoid avoidable horn-blowing'.

Thus Hare is attributing to 'inconvenience' what can only be ascribed to 'avoidable'. The latter word has the same verdict-giving sense which belongs to 'right' and 'wrong'. A verdict may be favourable or unfavourable, but when we know the verdict we do not thereby know its grounds. That something is inconvenient is not a sufficient ground for declaring it to be avoidable; whereas when we decide that an action was avoidable we have made a judgment which may later turn out to be mistaken but which cannot be overriden by another judgment.

Hare's choice of 'Avoid avoidable inconvenience' as an example of

a 'general end or principle' is therefore extremely significant. If our general ends were generally named by terms like 'the avoidance of avoidable inconvenience' then his thesis about the initial vacuity of the general end would indeed be highly plausible. But this thesis rests on a confusion. He is right in so far as learning a moral concept like justice or kindness well is not only to learn a word with a multiplicity of application, but also a word which becomes applicable or ceases to be so according to what other moral beliefs we hold. Thus take 'kindness'; if an employee turns up late every morning and is generally inefficient it would not be unkind to dismiss him. But suppose his employer believed that it was his duty to treat his men as his children; it would then be incumbent on him to treat an erring worker more leniently, and he could not then be so certain of escaping blame on the score of unkindness by dismissing him. Nevertheless, to learn to apply a term is one thing and to learn to decide whether when an action is covered by that term it is also obligatory another. This confusion does not arise in the case of 'avoidance of avoidable inconvenience' only because it represents an end which, by definition, cannot be overriden. But most moral ends - as indeed most ends - are not of this kind. We have not merely to apply terms like 'truthfulness' and 'justice'; we have also to learn when the ends they represent give way before other ends. Once this distinction becomes clear the thesis about the initial vacuity of the general end loses a great deal of its

force; for our not knowing at first when one end gives way before another (when, for instance, convenience yields to safety) does not in the least lessen our knowledge of what either end requires.

We can now see what role moral concepts play in Hare's view of moral principles. The view I want to suggest of the relation between moral concepts and the principles in which they occur essentially is that they name a consideration which the principle declares to be valid; or, in other words, that a moral principle declares a certain kind of action, named by a moral predicate, to be good or bad. and this is precisely what on my view their content is. But Hare cannot take such a view. In his view moral principles are a form of 'prescription'; and a prescription is for him a prescription only in so far as it entails imperatives. There is nothing to distinguish a prescription from a descriptive statement apart from the imperatives it entails. But the language of considerations implies precisely the opposite. To accept a consideration is not to accept a specific set of imperatives; for the imperatives issuing from it are not a function of it alone, but equally of what other considerations are adopted. Moreover, this view is so closely linked to his theory of evaluative meaning - that an evaluative term is primarily evaluative in meaning only when we cannot use it pejoratively - that the two necessarily go together. And this provides additional support for my interpretation of his theory of evaluative meaning: his imperativism involves such a theory.

It is plain now that for Hare the category of principles cannot have any application in morality, and that he must avoid a view which takes conflicts of duty to be inherent to morality. For if conflicts are implied by the nature of morality, so that the standards we adopt as moral agents are not reducible to sets of commands of the form 'Do such and such', his imperativism must be mistaken. But if moral principles could be reduced simply to the commands we are prepared to obey when we adopt these principles there is nothing to prevent us from making these commands consist with one another.

Hare's reductionism takes the form of the claim that moral principles function as premises in deductive arguments[9], which, when valid, establish a duty to perform an action; not a _prima facie_ duty, as in Ross, or the validity of a consideration, as in my theory. On such a view conflicts of duty are, of course, logically not necessary. How such conflicts - essential as they are in my view - are resolved I shall discuss in the last section of this chapter. Here I shall merely reproduce an argument of Mr. A. Phillips Griffiths against Hare which seems to me to be decisive. In his paper on 'Formulating Moral Principles'[10] Mr. Griffiths points out that, on Hare's view, when 'precisely and correctly stated a moral principle must mention all possible classes of cases providing an exception' (p.40). But we can never be certain that all the possible exceptions have been covered in the statement of a moral principle; thus our moral principles

9. _Language of Morals_, p.56.
10. _Mind_, Jan. 1956.

become provisional approximations to an unattainable ideal. Moreover the uncertainty belonging to the major premise which states the principle is necessarily communicated to the conclusion. In other words, the essential fault of this approach is that moral principles are conceived as A propositions, a form unattainable by them.

2. In his paper 'On Grading'[11] Urmson, unlike Hare, does not attempt to treat all evaluative terms on the model of a small sub-class of them. But the model which he applies to moral concepts proves, as I shall try to show, to be applicable at best to just those concepts whose claim to be treated as moral concepts may be disputed.

In this paper Urmson argues that by stretching in a perfectly legitimate way the ordinary notion of grading we can show a large majority of terms which philosophers nowadays call evaluative to be 'grading labels'. Analogous to Hare's distinction between 'typical' value words like 'good' 'right' and 'ought' and non-typical ones such as 'tidy' and 'industrious', Urmson makes a distinction between 'professional' grading words and a class of 'specialised' grading words. Thus 'good' is a professional grading word; so are 'first class', 'third rate', 'indifferent', 'bad' and 'medium quality'. 'These can be used as grading labels without explicit warning; they themselves give warning, if it is not otherwise evident, that the object of the exercise is grading. Furthermore, it is easy and natural to choose sets

11. Mind, 1950. Reprinted in Logic and Language, second series edited by Antony Flew. The pagination of the quotations is from the latter.

whose order is clearly defined. It would be an abuse of language to use "indifferent" of a higher grade than "good"'(p.163). The first of these points may be put more forcefully in this way: these words would not be the words they are if they did not grade, and a user must, except in a limited range of contexts, use them for this purpose. The second point reinforces the first; ordering being an 'almost necessary' qualification of them, their main use cannot be but grading.

But not all of Hare's typical evaluative words are grading words of this kind; 'ought' for instance is not, nor is 'wrong' or (presumably) 'correct'. In fact such words are not grading words at all (Urmson does not say why, but the reason can easily be supplied).

Urmson's view that most virtue-words can be treated as a sub-class of 'specialised' grading words, however, presents difficulties which, in my opinion, he does not fully face. I shall criticise him on three main grounds. He underestimates the difference between such words and the class of professional grading words, and tends to lean towards formalism. Secondly, he fails to give a correct account of the nature of the stretch in the normal sense of grading he asks us to accept in calling these words grading labels. And, thirdly, the central moral concepts are not grading in character; the moral concepts which lend themselves to a grading analysis are only marginally moral in character. I do not however propose to argue for the marginal character of the latter on the ground

that they seem to respond to a grading analysis; on the contrary, I want to show that they are marginal by appealing to the facts of our speech. In respect of the latter I shall further argue that the success of Urmson's treatment is largely illusory.

At the beginning of his paper Urmson says: '. . . I intend to extend the epxressions "grading" and "grading labels" beyond their normal employment to cover operations and words which, from the point of view from which I shall discuss them, seem to me to be essentially similar to grading in its narrower sense. There will be no harm in this if we realise that we are doing it and if we make sure that the other operations and words are really essentially similar to the more obvious cases of grading'. The first of these 'extensions' or 'stretches' is designed to enable us to call 'good', 'fair', 'excellent', etc. - i.e., the 'professional' grading words - grading labels. The stretch in their case takes place in the following way. Normally when we grade apples or railway sleepers we are dealing with large numbers. We might, however, using the same criteria, apply the same grading labels to single objects 'without explicit reference to any others'. Clearly the stretch thus implied makes no essential difference to the meaning of 'grading' or 'grading labels'.

Urmson makes his second stretch when he calls words like 'rash' 'brave', 'cowardly', 'extravagant', 'liberal', 'mean', 'boorish', 'eligible (bachelor)' and 'arrogant' grading labels. I shall quote the paragraph in which he pleads for regarding this stretch as legitimate.

'If any Army Commander were, as a preliminary to choosing a band of men for an important operation, to go through his Company roll marking each man as "rash", "brave" or "cowardly" we would surely not find it abnormal to say he was grading them (from a special point of view). If one were merely to say "He is a brave man" one would not normally call it grading; but I cannot see that the stretch of the word so to call it is harmful. One resistance to calling 'brave' a grading label arises from the fact that being more specialised than "good" it enables one to predict more accurately, though in a narrower field, the behaviour of a man so graded. This inclines people to think that it is a descriptive word in the way that "ferocious" noramlly is. But this is just a mistake; the resistance must be overcome. It would be better to regard "brave" as a grading label restricted to human behaviour in tight places, whereas "good" grades in all places, including tight ones.' (p.164).

Urmson does not find it necessary to explain why he thinks that 'ferocious' is normally descriptive while 'brave' is not. Is it because we say of, for example, tigers that they are fierce and of lambs that they are gentle, implying neither an unfavourable attitude towards the former nor approval of the latter, but merely thus far to describe their respective natures, whereas 'brave' cannot (except ironically) be used without such commitment, and is therefore not a describing but a grading word? An appeal to the lexicographer might settle this question, but there still remains a more fundamental logical problem to deal with -

whether the kind of words Urmson is interested in always convey the same minimum of identical information. We have seen that this is not so in the case of professional grading words. Therefore, the difference between the two classes of words is either merely that the former grade generally while the latter have a narrower field of application (that, for instance, 'brave' indicates its range of application in the way in which 'super' indicates its - apples), but neither carry a common descriptive meaning necessarily, or the latter carry also some descriptive content apart from indicating their field of application. How precisely the passage should be interpreted on this question I shall not attempt to argue. But it seems to me that the former alternative is untenable, while the latter raises difficult questions about the nature of Urmson's second stretch.

On the former interpretation there is no difference between 'good' and 'brave', except that since the former word can be applied in an unlimited range of places it does not by itself give any information, apart from the fact that something is being graded, whereas the latter word tells us fairly precisely what its range of application is - rather as an ad hoc label like 'super' tells us that it is applied to apples. The absurdity of this position is shown by the fact that it is inconceivable that we should call a man who fled before danger 'brave'. (On the other hand it is quite conceivable that some people should prefer apples which are sour and bruised to those which are sweet and free from blemishes.)

Though 'tight' is somewhat neutral-sounding, even so, in the use here in question, it can describe and so indicate the kind of places it is applicable to, only by determining to a large extent the corresponding applications of brave. A dying man in a state of unconsciousness is not to be described as being in a tight place, whereas a man who knows he is suffering from an incurable disease is. The logical point here is that we cannot know the grounds for saying that a man is in a tight place without also deciding how we shall apply 'brave' in his case. Thus if our incurably sick man was constantly complaining and lamenting his misfortune we could not call him brave.

But this raises the question of the nature of the stretch Urmson is asking us to make, and whether it is in fact to be described as a stretch at all. For central to Urmson's account of grading is the model of a set of criteria on whose satisfaction the grading label becomes applicable. If the so-called criteria and the grading label, so to say, interpenetrate, as they seem to in the case of 'brave', is it not time we looked for an alternative account?

In a foot note (p.164) Urmson refers to Aristotle's remark in the Nichomachean Ethics at 1107a that there are some 'passions' like spite, shamelessness and envy, and actions like adultery, theft and murder which do not admit of a mean because they 'have names that already imply badness [12] 'and says that this' applies to nearly everything which he discusses in this work', in the sense, as Urmson puts it in the text of

12. Ross's translation.

his paper, that they 'show order of merit'. Now Aristotle, in his treatment of such words, puts the most essential element of grading - the notion of a common scale - in the centre of the picture. There is no mean of adultery because there is no mean of 'excess and deficiency', and similarly there is no mean of courage because, being itself a mean, it can have no mean (and no excess or deficiency). But the attempt to provide a common scale often leads Aristotle to Procrustean beds. Thus when he treats truthfulness as a mean with boastfulness and humbleness as the extremes he distorts the logic of this word; for in its primary use 'true' contrasts only with 'false' or 'untrue' - one could boast truthfully or be truthfully humble. And it is hard to see how adultery can be placed on any kind of scale at all.

Urmson rightly insists that just as 'adultery' and 'malice' are essentially condemnatory so is 'brave' essentially merit-assigning. The difference between them lies in the fact that whereas 'brave' seems *prima facie* capable of being placed on a scale, at least in the case of 'adultery' no scale seems to be available. As we have seen Urmson does not regard 'right' and 'wrong' to be grading. I suggest that 'adultery' (rather 'adulterous') is more like 'right' than like 'brave'.

There is a sharing of merit in the case of the former only in the sense that adultery is worse than non-adultery. But this no more makes it a grading word than it does 'right' and 'wrong'. For the kind

of scale we require involves not merely differences of praise and blame, but also a set of common features correlated to such differences.

Let us now see what kind of stretch the attempt to view 'brave' as a grading word actually involves, and whether we can in face preserve this sense of a common scale in doing so. The specialised point of view from which Urmson's Company Commander might grade his men would be largely limited to conduct on the battle field. But even he would have to take into account certain individual characteristics of his men; he would have, for instance, to take into account the state of a man's physical fitness. The moral grader and the Army grader are in this respect doing the same operation. When we are using the will to face danger as the main criterion of bravery we must determine a man's dangers by considering the resources available to him and by what he knows and believes his situation to be (which includes up to a point what he takes it to require of him morally or socially). Now ordinary grading is quite different in this respect; it would be ridiculous to grade an apple favourably as a result of its having been borne by an old and unlucky tree.

Consider what 'brave' is contrasted with. If we take the other two members of Aristotle's trio how can we make an honest merit-assigning scale of the three? For what is it that they all possess in different degrees? The difficulty of taking the will to face danger as a criterion is that 'danger' suffers from the same defect from which

'avoidable' suffers; we must not shirk the dangers we are in, as we must not cause any avoidable inconvenience. But this does not apply to risk-taking; we may take too many risks or too few (or just the right number). Does the brave man then take risks whose number is an average of the risks which the coward and the rash man each take? This may or may not be the approach which lies behind Aristotle's characterisation of these words; but in any case it has only a remote connection with our concept of bravery, whether or not it has a closer connection with the Greek concept of it. Nor can we say that there is a class of good risks such that the brave man takes a number which forms a mean between those that the rash and the cowardly together take. For a man who takes many good risks is not rash but bold or daring. We might in the end be forced to say that a brave man takes the right kind of risks, a rash man the wrong ones and the coward shirks the ones he ought to take. But by how many stretches would this still be grading?

I want to suggest in parenthesis that the natural contrast is between 'brave' and 'cowardly', and 'rash' is brought in rather gratuitously in the interests of a theory; in other words, the notion of a scale is somewhat foreign to 'brave'. But admittedly only a full analysis could establish this point.

Another point of no less importance is this. Calling a man

bold is not indisputably pro tanto to praise him morally. Nor it seems to me is to call anyone brave. This is something moral philosophers have failed to notice; but it is nevertheless, I suggest, a fact of paramount importance.

I have so far assumed that the terms which Urmson calls specialised grading labels are necessarily evaluative, whether or not they are grading in character. We might however ask the more radical question 'Why should we not treat them as essentially classifactory labels which are in fact used almost universally in order also to mark our evaluations?' I shall answer this question by considering a form of answer implied in Mrs. Foot's paper on 'Moral Arguments' (Mind, Oct. 1958). In an argument designed to show that an evaluative conclusion may be entailed by descriptive premises alone, she takes the concept of rudeness from the field of etiquette. If someone says 'a man is rude when he behaves conventionally' or 'a man is rude when he walks up slowly to a front door', 'not because he believes such behaviour causes offence, but with the intention of leaving behind entirely the usual criteria or rudeness . . . . with the usual criteria of rudeness he leaves behind the concept itself.' (p.508). For her 'rude' is an evaluative word (since it is condemnatory), so that a man who admits the presence of the usual criteria of rudeness in a given case but refuses to call the

behaviour in question rude is really refusing to discuss points of etiquette. I do not want to retract my earlier objection against the suitability of the criteria - evaluative label model in the face of this argument; but the following conclusion can be drawn from it for our present purpose. 'Rude', and many other words, including a number of moral words, are evaluative in character. When the criteria of applying 'rude' are fulfilled one must apply it unless one is prepared to abandon etiquette. The consequences of the refusal cannot be any less far reaching because, firstly, the notion of rudeness is central to etiquette, and, secondly, 'rude' is an evaluative word in a way which requires that one uses it evaluatively unless one is prepared to abandon the concept itself. If we had chosen a non-central word, say 'correct dress', we should not indeed have to abandon etiquette itself, but a part of it would be lost to us. Thus it would seem that for Mrs. Foot evaluative terms like 'rude' have quite stringent conditions for their use; one cannot use such terms as calssificatory labels: one must use them as a badge of participation in a code of standards. For if one didn't the relation of entailment which exists between certain descriptive premises and an evaluative conclusion would cease to hold.

But I do not find this answer to our question satisfactory. I shall state my objection in terms of a distinction which I want to employ subsequently in developing my own approach to these questions. We may distinguish between what I shall call <u>refusing to speak the</u>

language of a game, and refusing to play a game. Mrs. Foot's man who says a man is rude when he walks slowly up to a front door is refusing to speak the language of etiquette; and similarly, we might say, a man who wants to 'leave behind' the usual criteria of justice is refusing to speak the language of morality (though this does not imply that he escapes blame in either case). A man does not necessarily refuse to speak the language of a game when he refuses to play it; he might remain a spectator.

The value of this distinction may be seen if we recall the discussion between Hare and Geach on good and evil which took place about three years ago in Analysis. In his paper 'Good and Evil' (Dec. 1956) Mr. Geach argued that 'good' has a primarily descriptive force. A man might not care two pins about cricket and still be able to say 'Hutton was batting on a "good" wicket'. Hare in reply ('Geach: Good and Evil', Analysis, April 1957) concedes this, but he claims that this is only true when 'good' is used in conjunction with functional words like 'batting wicket' and 'bygrometer'. But Geach holds that 'good' is quite generally descriptive and not in this limited respect only. He is able to do so by treating all uses of 'good' as in an important sense functional. Thus 'a good human action' is descriptive because, as Aristotle says, 'acting well . . . is a man's aim simpliciter . . . and qua man'; 'any man has to choose how to act, so calling an action good or bad does not depend for its effect as a

suasion upon any individual peculiarities of desire.' (p.40). As can be seen, they both assume that if 'good' is used in conjunction with a word related by definition to a function or a nature (the function of a hygrometer is to measure the humidity of the atmosphere, and the nature of a man is to be just) it is primarily descriptive in that case. Hare seems to make the further assumption that an expression containing 'good' in it would be primarily evaluative only if it did not carry a 'fixed descriptive meaning' (p.108); while Geach proceeds to take the position that an application of 'good' guides action as a result of the presence of certain wants.

But this leads to a hopeless stalemate, which neither side is able to dislodge the other from its chosen vantage-points. I suggest therefore that instead of discussing endlessly the question whether or when 'good' is primarily evaluative, we consider the more general question what would be involved in deciding to use a term, among those we have been considering, as a descriptive term only. With 'good' we can see that it cannot be used purely descriptively, not because there is a large class of uses in which it has no 'fixed descriptive meaning' but because its descriptive use presupposes an evaluative one. If someone refuses always to use it evaluatively he is denying himself not simply an important use of a major linguistic tool; he is refusing to use the word altogether. And, furthermore, he is in fact refusing to use a word which is logically implied in the existence of human

beings as social and rational beings - how could human beings be imagined apart from standards?

This seems to show that my distinction between refusing to speak the language of a game and refusing to play a game cannot be drawn in at least one case - in the game of standards, with the notion of goodness standing at its centre. But this apparent possibility arises from a misunderstanding. The game of standards is not a game in the sense here concerned, but rather a precondition of any game.

A very simple illustration of the distinction may be taken from cricket. The man who refuses to call a wicket 'good' which satisfies the usual criteria of a good wicket is refusing to speak the language of cricket. In doing this he makes a logical mistake; he assumes that a lack of interest in cricket entails a lack of right to use its vocabulary.

At a more sophisticated level we may say that a man who makes an arbritrary application of 'rude' is mistakenly assuming that an indifference to etiquette implies that one cannot intelligibly speak about it. But where I expect my distinction to be most fruitfully employed is in ethics. I do not see any logical difficulty in supposing that a man - any one person, that is - may be indifferent to morality and yet be able to speak quite intelligibly about the standards of morality and describe human behaviour in terms of its categories, though it may be doubted whether such a person would not have to

practise hypocrisy on a large scale.

But in speaking of the 'practical' nature of morality, or of its 'function', moral philosophers have never suggested that it would operate only if there were no amoral beings. The really interesting (and difficult) question therefore is: whether morality is wholly, and if not wholly up to what point, dispensable and the alternatives that may be necessary in its place. For at the level of cricket we can easily imagine that it simply ceased to be played; then we might all speak of it as spectators - as of a game whose interest is now purely historical. What, if any, analogies of this situation we might expect to find in morality could of course be discussed at great length; I can only hope to indicate a few points of attack on the problem. This I shall do in the latter part of the next chapter, where I shall attempt to provide a more positive account of moral concepts than was possible in this chapter, by examining a traditional question in ethics - whether moral principles are principles of a practical nature.

3. I have already admitted that my definition of a moral principle does not correspond to the ordinary meaning of 'moral principle'. The main and really important respect in which it diverges from ordinary speech is that it is too narrow. It does not, i.e., fail by taking certain principles to be moral when in fact, in terms of the criteria implicit in actual speech, these principles are non-moral in character; it fails by leaving out certain principles which may be treated as

moral principles without any logical infelicity. There are however many advantages in defining a narrower class in this way. One major gain is obviously this. In this way attention is focused on a large group of moral principles each of which requires us to concern ourselves with a class of actions defined without restriction by a moral predicate. The only reason moral predicates are able to play this role in the statement of moral principles lies in the fact that they name considerations in their own right. Since justice, truth-telling and promise-keeping are considerations which necessarily belong to morality the principles corresponding to them are moral principles only in virtue of the fact that the former are moral considerations. A clash of moral principles in my sense of 'principles' being thus a clash of moral considerations, any argument designed to show that we can have a set of rules which provides us, however adequately, with a mode of settling conflicts between moral considerations cannot prove that the category of principles is redundant in morals. This is so simply because some moral principles arepresupposed in the formulation of such rules. It is only because certain accepted duties clash that the need to adjudicate between them can arise. If we did not sometimes wish to help a friend in difficulty and also, at the same time, to keep an appointment with our neighbour, we should not face any moral indecision. That when faced with such a situation we are generally able to determine for

ourselves a better and a worse course to follow does not make it parallel to situations in which two rules clash. For the modified rules we obtain in the latter type of situation are what our revised considerations now are; whereas the fact that a lie is sometimes justified by the need to save valuable property does not qualify the original consideration that lying is to be avoided. In other words, certain moral considerations remain permanently unchanged, however elaborate the procedures for adjudicating between them that we might have evolved. The presupposition of such considerations is essential to morality, and the only way to state them is by employing the category of principles.

The argument that if we could formulate rules of morality which did not conflict then moral principles would become a superfluous notion is therefore invalid. For nobody assumes that we can operate with considerations without a more or less adequate system of priorities between them. But this argument can and does mislead. For in so far as it encourages the hope that such an order of priorities may in principle be complete, it shows obsession with a model which may at best work only in highly rigorous deductive systems. Even more, it obscures the major point that moral concepts express open considerations which cannot in principle be defined in terms of the classes of actions they make obligatory.

This fundamental logical point is obscured by formalism in

over-emphasising the importance of what I have called verdict-giving terms, like 'ought', 'right', and 'avoidable inconvenience', as paradigm value-terms; it tends to view the many typically moral terms which do not seem to conform to this model as somehow having been robbed of their original purity as evaluative terms as a result of our standards becoming over conventionalised. Since, however, morality has no essential content for the formalist it is made all the easier to view moral language in terms of a few such words, and thus to take the category of principles as redundant in morality.

Nor is the situation in the area of what are ordinarily taken to be the predicates of morality so simple that a rejection of formalism makes moral language essentially non-overall in character. For some moral predicates seem to have about them a verdict-giving air. Thus, despite the fact that we are sometimes 'cruel only to be kind', 'cruel' is more like 'avoidable inconvenience' than like 'truthful'. The infliction of pain ceases generally to be described as cruelty when the justification for it is seen to be present. 'Generous' has a similar tendency to be used in a non-ceteris-paribus sense. For an action seems, almost pari passu, to become desirable to the extent to which it is generous, and even when we are called upon to do an action which is not generous it does not, because it is not generous, become something which is ungenerous; as seems often to be the case with actions which, because they are not truthful, are thereby untruthful.

It is not a matter for surprise that moral philosophers with a bias for the rules model should often show a predilection for imperativism. Imperatives are essentially over-all and are not issued subject to considerations outside themselves. Moral principles are fundamentally different in this respect.

How are conflicts of principle in morality settled? There seem to be only two ways of answering this question. We may, either, follow a more or less revisionary line and adopt a criterion, such as the Greatest Happiness principle, which throws overboard fundamental distinctions of moral speech; or we may look to the rich and complex articulations of the categories of our actual moral thought and utterance for clues to a satisfactory answer to it. Saying that we decide in terms of consequences, or that we make our decisions in the light of our chosen way of life, seems to me to be neither here nor there. Nor does the answer that we decide by intuition seem any kind of genuine answer. For the question is not, how we come to know what we do come to know, but rather what kind of answer is the answer that we may correctly give (in whatever way we may have arrived at it). I want to suggest the following view.

As we have seen, the reason why the category of principles applies in morality is that a clash of moral considerations does not necessarily invalidate either of them. That we are sometimes justified

in lying in order to avoid causing suffering does not make the lie, even in those circumstances, anything but regrettable. Here G. E. Moore's principle of 'organic unities' may be invoked against me. It may, for instance, be argued - and I shall not disagree - that the pain which may be meted out as desert to a cruel man is not bad. But the validity of this principle does not make my position in any way untenable, though undoubtedly it does show that the situation here is extremely complicated.

Both these kinds of example indirectly illustrate a point of great importance, which neither Moore nor his successors seem to have noticed. A moral consideration is sometimes (whether or not always) waived because the situation in question falls under the concept which seems to be a modification of the concept involved in the original consideration. Thus, to take Moore's example, though causing pain is bad, causing pain to a cruel man may not only be not bad but even positively good. Similarly lying is sometimes necessary because the original consideration (though it holds in a way which it does not in the previous example) gives way to the special consideration that lying to avoid suffering is good. The conflicting considerations of not lying and avoiding suffering are here mediated by the consideration that lying to avoid suffering is good. This more specialised concept gives us, in its turn, a new moral principle.

But the more specific requirement is again only a principle which

may be overridden by another moral principle. The answer I want to suggest is a generalisation of situations of this kind. Since it is not necessary for me to assume that a moral consideration can never cease to hold when it gives way to a more specific consideration corresponding to it (as in Moore's example), but only that frequently such is not the case, the argument from the principle of organic unities does not raise any impediment to my doing so.

My answer to the problem of conflicts of duty is therefore the following. A conflict of duties is decided by appealing to a third principle whose concept mediates between their respective concepts. We are often reminded by philosophers of the importance of judgment and good sense in the application of moral notions. But unless we have some such procedure as I have just indicated in our moral discourse, judgment and good sense can do very little. It is only because we have the framework in which these qualities can be exercised can we ever begin to deal with the infinite complexity of moral situations.

CHAPTER IV

Moral Concepts and Moral Principles II

Are moral principles practical principles?

1. The view that moral principles are practical in character has, like many familiar theses in other branches of philosophy, caused a good deal of confusion in ethics. Its deceptive simplicity has lulled moral philosophers into an illusory feeling of being in possession of an important truth, blocking thereby important lines of enquiry. Though I should on the whole prefer to see it rejected as at least seriously misleading, if not fallacious, my object in this chapter is primarily to investigate it in a systematic - though far from complete - way in order to isolate what is clearly false in it from what may bear serious examination, and to introduce some of the essential qualifications it must be made to carry in the respects in which it is true. I shall therefore distinguish a number of senses of 'practical', without implying however that all of them are in fact well represented in our speech. And I shall introduce a major division between those which indicate the nature of the relation between a locution and something taken to be practical, and those that pertain to the nature of a field or activity claimed to be practical. In other words, I shall distinguish those senses of 'practical' which concern merely the question of the place of a mode of utterance in relation to something already taken to be practical, and the senses

which are germane to the question of the manner in which a practical field or activity is practical; or, very roughly, between the inner and the outer senses of the word. While disputes over the justification of morality relate mainly to the latter senses of 'practical', the former are of considerable value in showing the futility of many blanket theories of morality.

Some indication of the stultification which results from failing to draw distinctions in this field can be given even at this stage by considering Professor Nowell-Smith's characterisation of ethics in terms of his distinction between 'theoretical' and 'practical discourse'. The former has the purpose of enabling us 'to understand the nature of things' while the latter 'consists of answers to practical questions of which the most important are "What shall I do?" and "What I ought to do"?. If I put these questions to myself the answers are decisions, resolutions, expressions of intention, or moral principles. If I put them to someone else his answer will be an order, injunction, or piece of advice, a sentence in the form "Do such and such". The central activities for which moral language is used are choosing and advising others to choose.'[1] The two related questions he is answering here - viz., whether moral discourse belongs to theoretical or practical discourse, and if practical what makes it practical - are dealt with on the basis

1. Ethics. p.11.

of an ambiguous assumption. He assumes that there are certain activities which are practical in nature, and a form of discourse is practical if it is employed in such activities. Now an activity may be classed as practical as a result of its place on two very different kinds of scale. Thus seeing, contemplating, observing, inferring, choosing and deciding constitute a scale the last two of which are clearly practical (while inferring may or may not be so taken). On the other hand, we might say that angling, racing mathematics, worship, eating, drinking, industry and commerce constitute another scale the last four of which are practical. (No doubt both these scales are rather odd assortments, but 'activity', as used in philosophy and elsewhere, is itself an omnibus word which makes such diverse assemblages possible). In taking choosing and deciding as examples which illustrate the practical character of moral discourse Nowell-Smith is clearly thinking of the former kind of scale. But I suggest that this is a mistake. Choosing and advising are activities performed by scientists no less than by moral agents. What can distinguish the scientist's talk from the talk of the moral agent, so that the former is theoretical while the latter is practical, must lie in their respective subject matters (the former being concerned with electrons and genes, while the latter pertains to such things as promises and debts). The scale that is relevant here is the second and not the first, whether or not we decide

subsequently that moral discourse is practical. For what I am denying is not that human discourse can be divided into theoretical and practical discourse on the basis of the first scale, but rather that moral discourse can be placed at any given point on it.

Nowell-Smith's choice of an inappropriate scale is also accompanied by an attempt to apply it fairly strictly. Thus, though to appraise is not to perform a practical activity, it has no point, and would not belong to practical discourse, unless it links up with our subsequent behaviour. 'But the great philosophers of the past always treated questions of appraisal as subordinate to practical questions. They assumed - and who would not? - that the point of telling you that Jones is a good or a bad man is that you should imitate or should not imitate Jones, that you should or should not give Jones the job, or do whatever else might be in question.' (p.12). Two objections may be made against this statement. Firstly, the connection between appraisal and conduct need not be so close even in Nowell-Smith's own examples. When a man who lives in a very different social and cultural world from ours is praised as a good man there is little question of imitating him. The extreme variety of moral situations often precludes this. Secondly his examples are question-begging. If we consider a fairly specific moral judgment on a remote historical person there need not be any practical point to it. Thus it is difficult to see how

a judgment like 'Qubla Khan ought to have spent more time with his favourite concubine' can, when made by a historian, and without reference to his general moral outlook,have any bearing on the conduct of present-day English readers.

Hare's distinction between 'prescriptive' and 'descriptive' language is similar in purpose. He seems to succeed where Nowell-Smith fails by the simple device of making it analytic that a prescriptive use of language entails an imperative. But, as so often when success is sought by decision to use a word in a special sense, this does not solve the problem. Except where the form of words is itself in the imperative mood, or can be taken as operating as an imperative in its context, some form of a procedure for deciding, in a given situation, what actually is entailed in the shape of an imperative must be provided by the advocates of this connection between prescription and imperatives. The failure to do so is not a deficiency of detail but a point of considerable logical importance. All that the definition can secure is a minimum of commitment which all prescriptive use of language must carry; but what minimum is it? A somewhat empty sense of commitment to an imperative would be this. The judgment on Qubla Khan, for instance, might be taken to commit our historian to asking all subsequent Qubla Khans to do what the first ought to have done.

The reason why no practical conclusion of any significance follows from certain uses of prescriptive language is that, though they can be regarded as applications of principles, the relation between the two is not necessarily a one-one relation and, as in our example, the terms in which the judgment may be defended can vary: to say 'X is wrong' is not necessarily to make plain one's grounds for saying so. Very often, the more specific the action described in a judgment of appraisal the less definite the practical conclusion that may be drawn from it. Thus to say that divorce by mutual consent should be allowed commits one to the position that divorce is a revocable contract, but to say 'X ought not to have divorced his wife' gives little information about one's moral beliefs.

It would seem that the verbal form in which a moral principle may be stated can provide little indication of its logical character. The following sentences, though differing among themselves gramatically, express the same moral principle.

Never tell a lie.

Thou shalt not lie.

One ought not to lie.

Lying is wrong.

The main common feature, to offset the difference in tense and mood, seems to be that they all employ an action-word, namely 'lying'. But that does not seem to have any importance here. For a sentence like 'Lying causes dyspepsia', which, in terms of Nowell-Smith's distinction, belongs to 'theoretical discourse' employs the same action word. And since the kind of action mentioned is not always in the future his view that appraisal is subordinate to questions of conduct has no justification in grammar.

Our approach to the wider problem of the sense in which moral discourse is practical must therefore be by a less obvious route. The diversity of moral discourse, furthermore, makes it incumbent on us to distinguish more than one sense in which morality as a whole - i.e., from the outside - may be viewed as practical. Leaving aside the wider question of the different external senses of 'practical' for the present, let us now distinguish some of its senses which pertain merely to the relation in which a form of utterance may stand to an activity or field which is already assumed to be practical.

2. The following sentences may be considered as illustrating some of the ways in which an utterance may be taken to be practical in virtue of its relation to an activity or field assumed to be practical.

(1) Spring vegetables have a low protein content (probably a false generalisation in dietetics).

(2) Pain is evil.

(3) Always bring forward your pawns quickly.

(4) Always move a bishop diagonally.

(5) Be just.

The first sentence can be taken as stating a practical truth because our interest in the information provided by it is likely to be a practical one. The protein content of spring vegetables is a matter of interest largely because they are grown for human consumption. This is of course a contingent matter; it is easy to imagine circumstances in which the chemical composition of spring vegetables was studied for its own sake, just as some physicists are supposed to investigate the properties of matter from pure curiosity. This gives us the minimal sense of 'practical'. But before conceding the title of 'practical' to (1) an important distinction has to be drawn. It is obvious that we must not admit a sense of 'practical' which would permit us to treat every utterance in the general or universal form as practical in nature; to do so would rob the distinction between 'theoretical' and 'practical' of all value. There are some locutions in whose case it would be absurd to say that our interest in them is a practical one. Thus while the rule of non-contradiction is enunciated at times with a practical view, it would be inappropriate to say that someone, or a group of people, took interest in it from a purely practical point of view.

This arises - apart from the fact that clear thinking is not a practical activity of any kind - from the impossibility of any talk about practical purposes which does not presuppose this rule.

The inappropriateness of calling the rule of non-contradiction 'practical' seems to extend itself to a law like the law of gravitation. But this, I suggest, is a different kind of inappropriateness. Partly it is because laws of the latter kind are held to be true beyond question, even though they are not necessarily true, that we do not wish to call them 'practical'. Another and perhaps stronger reason seems to be this. The connection with actions which laws of this kind bear is quite indirect. For ordinary non-technical purposes they do not give us any indispensable information; whereas for purposes whose satisfaction depends on scientific knowledge they are only a starting point and very far indeed from providing information which can be acted upon.

Thus while (1) can be called 'practical' the possibility of taking an interest in it with some practical view must be understood in such a way that if no alternative to it were conceivable, or if it formed a condition for any talk about purposes, then we could not be interested in it in this way. Let us call this sense of 'practical' sense A. Here it must be noted that though in calling (1) a practical locution we do not depart from ordinary usage in

any important respect, in sense A even the law of gravitation is practical in nature. The divergence from ordinary speech can no doubt be rectified by further stipulations; but to do so would add unnecessary complexity to our discussion. There is no danger or misunderstanding if it is recognised that our minimal sense of 'practical' is a technical one.

The sentence 'Pain is Evil' does not state a moral principle in the way in which 'Be kind' does. 'Just', 'kind', 'brave', etc. are necessarily applied to kinds of action and characterise, in different ways, the conduct of agents; but to say 'X is painful' is not to say necessarily that someone is responsible for X.

Nor does a principle like this provide information in which our interest might or might not be of a practical nature. Even if we do not take the view that words like 'good' and 'evil' are used to refer to attitudes ('pro' and 'con' attitudes, to use Nowell-Smith's terminology) or for the purposes of 'commendation' (Hare's term) and condemnation, so that they are primarily evaluative, (2) has a justificatory role which precludes it from being contingently connected with actions. To say 'X is evil' is to imply that X ought to be avoided. But to give the chemical composition of a substance is not to imply anything about what actions one ought to take in regard to it (except when the context provides the necessary assumptions). (2) may thus be said to possess a non-contingent

connection with actions in the field to which it belongs. At the same time it does not mention a class of actions to be avoided in the way 'Do not lie' does. Let us call locutions which posses these two features 'practical' in sense B.

'Always bring forward your pawns quickly' resembled 'Pain is Evil' in not being related to actions in a contingent way only. That is, it is not possible to regard it as a valid principle of chess and at the same time not to hold that one's chess-playing should be guided by it. This is not to say that it does not differ from the latter in being necessarily connected with action in some other respect; for it differs from it in that in stating it we necessarily mention a type of action.

But while a principle or standard of this form is necessarily practical, it is not necessary that in the activity or field concerned there should be a place for it. This sense too deserves a separate label; let us call it sense C.

Sentences (4) and (5) are rather similar and may be considered together. They differ from (3) in being not merely locutions which are necessarily connected with practice, but also express norms necessarily belonging to the activity or field concerned. They differ mainly in that the former states a rule while the latter states a principle, a difference of no importance to the distinctions we are now making.

It will have been noticed that all the four kinds of examples I have considered may be taken as illustrating, each in some respect differently, the contingency or necessity of the connection between an utterance, or what is expressed by it, may have with actions belonging to a field or activity already assumed to be practical. Where these different ways of being practical are best illustrated by a moral principle I have, with some hesitation, not restricted myself to non-moral examples. Let us now consider how far moral principles, or any sub-class of them, qualify for the title of 'practical' in our four senses.

I shall give two reasons for not regarding moral principles as practical in sense A. Firstly, as we saw, it is a matter of what interest we take in a locution for it to qualify as practical in sense A. 'Spring vegetables have a low protein content' would in this sense belong to diatetics or to chemistry, depending on how we look upon it. A moral principle could only belong to morality, whether or not we cared about morality.[2] The second reason is this. There is a fundamental difference between a moral principle and a straightforward descriptive statement. This may sometimes be denied. On a view like G. E. Moore's, for instance, moral predicates are definable in purely descriptive terms, since for him 'good', the term which names the

2. For qualifications to this statement see next chapter. Here it may be sufficient to point out that the content of morality could only be appropriated by some other field, such as self-interest or religion, but not by anything which sought merely knowledge.

quality whose realisation is the sole purpose of moral endeavour, is like 'yellow', a descriptive word. As moral principles can be stated in the indicative, on his position it is possible to say that the function of moral principles is to inform us of the presence or absence of a quality in certain types of actions. Recent critics of intuitionist theories like Strawson and Hare have claimed that to do this is to rob value-words of their characteristic function - that which makes it possible to draw inferences of the form 'One ought to do X'. We can however - without going into the question whether and, if so, in what respect words like 'good', 'just', etc. are descriptive words - show that moral principles cannot be regarded as practical in sense A by means of the following argument, based on the difference between practical advice and moral advice.

Normally when someone offers practical advice what is practical about the advice is its claim that, if followed, it would lead to the results which the recipient of the advice desires; or, if not the results he is aiming at, then those at which he would aim, if he knew the possibilities of the situation. The meaning of 'practical' in this use of 'practical' is, roughly, that which works. If the advice is based on some general beliefs then those beliefs are practical in a sense closest to our first sense of 'practical'.

When a belief operates as a practical belief in sense A and advice is offered on the basis of it the adviser must hold it to be true. He can then be said not only to offer practical advice but to

advise someone to act on a piece of information which he holds to be true. He could not however be said to do this if he did not accept the belief himself.

But this is certainly not true of moral advice. I can advise a friend to take a vow of celibacy because for him this is the supreme condition of spiritual cleanliness, even though I myself regard it as at best a harmless fad. It might therefore seem that moral advice purports to indicate a way of acting which would lead to the fulfilment of the addressee's purpose of doing his duty in terms of the principles he accepts and is thus similar to the normal cases of practical advice. But this is surely a mistake. It is not always the case that advising someone on how to apply his moral principles is moral advice. This is because sincerity is not a sufficient condition for a form of behaviour to be morally right. And unless I think that it is right for someone to act in a certain way I cannot be said to give him the advice to do so, though that does not imply that when I cannot advise someone to follow a moral principle which he holds this must be because I hold that it is always a wrong principle to follow. It merely implies that in the circumstances in which it follows from his principles that he should act in a certain way I cannot (morally) advise him to do so unless it is justifiable in moral terms which I accept. One of the grounds on which I may ask someone to do something is that this is the sort of action required by his moral beliefs.

My argument against viewing moral principles as practical in

sense A may be summed up in the following way. Only beliefs which are held by the adviser to be true can qualify as practical in sense A; and once this condition is satisfied advice to act on them can be given. But in the case of moral principles this qualification is not necessary, so that advice to act on a moral principle can be given even when the adviser does not himself hold this principle to be valid, i.e. a principle worthy of adoption, not simply a principle he must in certain circumstances recommend someone to act on because the person advised believes in it.

'Pain is evil' is not, as I have said, a typical moral principle. Though some - for instance, the Buddhists - would regard it as the supreme principle of morality, its status as a moral principle, as that of its Utilitarian counterpart, may be questioned. When construed as forbidding pain-causing behaviour, and thus as employing pain-causing behaviour as a moral concept, it seems to do some violence to our moral language. To call an action 'unjust' is to provide a very strong prima facie reason for condemning it. On the other hand, even the best of our actions so often result in pain that it may be doubted whether there is a general onus on us to justify the painful consequences of our actions. (Does the ascentic merit moral condemnation for the pain he inflicts on himself?). The so-called duty to avoid pain must not be confused with duty not to be cruel or unkind. Both the latter kinds of action cause pain but the reason why they are bad is not this. Their badness is to be explained on other grounds - for instance,

because they cause pain which is unmerited or unnecessary, or because they hurt where the obligation is to help.

Both the Buddhist and Utilitarian principles purport in fact to re-define the scope of moral behaviour. Instead of the normal multiplicity of moral criteria they are meant to serve as the one supreme test of the morality or immorality of actions. Whether such revolutionary proposals are accepted or not they must not be confused with moral principles in the ordinary sense.

The extent of the analogy between sense C of 'practical' and the sense in which moral principles are practical is a matter of dispute. 'Always bring forward your pawns' is a principle within the frame-work of chess rules and the aim of winning at chess; but there are no agreed definitive rules which delimit the field of morality, nor is there an agreed, much less clearly defined, aim of morality. Here we get a good example of an external sense of 'practical' impinging on the application of an internal sense of that word. Depending on how the aim of morality is taken we should expect various possibilities of dividing moral principles in respect of the necessity or contingency of the place held by them within it. If the analogy between moral principles and principles or rules which are practical in sense C is a strong one we should expect a large number of our moral principles to be contingent in this way. But there will always be some in whose case the search for alternatives makes no sense.

This brings us to sense D. We saw earlier that the principle of justice is practical in this sense. Now in general moral philosophers have not held that all moral principles are practical in this sense. No doubt for Kant all moral principles are a priori in character.[3] But this only implies that only valid or correct moral principles are practical in this sense. If we assume that there are good and bad, or correct and incorrect, moral principles - as we must unless differences in moral matters are held to be never differences in moral principles - then only valid moral principles can be practical in this privileged sense.

Now a principle may be necessary to morals in two rather different ways. The principle of justice is necessary to morality in that anyone who does not accept it could not be said to have a moral standpoint at all. On the other hand there can be principles without which a man could have at best a rudimentary sort of morality. They may be necessary in the sense that he cannot acquire a developed morality without them. In this latter category might be put kindness, generosity, etc. Clearly, however, in relation to a developed morality, both kinds of principles are necessary in the same sense; such a morality is inconveivable without these principles.

A principle may thus be not only a valid moral principle but a necessarily valid moral principle. When a principle is valid in the latter way - and ipso facto in the former - it has no conceivable rival.

3. Metaphysic of Morals, Introduction.

At this level there is no distinction between correct and incorrect moral principles.

A parallel with fundamental logical rules may help here. If someone were to deny the law of non-contradiction - as Marxists seem to sometimes - and claim to have discovered a truer law in its place, we should want to deny the supposed alternative the title of a logical rule. We treat such claimants as we treat counterfeit currency; i.e., as worthless articles rather than as inferior goods (as old and worn out coins were in the days of the Gold Standard).

But a large majority of moral principles cannot, of course, be said to be necessary in this double way. There seems to be no necessity that helping one's enemies when they are victims of some natural calamity, or denying help to those who have wronged us, should be a moral principle which someone with a more than rudimentary moral standpoint should hold.

Thus while Kant was closer to the truth when he thought moral principles to be a priori in character than those moral philosophers who treat moral principles in a sense quite unlike our sense D, and tend rather to treat them as practical principles in sense C, his theory left no room for alternative moral principles.

Though the distinction between these two kinds of principles is of fundamental importance, the point at which it is to be drawn cannot be indicated even very roughly without a great deal of detailed investigation into the structure of our moral beliefs. But one thing

must here be mentioned. This is the difference between the condemnation which the amoralist (i.e. the person who denies even the most fundamental moral principles) earns at our hands and the censure to which the person whose moral awareness is limited or crude is liable. The notion of an amoral person, despite the facility with which some novelists and psychologists speak of him, presents many conceptual difficulties, and before we can condemn or exonerate someone reputed in this way we ought to be clear in our minds about the significance, or lack of it, of what is being attributed to him; whereas the notion of a person whose moral beliefs err signigicantly (and are not simply moral by courtesy) is, by comparison, far simpler.

3. I shall now draw attention to a miscellany of uses which, though of no great intrinsic importance for the purposes of this chapter, are likely to throw light on the approval-charged application of 'practical' to morality in recent ethical theory.

When someone calls a proposal or suggestion practical it is natural to assume that he means to praise it. Its end or purpose being not under consideration, or being taken to be desirable, the point of calling it practical is to admit its claim to be efficacious in what it is intended to achieve. The four senses of 'practical' we have so far distinguished must not be confused with this use, though where we can apply it in this praise-bestowing sense, we can also apply it in

sense C (because principles in the latter sense of 'practical principle' are contingently efficacious). What is important to notice here is that we cannot praise a proposal as practical unless there could be one which might not be practicable. Therefore, since certain moral principles have no conceivable alternatives it follows that the application to them of 'practical' in this sense is excluded.[4] A question that naturally arises here is whether moral principles which are not necessary in either of the two senses distinguished above, since this difficulty does not exist in their case, qualify for the commendatory application of 'practical' to them. If there were a general end, like the greatest possible happiness, in terms of which we rated moral principles, then such principles would be describable as more or less practical. Now whatever procedure utilitarians, or sociologists of a utilitarian persuasion, might adopt, this is not how such principles are actually defended or rejected. A principle like 'All wrongs ought to be avenged', for instance, seems to bear little connection with any general end of morality.

The pejorative uses of 'practical' are more germane to persons than to actions. Often in saying of someone that he is a practical man we suggest that he has a limited outlook, that, for instance, he is

4. Mr. Griffiths in the paper referred to at the end of the previous chapter calls moral principles 'rules of thumb'. Since a rule of thumb is necessarily 'practical' in this commendatory sense it is clear that an illegitimate generalisation is involved in his so calling them.

innocent or oblivious of finer distinctions; that his life moves in narrow grooves, and that he would rather succeed at something conventional and commonplace than venture forth into anything bold and imaginative.

Sometimes however, 'practical' is used to apply, not to actions or persons so much as to a style of acting, without implying either unqualified praise or blame. Thus a 'practical appraoch' may, in certain circumstances, connote an approach which, though productive of certain results, may be expected to miss something of the original conception (rather as a rule of thumb is often good enough for the purpose in hand, but sometimes only an approximation to what is desired). Clearly it is highly doubtful whether acting on a moral principle can be called practical in this sense.

4. We may now consider some of the senses of 'practical' in which it may be used to characterise morality - or moral principles, as the principles of the field of morality - from the outside. The uses I want to consider are not, as I pointed out earlier, necessarily reflected in ordinary speech; nor are they such that the mere recognition of a possibility on my part commits me to the view that they are legimately applicable to morality. I shall in fact argue against the possibility of doing so in more than one case.

As a preliminary it would be worth our while to recall here the distinction I made in the previous chapter between refusing to play a

game and refusing to speak the language of a game. I said there that refusing to speak the language of a game is logically senseless, but that to refuse to play a game is not logically impossible. The latter part of this statement may now be amplified further. Even when I refuse to play a game it may nevertheless be to my advantage that the game continues in fact to be played. The cynicism involved in such an attitude - i.e. in such a refusal when it is accompanied by an awareness that I stand to gain from the others playing it - varies of course with the game. At a simple level we have the man who scorns, secretly or openly, the fabourite pastime of many while benefiting tangibly from the fact that they persist in such an inane exercise (e.g. the musical snob who earns his livelihood by selling records of popular music). Clearly there need be no inconsistency in his actions; for he may think that good music can never appeal to more than a small minority. And at perhaps the most difficult we have the immoralist who disregards the standards of morality but wants other to continue behaving morally. Sometimes the problem of persuading him to accept morality is taken to be equivalent to the question of what, if anything, will serve as an argument which he can only reject by abandoning rationality. But the notion of rationsl behaviour is full of ambiguity. If it is simply a matter of consistency, then, prima facie at least, it seems arguable that the immoralist can - as a rational egoist - have a consistent

position. The Classical answer - that it is to his own advantage to be moral (or just) - comes up against the difficulty that moral behaviour is defined as not merely behaviour in conformity with moral standards, but rather such behaviour accompanied by the right reasons for acting. It might however be said that, though the person who pursues his own interest (however truly) cannot ever be said to be acting morally, nevertheless, it may be possible to show that moral behaviour achieves in fact the same results as the correct pursuit of our own interests. But, how are we to show that self-interest and morality coincide, not simply generally, but always and necessarily?

Whether such a dialectical feat is possible or not, at least one point which is of relevance to the problem of this chapter does emerge. If morality and self-interest achieve the same result then we might say that morality is practical in the same external sense of 'practical' as self-interest. Intuitively there seems to be no difficulty in saying that to pursue one's interests is to do something practical, and so our discussion would come to a satisfactory culmination.

If, on the other hand, we assume that the two do not coincide, then the question in what way morality is practical remains still to answer.

Another possible line of argument might be this. We saw in the case of 'Pain is evil' and its Utilitarian counterpart that they are not like ordinary moral principles but in fact constitute re-definitions of the scope of morality. But once this is granted we might say that morality is practical because it is a pursuit aimed at minimising pain (or maximising pleasure) in a systematic way. Intuitively also there seems to be a possibility that we can call such a pursuit practical. But there are at least two inescapable difficulties in taking such a view. There is, firstly, not only no conceptual necessity (as I have already suggested) about taking such a view of ethics, but, on the contrary, there are strong grounds against defining ethics in this way. For normally we take the avoidance of pain to others only to be a duty; in so far as I aim at eliminating pain from my own life (or try to maximise my own pleasure) in a systematic way without hurt to others I am doing something which is ethically neutral rather than something which is morally good or bad. In other words, ethics is characteristically other-regarding.[5] Secondly, pleasure and pain are not such simple notions as this view seems to imply.[6] So often pleasure and pain arise

5. With perhaps some qualifications; such as, that, I should be honest not only with others but also with myself.
6. Cf. Professor Ryle's paper on 'Pleasure', Aristotelian Society Supplementary Vol.XXVIII (1954).

as a result of success in what we aim at or from frustration in our endeavours, rather than because we are successful in cultivating certain feelings or fail in our efforts to avoid certain other feelings, that neither of these principles seems to relate to any definite pursuit. Though our aim to acquire riches, or to reduce illness, is a characteristically practical aim, the avoidance of pain or the pursuit of pleasure cannot, for this reason, be treated in a similar category.

We have already seen that morality cannot be characterised by reference to certain members of the class of activities formed by observing, contemplating, deciding, choosing, etc. Nor, it would now seem, can it be by reference to any of the second (angling, games, engineering, commerce and indstry). For it does not relate specifically to any of them but seems rather to be something of a higher order concerned in principle with all of them. But might we not extend this second list and include such activities as politics and administration, and then treat morality on an analogy with the last two (which we should all regard as practical)? Whether this is so or not, there is at least this obvious difference between morality and the entire second list, even in its extended form; though we are all moral agents, whether we like it or not, those amongst us who are politicians or administrators are so by choice. It is therefore reasonable to assume that, in whatever sense we apply 'practical' to

morality, it will be a somewhat artificial sense, or at least one which calls for some explanation. I shall now comment on Mr. Toulmin's attempt to define the 'function of ethics', as an attempt which faces essentially the same problems as the attempt to characterise the sense in which morality may be said to be practical.

In his The Place of Reason in Ethics, he writes: ' . . . we can provisionally define it as being "to correlate our feelings and behaviour in such a way as to make the fulfilment of everyone's aims and desires as far as possible compatible".'[7] And in conclusion: 'Ethics is concerned with the harmonious satisfaction of desires and interests'.[8] He tries to meet the likely objection that 'compatibility of aims and desires' is possible 'on various levels of excellence' by claiming that 'the idea of obligation, as it affects our decisions, is primarily moral'. If by thie Toulmin means - as seems likely - that the idea of moral obligation is logically prior to that of obligation in other fields, this might well be questioned; it seems to me to be arguable that moral obligation and political obligation are correlative notions. But even if he is right this does not dispose of the objection. By 'harmonious satisfaction' or 'compatibility' of aims and desires he surely does not mean a process whereby we no longer have aims and desires which clash or which call for adjudication. Therefore, unless the definition is amplified and

7. p.137.
8. Op.cit., p.223.

we are told what kind of harmonisation is characteristically moral, we have at best named a function which is performed equally well by politics.

The important question therefore is not whether ethics has a function, but in what sense we may speak of the 'function of ethics'. In what is perhaps the standard sense of 'function' to speak of a function is not to imply that it is necessarily applicable to a unique object or class of objects. Thus though the function of a knife is to cut it is not necessary that only knives should be used for cutting. Nor, in this sense of the word, do we imply that the referent necessarily performs the function in question; though a computer can compute, it is quite possible that there should be computers which have never been, nor ever will be, used to compute.

Now imagine a case in which that which performs the function cannot exist, as it can in the above examples, without the function itself being performed, though the performing of the function can happen without this particular performer's being the one to perform it. A king cannot be king (assuming that dethroned kings are not really kings any more) without performing the function of holding the highest office in his country, though others - such as a president or a chief - can hold this office. Here we are using 'function' in a non-standard sense; for now we cannot ask whether the king is performing his function (as we noramlly can when we speak of a function). For the same

reason it is a weaker sense of the word, since to say 'King John is performing his kingly functions' in this sense is merely to say that King John is still king (We might in the first sense of 'function' say that a king necessarily reigns but may or may not govern).

Though we speak tautologously when we ascribe the function of reigning to a king (or of holding the highest office to a chief), there is no coverse tautology in saying that, in such and such a community, the highest office is held by a king or a president. But if we said that the kingly function or office is performed by kings we should be speaking not only tautologously; we should also be using 'function' in a purely empty way. (For not only does a king necessarily hold the highest office in his country; he alone can perform the kingly function, and necessarily performs it).

Our question then reduces to the following: in how strong a sense of 'function' are we able to attribute the function of harmonising aims and desires to morality? Consider this further passage from Toulmin: ' . . . there would be no use for ethical reasoning either among people whose feelings were wholly unalterable (and who would therefore behave exactly the same whether exorted to change or not) or, on the other hand, among angels, whose dispositions were always of the best (and who would therefore have no need to enquire or discuss what to do)[9]'. Toulmin commits himself to, (a) the view that harmonious

9. Op.cit., pp.136-137.

aims and desires are possible without moral reasoning, and (b) the view that such a state of affairs may exist without any agency to bring it about. In doing this he seems to treat morality as having a function in a far stronger sense of the word than may plausibly be maintained. It may be doubted whether beings whose aims and desires cannot change, because their feelings are 'wholly unalterable', can be regarded as rational beings; it is not so much that moral reasoning is useless in their case as that they are incapable of moral reasoning. Angels on the other hand, being necessarily rational, are quite capable of moral thinking. But from the supposition that their dispositions are always of the best it does not follow that ethical reasoning has no use for them. If 'dispositions' is used in a Rylean sense then saying that their dispositions are always of the best merely means that they always behave in the best way; they might nevertheless employ moral arguments in making their decisions. If, on the other hand, their dispositions are supposed to be of the best because they have no need to employ moral concepts in their decisions, then the question arises whether people whose decisions are never moral decisions can be said always to make decisions which are morally of the best. Nor can it be said that they make no decisions, for beings who make no decisions are, again, not rational beings. Furthermore, being angels, they may be presumed not merely to do the best but to want to know that they in fact do the best. This necessarily gives a use for ethical reasoning in their lives.

Kant, it seems to me, made a sounder approach to the problem when he distinguished morality as obligation and morality as the principles of practical reason. 'A perfectly good will would therefore be equally subject to objective laws (viz. laws of good), but could not be conceived as obliged thereby to act lawfully, because of itself from its subjective constitution it can only be determined by the conception of good'.[10] A distinction of a related nature, to which some will object, that may be drawn is the following. One might claim that rational beings must possess moral concepts, without necessarily implying that they have a morality. In other words, there is a difference between playing the game of morality and merely having a use for its language. Morality has a function in the lives of all rational beings in the sense that some of its concepts are implied by the possibility of intercourse between them, but not in the sense that they follow moral principles. An example from Mr. Griffiths' paper on 'Justifying Moral Principles'[11] will explain my point. He points out, rightly I think, that a prudential justification of moral principles may be given by assuming that God is a Utilitarian in this world and a retributivist in the next, but that actually such a justification would not enable us to make the transition from prudence to morality. Clearly then prudence can do the job which morality does in the sense that there could be rational beings

10. Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics, p.36.
11. Aristotelian Society, Proceedings, Vol.LVIII.1957-58.

whose aims and desires were regulated by a rational procedure.

But this is not to say that we can always decide in a clear cut way whether a principle is being followed as merely a prudential principle or as a moral one, nor that the fields of religion and morality can be clearly demarcated.[12] The criteria for deciding whether a non-moral principle or rule is being followed are fairly liberal, as may be seen from the following example. My motive in following a principle of chess-strategy on a particular occasion may not be to play the best game, since I am generally a lazy player, but only to impress Jones. I can, in such a case, be said to know that X is a correct principle of chess strategy and to follow it when I move my chessmen in the right way. It is not that I am merely following what Jones thinks to be a correct principle of chess-strategy; for, then, though my action could be described as following what Jones thinks to be a correct principle of chess, that would not be an adequate description of it. I can imagine a situation in which I know that Jones thinks X to be a correct principle without knowing whether it is in fact correct. The difference between this and the previous situation is precisely the difference which is described by saying that, in the one, I follow a principle of chess-strategy which I hold to be correct, though only because Jones thinks so, while, in the other, I follow a principle which, though possibly incorrect from my point of view, I

12. Some further observations on this subject will be made in the next chapter.

know Jones to hold to be true. In other words, it is possible to follow a non-moral principle from a motive which has nothing to do with its correctness.

We might on the other hand be inclined to think that the criteria for deciding that a moral principle is being followed are straightforwardly unambiguous and of the yes-or-no variety. But this would be a great mistake. So much of the inspiration behind the moral heroism of a religious person is likely to lie in his faith, that it would be highly paradoxial to say that he acts on moral principles only to the extent to which he neglects his religion.

I shall now sum up my discussion of the 'function' of morality. In a weak sense of 'function' morality has a necessary function in rational existence. And we might say that morality is practical in this special sense of being involved in the notion of rational beings in intercourse, remembering how far removed it is from the ordinary sense of 'practical'. We might also claim it to be functional in the stronger sense of consisting of principles, which may be, and often are, followed for their own sake; it would then also be 'practical' in the stronger sense that it is one possible mode of deciding between conflicting aims and desires. But once we have made either of these claims we cannot then also say that there are beings, whether with unalterable feelings or with feelings which are of the best, who have no 'use' for ethical reasoning in realising their aims and desire.

For even if there were beings who had no use for morality *qua* obligation this would not imply that they employed no moral concepts.

CHAPTER V

The Ultimacy of Moral Principles[1]

1. In arguing that on the whole the statement that moral principles are practical principles is extremely misleading, as I did in the previous chapter, one may naturally be assumed to indicate a prediliction for what seems, at least intuitively, to be the opposite view, expressed in the dictum that morality is 'ultimate' or 'categorical' or 'unconditional' in character. Although I did not appeal to it in my discussion of the former, but only to the logic of 'practical' and related terms like 'function' and 'use', and can therefore examine it without having to save it as a prop to conclusions to which I have committed myself in that chapter, I have already indicated my broad acceptance of it in earlier chapters. It seems to me that, though the most celebrated and entrenched of dicta are sometimes rightly questioned in philosophy, in the present case tradition is right,[2] and attempts at innovation or revolution are likely to be misconceived. But what I propose to do in this chapter is not to define a well established thesis, but to analyse or explicate in some

1. I have profited greatly from Mr. Griffiths' observations on an earlier draft of this chapter, though we differ in quite fundamental ways. He is of course not to be associated with any of my mistakes.
2. Mr. John C. Harsanyi, in his article 'Ethics in Terms of Hypothetical Imperatives' (Mind, July, 1958), questions the most widely accepted form - the Kantian Categorical Imperative - in which it has been held. But, as I hope to show, his view stems from confusion.

measure an obscure but fundamental concept in moral philosophy.

In the title I advisedly speak of 'moral principles' instead of morality for the following reason. To make a judgement of the form 'X is morally obligatory' implies that there are reasons which rest ultimately on one or more moral principles in terms of which it may be defended. The latter are what Kant spoke of as 'categorical imperatives' (as against 'The Categorical Imperative'). Though they are categorical only because moral judgements are categorical, nevertheless they are not, on my position, categorical in the same sense. I shall naturally be concerned with both.

Since the thesis that morality is unconditional is rarely questioned, disagreement over it takes the form of dispute about how it is to be understood. Two extreme views which seem to recur in the history of ethics may here be mentioned. It is sometimes claimed that the attempt to justify morality is misconceived for the simple reason that morality is neither in need of, nor does it admit, any justification. Prichard's 'Does moral philosophy rest on a mistake?' is a good example of this mode of approach to our problem. (Here more important than the conclusion is the direction from which it is reached. For we saw that formalism trivialises questions of justification by depriving morality of any essential content). The Classical view that only the just man can be happy provides the the second extreme.[3] It represents an extreme on the other side

3. It receives its latest endorsement in Mrs. Philippa Foot's paper on 'Moral Beliefs', Aristotelian Society, Proceedings, Vol.LIX 1958-59.

because it assumes that morality is involved in any form of rational egoism, and gives to the problem of justification at least one straightforward answer.

Though I reject both these extremes, my inability to see a way of making the transition from the standpoint of self-interest to the moral point of view, and the difficulty of applying a strong external sense of 'practical' to morality, incline me to the former rather than the latter But no answer I can think of to the problem of this chapter seems to me to be free of difficulty, and the general solution, as distinct from answers to fairly specific questions, I shall commend in conclusion will be offered with hesitation; for here many of the major sources of controversy in ethics are, as it were, brought to focus and our uncertainty (or for that matter certainty) assumes neurotic proportions. Where I feel least hesitant is in respect of the role of wanting in explaining the logical character of moral judgments, whether they are expressed in moral principles, or in the verdict-giving sense of 'X ought to be done', and generally of the imperativist approach to ethics. I shall thus question the importance that is sometimes attached to the concept of wanting as a point at which the demand for reasons comes to a logical end, and also argue that the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is irrelevant to ethics if 'imperative' is taken in a standard non-metaphorical sense.

My difficulties are made acute as a result of my simultaneous opposition to two theses, namely formalism and the claim that the category of rules applies in morals in such a way as to make the category of principles redundant, which, as we have seen, have recently enjoyed considerable support. If they are both accepted the problem of this chapter virtually disappears. For the question whether, and if so why, moral considerations are overriding takes the simple answer that moral considerations are the considerations we take as overriding considerations. The further assumption that the category of principles is redundant in morality gives the notion of overridingness a simple logical form by making it unnecessary for us to ask how our overriding considerations are to operate if they are to remain overriding, for they are no longer stated as open considerations but are just what our ultimate rules require. That is, problems such as the following do not arise any longer. If a man declares that not lying is one of his overriding considerations but nevertheless holds that, even so, he could lie in certain sorts of circumstances because lying would be to his advantage, we should have doubts whether he was actually treating it as an overriding consideration. What makes such cases difficult is that as a rule moral considerations are taken as overriding when no other sort of consideration is given a generally pre-emptive status over them. On my position this sort of difficulty is to be explained ultimately in terms of the highly complex relationship in which morality stands with other fields like self-interest and religion.

Sometimes they rather seem to take over the entire content of morality as their own; but apart from these extreme situations, often there are large areas of conflict between them where a permanent condition of stalemate seems to prevail.

2. I have spoken of morality as a field, and of rival fields conflicting with morality, without indicating in a precise manner what I mean by this term. This notion is crucial to the view I want to develop as an alternative to formalism, as well as to the problem of this chapter; I can now give a precise sense to it. I shall do so by contrasting a field with something very different, which I propose to call an activity.

As I propose to use 'activity' in this chapter, an activity is always voluntary so that one may or may not participate in it, its standards in the latter case being simply inapplicable to one's actions. Thus if I have never played cricket I am neither a good batsman nor an indifferent one. A field on the other hand, though voluntary in that one may or may not pay heed to its standards,[4] is not voluntary in such a way that its standards can ever become completely irrelevant to one's conduct. In terms of this definition we can say that morality and self- interest constitute fields; so also are religion and, perhaps, etiquette.

In each of these fields we can distinguish a set of special

4. Clearly my distinction between refusing to speak the language of a game and refusing to play a game has different implications for a field than for an activity.

predicates, or at least a set of standards specially belonging to it. Thus we could say that a man is happy or wretched, prosperous or poor, sick or healthy (self-interest); religiously speaking he may be God-fearing or arrogant, worthy of election or deserving of damation; he might, from the point of view of etiquette, be well-spoken or boorish, courteous or rude, correctly dressed or bohemian. The predicates of morality do not need illustration.

It might be argued against my view that there are a number of competing but antonomous fields that in our actual modes of speech many restrictions are in fact placed on the application of the predicates and standards which may be assigned to the fields I have named. Thus it would seem - and I am inclined to agree - that some of the prudential predicates (i.e. the predicates of the field of self-interest) are inapplicable to the actions of saints; we can hardly say that X, a saint, behaved sensibly or foolishly on such and such occasion. And, similarly, the point of the distinction between a wicked man and an amoral person would appear to be that the latter, unlike the former, is indifferent to all moral considerations, so that when he fails to conform to a moral requirement we put him beyond the moral pale.

But these restrictions are not as destructive of the distinction as they may appear to be; they rather bring to light the differences between the various fields. 'Sensible' and 'foolish', unlike 'careful', 'cautious' or 'reckless', are not necessarily what Mr. Griffiths would

call 'style-predicates', i.e. predicates which describe modes of doing what one does rather than the kind of action it is; they do not refer solely, as the latter do, to abilities. Thus though a saint may sometimes act with care or caution, he cannot, almost by definition, pursue his own interest, and considerations of self-interest are inapplicable to him by virtue of the meaning of 'saint'; he would cease to be a saint if he acted otherwise. A wider implication which may be drawn is that the notion of a rational being - for surely saints are rational - does not guarantee the applicability of the predicates of prudence to beings one can correctly call rational.

There is often a tendency to assume that in calling a person amoral we necessarily exclude him from the community of moral agents. But I suggest that this can be so only when a person is constituted in such a way (or has come to be such) that we can say, not only that he is indifferent to moral considerations, but further that he is incapable of caring about morality. Morality is not, however, some faculty we may lose as a result of injury, or be congenitally without, as some people are born colour-blind. Therefore - though this is a subject which requires investigation is detail - the psychiatrist's concept of the psychopath is bound to raise conceptual difficulties.

Generally however when someone is described as amoral all that is meant is that he does not care about morality. Now when our conduct is judged our own beliefs, and what we accept and what we don't, are

often relevant; nevertheless, we cannot be released from our duties just because we are indifferent towards them; we often say 'He ought to have cared'.

It is clear that if we recognise morality to be, like self-interest or religion, a field, then it follows that its ultimate character does not arise from the general applicability of its predicates; since the predicates of fields which are not ultimate are also of general application. Since we have rejected formalism, a rational mode of adjudicating between them becomes a genuine problem, instead of being simply a matter of choice. The answer I shall suggest is one which, on the main counts, seems to me the best, rather than one whose difficulties I can all overcome. I shall argue (with some qualifications) that playing the game of morality implies that one follows its principles as ultimate principles. The rationale behind this status of morality seems to me to lie in the special position it holds as a field among other fields, which is to be explained largely in terms of the uniqueness of its predicates. Moral predicates are unique as field-predicates for the following reason. To follow the standards of any field whatever implies possessing some moral predicates. A person could be prudent or religious only if he knew what it was to keep a promise or to be truthful. But, it might be argued that the same is true of self-interest; that is, it might be claimed that one could not be moral without having a use for some of the concepts of self-interest. If morality were by definition concerned with interests,

then clearly it would be on a par with self-interest, for the interests of others and one's own interests are correlative concepts, and no pre-eminence could be claimed for its predicates. But, as Kant would have said, morality is grounded ultimately in rationality not in humanity; we can, as we have seen, speak of beings (like saints and angels) who possess moral concepts without having a use for prudential concepts (at least among themselves). We could not speak of self-interest unless we were rational, and rational beings must necessarily possess moral concepts. Thus moral concepts arise out of rationality, while self-interest arises only out of our humanity. We might say, therefore, that the moral concepts are the primary field concepts, because they are the most a priori, or the least contingent.

This may seem a half-hearted approach to our problem; but I suggest that this is because the alternatives I reject are so well-entrenched in ethical theory that a less clear-cut answer seems to be a poor answer in comparison. If formalism is rejected, the natural alternative seems to be to embrace a view which sees morality as the principles which are determined by a conception of human excellence. But this would be to escape one horn of a false delemma only to fail on the other.[5] Human excellence is so patently wider than morality that

5. This is my main criticism of the ethical theories of writers like Mr. Geach and Miss Anscombe. See also Professor Stuart Hampshire's Thought and Action.

only a failure to see a third possibility can make us take it as the foundation of morality.

The alternative I want to suggest does not uphold so strong a form of the doctrine of the ultimacy of morality as to claim that morality is obviously at the summit (in the manner of intuitionists like Prichard); nor do I hold so weak a form of it as to tie it up directly with our own individual interests, or to make it contingent on our wants. I shall now examine some of the mistakes associated with the doctrine, in order to show that a weak form of it won't do, and to prepare some ground for my own view, which I propose to argue for quite briefly in conclusion.

3. The historical connection of the doctrine of the unconditional character of morality with Kant's moral theory is responsible for a good deal of confusion; the problem is too often seen as concerned with the kinds of commands morality may be taken to consist in, when the real question is 'What can be meant by the claim that the commands of morality are unconditional?' (and more generally 'What is the status of moral considerations?'). For this the responsibility is not mainly Kant's. His use of 'imperative' is usually a metaphorical use, and what makes an imperative an imperative is for him a matter of reason. We can see this in terms of the following distinction. We often employ the expression 'It is imperative that' without referring to an imperative of any kind. This is a metaphorical use of 'imperative'

which must be distinguished from its standard substantival use. Kant's distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is, in other words, not a distinction between two kinds of imperatives (in the normal substantival sense) but a distinction between two different ways in which an action or a class of action may be rationally necessary. Very roughly, and as uncontroversially as possible, this distinction might at this stage (and in modern terminology) be explained in the following way. When Kant spoke of hypothetical imperatives, he was concerned primarily with the conceptual point that when we make our choices or decisions (or when we exercise our 'wills') certain consequences relating to their execution follow. These consequences have the urgency which commands have; but this is so only because we are rational beings, not because we have agreed to obey some mythical commands. But they are contingent in an important respect; they arise only because we make certain decisions (etc.) - because we 'will' certain results. On the other hand, there are certain actions which, though also necessary in a conceptual way, are made so directly as a consequence of the fact that we are rational beings. These latter are the categorical imperatives of morality.

Now what is the significance of the fact that the conditional form of sentence is often employed in the issuing of an imperative (in the standard sense)?. To answer this question let us see when the need to employ this form arises. Simple commands of the form 'Do such and

or 'Stop doing such and such' are generally two-valued in respect of obedience - i.e. they can either be obeyed or disobeyed, but there is no third possibility. Orders like 'Open fire' or Stop laughing' (unless they are pointless because there are no guns to fire or because no one is in fact laughing) can only be obeyed or disobeyed. But when people are ordered to do certain actions if certain specified circumstances obtain it becomes necessary to employ an 'if' clause, or an ersatz, for stating these conditions (we might, in terms of Wittgenstein's notion of language - games, say that two different games of ordering are possible; a primitive one in which there is no distinction between an ordered action and the conditions under which it is ordered to do it and a more complex one in which this distinction is provided). Such orders are, in terms of execution, three-valued; apart from the two possibilities of obedience and disobedience, there is now another possibility also. When the condition stated in the protasis does not materialise, when i.e. an order like 'If you see enemy tanks approaching, retreat' is issued and no enemy tanks are seen to approach, then we neither say that the order has been obeyed nor that it was disobeyed.

We might say, if we like, that orders of the latter kind are hypothetical, though I am not sure that ordinary usage sanctions such a description. At least a sense will have been given to 'hypothetical command' and, mutalis mutandis, also to 'hypothetical imperative'. But even in this sense, there is nothing conditional about the execution of a command. For it is not as if we had a choice between carrying out and

not carrying out a command. There is here no question of a choice; after all the command is to do a certain action, if certain conditions arise. A command would be conditional in respect of execution only if, per impossible, it were issued on the express condition that we could disobey it if we chose. In other words, the notion of a command whose execution is explicitly made subject to the addressee's choice is self-contradictory. For though both obedience and disobedience are necessarily voluntary and what is commanded may sometimes coincide with the addresses's choice, what a command cannot ensure is that whenever we choose not to do what it commands we cannot be said to disobey it.

Since the ordinary notion of a command can be used in giving a sense to the expression 'hypothetical command' it might easily be supposed that the philosophical distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is not in need of employing a different notion of a command. But, as I say, the ordinary notion of a command does not permit us to call an utterance of a conditional form in whose protasis a condition in terms of the wants and choice of its addresses, of the kind I have just described, is stated, a command. Thus the philosophical term cannot acquire a sense just because the ordinary terms 'hypothetical', 'categorical' and 'command' are perfectly clear; they have to be given a sense which is in accord with the purpose of the theory they are meant to state.

At one place in the Grundlegung Kant writes: 'Now all imperatives

command either hypothetically or categorically. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to something else that is willed (or at least which we might possibly will). The categorical imperative would be that which represents an action as necessary without reference to another end, i.e. as objectively necessary.' (p.37). My interest in this passage, though I shall discuss it at some length, is purely illustrative. In view of the notorious difficulties of Kantian exegesis I must make it plain that I shall not even try to be faithful to Kant's intentions. My chief excuse for this irreverence is that what I wish to say is quite complimentary to him.

Clearly here, as elsewhere, Kant is not using 'imperative' in its ordinary sense. In ordinary usage, an imperative (i.e. an utterance in the imperative mood) is not necessarily a command; it can be a request or an entreaty or an exhortation. In this use however, all imperatives, command, though in different ways.

In the above passage Kant speaks of 'something that is willed'; it is only because this something or other is, or might be, willed that a certain action is 'practically necessary'. In another place in the Grundelgung (p.54) he defines the will 'as a faculty of determining oneself to action in accordance with the conception of certain laws'. It seems to me that whether this definition of the will makes sense or not, willing, where it does not imply doing, cannot stand for a faculty

or power.[6] In exerting a power one necessarily employs the means which are implied by its exercise. If I have the power to carry my heaviest trunk up a steep flight of stairs unaided, then whenever I exert this power I necessarily employ the muscles of my arms and back in a pretty strenuous way; and though of course if I slipped on the way I should have exercised my power in vain, I should still have employed the same means. Only in the first of these passages, therefore, is a separation of means and willing implied. Thus Kant needs - whether he realised it or not - a second sense of 'willing', in which willing an end has nothing to do with power but is simply a matter of choosing or adopting an end. It is only in this second sense of 'willing' that what he says about hypothetical imperatives makes snese. For in the first sense willing an end is already to take recourse to the means of its happy consummation and there is nothing that can become practically necessary when it is exercised as a result of it.

Let us assume that there (i.e. in the first quotation) Kant does in fact use 'will' in the second sense. Since in this sense willing implies deciding, to say 'I have willed X' is to imply that I am ready to do what is necessary to bring X about unless for some reason I come in the meantine to reverse my decision. This is what gives point to his

6. In translating this sentence, Paton seems to prefer 'power' to 'faculty'. (See his The Categorical Imperative, p.82, second edition) Clearly the distinction I am trying to draw here can be made by employing either of these words.

remark that to will the end is to will the means thereto. I shall argue later that the use of the notion of willing, in his explanation of the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives, is preferable to the notion of wanting which is sometimes employed in current moral philosophy.

We have seen earlier that the ordinary notion of a command does not permit us to regard a conditional sentence as the expression of a command if in its protasis the action commanded is made contingent on the wants or choices of its addressee. In this respect there is no difference between commands and requests. If I say 'Please lend me sixpence', I could not, despite Mr. Harsanyi[7], make the same request by 'If you want to help me, lend me sixpence'. The request would be refused if you did not lend me the sixpence even when in fact you did not want to help me. In other words, the condition expressed in the protasis of the second sentence does not function as any kind of criterion for deciding whether the request has been acceded to or not,

7. Op.cit. His division of non-moral imperatives into 'advices' and 'demands' and the definitions he gives to these two terms do not help him as far as the point I am making is concerned. He says: 'By a demand I mean an imperative suggesting a certain course of action as conducive to the speaker's own ends, whether these ends are selfish or unselfish. By and advice I mean an imperative suggesting a certain course of action as conducive to the addressee's ends, again irrespective of whether these ends are selfish or unselfish'.(p.306). He is of course free to define his own terms, but he is actually defining two terms in his own way which are explicitly taken to cover between them all non-moral imperatives; he is thus redefining the constituent members of a class while leaving the original class as it was. By showing that some non-moral imperatives are not like what he calls demands or advices we can prove his characterisation of non-moral imperatives to be mistaken. The fallaciousness of his view becomes quite patent when he claims it to be applicable to moral imperatives as well.

however important it may be in determining what the addressee actually does. On the other hand, the protasis in 'If it is raining tomorrow they will stay in and play bridge' ensures that it if does not rain tomorrow the prediction this sentence is used to make cannot be false.

A related and more general point in respect of the relation between wanting and imperatives can be made by taking the case of advice. In the case of commands and requests, though we can speak of justified or unjustified, reasonable or unreasonable, commands and requests, the specific predicates of indicative sentences - true or false, correct or incorrect - have little or no application. But pieces of advice often admit of such description. This means that though grammatically speaking advice is a form of imperative as much as commands and requests, there is nevertheless a fundamental logical difference between them. The difference between them appears at its sharpest when the means-end model applies in a fairly straightforward sense. All that is required of the expert who advises us on, say, how to invest our savings is that in relation to our wants and preferences, his expertise is not at fault. His scruples are, in his capacity as investment expert, simply irrelevant to what he recommends. But we saw that in the case of moral advice the situation is much more complex.[8] The adviser's views on morality, however expert he might be, do not always override the addressee's; nor, at the same time, can he simply advise the latter on how to apply his own moral beliefs, to

8. Supra, pp.124-126.

given or hypothetical situations, if his advice is to count as moral advice. The situation is similar in the case of self-interest, for we do not advise a man on how to carry out what he takes to be his interest, but rather to do what, everything considered, we think his true interest to be; though clearly here sincerity does not count for as much as it does in morality.

Harsanyi's treatment of moral principles as hypothetical imperatives would be plausible if we could assimilate all imperatives to the kind of advice we get from our bank manager or plumber. The real difficulty here seems to be this. If all advice is treated as a form of hypothetical imperative then the notion of autonomous fields cannot have any application. Take the indicative sentence 'In Japanese morality a man ought to commit hara-kiri when he has dishonoured himself'; in its use to make the corresponding statement it yields the corresponding imperative 'If you want to follow Japanese morality, then . . . '. Clearly the latter can be moral advice only if I am prepared to endorse the principle of hara-kiri as a moral principle; I have, in other words, to say 'If you want to do your moral duty, then . . . '. There is however an ambiguity in the latter sentence. It qualifies as moral advice only when I speak as moral agent, i.e. as one who plays the game of morality, not as one who merely speaks its language. For in the latter case I should merely be saying 'If you care about morality, whether or not I

myself do, then . . .'

But commitment to a field makes the 'If you want' clause positively misleading. The significance of our wants here lies simply in the question whether or not there is any practical point in saying that something is a duty.

Harsanyi's prediliction for formalism leads him to attribute to his impartial spectator the limited function of being the expert on how best to apply our respective moral beliefs. This inevitably means the end of moral autonomy and ultimately that of the notion of autonomous fields, for if any predicate can be a moral predicate the autonomy of morality, or of any field, is merely our own autonomy to make what we like of it.

4. The temptation to construe moral principles as hypothetical imperatives stems in part from an exaggerated belief in the explanatory power of want-statements. If it is generally true that our wanting to do an action gives it some genuine justification, then the 'If you want' clause of these so-called imperatives cannot be idle, but coresponds to the implied truth that when we do what is mentioned in the consequent clause as the means to the end specified in the antecedent there exists a justification for doing it. But if it can be shown that the explanatory power of want-statements is in fact poor, except in certain simple contexts this temptation is bound to lose much of its strength.

There is a minimal sense of 'wanting' in which no action can be

done without the agent's wanting to do it, unless it is done from habit, absent-mindedly, or is in some other way unintentional. This is a quasi-vacous, and perhaps purely philosophical, sense of 'wanting' in which to say 'I wanted to do X' is merely to class X as an intentional act. It is in this sense that 'I obeyed X' implies 'I wanted to obey X' (where X is a command). Clearly this sense of wanting cannot distinguish imperatives of one kind from those of another. Nor can it provide any kind of reason for doing something; for to say 'I wanted to do X' in this sense is merely to assume some responsibility for X, not to explain or justify why one did it.

The second sense of 'wanting' I propose to distinguish is this. The assumption normally implicit in requests, pieces of advice, etc. is not simply that if the person requested or advised were to do what he is requested or advised to do he would do it voluntarily. To say 'Please lend me sixpence' to someone is to assume (unless the request is idle) on his part a want in a sense stronger than this quasi-vacuous sense of wanting; it is to assume some readiness on his part to do the action he is requested to do.[9] Clearly the justificatory power of a want-statement, if it has any, must lie in the fact that it is being employed in this way. But the problem which faces a moral philosopher when he considers the latter kind of statement is not simply to distinguish the varying degrees in which they can be justificatory,

9. Cf. Anscombe, Intention, pp.66-68.

but also to determine the extent of their applicability. I submit that they are inapplicable, or have poor justificatory power, just in those regions of our speech where certain moral philosophers are inclined to look for help from them.

Often a want-statement derives its justificatory power from an understood conjunction with an 'I like' ctatement. But not all statements of likes are equally justificatory. Thus the force of 'I like coffee' is not the same as that of 'I like Gauguin' (in regard, respectively, to the questions 'Why do you drink coffee?' and 'Why did you buy this picture?'). The person who does his duty against his inclination is not like someone who continues to play a game sometimes from tenacity rather than because it gives him pleasure. For while there may be no point in persisting in a sport when one has ceased to enjoy it, morality is the sport (game) <u>par excellence</u> in this respect. And because duty and inclination stand in contrast it is not easy, despite what some moral philosophers say, to explain what 'I like doing my duty' can mean (while the sense of 'I like playing football' seems obvious).

It is clear that the contrast between wants or inclinations and duty would cease to have the significance it has normally if human beings were able to do their duty not because their sense of duty was highly developed but because they simply liked doing what was morally right. For there can be no great merit in doing what one is naturally inclined to do.

The reason why we say 'I like X' rather than 'I want X' sometimes is that thereby we put the object wanted in the class of objects wanted for their own sake. Nevertheless the fact that something is wanted for its own sake does not constitute any guarantee that the demand for further justification is therefore inappropriate. Even in activities (which are optional) 'I like X' is not necessarily a good reason for choosing or pursuing X. Thus if we asked an average player of chess 'Why do you play chess?' 'Because I like it' would, admittedly, be a good answer; but coming from a grand master it would be extremely disappointing.

Roughly speaking, we might say that the function of 'I want X' in fields generally, and in certain activities, is to act as an assurance that one has one's reasons, rather than to provide a reason in its own right. And since sometimes it seems plainly impertinent (as in 'I like doing my duty') to expect our likes or wants to function as justifications of any kind I want to mark off a separate use or sense of wanting in which 'I want' or 'I like' is mainly performatory and serves to give an undertaking or commitment. I shall call it the third sense of 'wanting'. The logical power of want-statements in this sense is the power of the reasons behind them. Sometimes we use 'want' in this sense from snobbery. Thus if a tourist in Paris says to a fellow-tourist 'I want to buy a Guaguin print' he might do so from a desire to gain prestige in the latter's eyes; he thereby seems to put himself in the world of aesthetic reasons and

to claim some acquaintance with it. But if he lacks any he would be made uncomfortably aware of this by a 'Why?' from his companion; he might say 'I like Gauguin' by way of retreat, admitting in effect that his choice was not made on aesthetic grounds (though of course he would still be denying that his motive was, say, to please his wife).

5. Another source of the temptation to take an imperativist view of ethics lies in the failure to see that the concept of wanting is primarily non-overall in the sense that we normally speak of our wants under a ceteris paribus clause (generally understood rather than explicit). Our wants are not compelling in the sense in which our decisions and verdicts are. Thus it is natural to say 'I want to go to London but I can't', whereas 'I have decided to go to London but I can't' is absurd. Hare, whose account of imperatives Harsanyi accepts, fails to see this point. He is therefore able to say that indicative statements entail hypothetical imperatives; that for instance 'Grimbly Hughes is the largest grocer in Oxford' entails 'If you want to go to the largest grocer in Oxford, go to Grimbly Hughes'[10]. But in saying this he is using 'want' in the sense in which Kant uses 'will' when he says 'Who wills the end . . . wills also the means' (which Hare endorses). Once we recognise that Hare's hypothetical imperatives are arrived at only as a result of a non-standard use of 'wanting' (or at best a use which does not

10. Op.cit., p.35.

distinguish it from 'choosing') the temptation to treat them as genuine imperatives is very much weakened. For, as I have said, Kant uses 'imperative' as a metaphorical way. Our wants often conflict and the necessity to employ the means to their fulfilment is on us only when we have decided between them; it is then 'imperative to' take the steps which our decision calls for. The superiority of Kant's appeal to the notion of willing, instead of to wanting, in his account of hypothetical imperatives thus lies in his making the commands of reason genuine, even though they are only commands of reason, instead of being commands which leave to us the decision whether the conditions under which a want exists are such that other wants are to be ignored.

Hare realises that, despite the analogies he sees between hypothetical imperatives and value judgments, the former are 'a difficult matter' forming part of 'the wider problem, still very dark, of the analysis of hypothetical sentences in general'[11]. My own view has been that the ordinary notion of a command, as indeed of a request and in part of advice, rules out the possibility of genuine hypothetical imperatives in which disobedience or lack of compliance is not possible when the addressee of the imperative does not want or choose to do what is mentioned in the protasis. I do not find Hare's claim that hypothetical imperatives are genuine imperatives acceptable. His main argument seems to be this. Though

11. Op.cit., p.38.

a hypothetical imperative may be entailed by an indicative statement (as in the example quoted on the previous page), whereas this is impossible in the case of categorical imperatives, nevertheless hypothetical imperatives are genuine imperatives because they would not be intelligible to someone 'who had learnt the meaning of indicative verb-forms but not that of imperative verb-forms'. But I am surprised that Hare should treat such an argument as conclusive. Obviously from the fact that a certain linguistic form corresponds to a genuine logical type it does not follow that a form of expression constructed by employing this form represents a logical category of the same kind. (And the fact that the latter form must necessarily employ the former in expressing what it is normally used to express cannot make any difference). For the fact that, say, we can only express what is expressed by 'Some universal statements are silly' by employing 'universal' or one of its cognates does not make it into a universal form of utterance. Nor does it become universal because it can only be understood by someone who has learnt the word 'universal'. And for exactly the same reason 'If you want to go to the largest grocer in Oxford, go to Grimbly Hughes' is not an imperative because such a construction would not be understood by someone who had not learnt the imperative verb-form.

Since Hare's anti-naturalism does not exclude the possibility of a descriptive statement entailing a hypothetical imperative, to commit the naturalistic fallacy one must infer a categorical

imperative from an indicative. But having done away with categorical imperatives altogether, the only form of insurance against the naturalistic fallacy Harasanyi is entitled to take is by an appeal to the notion of a hypothetical imperative. For this reason he is involved in the very error he is most anxious to avoid, namely the naturalistic fallacy, as may be seen from the following argument. He defines the rule forbidding the naturalistic fallacy thus: 'from what there is it cannot be inferred what should be done'[12]. Since for Harsanyi all 'should' sentences (or at least some, it does not matter here which) are analysable into hypothetical imperatives we can infer what should be done from 'what there is'. Thus it is a fact that forest fires are liable to take place in times of drought unless people are careful to put out matches before throwing them away when they are in a wood. This entails 'If you do not want to start a forest fire, then. . .' But this may reasonably be taken to be equivalent to 'One should put out a match before throwing it away . . . etc.'

Harsanyi makes an important distinction between formal and causal imperatives. In the case of many imperatives the relation between the protasis and the apodosis is a causal one; the antecedent clause mentions an end to which the consequent clause proposes a certain means ('If you want to put on weight quickly eat a lot of starchy food'). On the other hand there are imperatives in whose case the means-end model is clearly unsuitable. 'For instance: "If you want to climb a very high mountain" (or "If you want to climb the

12. Op.cit., p.308.

highest mountain in Europe . ."), "climb Mont Blanc".' Here the protasis 'specifies certain desired criteria whereas the apodosis suggests an object or a pattern of behaviour satisfying these criteria'.[13] The latter kind of imperative he calls 'formal' or 'non-casual', and moral principles are for him also describable in this way. What he fails to see is that among imperatives (so-called) of the non-casual type two rather different kinds have to be distinguished. Of these his definition only applies to one. When we say 'If you want to climb the highest mountain in Europe. . .' we do so in order to give information. It is no part of the meaning of 'the highest mountain in Europe' that Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Europe; for though 'Mont Blanc' is a definite description which may reasonably be taken to imply 'highest mountain in Europe' the converse implication seems far-fetched. We can thus say that, in terms of Harsanyi's definition, the protasis gives a criterion which is said to be fulfilled in the apodosis.

But when we consider moral principles in their alleged imperative form this criterion does not always work. It is reasonable to assume that an imperative like 'If you want to do your duty, commit hara-kiri when you have dishonoured yourself' satisfies this criterion, since the principle of hara-kiri is no part of the meaning of 'duty'. But what are we to say of a fundamental moral principle like truth-telling? Can we say that in 'If you want to do your duty then be

13. Op.cit.,p.305.

truthful' the apodosis 'suggests a pattern of behaviour' satisfying the criterion of duty? What kind of suggestion is it?

It might here be argued that Harsanyi is entitled to speak in this way because, being a formalist, morality has no essential content for him and therefore hypothetical imperatives of this kind are not empty. But this argument is untenable. Since we choose our fundamental moral principles, there is no point in 'suggesting' to someone that he should act on a principle which is a fundamental moral principle for him if he wants to do his duty.

I want now to suggest that in the sense in which the notion of wanting is inapplicable to morality so is the notion of choice (and willing in so far as it implies choice) at least over a large part of its field. Thus superficially it might seem that Kant, in the passage quoted earlier, is being inconsistent - since the notion of freedom is central to his moral philosophy - when he says that the categorical imperatives are objectively necessary without mentioning any kind of choice. But what he seems to have seen is the difficulty of applying the notion of choice (in the relevant sense) in their case.

Take for instance the principle 'Be just'. If we try to state it in a way which makes obedience to it conditional on choice all we get is a pseudo-injunction like 'If you aim at justice then be just'. The latter is not hypothetical in any significant sense. It is either a tautology ('Aim at what you aim at') or a plain imperative which

merely says 'Don't dither'.

The difficulty that I am trying to explain arises in the following way. The choice to be moral is necessarily involved in doing one's duty; but this choice determines so much that obedience to principles like 'One ought to be just', 'One ought to be kind' etc. is part of the very same choice. In other words, 'If you aim at being moral then be truthful' fares little better than 'If you aim at justice then be just'. Both are bogus in claiming to be conditional when in fact they present no possibility of an alternative.

6. I shall now suggest my own view on the subject. First of all it must be pointed out that the problem arises in a serious form only as a result of rejecting formalism. When morality is deprived of any essential content, the question why certain principles are ultimate turns into the question 'Why do we choose the principles that we do choose as our ultimate principles?' and to this there can be no general answer. Furthermore, not only does the question whether or not morality is ultimate disappears (for it is so by definition); the question whether religion, which presents many intractable problems in relation to morality, or any other field, can sometimes override morality cannot now arise.

One reason why Harsanyi's imperativism was of special interest to us in this chapter was that it purported to question the most influential form of the doctrine of the ultimacy of morality. It is

clear however that his position need not be taken as a rejection as such of the doctrine. For though all normative principles are to be construed as hypothetical imperatives, there can still be an order of priority between them; and his formalism ensures that moral imperatives are given top priority.

In introducing the notion of competing fields I pointed out that ordinary speech has no clear verdict to give on the lines of demarcation between them. A related uncertainty is to be found in respect of the extent and manner in which moral considerations override non-moral considerations. No single answer to this question seems to be available, but whatever answer is given one point has to be accepted. Moral considerations override other considerations over a large area of their application as a matter of logic. This may be explained in terms of my distinction between merely speaking the language of a game and playing a game. When a principle is held as a principle belonging to the field of morality, and not merely taken as one belonging to it, then one acts on it in the manner in which playing the game of morality requires it. One can play the game of morality only when one is prepared to let it win against its rivals most of the time. Thus the question is not whether morality can override other fields as a matter of logic, but rather whether it does so always. But even when this question is settled there still remains the more fundamental question 'What is the rationale behind

this logical situation?' The answer to the latter question that I want to give will be offered in the absence of a systematic study of field concepts, and points which may seem matters of detail may upset any general thesis one may venture to put forward. The present enquiry has thus been in the nature of a prolegomenon; any systematic enquiry into these concepts is likely to lead to further prolegomena which may in their turn suggest further work in the nature of logical cartography.

But the two questions distinguished in the previous paragraph are by no means unrelated. An answer to the latter question is bound to be of help in providing a more precise answer to the former, though I am inclined to think that dependance in a similar measure in the opposite direction is not likely to be found.

The hesitation which exists in choosing between possible answers to the former question may be explained by distinguishing between two incompatible uses of 'moral', both non-formal, which seem to be sanctioned by our speech (and in respect of neither of which we are able to claim that it is logically prior to the other).

Sometimes 'moral' (or 'morality') is used in such a way that though a man may be said to have a morality he could nevertheless think it right to do an action which conflicted with a moral duty. I shall call it the competitive use of 'moral' or 'morality'. It seems to be clearly a non-standard, and somewhat artificial, use when it occurs in the expression of the literary idea of a person who

behaves in ways which, though immoral, are nonetheless capable of a perfectly adequate defence. But this is so because it is used in literature to state a paradox - a species of shock tactics, attacking the accepted morality on a large scale - to bring home a point which may equally be expressed, albeit less effectively, in straightforward language. It occurs in a less extreme form in the clash which is sometimes visualised between religion and morality in which the former can win without breaking any logical requirement. Theologians take up different positions on this problem. On one extreme is a position like Kant's which views religion as in no way able to override the requirements of practical reason; the other extreme being represented by a view like Kierkegaard's, which sees morality as ranking lower than religion. But I shall leave aside this question as one on which I am not qualified to speak, and as one which, moreover, calls for detailed investigation of certain areas of religious discourse, as well as of a number of field concepts.

This ambiguity in the relationship between morality and religion, and perhaps to a lesser extent between the former and a field like honour, is likely to look less irksome if we bear in mind the following. Paradoxes are known to arise not only in logical and mathematical systems but even in ordinary speech. Wittgenstein's comment on the liar-paradox is here pertinent. 'Is there harm in the contradiction that arises when someone says: "I am lying. - So I am

not lying. - So I am lying. - etc."? I mean: does it make our language less usable if in this case, according to the ordinary rules, a proposition yields its contradictory, and vice versa? - the proposition itself is unusable, and these inferences equally; but why should they not be made? - It is a profitless performance! - It is a language-game with some similarity to the game of thumb-catching.'[14] The analogy between the situation we are confronted with and that described by Wittgenstein does not hold mainly in the following respect. In the type of conflict we are dealing with it just does not do to say that the 'proposition' is unusable. The paradox which Abraham's 'sacrifice' poses for us calls for resolution, were it only by the toss of a coin, for the simple reason that one cannot get out of a field as one can get out of the situations from which the latter kind of paradox arises. There is, furthermore, the fact that, unlike mathematical and logical systems, morality is not substitutable. It is not as if we could make our decisions in terms of an alternative morality when the one we happen to be using breaks down. But even so, I am inclined to think that morality must remain essentially (logically) ultimate. If we are inclined sometimes to think otherwise this is perhaps because we tend to confuse the inadequacy of the moral principles with which someone might operate with the fact that we do not necessarily employ a logically ultimate sense of 'moral'. The kind of breakdown of our moral concepts which is illustrated in

14. Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, p.51.

literature is after all only an ideal situation intended to bring home the necessity for a radical revision or improvement, not to justify a wholesale surrender to the concepts of another field.

Philosophically the more interesting question is whether the borders of morality are necessarily such that paradoxes must arise, or whether a systematic study of the areas of conflict is likely to reveal an actually operative mode of settling disputes which makes morality as the necessary victor. But this is a question I must leave open.

The second non-formal use of 'moral' is the use which gives to morality, in whatever form it happens to be, the palm of victory as a matter of logic. The justification for it lies in certain recurrent types of rational religion ('Religion within the bounds of reason', as Kant put it) which have influenced our moral and religious talk. Being a non-formal use it cannot be accused of flying in the face of the fundamental category of competing fields which lies at the heart of our conceptual scheme. But it must in some measure lead to an impoverishment of religious speech.

The answer to our second question was already determined by the discussion of the previous chapter. For if morality is not practical in any sense which at all resembles the ordinary notion of what is practical the rationale behind the logical ultimacy of moral principles can only be explained, if at all, by the place which moral

concepts occupy in our conceptual scheme. And this is indeed the kind of explanation I wish to give. Moral principles are ultimate in virtue of the primacy of their concepts as field concepts. The concepts of morality are presupposed in the operation of other field concepts. There could be no religion without the existence of moral concepts; i.e. unless a community possessed some of the main concepts of morality it could have no religion. Could there be the pursuit of self-interest unless some moral concepts were also possessed? It seems to me, and I have already argued, that there could not. For the question is not whether a rational or human being innocent of moral concepts (is such a being conceivable?) could pursue self-interest among beings who were not, but if we can conceive of a society of such beings who have no moral concepts whatever. The answer to the latter question is, again, I must admit, in the negative. The notion of intercourse among such beings implies the concepts of the due and the fair, the truthful and the false - if of nothing else. Where the predicates of morality gain precedence over those of self-interest is, however, not in respect of our humanity but of our rationality. We have seen already that the predicates of self interest do not apply to saints. It might also be argued with good justification that they do not apply to angels.

But even if some moral concepts are, it might be argued, primary in this way, what we are to say of the other moral concepts?

To this, and the related question how concepts contested between competing fields may be distributed among them, I can suggest only the general form of an answer. Though I have rejected the view that moral principles are the principles of human excellence I cannot say that they are the principles which belong essentially to the field of morality rather than to any other field without obvious circularity. Nevertheless the primacy of certain moral predicates establishes the primacy of the whole field of morality over other fields, even though the question why certain predicates which belong to our humanity rather than to our rationality are moral predicates and not the predicates of some other field still remains to answer. A clue to this question is provided by the fact that certain non-moral field concepts seem to presuppose analogous concepts in the moral field. Thus tact (in the field of etiquette) seems to presuppose the notion of considerateness, which is undoubtedly a moral concept. Similarly we might say that the concept of Christian charity is logically posterior to the non-religious concept of charity. Concepts of this kind - generosity and kindness are other examples - give us a second line of moral concepts which are a precondition of a great deal of what we value in human existence, which is not distinctively moral. It is inconceivable that there should be culture or taste (i.e. such things as art and literature) without these concepts. This opens a large area of investigation and we can thus account for the claims

of many other concepts to be treated as moral concepts. The main things here is that the concepts which are non-moral receive their full flowering only when the corresponding moral concepts exist, but that there is no corresponding necessity in the opposite direction. We shall often face the danger of going too far in pressing the claims of our own particular moral beliefs and in stressing or minimising unduly the relevant factors; but this is a matter of judgment, not of infallible rules. There will, in the very nature of the situation we are dealing with, be checks to extravagent claims, provided by the counter-claims of other fields. And in the end there is no better advice to give than that one must keep ones eyes open all the time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The systematic part of this enquiry has now come to an end, and in retrospect moral principles can be seen to have proved a topic of no small philosophical importance. Not only did we find a network of specific problems to be considered, but often we found ourselves obliged to conduct our discussion at deeper levels; and we could not escape involvement in some of the central questions of ethics - e.g. the question of the logical status of ethical utterance, and the problem of justification. At a still more fundamental level it appeared that the nature of rules (as this notion has recently been employed to cover general requirements of various kinds) has been discussed without sufficient regard for the problems ethical speech forces on us in this area of the theory of meaning. The specific conclusions I have come to about the nature of moral principles (that, for instance, they essentially involve the language of considerations) hardly need recapitulation. But some further observations on the more fundamental questions I have discussed, or more or less briefly commented on, may now appropriately be made with a view to gaining a clearer perspective of the nature and results of this investigation.

I have claimed that the current discussion of the question whether ethical terms are evaluative or descriptive has reached an impasse, and suggested that the problem might be examined afresh in terms of my distinction between merely speaking the language of a game

and playing it. The futility of carrying on the controversy in the present form lies in the assumption on which the protagonists of both the sides of it proceed; they seem to assume that if moral terms are mainly evaluative or mainly descriptive this must be so because of the strength or weakness of their connection with actual conduct.[1] In discussing the 'practical' character of moral principles we saw that Nowell-Smith places morality on the wrong kind of scale;[2] it is not because we practise our beliefs - because, for instance, the scientist applies his hypotheses in his experimental work - that they are practical. What can make them practical must depend upon the nature of the field to which they belong, viz. morality. The point of my distinction is that there is no contradiction in saying 'X is just, but I won't do it'; and this does not presuppose any distinction between a primary and an 'inverted-commas' use of 'just'. But this does not mean that the logical status of 'X is just' is the same as that of 'X is batting on a good wicket'. We have found two (there may be others) reasons why such a simple assimilation cannot be made. First, we saw how moral advice differs from advice in most non-moral contexts in the role which sincerity plays in it. And, second, we found that moral knowledge is not knowledge in any straightforward sense; that, at least, the success of instruction in morality is judged in terms of actual performance and not in terms of an ability. This means

1. For instance, the two articles in Analysis by Geach and Hare, referred to earlier, share this assumption.
2. Supra, Chapter IV section 1.

that when one refuses to play the game of morality, i.e. when one is not prepared to speak as a moral agent, one is not entitled to make as full a use of moral language as when one is a participant in it. If we decide to call moral terms evaluative on such grounds the justification for our decision will depend on the strength of this difference.

My firm rejection of formalism is not intended as a denial of all value to revisionary ethics (e.g. of the possibility of reformulating Utilitarianism in the tenable form) but is rather a plea that they are likely to be fruitful only after we have achieved an understanding of the structure of moral concepts (which was once possessed in a fair measure, perhaps, in the Middle Ages). Nor do I wish to recommend a ban on the study of general words like 'good', 'right', 'ought', 'praiseworthy' or 'blameworthy'. It does seem to me however, that they are terms of wider generality than what I have called moral predicates. And whether or not we assign to them the importance they have so far been given in ethical theory, there is one point which a clear distinction between the two classes of words does establish. Instead of selecting two or three of them and isolating them for intensive study, it would be more fruitful to study them, so far as possible together. In this kind of work there is a place for the informal methods of linguistic philosophy as well as for the rigorous techniques of symbolic logic.

Lastly it is clear that the view that ethics is a subsidiary field of philosophical enquiry whose results are largely conditioned by the conclusions reached in other branches of philosophy, such as philosophy of mind and the general theory of meaning and truth, is mistaken, and that in fact moral theory may sometimes be in the position of being an important contributor to a problem traditionally assigned elsewhere. We found this at least in one instance.

My distinction between rules and principles has provided some indication of the inadequacy of the Wittgensteinian view that a rule is a 'form of life' or 'practice'. A systematic investigation of the interrelations of the major kinds of regularity which our conceptual scheme requires to be distinguished seems to be necessary before the somewhat vague characterisation in this form can be replaced by a more satisfactory account. To this ethics has an important contribution to make.

C O N T E N T S

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Chapter I. Rules and Principles.

1. Moral philosphers have generally used words like 'rules', 'principles' and 'laws' without adequate regard to the distinctions which these words exhibit in ordinary speech. They have made their choice between them, not in terms of a theoretically neutral distinction, but on the basis of their own philosophical predilections. 1

2. A distinction between 'rules' and 'principles' may be made which does not suffer from this defect, and which is rich in application. Professor D. J. O'Connor's somewhat similar distinction between 'constitutive rules' and 'standards' rejected as unsuitable for our purpose because it makes the possibility of calling a set of rules 'constitutive rules' contingent on the ability to remedy conflicts between them, and thereby gives too narrow a class. In my use of 'rules' conflicts between two rules belonging to a body of rules must be infrequent and be considered a defect in their formulation, whether or not such conflicts can always be eliminated in practice. 9

3. There are, on the other hand, certain requirements of a general nature belonging to a given field which conflict with one another in a systematic way in virtue of their subject-matter and their place in that field, and therefore without indicating a defect in their formulation (e.g. 'Play with a straight bat' and 'Always try to demoralise the bowler when he has got a psychological upper hand over the batsmen' in cricket). These I propose to call principles. 18

The importance of the concept of principles as thus defined may be illustrated negatively at this stage by considering the expression 'rule of thumb', which makes a dissociation between what is possible in the subject-matter and what is actually available or conveniently to hand.

4. Wittgenstein's view of rules as 'forms of life' fails to cover the category of principles. The criteria of 'sameness' for rules are not of 25

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the same logical kind as for principles. G.E.Moore's account of Wittgenstein's lectures in 1930-33 seems to indicate that he thought principles represented a category redundant to aesthetics and morals.

Chapter II. The Formalistic Fallacy.

1. The preoccupation with the naturalistic fallacy has resulted in a fallacy of an opposite kind, which is named here the formalistic fallacy. It is marked by an assumption that ethical utterance is demarcated from other kinds of utterance by its form and status rather than by its content. But in one form it may be defined precisely by considering the question of the criteria or distinguishing characteristics of moral principles. 33

2. Two varieties of the formalist position with respect to this question may be distinguished, namely a weaker and a stronger thesis. The weaker thesis merely claims that any principle in the universal form is capable of being a moral principle. The question when a potential moral principle becomes an actual moral principle is however inescapable, and this variety faces serious difficulties in providing an answer to it. 37

3. The strong form of formalism attempts to give the criteria of actual moral principles, not merely of potential ones. The additional requirement postulated by it is in terms of a mistaken view of ultimacy. An analogy drawn between ultimacy or over-ridingness and the primitiveness of certain propositions in a deductive system by commenting on Mr. P. F. Strawson's account of logical form in his An Introduction to Logical Theory; but this is done primarily for the limited purpose of this enquiry and without recommending any view as the most plausible from the general point of logical theory. 40

4. Certain views of Mr. Hare on the nature of justification are criticised, with a view to showing the extreme formalism of his position. 53

5. The difficulties of making the transition from potential to actual moral principles in which the weak form is involved are brought out by considering Mr. Jonathan Harrison's version of it. 60

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His appeal to the notion of an impartial observer makes such a transition possible, but only by resort to an odd way of distinguishing between correct and incorrect moral principles.

6. The question whether formalism can survive at a more fundamental level of conceptual revision must be left unexamined in this enquiry. 63

7. A radically anti-formalist view of moral principles is sketched largely in the shape of a few rapid steps leading to the definition of a moral principle. The starting-point of this definition is provided by certain remarks of Mrs. P. R. Foot's on the importance of moral concepts in understanding another person's views 'on matters of right and wrong' in the paper contributed by her to an Aristotelian Society Symposium on 'When is a principle a moral principle?'. 65

My definition stipulates, firstly, that a moral principle must contain a moral concept in its statement as constitutive of its scope and, secondly, that it must do so in its own right; on this definition we can have a moral principle only when a distinctive moral concept is involved. It is adopted largely on philosophical grounds and without any intention of claiming that it is faithful to the actual usage of 'moral principles'.

The relevance of the distinction between what may be called a requirement of morality and what may become a duty on moral grounds to the understanding of the nature of moral concepts is stressed.

Chapter III. Moral Concepts and Moral Principles I

1. Without an account of moral concepts my definition of a moral principle is incomplete in all but form. In this and the next chapter an attempt is made to explain the nature of moral concepts. Here two related theories of the nature of value-terms are considered, which employ a form of insurance against the naturalistic fallacy which implies a mistaken view of moral concepts. 77

Hare takes 'good', 'ought' and 'right' to be 'typical value-words' and in his view words which can be used pejoratively without implying irony are

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not 'fully evaluative'. But on this criterion even 'kind' and 'generous' cannot be fully evaluative.

This view stems from his formalism. He does not want to give fully evaluative terms any definite content and his imperativism leads him to over-emphasise the importance of what I call verdict-giving terms. Terms like 'right' and 'avoidable inconvenience' are verdict-giving because we cannot say that a man ought not to do what is right, or to do that which causes 'avoidable inconvenience'. But terms like 'truthful' and 'just' belong to a class of value-words which do not have this characteristic.

2. Professor Urmson's distinction between 'professional' and 'specialised' grading-labels has parallels with Hare's distinction between fully-evaluative and only partially evaluative terms. 'First-rate', 'good' and 'excellent' belong to the first category; whereas most virtue-words which Aristotle discusses in the Nichomachean Ethics are taken to form a sub-class of the second. This view is questioned by considering the word 'brave'. 91

A distinction is introduced between refusing to speak the language of a game and refusing to play a game with a view to throwing some light on the question whether moral terms are evaluative or descriptive.

3. A solution of the problem of conflicts of duty is suggested in terms of my view that moral principles adduce considerations. A conflict of duties is decided by appealing to a third principle whose concept mediates between their respective concepts. 105

Chapter IV. Moral Concepts and Moral Principles. II

Are Moral principles practical principles?

1. The view that moral principles are practical principles is responsible for a good deal of confusion. In this chapter an attempt is made to isolate what is clearly false in it from what may bear serious examination. A number of senses of 'practical' are distinguished, some of them purely technical, with this purpose, and a major division 112

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is made among them between those which indicate the nature of the relation between a locution and something taken to be practical and those that pertain to the nature of the field or activity claimed to be practical - between the internal and the external senses of the term.

2. Four different senses in which an utterance may be taken to be practical distinguished as illustrating, each in some respect differently, the contingency or necessity of the connection an utterance may have with actions belonging to a field or activity already assumed to be practical. Arguments are put forward to show that no moral principle can be practical in the first of these senses. In this connection an important difference between moral advice and most other kinds of advice is mentioned. The inapplicability of any of these senses to all moral principles shows the futility of blanket theories in this area of ethics. 118

3. A miscellany of uses of 'practical', of no great intrinsic importance for the purposes of this chapter, which are likely to throw light on the approval-charged application of 'practical' to morality in recent ethical theory are distinguished. 130

4. Some of the senses of 'practical' in which morality may be characterised, though not always legitimately, from the outside are considered. As a preliminary however, my earlier distinction between refusing to play a game and refusing to speak its language is recalled and further amplified. In this connection it is found useful to introduce the parallel notion of function, and a number of senses of this term are distinguished and the question whether they are applicable to morality is discussed. 132

Mr. Stephen Toulmin's view that there may be beings with 'wholly unalterable' feelings, or beings 'whose dispositions were always of the best', so that they had no 'use' for ethical reasoning, is criticised, and it is argued that moral concepts must be employed by all rational beings.

Chapter V. The Ultimacy of Moral Principles.

1. Though the dictum that morality is 'ultimate' or 'categorical' or 'unconditional' has recently been questioned by one writer (by Mr. Harsanyi in an article in Mind), the aim of this chapter is not to defend or to reject a celebrated thesis but 145

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rather to analyse or explicate in some measure an obscure but fundamental concept in moral philosophy. My difficulties are made acute as a result of my simultaneous opposition to two views, namely formalism and the claim that the category of rules applies in morals in such a way as to make the category of principles redundant.

2. The terms 'activity' and 'field' are given precise senses. As I propose to 'activity' in this chapter an activity is always voluntary so that one may or may not participate in it, its standards in the latter case being simply inapplicable to one's actions. A field on the other hand, though voluntary in that one may or may not pay heed to its standards, is not voluntary in such a way that its standards can ever become irrelevant to one's conduct. 149

Since not only are moral principles applicable to our conduct regardless of what we choose to do, but so also are those of other fields, the ultimate character of morality cannot be explained in terms of the general applicability of its predicates alone.

3. The historical connection of the doctrine of the unconditional character of morality with Kant's ethical theory is responsible for a good deal of confusion. The problem is soon too often as one of the kinds of commands morality may be taken to consist in, whereas the real question is what can be meant by the statement that the commands of morality are unconditional. But for this the responsibility is not mainly Kant's; his use of 'imperative' is usually a metaphorical one. 154

What is the significance of the fact that the conditional form of sentence is often employed in the issuing of an imperative or command? It is possible that orders are three-valued in respect of obedience when the antecedent clause in such a form states certain conditions, but not when these conditions are made such that if the addressee chooses or wants not to do what the consequent clause mentions then he cannot be said to disobey the command (for then we no longer have a genuine order). Harsanyi's attempt to treat moral principles as hypothetical imperatives is therefore mistaken.

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4. The temptation to construe moral principles as hypothetical imperatives stems in part from an exaggerated belief in the justificatory power of want-statements. It is suggested that the explanatory-power of such statements is in fact generally poor, except in certain simple contexts. 163

5. Another source of the temptation to take an imperativist view of moral principles (and of ethics generally) lies in the failure to see that the concept of wanting is primarily non-overall in the sense that we normally speak of our wants under a ceteris-paribus clause (generally understood rather than explicit); our wants are not compelling in the sense in which our decisions and verdicts are. This shows the superiority of Kant's appeal to the notion of willing, instead of wanting, in his account of hypothetical imperatives. 167

6. Lastly my own view on the problem is very briefly argued. Morality being one of the fields the question arises in what relationships it stands to other fields. Whether or not morality is necessarily overriding in character, it seems to me that moral considerations override other considerations over a large area of their application as a matter of logic. 173

But what is the rationale behind this logical situation? It is suggested that the ultimacy of moral principles can be explained by the place which our moral concepts occupy in our conceptual scheme. The concepts of morality are presupposed in the operation of the concepts of other fields in a way which gives them primacy over the latter. Thus there may be rational beings who possess no concept of self-interest; and it is not at all difficult to imagine rational beings without religious concepts. But some of the fundamental concepts of morality are necessarily implied by the notion of a rational being in intercourse with other rational beings.

But even if some moral concepts are primary in this way, what are we to say of the other concepts? An answer to this question may be attempted by considering a second line of concepts - for instance, generosity and kindness - which are a precondition of a great deal of what we value in

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human existence which is not distinctively moral. The main thing here is that the concepts which are non-moral receive their full flowering only when the corresponding moral concepts exist, but that there is no corresponding necessity in the opposite direction.

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